

This PDF includes a chapter from the following book:

The Resistance Dilemma

Place-Based Movements and the Climate Crisis

© 2021 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

License Terms:

Made available under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public
License

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

OA Funding Provided By:

MIT Libraries

The title-level DOI for this work is:

[doi:10.7551/mitpress/13668.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/13668.001.0001)

Series Foreword

For decades, residents of communities around the world have fought against the imposition of energy production and related facilities that may impose local health or economic risks against their will. Sometimes the focus of the communities' wrath has been nuclear power plants or nuclear waste facilities and the public's understandable concern over radiation leaks and related hazards. This has been particularly so when government agencies have been less than forthright about such risks. At other times, the public has worried about the local impacts of producing oil and natural gas through both conventional drilling and hydraulic fracturing and its transportation across a region through pipelines for delivery to distant destinations.

These kinds of battles have been important in Canada and the United States, and increasingly they seem to divide the public along partisan and ideological lines. Even renewable energy projects that require the building of large solar arrays and expansive wind farms (on land and offshore) or high-voltage power lines have prompted community concern over aesthetic and environmental impacts, property values, and even public health. In such cases, the environmental community itself often has become divided between proponents of much-needed energy generation to replace fossil fuels and opponents concerned about specific local impacts.

These disputes raise fascinating questions about the public's role in governing, the options open to communities when a state or national decision adversely affects their residents or at least is perceived to do so, and the challenges that governments themselves face when they seek to develop new energy facilities as part of their efforts to ward off climate change disasters. Citizens might ask what opportunities they have to participate in decision-making and what forms of resistance to energy development

projects have proven to be the most efficacious. That is, they may be looking for strategic guidance. Concerning the looming risks of climate change, governments need to know what they might do to overcome community resistance and build public support for the renewable energy projects that are now so essential if nations are to begin a serious movement toward sustainable energy systems.

George Hoberg's *The Resistance Dilemma* offers a fresh and intriguing examination of such crucial questions, drawing from a series of in-depth case studies of community resistance to energy development projects in Canada and the United States. He examines the origins, influences, and challenges facing this social movement strategy through a focus on resistance to new oil sands pipelines. In doing so, he addresses four core questions: (1) Has this kind of place-based resistance to fossil fuel development been effective, say in promoting climate action and reducing carbon emissions? (2) Does that strategy risk the unintended consequence of also feeding resistance to the clean energy transformation that is now so necessary? (3) Might more-innovative processes of governmental regulatory review and facility siting improve public acceptance of a transition to clean energy while avoiding the adverse consequences seen in fossil fuel resistance? (4) If such innovative approaches can reduce conflict, why are they not used more often?

The book employs a variety of policy theories to explore these questions, drawing from the most widely recognized work of the last several decades. These include the advocacy coalition framework, the multiple streams approach, punctuated equilibrium theory, and institutional theory. Hoberg distills them into an integrated policy regime framework that focuses on strategic actors both inside and outside government who interact within a context of ideas and institutional rules to pursue policy change. Doing so allows him to speak to the role of government institutions and rules, how key policy issues are framed over time, the impact of media coverage, the importance of legal issues, and the variety of actors who are critical to how these disputes are resolved. Both the book's theories and its dominant focus on oil sands development and resistance in Canada can be applied broadly to other energy challenges and other national settings.

Hoberg puts the challenge of climate change front and center in this analysis. In the first chapter, as well as later chapters, he reviews the evidence of climate change, and both national and international commitments to dealing with it, with a focus on Canada and the United States. He then proceeds

in the following chapters to offer a rich and detailed history of specific cases of place-based resistance to fossil fuel and renewable energy development. That kind of coverage allows him to bring a variety of important data to the analysis, including energy production statistics, greenhouse gas emissions, public opinion, issue saliency, and keyword usage in media coverage, interest group strength, and trade and other key financial information.

Hoberg highlights the Keystone XL pipeline controversy and many others that have received less attention, and he analyzes the adverse consequences such resistance can have for clean energy projects, including wind and solar power; hence the book's reference in its subtitle to the dilemma of place-based resistance. At the end of the book, Hoberg gives his conclusions about how place-based resistance to clean energy projects might be overcome and thus aid in nations' responses to climate change.

At a time when environmental policies are increasingly seen as controversial and new approaches to address environmental issues are being implemented widely, we especially encourage studies that assess policy successes and failures, evaluate new institutional arrangements and policy tools, and clarify new directions for environmental politics and policy. The books in this series are written for a wide audience that includes academics, policymakers, environmental scientists and professionals, business and labor leaders, environmental activists, and students concerned with environmental issues. We hope they contribute to the public's understanding of environmental problems, issues, and policies of concern today and also suggest promising actions for the future.

Sheldon Kamieniecki, University of California, Santa Cruz

Michael Kraft, University of Wisconsin–Green Bay

