

Advocacy Organization Affiliations: Alliances and Perceived Common Interests between Socially, Politically, and Informationally Disadvantaged Communities

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Abstract

In order to address issues of inequality, advocacy organizations aggregate into coalitions and interest networks which have significant implications for the success of advocacy efforts and impact on the policy making process. Structural and contextual analysis of a link network consisting of advocacy organizations representing the interests of socially, politically, and informationally disadvantaged communities reveals patterns in coalition formation for successful advocacy. Analysis supports advocacy coalition framework-based theories of parallel network structures and advocacy hubs as key nodes for bridge formation across advocacy areas. This preliminary study also explores unanticipated alliances between discrete areas of advocacy and the implications of cross sector alliances. A design for more expansive inquiry is proposed and hypotheses are posited for relationships between information inequality and other asymmetries, which can be tested within advocacy organization networks. Continued analysis of the relationships between advocacy organizations will identify successful coalition structure to inform future advocacy coalition development.

Keywords: information inequality; coalition structure; strategic alliances; networks

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1 Introduction

Social, political, and information inequalities impact communities in a way that is disenfranchising and disadvantaging (e.g. Neckerman & Torche, 2007; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Disadvantaged communities are rarely the subject of favorable mainstream media attention (Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1993) and are overlooked in many domains of scholarly literature (Neckerman & Torche, 2007), which results in part from the structural nature of disadvantages (Di Maggio & Garip, 2012). Relationships between different types of inequalities are complex and difficult to empirically assess, yet conceptual models exist for some manifestations, such as social construction theory of social inequality (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). If perceived inequalities are accepted as significant representations, the relationships between inequalities can be explored through the relationships between: political advocacy groups, such as MoveOn.org; social advocacy groups, such as NOW or the NAACP; and information access and digital divide advocacy groups, such as the Coalition for Networked Information or the Digital Empowerment Foundation. The legitimacy of advocacy organizations as representing the disadvantaged has been contested; yet, empirical evidence indicates that these organizations do categorically represent marginalized groups, while in some instances failing to address the needs of certain sub-groups within their sphere of advocacy (Strolovitch, 2006).

In seeking to understand the relationships between social, political, and informational inequalities, as well as how social, informational, and political systems marginalize sub-communities, the collaborative relationships between political advocacy and information access and digital divide advocacy groups illustrates. Using aggregated ego-centric network data generated around large advocacy organizations (e.g. The Action Network, The Digital Divide Network, Immigration Advocates, The Start Guide), network analysis will illustrate relationships between groups advocating for increased equality in a variety of spheres, which is useful in increasing understanding about how experienced inequalities are perceived as related in either origin or common objectives to overcome or compensate for inequalities.

2 Research Questions

Exploration of relationships between inequalities through assessment of structural relationships between interest groups allows for both an empirical test of the Advocacy Coalition Framework and preliminary answers to significant questions regarding common interests. The research questions guiding this study include: what communities recognize their area of advocacy (i.e. civil rights, immigration, etc.) as related to digital divide and information inequality issues; how do organizations within specific advocacy communities structurally interact; and what aspects of social and political inequality are most closely allied

with information inequality? In this sense, the study will be both exploratory and suggest answers to significant questions that should be subject to future empirical tests

In order to understand how advocacy organizations perceive common interests with other groups, as well as the structures formed to advocate for experienced inequalities, it is important to identify what network aspects will best answer the research questions. The research questions will largely be operationalized through identification of common ties to identify relationships, analysis of frequency and overlap to identify close relationships, and analysis of communities and clustering to understand structural patterns. Specifically, it will be most important to answer the following subordinate questions: where do strategic bridges, as organizational relationships, form between advocacy communities; and are there common or strategic patterns in the structures of advocacy communities?

3 Background

Theoretically grounding this study is the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith to explain policy processes when there were goal conflicts or competing interests (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Competing interests are products of unequal distributions (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). ACF explains how exogenous shocks allow particular interest groups to take advantage of policy windows as opportunities to advance their interests despite opposition; specific to this inquiry, the framework has grounded significant theorization about how policy actors form strategic relationships based on perceived common interests and how coalitions are successfully structured for ideological, social, and political purposes (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Structurally, coalitions seek stability within a dynamic policy environment, which comes from numbers and institutional relationships, and “coordination patterns do overlap as expected in clusters based on policy core beliefs” (Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p.197). Possible levels of analysis within ACF include: members or grantees, leadership, and partner organizations (Honeycutt & Strong, 2012).

ACF scholars have employed network analysis to test structural coordination theories associated with the framework that predated computational network analysis in social sciences (Weible & Sabatier, 2005). Specifically, a significant body of research has tested whether advocacy networks overlap (e.g. Honeycutt & Strong, 2012; Leifield, 2013) and whether core policy beliefs are the unifying factor in coordination networks (e.g. Ingold, 2011; Matti & Sandström, 2011); one of the first network applications was among marine ecology protection advocates (Weible & Sabatier, 2005). In this study, individual members and actors were associated with the levels of government and organizations they participated in within the California context examined; the institutions and organizations with common membership were clustered, revealing different advocacy coalitions based on position and issue (Weible & Sabatier, 2005). Network analysis testing ACF has empirically validated the predictions that individuals coordinate with information and allies that support common objectives (Weible & Sabatier, 2005), yet there have not been empirical tests of the structures organizations build as they coordinate with one another directly, rather than indirectly through common membership. It is however likely organizations with common interests coordinate in parallel structures, coalescing in stable arrangements with large membership and central actors who coordinate.

The importance of central coordination is another significant feature of ACF; composition requires members and representatives who lead as skilled facilitators and mediators (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). This is important for structural maintenance, stability of a coalition, and alliance building between related coalitions and coalitions with common interests at strategic policy windows (Henry, 2011). It is thus possible to hypothesize that key nodes in particular coalitions are also key nodes between which densely clustered coalitions bridge loosely with other clusters to form larger advocacy networks. These skilled coordinators are “neutral” yet strategic in structurally developing the coalition (Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p.206). Which, in a sense, is an exhibition of preferential attachment in that the most central nodes seek out each other; preferential attachment is exhibited when links are formed to nodes that are already very popular (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010).

In summary, it can be hypothesized that: 1) each area of advocacy will form similar community structures, following the parameters of coalition formation, and 2) the edges that connect nodes in one community to nodes in another community will also be strategically important within their own communities because coalition theory asserts that key actors often recognize connections to parallel or related issues earlier than others, in order to further their interests or causes. Both hypotheses pertain to the third research question and are testable within this preliminary study of advocacy groups.

4 Data & Methodology

In order to test the hypotheses and address the identified research questions, hyperlink data illustrating relationships between advocacy and special interest organizational websites presents a testable network data set, which is publicly available and can be harvested. Beginning with ego-centric networks around key organizations in particular advocacy areas and employing a snowball-sampling crawl, a network that includes constituent, partner, and member organizational relationships within and across interest areas will provide a testable, albeit, limited structure.

The advocacy organization network analyzed in this study was constructed by feeding ego-centric network data generated around large, U.S. advocacy organizations to the Issue Crawler, which aggregates larger network details for political network research (Govcom.org, 2013). The Issue Crawler harvested links to member or constituent advocacy websites, as well as their member or partner organizations, including co-links, using a snowball sampling technique to generate additional organizations not mentioned within the seed networks, based on initial parameters. Link networks will provide a preliminary outline as to how information inequality is perceived to related to social inequality.

Data was drawn from a crawl that produced an initial set of 6327 ties between 2327 nodes, where nodes represented sites rather than pages. The crawl used for this study was based on membership in START, the Immigration Advocates Network, TakingITGlobal, 350.org, InterAction, Earth Day Network, and Make Poverty History. The parameters of this snowball sample crawl based on links were a crawl depth of two and one degree of separation. The Issue Crawler, which was designed to primarily collect organizational data, also collected news references to these organizations. Therefore, manual removal of media references to these organizations was necessary, removing roughly 50% of the nodes collected. It is also important to note that relationships are not gathered if institutional affiliations are not hyperlinked; in order to compensate for this, data was manually gathered for institutions for which no data was gathered, yet clearly have organizational affiliates (i.e. coalitions and networks) in order to better identify community members. To gather this data, organizations' websites were combed for membership and partnership pages and lists were harvested and formatted to coincide with the larger data set. Imperfect automated data gathering is a distinct drawback of the data set, the implications of which will be discussed in the limitation section.

Details of linking and co-linking were collected, though for the purposes of analysis, the links were symmetrized. Furthermore, the number of links between organizational pairs was not be considered because the presence or absence of a relationship is more significant to answering the research questions; multiple ties were removed using Pajek to transform multiple lines to single lines. Weight might be more meaningfully calculated by shared funds or activities between organizations, but this data was not collected. As a result, an undirected, un-weighted network was considered. Supplementary qualitative data has also been collected on organizational membership and mission statements for nodes that appear to be well connected as evident when manually viewing the data, to facilitate interpretation of the network as the project progresses.

When the data set was complete and clean, a net file was reconstructed using the standards for Pajek (Batagelj & Mrvar, 2011). The final data set included 3455 ties between 3042 nodes. Analysis was conducted using both Pajek (Batagelj, Mrvar, & Zaversnik, 2013) and Network Workbench (NWB Team, 2006), while visualization was conducted through Guess (Adar, 2007).

5 Analysis & Interpretation

Analysis of this network provided considerable insight into the identified research questions, as well as into aspects that were unanticipated and broader than the inquiries within this study. Specifically, the coalitions were surprisingly well connected, with one major component and 5 isolates, which were gathered through the snowball sample but separated when news links were removed. It was not clear from previous studies, which correlated organizations by members, that distinct advocacy areas would be well connected. As a result, a general description of the network will be provided prior to analysis; the subsequent discussion section will present implications specific to the inquiry, as well as suggestions to be explored in future research.

5.1 Description

This network as a whole represents connections between many ego-centric, sub-networks, which is intuitive given the nature of coalitions described within the theoretical background to this study and the methodology employed for data collection. Table 1 presents a basic network description, including degree

centrality and the range of degree distributions which fundamentally illustrate the connections between ego-centric networks; with a degree centrality of 1, it is clear that most organizations are connected only to one coalition. This structurally results in ego-centric networks, with the highest degree totaling 578 ties to a single node, that representing the large ego-centric network surrounding 350.org.

Network Attribute	Measure
Vertices	3042
Ties	3455
Degree Centrality	1
Degree Centralizations	0.18945486
Average Clustering Coefficient	0.37085575
Transitivity	0.00122385
Average Shortest Path	4.11701
Degree Distribution	Lowest: 0 Highest: 578
Betweenness Centralization	0.3643844

Table 1. General Network Measures

Other interesting metrics include transitivity, which is exceptionally low at .0012; this indicates that there are very few closed triads (Louch, 2000) and reflects on coalition structure as constituents form open triads with the coalition partners of their coalition leader; given that 2658 nodes have only one tie, presented in table 2, the vast majority must be open. Few closed triads generally make network structure unstable (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010). In the context of advocacy coalitions, this can be explained at two levels: first, relationships between coalitions are unstable due to the dynamic nature of policy windows (Henry, 2011; Sabatier & Weible, 2007), meaning that the relationships change with time and this network represents a particular time slice; and second, values and interests of coalitions overlap only slightly (Sabatier & Weible, 2005), enough so to prevent transitivity between the associated coalitions of a node's associated coalitions. To take a specific example from this network, there is an open triad where Make Poverty History and the Earth Day Network connect to the Global Campaign for Climate Action, yet not to each other, as is visible in figure 3. All represent large coalitions. Contextually considering these organizations' mission statements, this is easy to explain; the Earth Day Network and the Global Campaign for Climate Action both have vested interests in awareness about environmental protection from adverse human impacts, while Make Poverty History and the Global Campaign for Climate Action both have vested concerns about the disproportionate environmental burden borne by the socially and economically disadvantaged, which falls outside of the generalist scope of the Earth Day Network and prevents them from linking to Make Poverty History.

Cluster	Freq	Freq%	Representative
0	5	0.1644	"Adirondacks"
1	2658	87.3767	"Zonta International"
2	264	8.6785	"1 Sky"
3	41	1.3478	"AARP"
4	16	0.526	"Alliance for Climate Education"
5	11	0.3616	"Amnesty International"
6	6	0.1972	"Action Aid"
7	4	0.1315	"American Immigration Council"
8	2	0.0657	"American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE)"
9	2	0.0657	"Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)"
10	2	0.0657	"Information Program"

11	2	0.0657	"10:10"
12	2	0.0657	"Open Society Foundations"
13	1	0.0329	"Immigration Advocates Network"
18	4	0.1315	"Correlation Network"
20	1	0.0329	"American Civil Liberties Union"
23	1	0.0329	"Black Immigration Network"
26	1	0.0329	"Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities"
30	1	0.0329	"American Library Association"
35	1	0.0329	"National Coalition for Literacy"
36	1	0.0329	"Community Against Poverty"
39	1	0.0329	"We the World"
42	1	0.0329	"NetHope"
58	1	0.0329	"CARE International"
81	2	0.0657	"International Society for Technology in Education"
87	1	0.0329	"Internet Society ISOC"
101	1	0.0329	"International Organization for Migration"
117	1	0.0329	"American Council on Education (ACE)"
140	1	0.0329	"TakingITGlobal"
182	1	0.0329	"InterAction"
219	1	0.0329	"Earth Day Network"
231	1	0.0329	"Coalition for Networked Information"
233	1	0.0329	"START"
244	1	0.0329	"Global Campaign for Climate Action"
554	1	0.0329	"Make Poverty History"
578	1	0.0329	"350.org"
Sum	3042	100.000	

Table 2. Degree Distribution Frequency

Frequency of degree by distribution of nodes, as represented in table 2, is significant both in that there is an extremely high number of nodes with only one tie, at 2658, and a wide range of high degrees among a relatively few nodes, which illustrates the variability of coalition size. What is implied by this fundamental metric is support for the hypothesis that community structures would be parallel; there is a common organizing principle of ego-centric networks around powerful leaders in coalitions. However, based on the range in size of coalitions, a number of questions can be raised, including: does the size of the coalition impact success in advocating and do these coalitions function as hubs?

5.2 Parallel Community Structures

Analysis suggests support for hypothesis 1, which anticipated common structure in advocacy coalition formation. The framework describes how actors and organizations identify with others on particular issues by common values, interests, and positions, rather than simply by common policy areas (Henry, 2011; Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weible & Sabatier, 2005), which leads to differentiation and very specific policy areas. This is precisely visible within the network, as small organizations are coalition members surrounding powerful organizing nodes, which represent the leaders necessary to guide coalitions

strategically and to coordinate members (Henry, 2011; Matti & Sandström, 2011). Furthermore, as mentioned above, very few nodes are structurally constituents of multiple coalitions; the majority of nodes, 2658 of 3042, have only one tie associating them with one coalition. This is visually evident as the dense fans surrounding coalition leaders in figure 1.

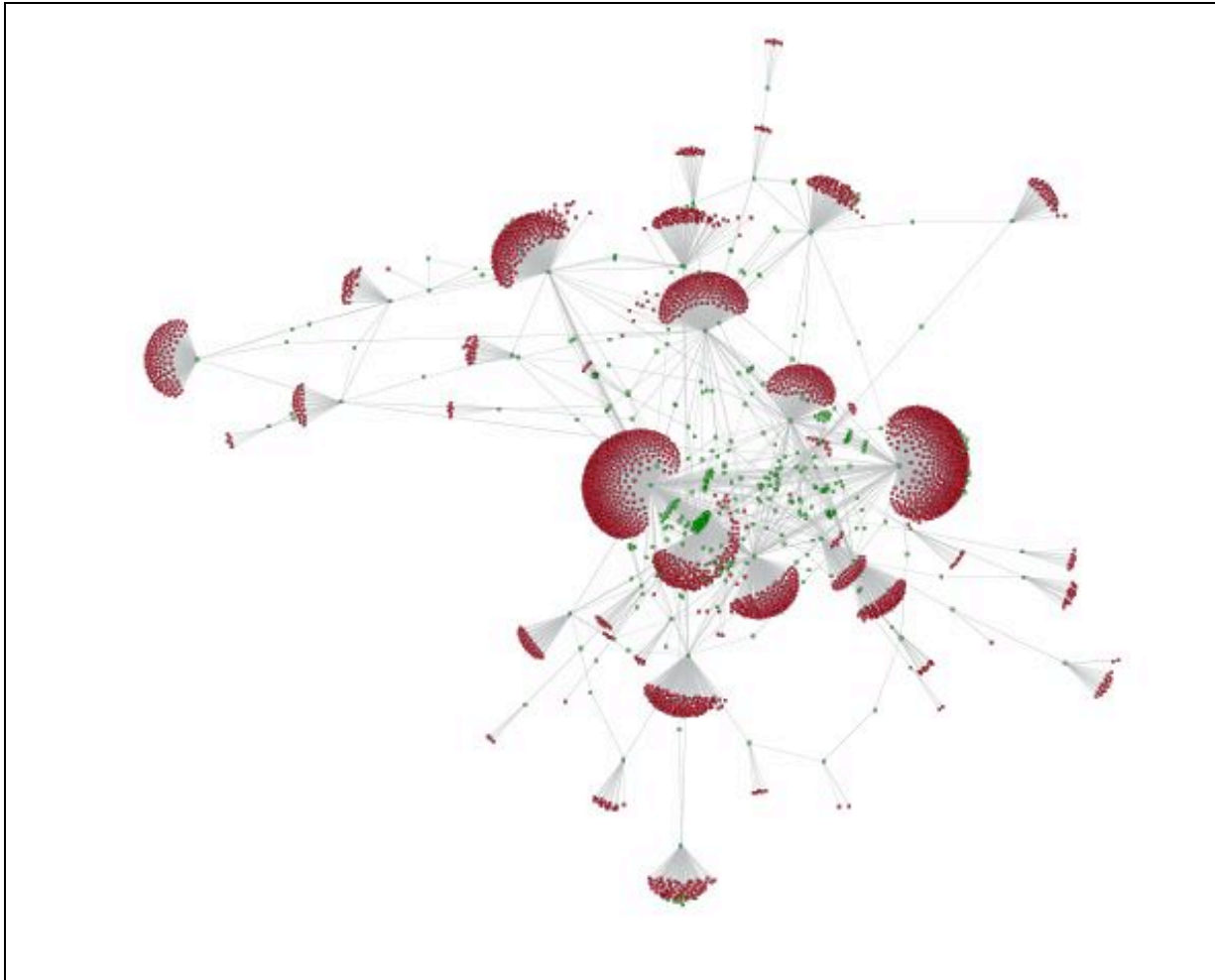


Figure 1. General Network Visualization (Visual Differentiation between Constituents and Leaders in Coalitions)

As most nodes are constituents of only one coalition and thus loosely connected to the network as a whole, they are highly dependent on coordination by coalition leaders; this is structurally significant and was theorized prior to empirical network analysis of ACF. And yet, some constituents do join multiple coalitions; in this data set, there are, for example, 264 nodes with two ties, indicating two affiliations. Figure 1 illustrates the nodes with 2 or more ties in green, while the majority of nodes, having only one tie, are depicted in red. This visualization is useful in highlighting connections between coalitions and some shared membership between the coalitions at the center of the network.

The presence of coalition overlap within the network is, while minimal, is also consistent with the framework and previous network analysis of advocacy coalitions based on shared membership (e.g. Weible & Sabatier, 2005). Statistically, this work identifies small percentages of members in any given coalition as belong to another coalition (Ingold, 2011), as the strength of common values must be great enough for coordination (Matti & Sandström, 2011).

5.3 Strategically Important Actors and Coalition Formation

Analysis also suggests support for hypothesis two, in that coalition leaders, as the large coordinating and influencing organizations which serve as hubs of advocacy, connect with one another as a likely indication of preferential attachment, through which the well-connected seek ties to the well-connected (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010), which should be further explored in a directed iteration of the network. Coalitions are most commonly affiliated by direct ties between leaders, rather than by shared membership. Figures 2 and 3 best illustrate this phenomenon.

In figure 2, the visualization restricts the nodes to those with a total degree greater than or equal to five, with the ten largest coalition leaders labeled, which range in degree from 101 to 578, as presented in table 2. Many of the largest coalitions are closely clustered. Specifically, while the overall Watts-Strogatz clustering coefficient is 0.37085575, as presented in table 1, the clustering coefficient when the network is restricted to coalition leaders and leaders of the ten largest coalitions varies considerably. Table 3 provides these comparative measures; the largest coalitions are clustered much more closely than are coalitions generally, with closed triads, as can be seen in figure 3. The clustering coefficient, which measures close aggregation including clique formation as closed triads at the local level (Watts & Strogatz, 1998), illustrates both that generally the coalitions have distinct interests and thus do not necessarily find common ground with the associated coalitions of their associates, as discussed in section 5.1, and that large and powerful coalitions with many members, as represented by the highest degree nodes, strategically seek to interact with one another in forming cliques, providing the basis for stability in the network as a whole (De Nooy, Mrvar, & Batagelj, 2011) despite the dynamic nature of policy windows.

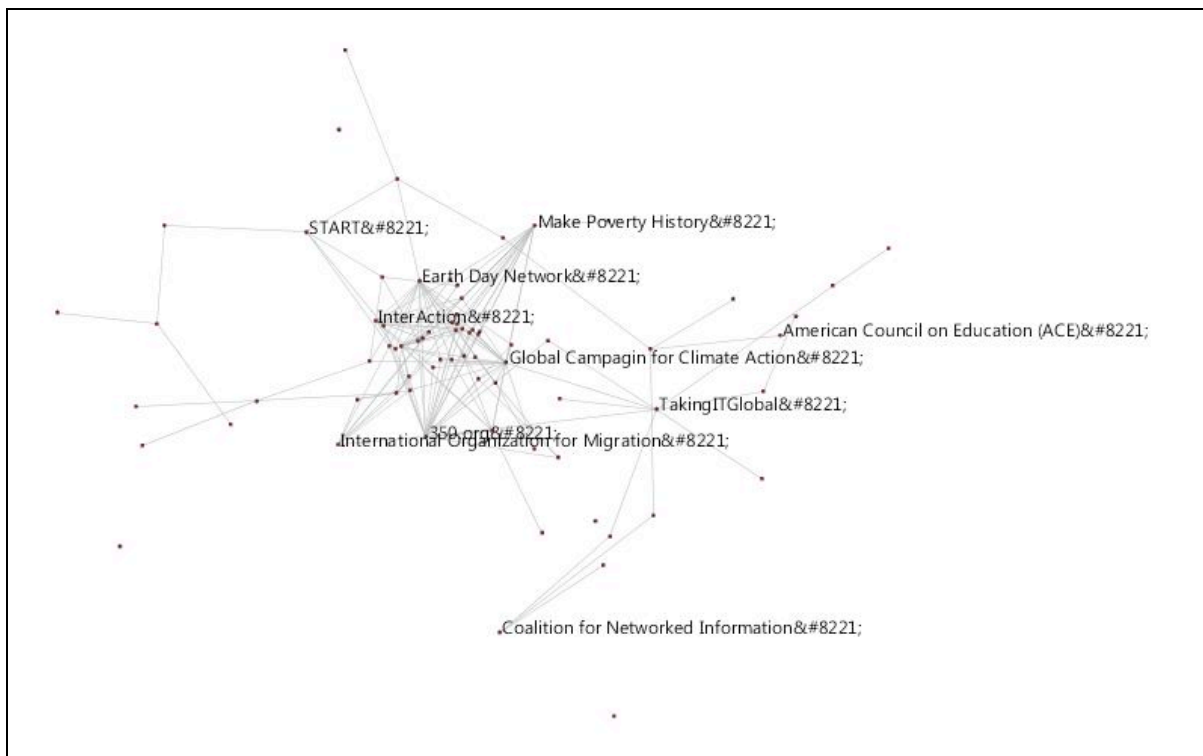


Figure 2. Ties Between Coalitions

Network Parameters	Clustering Coefficient
Complete Network	0.37085575226172646
All nodes with degree ≥ 5	0.22324379324379326
All nodes with degree ≥ 101	0.5833333333333333

Table 3. Watts-Strogatz Clustering Coefficients

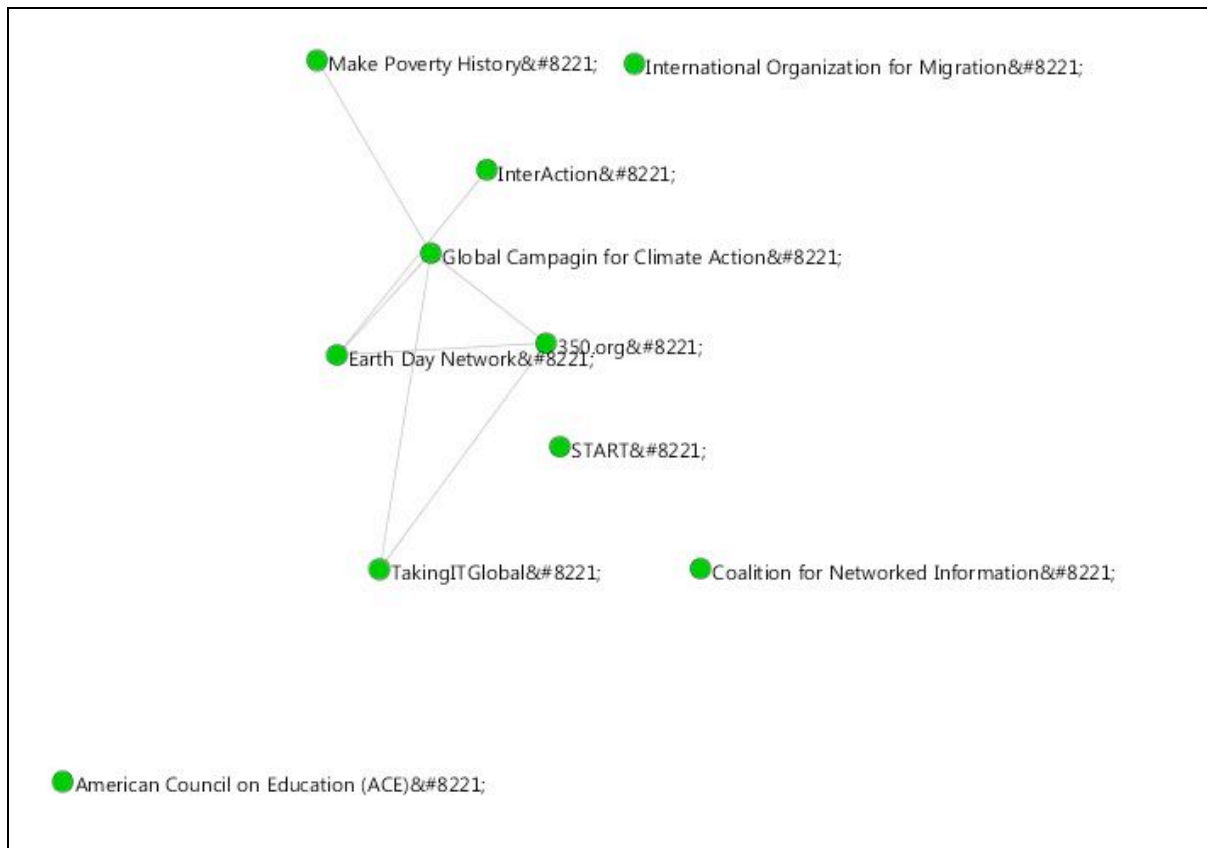


Figure 3. Ties Between Largest Coalitions

5.4 Connections between Spheres of Advocacy

Relationships between advocacy areas, as one manifestation of perceived common interests between different disadvantaged communities, provide answers to the first two research questions: what areas are related and what areas are most closely related to information inequality issues, including the digital divide.

To address the first question, regarding inequalities related to information inequality, is significant in its own right and not simply as a stepping stone to the second research question because it speaks to relationships which may be better developed at other points in time or in other contexts, depending on the types of policy windows that open, as the current network simply reflects a network a particularly current point in time. Areas that were related through ties, including bridges, common membership in coalitions, and close clustering of multiple advocacy coalitions due to partnerships between constituents, included: education, environmentalism, women’s empowerment, immigration, national security, anti-poverty, and disaster relief. Examples of these relationships are presented in table 4.

Area of Advocacy	Exemplar Organization	Relationship	Information Advocacy Organization
Education	Open Education Resources Initiative	Constituent of	Information Program
Environmentalism	350.org	Bridges to	TakingITGlobal
Women's Empowerment	Mi Casa Resource Center for Women	Constituent of	iCAST (International Center for Appropriate & Sustainable Technology)
Immigration	International Organization for Migration	Shares Constituents	Open Society

			with	Foundations
National Security	KISA (Korea Internet & Security Agency)		Constituent of	Internet Society ISOC
Anti-Poverty	Make Poverty History		Leads Coalition including	Powerful Information
Disaster Relief	Communicating with Affected Communities	Disaster	Leads Coalition including	Open Society Foundations
Human Rights	Amnesty International		N/A	
Religious Organizations	Church Mission Society		N/A	
Public Health	World Health Organization		N/A	

Table 4. Relationships between Advocacy Areas

The prevalence of connections between coalitions is high, yet also highly varied, which is to be expected based on previous survey research of organizations which finds unpredictable levels of communication between coalitions, yet pervasive communication and information exchange between diverse areas (Honeycutt & Strong, 2012). Areas of connection in this study may seem diverse, as if there is no differentiation and all areas connect to some extent, yet there are notable areas without overlap with or connection to information inequality advocates within the network studied. Specifically, human rights groups, religiously affiliated organizations advocating on behalf of various disadvantaged communities, and public health groups were in no way connected, as were some sub-communities.

To address the second question, regarding the most closely correlated areas of advocacy to information inequality advocacy, there are competing measures and definitions for most closely associated, leading to the identification of three distinct areas for three distinct reasons. Women's empowerment organizations, which were unexpectedly connected, were actually among the closest, on the basis of clustering and in part as a result of the number of organizations that defined themselves as women and technology groups, seeking to overcome the digital divide in order to drive women past inequalities in other areas of their lives. Specific examples are the distinct coalitions that formed around Women in Technology International (degree 12), Womenetics (degree 4), and ION (degree 18); there was a parallel phenomenon between women's group and environmental groups, with a coalition forming around WiserEarth (degree 18). Environmentalism was also closely associated, as strategic ties were formed between the largest digital divide coalition and some of the largest environmental coalitions; specifically, 350.org and the Global Campaign for Climate Action formed a clique with TakingITGlobal, as can be seen in figure 3. These relationships did not simply connect members of the coalitions, but rather the coalition leaders themselves. Furthermore, education advocacy was closely associated, which is logical given shared interest in literacy; this association was formed through the presence of information inequality groups as constituents in educational inequality coalitions and educational inequality constituents in informational inequality coalitions (i.e. the Open Educational Resources Initiative is a constituent of the Information Program), as well as common interest coalitions, such as Computer Using Educators and International Society for Technology in Education. These coalitions overlapped in topical kind, as well as through specific nodes.

6 Discussion

Analysis provides preliminary answers to the research questions, as well as implications about other aspects of advocacy coalitions and advocacy for information and digitally disadvantaged communities. Coalitions generally related to other coalitions through coordinating leaders, rather than from members to leaders or members to members; specifically, the largest coalitions sought to relate to one another, which imply structural ties provide strategic advantage, given previous research into coordinating behaviors (Matti & Sandström, 2011; 2013). Within the area of information inequality and digital divide issues, it is significant to look at the relationships between these coalitions, or dearth of relationships, particularly in comparison to environmental coalitions, of which the largest have formed cliques, as is visible in figure 3. What the comparative lack of coordination between information advocacy groups may indicate is that it is a relatively less well-developed area. Some of the failures to make gains against these inequalities may

result from lack of structural coordination. Perhaps with time, structure will increase and changes to information and information technology distributions may result; this should be monitored over time.

6.1 Future Directions

From this analysis, it is possible to posit perceived relationships between information, social, and political inequalities. Subsequent studies should, in the short term, seek to verify the proposed relationships between advocacy on behalf of the various inequalities explored here, as well as other relevant areas of inequality, such as economic inequality. This could be accomplished by replicating the inquiry in a larger data set generated from all registered advocacy groups in federal records, using a more expansive data crawl that does not begin with hubs as exclusive starting points. Furthermore, comparative exploration of the same set of nodes through different relationships—such as shared funds, shared donors, or membership, following the parameters of other inquiry into advocacy coalition networks—would reinforce the relationships evident in link networks between the organizations studied. The validity of advocacy organizations in representing the interests of disadvantaged and marginalized groups on the basis of various inequalities could also be strengthened by coupling this analysis with surveys of organizations regarding perceived common interests with their affiliates. This would be significant in addressing the contested nature of these organizations as representative as evident in the literature (Strolovitch, 2006), as well as in strengthening the applicability of advocacy coalitions as manifestations of perceived links between the inequalities, rather than simply the strategic nature of policy windows, for which there is some evidence that these types of relationships occasionally occur (Henry, 2011; Sabatier & Weible, 2007).

In the long term, there must be further research to structurally examine how advocacy and political networks impact social, informational, and political inequality. Specifically, it is important that the following questions be investigated: do the three other types of non-profit organizations form structural relationships similarly to advocacy coalitions, and how do advocacy coalitions structurally interact with governance networks? Both questions build on the research presented in this paper and will provide both practical and theoretical insights that are significant to expanding understanding of how marginalization happens and can be overcome.

Increased understanding of how advocacy coalitions interact with governance networks is also important to improved understanding and theorization about political networks, as well as practically illustrating how structures can be capitalized upon most effectively by advocacy coalitions to achieve their goals. There has been significant scholarly development on interfacing between government and non-profits (Rathgeb Smith & Grønberg, 2006), as well as some on government and advocacy coalitions (Beer, Bartley, & Roberts, 2012), yet there has been no structural analysis. Understanding of the relationships that form between these institutions and organizations would be significant to improving information flow between those experiencing disadvantage or with distinct policy needs and those in a position to produce policy change, which is currently a relationship fraught by disrupted information flows (Workman, Jones, & Jochim, 2009), gatekeeping (Fedorowicz, Gogan, & Culnan, 2010), and contradictory messaging because of unequal access to policy makers (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). These problems are clearly manifested in network analysis with respect to study of diffusion and influence (e.g. Burt, 2004; Kadushin, 2012) and should be subject to the expertise and scrutiny of network scholars.

6.2 Limitations

Support for the hypotheses are not simply an artifact of data collection, as the data crawl did not include all of the coalition leaders, but rather only a few, which were in fact among the most complex structural coalitions within the network. Additionally, the snowball sampling crawl did harvest links to two degrees from the start points and through manual data gathering, a realistic set of relationships were generated around these advocacy areas, rather than simply a falsely perfect structure which might result if only relationships surrounding the start point were generated.

However, this study has distinct limitations concerning the data set, indicating that why hypotheses are supported and exploration of the research questions appears consistent with previous research and theoretical constructs within ACF, further research is necessary to legitimize the findings. First, it is important to note that the organizations included in the network were not: a comprehensive set, a random set, or a representative set. For the purposes of this preliminary study, beginning the data crawls from the websites of large and well-known organizations with many members and partners in different areas of advocacy served the necessary purpose of illustrating connections between areas and the central structures, yet it was biased. Future studies should certainly use larger data sets, employ more rigorous criteria for crawling start points, and consider more varied start points.

Second, there are gaps in data set due to the collection methodology, in that broken links cannot be crawled and lead to undocumented relationships that, in reality, do exist between organizations. While manual identification was employed to collect data at noticeable gap points, there are likely gaps that were not obvious, which certainly affects network measures, such as connectivity, path length, and degree measures.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, the crawler employed for data collection depended on ego-centric networks as starting points for link harvesting, which intuitively presented a simple and low-resource mechanism for network generation, yet also capitalized on aspects of the network which would be interesting to explore as hubs, thereby precluding useful analysis of this structural aspect of advocacy coalitions. Specifically, by constructing from hubs, network analysis of hubs would only serve to reinforce that data collection succeeded, as additional organizational relationships were only collected among the members of the coalitions. Future research should use more exhaustive relationship data so as to structurally assess the nature of the parallel structures as hubs.

7 Conclusion

This preliminary study indicates that: 1) there is empirical support for the advocacy coalition framework, 2) formal organizational relationships are structured in the same way that organizations are clustered by shared membership in previous network studies of coalitions, and 3) information advocacy is perceived to be related to other inequality advocacy areas. First, network analysis has not been employed to illustrate that advocacy coalitions of formal organizational relationships are structured in the same way that coalitions of individuals joining coalitions of organizations are. Second, organizations formally related according to the same structure as clustering of organizations based on shared membership, which illustrates that members view the areas of advocacy as related in ways similar to how organizational coordinators do. This validates assessment of advocacy organizational relationships as a measurable manifestation of perceived relationships between advocacy issues, rather than simply strategic courses of action. Based on this, the third conclusion to be made is that information inequality is related in complex ways to social and political inequality because the organizations representing these issues for relationships and align coalitions.

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9 Table of Figures

Figure 1. General Network Visualization (Visual Differentiation between Constituents and Leaders in Coalitions).....	6
Figure 2. Ties Between Coalitions	7
Figure 3. Ties Between Largest Coalitions	8

10 Table of Tables

Table 1. General Network Measures	4
Table 2. Degree Distribution Frequency	5
Table 3. Watts-Strogatz Clustering Coefficients	7
Table 4. Relationships between Advocacy Areas	9