Exploring Contention in Oil & Gas Policy Contexts

Tanya Heikkila & Chris Weible
Professors & Co-Directors, Workshop on Policy Process Research
School of Public Affairs
University of Colorado Denver

Presentation for the Colorado Energy Research Collaboratory
October 22, 2020
All democracies involve contentious policy issues, but unanswered questions about them persist.

- What are their characteristics?
- Are they uniform or varied across contexts?
- How do they change over time and what are their effects?
How Do We Study Contention in Oil and Gas Policy Contexts?

**Study Population:** ‘Policy Actors’ (Govt., NGOs, Industry, Consultants, Academics, etc.)


**Current Study Locations:** 15 state analysis (with added COVID questions)

**Methods:** Interviews, Surveys, Media analyses, Policy analysis

**Key Questions:** General positions, problem perceptions, perceptions of conflict, preferences, evaluation of policies and processes, and more
Part 1: What are the characteristics of contention in the news media across states 2007-2017?
Fig. 1. Number of articles on hydraulic fracturing, per state and year (2007–2017).
Fig. 8. Relative importance of topics associated with hydraulic fracturing, for Republican states per year (2007–2017).
Fig. 9. Relative importance of topics associated with hydraulic fracturing, for Democratic states per year (2007–2017).
Part 2: What are the characteristics of contention among policy actors?
Three Key Characteristics We Often Measure in Surveys

- Divergent Positions
- Perceived Threats
- Unwillingness to Compromise
Let’s Dive into One Measure…

“Please indicate what comes closest to your current position in relation to oil and gas development that uses hydraulic fracturing. It should be … “
2013 Policy Actor Positions on Oil and Gas Development in Colorado

- **Percent of Respondents**
  - 0%
  - 5%
  - 10%
  - 15%
  - 20%
  - 25%
  - 30%
  - 35%

- **Options**
  - Stop
  - Limit
  - Continue at Current Rate
  - Expand Moderately
  - Expand Extensively

The graph shows the distribution of policy actor positions for oil and gas development in Colorado. The highest percentage of respondents supports continuing development at the current rate, followed by those who favor expanding development moderately. The least supported options are stop and limit.
2014 Policy Actor Positions on Oil and Gas Development in New York

- **Stop**: 27.5% of respondents
- **Limit**: 26% of respondents
- **Continue at Current Rate**: 10% of respondents
- **Expand Moderately**: 15% of respondents
- **Expand Extensively**: 20% of respondents
How does divergence of policy positions among policy actors compare over time?

Let’s zoom into Colorado
Policy Actor Positions on Oil and Gas Development in Colorado 2013, 2015, 2017
Over the Past Two Years, Have Issues Become Worse, Stayed the Same or Become Better?

(means)

Worse   About the same   Better

Stop/Limit
Intensity of Political Debate
Economic Benefits
Government Relations
Protect Env & Public Health
Sci & Tech Info

Continue
Intensity of Political Debate
Economic Benefits
Government Relations
Protect Env & Public Health
Sci & Tech Info

Expand
Intensity of Political Debate
Economic Benefits
Government Relations
Protect Env & Public Health
Sci & Tech Info

Over the Past Two Years, Have Issues Become Worse, Stayed the Same or Become Better?

(means)

Worse   About the same   Better

Stop/Limit
Intensity of Political Debate
Economic Benefits
Government Relations
Protect Env & Public Health
Sci & Tech Info

Continue
Intensity of Political Debate
Economic Benefits
Government Relations
Protect Env & Public Health
Sci & Tech Info

Expand
Intensity of Political Debate
Economic Benefits
Government Relations
Protect Env & Public Health
Sci & Tech Info

Over the Past Two Years, Have Issues Become Worse, Stayed the Same or Become Better?

(means)

Worse   About the same   Better

Stop/Limit
Intensity of Political Debate
Economic Benefits
Government Relations
Protect Env & Public Health
Sci & Tech Info

Continue
Intensity of Political Debate
Economic Benefits
Government Relations
Protect Env & Public Health
Sci & Tech Info

Expand
Intensity of Political Debate
Economic Benefits
Government Relations
Protect Env & Public Health
Sci & Tech Info
How ‘sticky’ are policy actors’ positions?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Accept the Information</th>
<th>Reject the Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>supports existing policy positions</td>
<td>‘I’m doubling down’ (reinforced position)</td>
<td>‘I’m satisfied’ (same position)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counters existing policy positions</td>
<td>‘I’m persuaded’ (changed position)</td>
<td>‘I don’t believe it’ (same position or reinforced)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Willingness to Change or Reinforce Policy Positions Based on Scientific Information

(-2 = strongly disagree; +2 = strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willing to <strong>Limit</strong> Oil and Gas If...</th>
<th></th>
<th>Willing to <strong>Expand</strong> Oil and Gas If...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science Shows it Hurts Env/Health</td>
<td>Science Shows it Harms the Econ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with Stop/Limit Oil and Gas Beliefs</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m doubling down”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t believe it”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with Expand Oil and Gas Beliefs</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t believe it”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with Keep the Status Quo Beliefs</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m persuaded”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m persuaded”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Willingness to Change or Reinforce Policy Positions Based on Scientific Information

(-2 = strongly disagree; +2 = strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Willing to <strong>Limit</strong> Oil and Gas If...</th>
<th>Willing to <strong>Expand</strong> Oil and Gas If...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science Shows it Hurts Env/Health</td>
<td>Science Shows it Harms the Econ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with Stop/Limit Oil and Gas Beliefs</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m doubling down”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with Expand Oil and Gas Beliefs</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t believe it”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with Keep the Status Quo Beliefs</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m persuaded”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 3. How are public policies associated with contention?
Examples from Interviews about Policies

**More contention**
- Colorado: Setbacks, local authority
- Texas: Local authority; produced water
- New Mexico: Produced water; penalty assessment

**Mixed**
- Colorado: Methane
- Texas: Light pollution
- New Mexico: Methane

**Less contention**
- Colorado: Penalties; flowlines
- Texas: Application fees

Interview question: Can you tell me about a recent policy issue in the last three years where there was a lot of conflict in your state? And a recent policy issue where there was more concord in your state?
## Contention around Policies: Interview Insights

### What Fosters Contention?

- "a fair amount of mistrust"
- "differences of opinion, even within the industry, depending on if it's a smaller, large company"
- "...the data itself, and how big of a problem it is, or isn't, depending upon who you're talking to"
- "groups that don’t really look for solutions or want to have a conversation"
- "more behavioral change required"

### What Fosters Concord?

- "a good willingness on stakeholders from various perspectives to roll up their sleeves and come to consensus"
- "leadership by the governor"
- "industry understands the value"
- "Sometimes... working through the conflict itself"
How Do Policy Issues Align with Media Coverage in CO?

- Articles on oil and gas
- Articles w policy and conflict
- Articles w policy and concord

- Local bans/moratoria & court cases
- Local control ballot compromise & Task Force
- Reforming regulatory authority
- Setbacks & GW rulemaking
- Air quality rulemaking
- Disclosure rulemaking
- Spill reporting, wildlife mapping rules
- Task Force rule making
- Floodplain rules
- Firestone explosion
- State Supreme Ct Decision
- Articles on oil and gas
Lessons about Contention

The level and nature of contention varies

- By state, associated political ideology, and public attention
- By topics and over time
- By person
- By public policy issue

Thus, to navigate and address contentious policy issues, we should avoid ‘one-sized fits all’ approaches
Lessons about Contention

Despite variation in contention, individual positions appear stable.

People tend to “double down” on information that confirms their beliefs or “don’t believe” information that disconfirms their beliefs.

People with moderate beliefs are most likely persuaded by science.

Thus, learning can difficult as people’s beliefs tend to be sticky and can get even stickier.
Putting this Research into a Bigger Picture

Our goal is to provide a better understanding of contentious policy issues and a platform for informed about them.

Some of our outstanding questions include:

1. How can we assess the impacts of contentious debates on society?
2. In what ways are contentious policy issues “good” and/or “bad” for individuals and society?
3. What processes and mechanisms help address contentious policy issues and when can they improve policy outcomes?
Thank you!

Tanya.Heikkila@ucdenver.edu

Chris.Weible@ucdenver.edu

http://woppr.org