

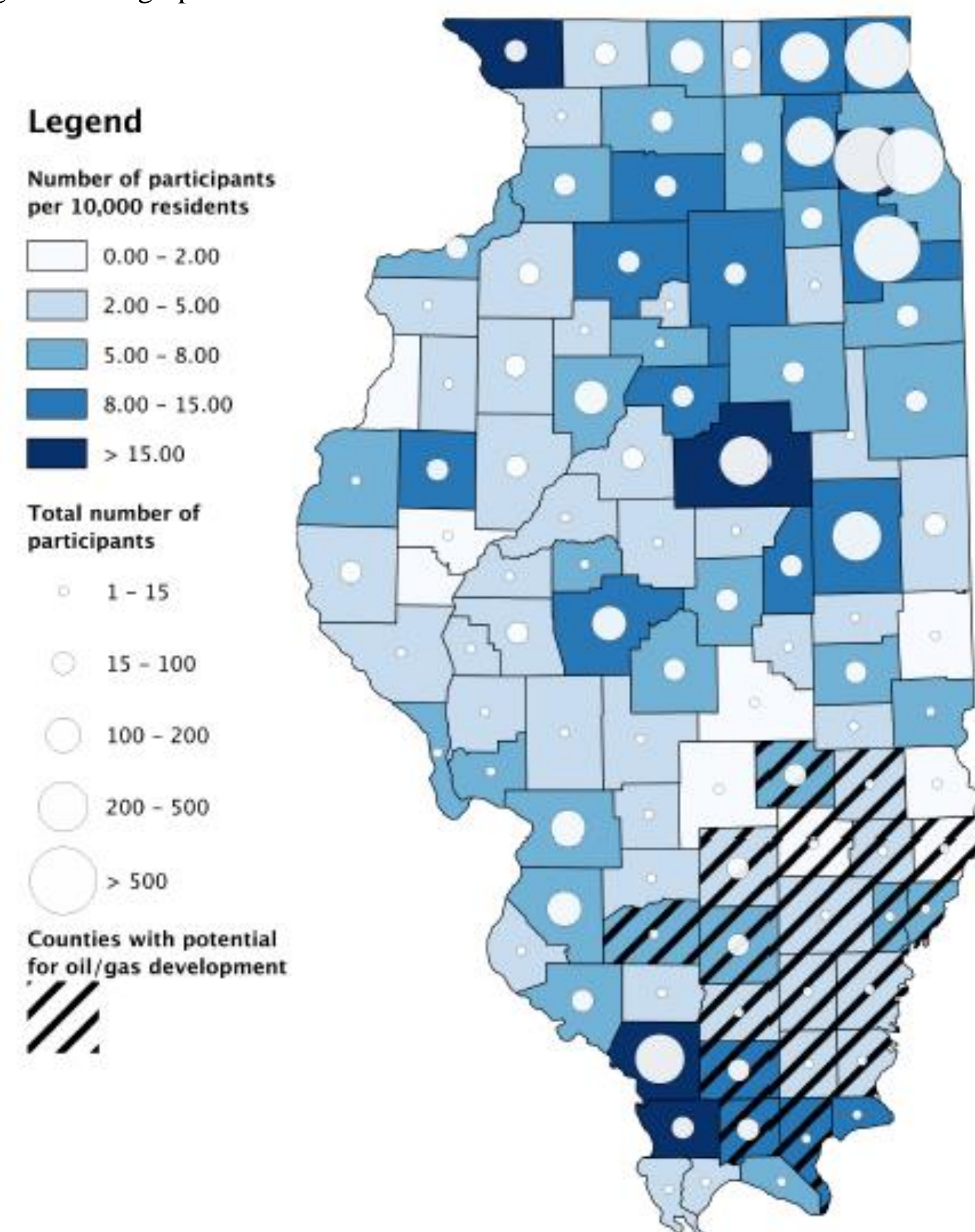
Abstract

We test a model of recruitment to social movement participation which examines how proximity to a shale play and partisan affiliation affect the likelihood of submitting a public comment opposing unconventional oil and gas development (UOGD, or “fracking”) during a regulatory review in the state of Illinois.

Introduction

Online communication networks enable social movement organizations (SMOs) to issue broad calls to action and to offer members easy ways to participate in social movements (Karpf 2012; Walker 2014). We predict that this encourages SMOs to recruit participants who may be *ideologically* motivated, but have no *material* interest in achieving movement goals (McCarthy and Zald 1977). We use the case of a regulatory review of UOGD in Illinois to test our hypothesis.

Figure 1. Geographic Distribution of Public Comments



Methods

Our data consist of 37,559 public comments submitted to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), which include commenters’ geographic location and organizational affiliations. Using data from the U.S. Census and the Harvard Election Data Archive, we use negative binomial regression to test the effect of proximity to proposed UOGD sites, community context, and partisanship on the likelihood of submitting a comment.

Table 1. Organizations that recruited the largest number of anti-fracking comments

Organization	Number of Unique Participants	Number of Comments	Average Number of Comments per Participant
CREDO Action	5,384	9,806	1.82
Sierra Club	2,338	5,656	2.42
Frack Free Illinois	1,511	4,756	3.15
350.org	1,092	3,502	3.21
Fair Economy Illinois	435	16,819	38.66
Food & Water Watch	276	1,617	5.86
Environmental Law and Policy Center	276	931	3.37
Faith in Place	134	585	4.37
IIRON Student Network	72	5,222	72.53
RISE	45	2,486	55.24
Chicagoland against Fracking	20	1,163	58.15
Illinois People's Action	19	353	18.58
Climate Action Network	16	951	59.44
SAFE	10	255	25.50
Other organization	78	316	4.05
No organizational affiliation	480	1,335	2.78
Total	9,822	32,196	3.28

Findings

Just 179 of the 9,847 participants who submitted anti-fracking comments reside in counties identified as having potential for UOGD by the U.S. Geological Survey (Fig. 1). In contrast, 9,668 residents from the non-targeted region submitted the remaining 32,161 comments. Mobilization of participants residing outside of the shale play is attributable to recruitment efforts by several large, progressive and environmental organizations (Table 1). Recruiting organizations encouraged participation in the IDNR public comment period by emailing petitions and templates for public comments to listserv members. Interestingly, commenters from outside the targeted shale play were more likely to have voted for Barack Obama (D) in the 2008 election than were commenters from inside the targeted region (Table 2). Inside the targeted region, the community context variables had little significance on their own. However, greater presence of a tourist industry has a positive effect only for Democratic-leaning communities.

Table 2. Coefficients from Negative Binomial Regression Models of Public

Comment Mobilization Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Democratic Vote	0.323** (0.0363)	0.264** (0.0330)	0.141** (0.0458)
Targeted Area (D)	-0.108 (0.132)	0.195 (0.135)	0.231 (0.133)
Targeted Area (D) * Democrat Vote	-0.390** (0.152)	-0.300* (0.150)	-0.348* (0.165)
Percent with Bachelor Degree		0.315** (0.0350)	0.313** (0.0345)
Rural (D)		0.0924 (0.0807)	-0.115 (0.0895)
Rural (D) * Democrat Vote			0.258** (0.0820)
Percent Homes Vacant		0.0119 (0.0476)	0.0155 (0.0510)
Percent Homes Vacant * Democrat Vote			-0.0775 (0.0453)
Share of Economy in Oil and Gas		-0.0477 (0.0475)	-0.0424 (0.0477)
Share of Economy in Oil and Gas * Democrat Vote			0.180* (0.0788)
Share of Economy in Tourism		0.134** (0.0408)	0.00882 (0.0461)
Share of Economy in Tourism * Democrat Vote			0.232** (0.0410)
Constant	-7.542** (0.0423)	-7.734** (0.0625)	-7.641** (0.0628)
Alpha	-0.436** (0.0958)	-0.905** (0.121)	-1.032** (0.124)

Discussion

The majority of anti-fracking comments submitted to IDNR were submitted by Illinoisans who did not face a direct threat from the local impacts of UOGD. These participants were more likely than commenters from inside the shale play to be Democrats. Fracking opponents from outside the targeted region were also more likely to be mobilized through professional advocacy organizations than opponents from inside the targeted region. On one hand, this broad recruitment served to amplify the opposition of downstate residents, particularly in communities with larger tourist economies. On the other hand, the extensive participation of residents from outside the shale play- which is an economically depressed rural region- raises questions about how truly representative this participatory regulatory process actually was.

Selected References

- Karpf, D. 2012. *The MoveOn Effect* New York: Oxford.
 Walker, E. 2014. *Grassroots for Hire* New York: Cambridge.
 McCarthy, J. and M. Zald. 1977. “Resource Mobilization & Social Movements.” *AJS* 82: 112-41.