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Method Article

Representation-Influence Framework (RIF) for analyzing the roles of organized interest groups (OIGs) in environmental governance



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A B S T R A C T

This paper outlines Representation-Influence Framework (RIF) for analyzing the roles of organized interest groups (OIGs) in environmental governance. This framework is created to check OIG claims as representatives of particular groups within society, to capture OIG diversity, including those acting beyond the pursuit of common interests. The development of this framework used two basic OIG roles—the extent of OIGs in representing group interests and exerting political influence on governments. This framework proposes three main categories of OIGs based on their claims as representatives of particular social groups, en route to fulfilling the claims, breaking the claims, and opposing the claims. Finally, this framework is able to present types of OIGs in environmental governance.

- RIF is an applicable framework for analyzing the roles of organized interest groups
- This framework proposes categories and types of OIGs based on the extent of their role-fulfillment in representing particular groups within society and exerting political influence on governments
- This framework captures the actions of OIGs beyond the pursuit of common interests

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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Specifications Table

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Resource availability:	Not applicable

Method details

Organized interest groups (OIGs) play pivotal roles in democratic life as vehicles for citizen engagement in political processes. OIGs should adopt roles that represent the interests of particular groups within society and advocate for those common interests to governments through the exertion of political influence [1,2,21]. However, evolving phenomena indicate the existence of OIGs which deviate from their core roles and no longer represent the interests of the groups they represent [3,22]. An OIG, however, consists of rational individuals who tend to pursue self-interests and private goals [4]. We are therefore encouraged to develop an analytical framework to check OIG claims as social representatives of particular groups, to capture their diversity including OIGs which act beyond the pursuit of common interests. We established RIF to assess the extent of the OIG role in environmental governance.

In developing RIF, we adopted a theory-driven qualitative strategy [5] with an empirical-analytical approach [2]. This approach departs from the assumption that specific sociopolitical events follow certain patterns that can be interpreted with specific political theories [6]. We applied theories of OIGs from the Western tradition and developed those theories with respect to Global South contexts. Based on the theories, we determined that OIGs should take roles i) representing the interests of particular groups within society (called 'the groups') and ii) based on their common interests, exerting political influence on governments to achieve common goals. We used these two roles as the basis for developing our framework. We change the two roles into X and Y dimensions, where the X dimension represents the first role and the Y dimension represents the latter. In the following, we developed criteria and operational indicators to assess the extent of OIG fulfillment of the two roles, and place OIGs in the X and Y dimensions.

Criteria and operational indicators

Representing the groups' interests (X dimension) – To measure the extent to which OIGs fulfill this role, we first check group arrangements and accountability mechanisms. Group arrangements explain which groups OIGs represent and how they are recruited. The groups might be comprised of members [7], or target groups [2,8] such as forest user groups and financial supporters. It is possible for OIGs to represent members and target groups simultaneously [23]. The groups also might take the form of individuals or organizations [7]. We analyze the group's recruitment since not all OIGs in the Global South are membership-based organizations. While for membership organizations, there are two systems of recruitment: upward and downward. The upward system recruits members among those who, with mutual interests from the beginning, form a group to achieve common goals. The downward system uses persuasive methods, such as modern marketing [2]. We analyze accountability mechanisms provided by OIGs to the groups. Accountability analysis evaluates the means by which actors represent their interests [8,9]. Accountability mechanisms explore the tools and processes of accountability. Tools of accountability include reports on finances and performances and activities [10]. Processes of accountability include democratic participation forums to discuss and evaluate OIG's conduct and performance. These can manifest formally or informally [11].

Political influence on the government (Y dimension) – In this section, we analyze autonomy and power distribution. Autonomy analysis aims to explain an organization's self-monitoring and self-regulation [12]. This analysis is key to ensuring that OIGs are independent from their governments. We analyze financial resources [13], founders of the organization [14], the existence of government representatives within their bodies [15], and whether or not they implement formal tasks from the

Table 1

Criteria and operational indicators to place OIGs in the X and Y dimension.

Dimension	Criteria	Operational Indicators
X	Group arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group type • Recruitment system
	Accountability mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity and performance reports • Financial reports • Democratic participation forums
Y	Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resources • Founder of the organization • Existence of government representatives within OIG bodies • Whether or not they implement formal tasks from the government
	Power distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manifesting resources • Lobbying • Outcomes

government [13,16]. Meanwhile, to disclose the success of OIG power distribution, we analyze their resource manifestation, lobbying, and the outcomes. Resources of OIGs may include knowledge and information, powerful members and membership size, access and networks/alliances, and finances [17]. Related to lobbying, we analyze whether OIGs lobby or do not. Not all OIGs in the Global South lobby their governments, nor are they necessarily interested in influencing policy processes. Some prefer to focus on providing services at the ground level [18]. OIGs that are interested in lobbying may use inside or outside means or combinations of the two [24]. Inside lobbying directly influences the government by formally participating in policy-making processes or informally through personal relations and communications with targeted official governments. Outside lobbying indirectly influences the government by mobilizing public opinion [19] through demonstrations [20] and other agents to influence policy-making processes. Finally, analyzing outcomes is the key determinant of whether an OIG can be said to be powerful or not, and whether or it carries 'political influence'. The outcomes of lobbying can be policy changes or policy creation. In this analysis, OIGs which do not conduct lobbies may never be powerful or influential OIGs. Criteria and operational indicators are resumed in Table 1. Following the development of criteria and operational indicators, we provide procedures and guidelines to place OIGs within our framework.

Procedures to plot OIGs into the framework

Based on OIG theories, two basic OIG roles should not be assumed to be equivalent. OIGs should attempt to fulfill the first role then continue to pursue the second. In other words, the X dimension becomes the more fundamental basis for grouping OIGs. In this way, we should first look for the OIGs' position in the X dimension. That position includes three zones: X (+), X (\pm), and X (-) (see Table 2.a). The first zone consists of OIGs that represent groups' interests, OIGs that are **en route to fulfilling their claim** as representatives of particular groups within society. The second zone is a place where OIGs do not represent the groups' interests. They are **breaking their claim** as representatives of particular groups within society. The last zone is a place for OIGs that manipulate the groups to pursue their self-interests. These OIGs are **opposing their claim** as representatives of particular groups within society. Each zone is represented on two sides—right and left—to obtain more stratified and varied positions of OIGs. Table 2.a provides a guideline to find relative position of OIGs in the X dimension.

After determining the relative position of OIGs in the X dimension, the next step is to find the relative position in the Y dimension. Similar to the former dimension, we divided the Y dimension into three zones: Y (+), Y (\pm), and Y (-) (see Table 2.b). The first zone is a place for OIGs that are successful in exerting political influence on the government. The second zone is a place where OIGs do not result in political influence on the government. The last zone is a place for OIGs that are controlled or driven by the government. We also divided each zone into two sides—upper and lower. Guidelines to place OIGs in the Y dimension are provided in Table 2.b.

Table 2.a

A guidance to place OIGs in the X dimension.

Criteria	Operational indicators	X (+)		X (±)		X (-)	
		Right	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left
Group arrangements	Group type	Members	Members	Target groups	Target groups	Target groups	Target groups
	Recruitment system	Upward	Upward	No recruitment	No recruitment	Downward	Downward
Accountability mechanisms	Activity and performance reports	Provided to the all groups	Provided to part of the groups	Open	May open	Open	No
	Financial reports	Provided to the all groups	Provided to part of the groups	Open	Close	May open	No
	Democratic participation forums	Provided to the all groups	Provided to part of the groups	No	No	No	No

Table 2.b

A guidance to place OIGs in the Y dimension.

Criteria	Operational indicators	Y (+)		Y (±)		Y (-)	
		Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower
Autonomy	Financial resources	Non-government	Non-government	Non-government	Non-government	Government	Government
	Founder	Non-government	Non-government	Can be government or non-government	Can be government or non-government	Government	Government
	Government representative	No	No	May exist	May exist	Exist	Exist
	Implementing formal task	No	No	Can be Yes or No	Can be Yes or No	Can be Yes or No	Can be Yes or No
Power distribution	Manifesting resources	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can be Yes or No	Can be Yes or No	Can be Yes or No
	Lobbying	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
	Outcomes	Policy creation	Policy change	No	No	The behavior of OIGs is dependent on individual government	The behavior of OIGs is dependent on institutional government

The meeting between the X and Y dimensions finally results in nine OIG positions as presented in Fig. 1. These positions configure the extent to which OIGs fulfill their roles in representing the groups' interests and exerting political influence on the government. We propose these positions as categories and types of OIGs in environmental governance.

Examples of operationalizing the framework

To test the operationalization of our framework, we extract some examples of the OIGs from the main paper. We plot two extremely polarized OIGs types, specifically Types 1 and 9. We use selected OIGs that are eminently represented in timber and social forestry policies, where those have been included as prominent forest-environmental policies in Indonesia in recent years.

First, we locate a public OIG involved in timber legality policy in Type 1, on the left side of X (+) and the lower position of Y (+). This OIG is located thusly due to it: has formal members and

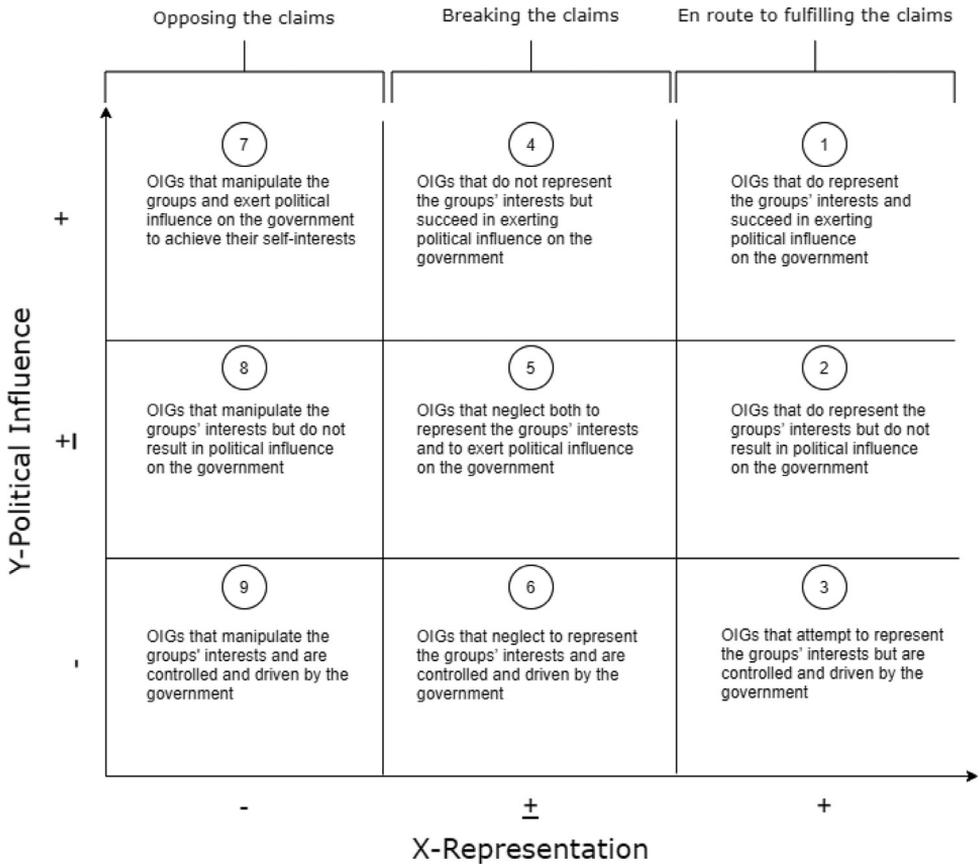


Fig. 1. Categories and types of OIG in environmental governance.

also target groups i.e. forest farmers, fishers, and indigenous people, ii) uses the upward system for recruiting the members, provides activity/performance and financial reports to its members and target groups, but its democratic participation forums are available exclusively to its members. This OIG is plotted in the lower position of Y (+) because it is institutionally autonomous from the government (in this case the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry), financed by international donors, and established by some environmental activists who concern on forest governance themes. Its leaders, members and target groups come from the civil society, and it does not implement any formal government tasks. Together with its international networks, it released a phenomenal report about the practices of illegal logging in Tanjung Puting and Leuser National Parks to the government of Indonesia and internationally. It has conducted active lobbying to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and also provided advisories and consultancies during the policy development process. This OIG is therefore recognized by other stakeholders as one of the creators of the timber legality policy in Indonesia.

Second, there is one OIG working on the social forestry policy position in Type 9, to the left side of X (-) and at the lower position of Y (-). This OIG recruits forest farmers as its members (downward system) and advocates for their acquisition of social forestry permits to manage forests. We find very limited information about this OIG on its official website, nor clear accountability mechanisms available for its members. This OIG therefore falls to the left side of X (-). Furthermore, this OIG is placed in the upper of Y (-) because we find the existence of the government-affiliated individual as

the creator and at the same time the senior advisor of this organization. The behavior of this OIG tends to pursue that individual preferences, for instance, establishing cooperatives for forest farmers who have obtained social forestry permits.

In summing up, our framework, the Representation-Influence Framework (RIF), aims to clarify the extent to which OIGs are undertaking their roles in environmental governance. RIF is rooted in two basic roles of OIGs in a democratic political system: the extent to which they represent the interests of particular groups within society and the extent to which they exert political influence on governments. This framework enables results in several categories and types of OIGs which represent the OIG diversity in environmental governance. The operational indicators that we have developed are based on our empirical experiences in Indonesian environmental governance. For use in other empirics and contexts, these indicators may need further adjustment and development.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The Authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest.

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