

Examining Collaborative Governance for the Bahia Grande in Cameron County, Texas

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Introduction

- The Bahia Grande is a historically significant wetland that once provided a habitat for diverse species. Construction projects, like the construction of the Brownsville Ship Channel, altered ecosystem functions and separated it from its water source.
- In 2000, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) acquired this area and began restoration initiatives by reconnecting the Bahia Grande to the Lower Laguna Madre through the Joe Gayman channel.
- Since then, additional restoration efforts have occurred, but there are notable deficiencies in management efforts due to resource scarcity, limited research, and insufficient public awareness.



Before

After

Research Question

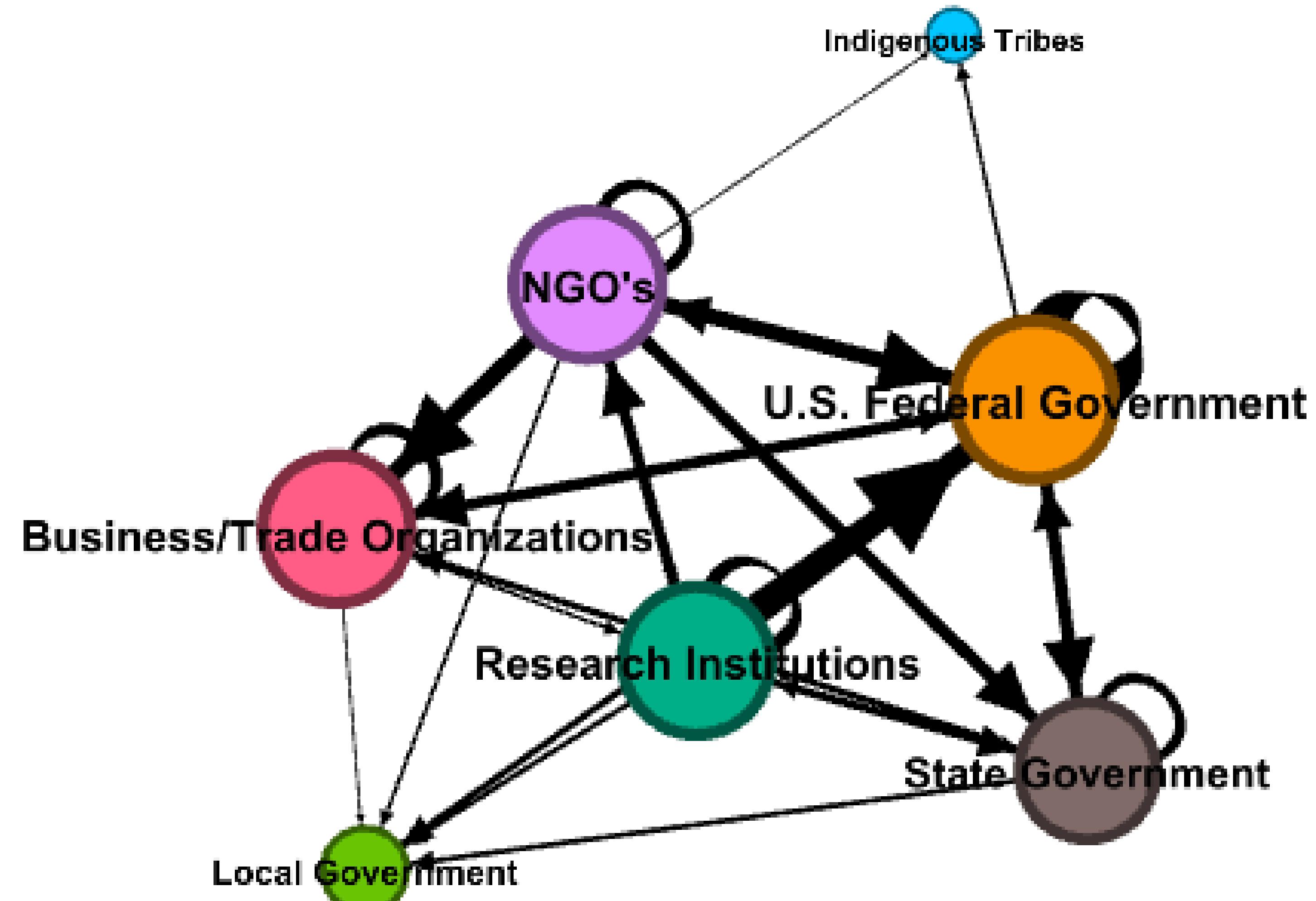
- What are the types of control mechanisms that stakeholders are using in the Bahia Grande recovery projects and how do these affect the antecedents and barriers to collaboration in this area?

Methods

- This research draws on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews to describe and investigate the collaborative network and performance of stakeholders.
- A purposeful sampling method was used to identify stakeholders who were involved in the decision-making and implementation processes related to the Bahia Grande restoration initiatives.
- A total of 20 interviews were conducted out of 52 identified stakeholders.
- Interviews were conducted and transcribed using Zoom.
- Thematic analysis occurred utilizing the NVivo qualitative software program.

Results

- The strongest collaborative ties are between the U.S. federal government and itself with 16.4% of all reported collaborations occurring.
- Research institutions can be seen as acting as a hub or facilitator of collaboration.
- These findings align with the management practices in this area given that the Bahia Grande is within a national wildlife refuge.



Control Mechanisms	Findings	Quotes
Social Control: Joint dispute resolution	No network leader was identified, but it was recognized that this area depends on collaborative joint dispute resolution.	"We were required to have public input and so what we go through is called a restoration planning process."
Behavior Control: Staffing and training	Only one stakeholder acknowledges attending a training or retreat.	"Occasionally they'll invite me to one of their retreats."
Output Control: Planning and budgeting	Budgeting was identified as an important priority for ensuring that project goals were met.	"Scope creep is a real danger in project management and that's a good way to ruin a budget."

Antecedents and Barriers	Findings	Quotes
Antecedents: Leadership	Team leadership was identified as serving many critical functions, including creating a vision for the team, overseeing communication, and conflict resolution.	"Well, a good leader can bring both of those opposites back to a common ground."
Barriers: Bureaucracy	Bureaucratic issues that were identified centered around administrative issues, permitting, and regulatory burdens.	"Just so much administration, so much paperwork work to be done, and getting the permission from people to do things."

- Behavior control mechanisms were the least identified and functional within this network. These findings suggest that there is a deficiency in strategies that manage and influence the behaviors of stakeholders.
- Notably, of these antecedents' leadership, resource allocation, goal setting, communication, and trust were among the most acknowledged.
- Barriers that were most identified in this network include financial barriers, a lack of knowledge sharing, bureaucracy, varying opinions, communication issues, lack of engagement, and underlying motives.

Discussion & Conclusion

- Given the findings, while there is the presence of antecedents within this network there are notable barriers as well. For instance, there was no identified leader for the network regarding these restoration projects.
- The findings presented in this research demonstrated a lack of behavioral control mechanisms present. This deficiency suggests that there may be difficulty in implementing appropriate strategies for guiding and regulating behaviors effectively that may affect project outcomes.

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