

What We Have Here is a Failure to Collaborate: Misinformation and Collaboration in the Anti-Offshore Wind Community

Melanie Kwestel

Rutgers University School of Communication and Information

Analysis of Facebook Activity of Public New Jersey/NY/Massachusetts Anti-Offshore Wind Groups, December 15, 2022 – February 7, 2024

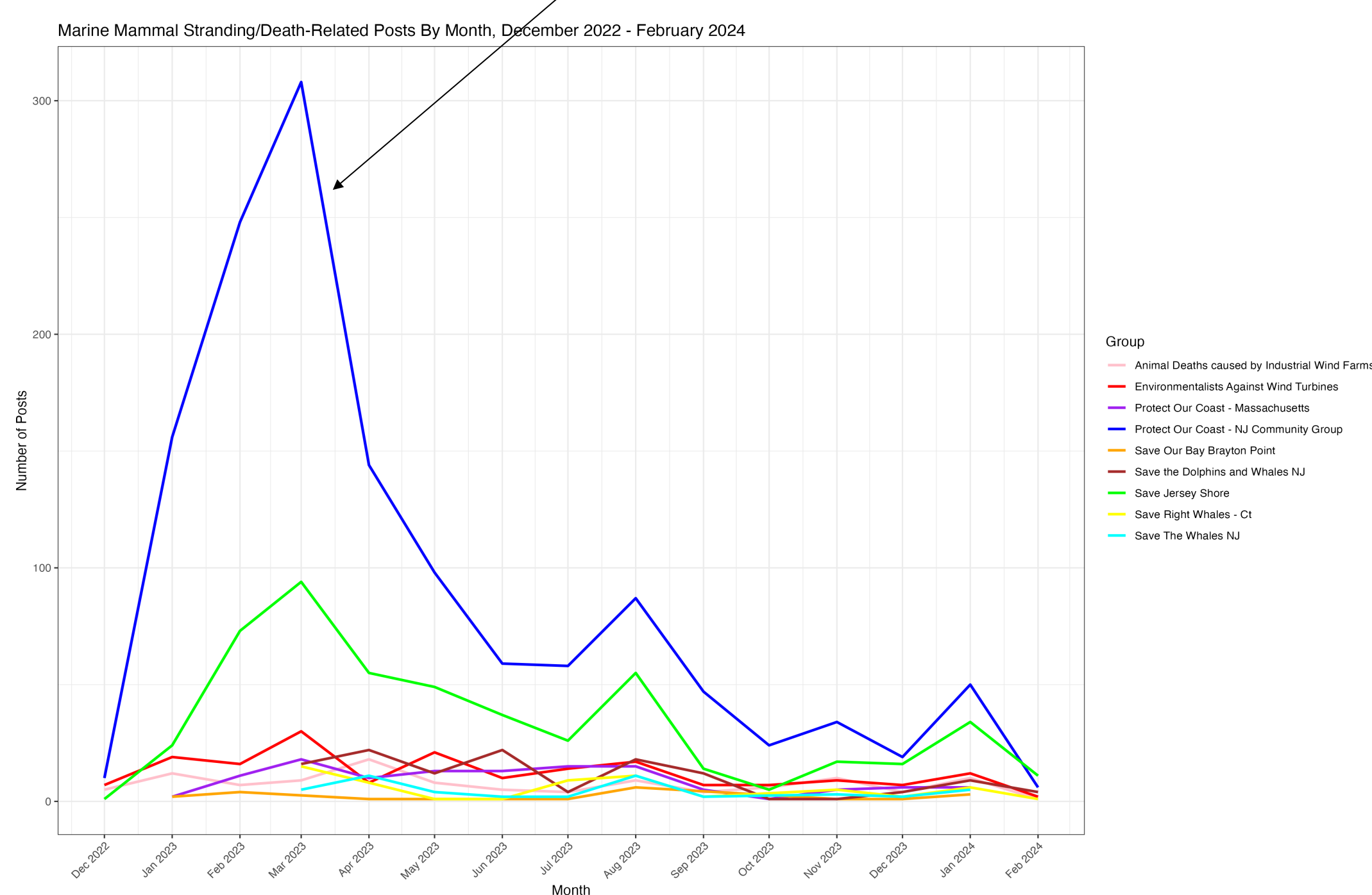
The Importance of Communicative Engagement

- ✓ Groups who hold unpopular or marginalized stances can impact public policy and opinion through meaningful collaborations that enable them to share resources and grow stronger.
- ✓ Engagement is measured by the quality of interactions within a network. Engaged collaborations are marked by equitable distribution of interaction; all members can influence decisions.

Misinformation

- ✓ We tend to believe information that conforms to our existing world view, appeals to our emotions, comes from people we trust, or that we hear repeatedly – even when that information is not true.

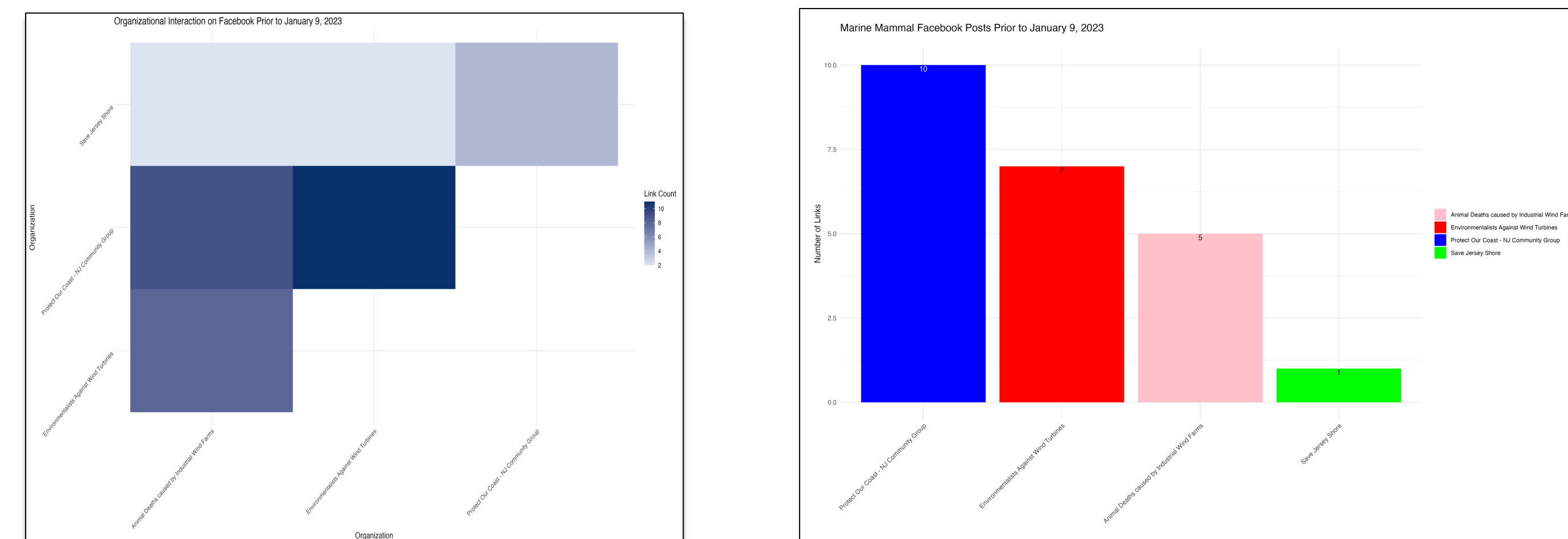
Misinformation About Marine Mammal Strandings Spiked Following a January 9, 2023, Press Conference Linking Whale Deaths to Offshore Wind Exploration.



Research Questions

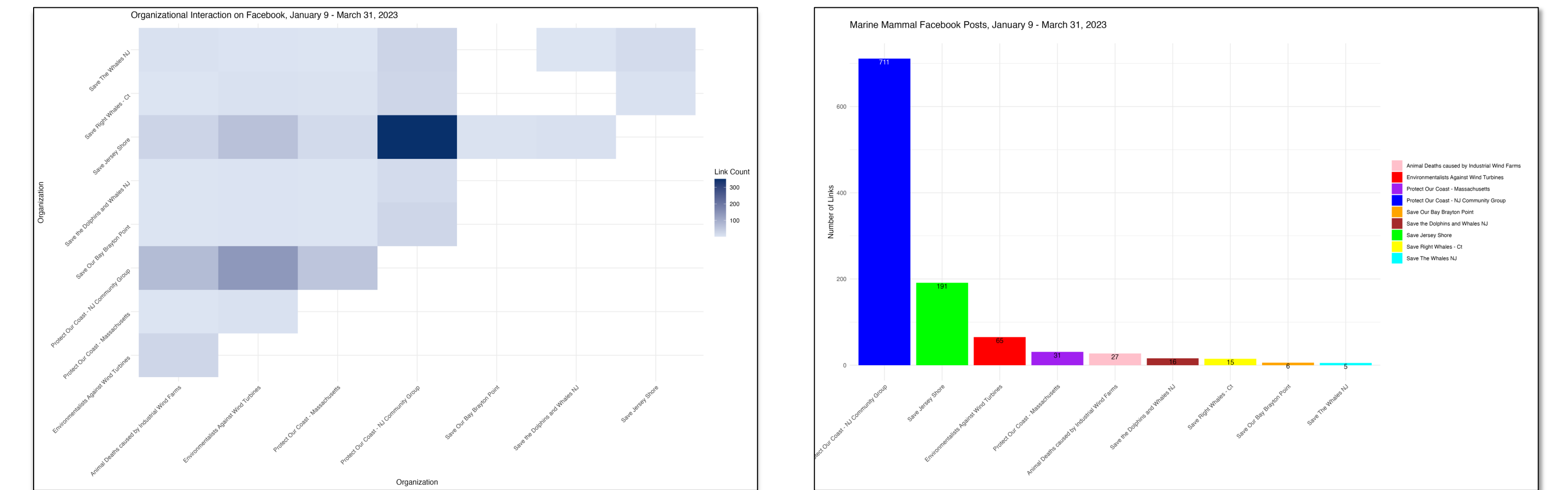
- ✓ Within the online anti-wind community, to what extent have organizations succeeded or failed in collaborating for change?
- ✓ To what extent does misinformation affect collaborative activity?

Intranetwork Communication Prior to January 9, 2023 (n = 23)



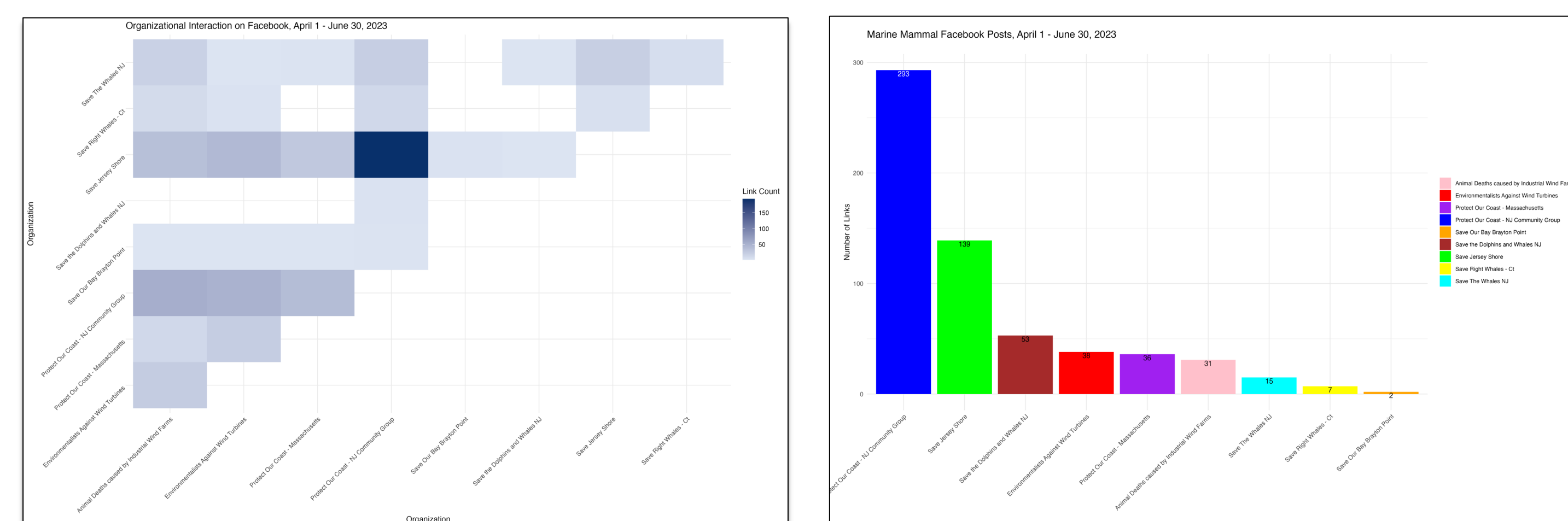
Little communication or coordination. Only four groups are sharing information.

Intranetwork Communication, January 9 – March 31, 2023 (n = 1067)



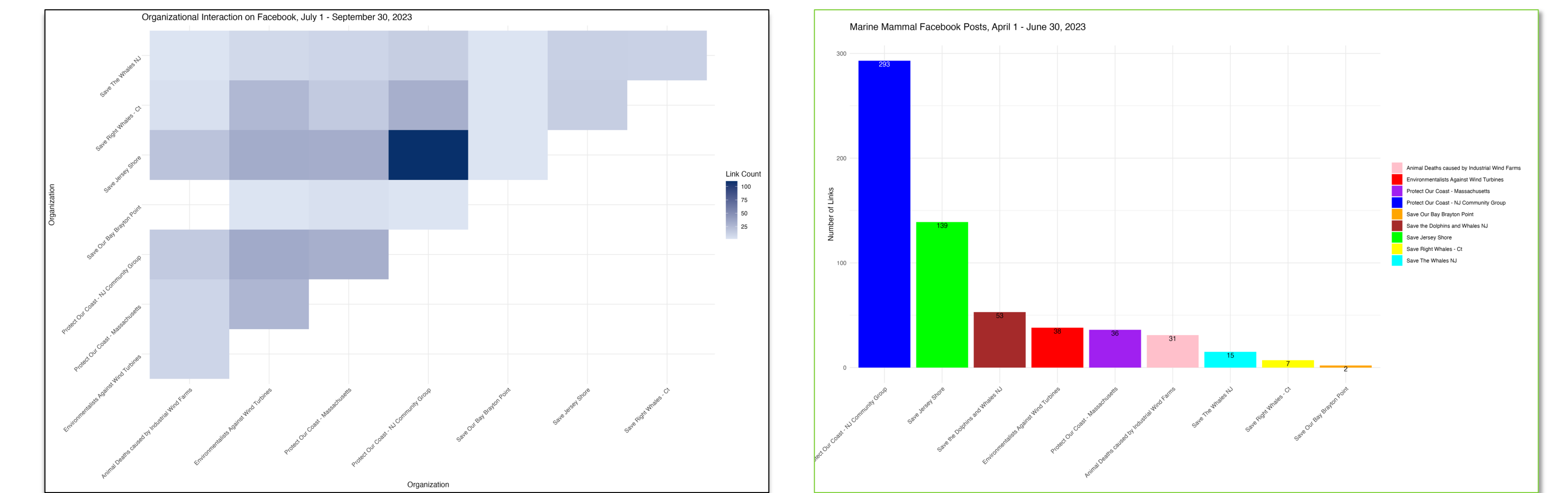
Communication increases significantly, driven by sharing of media reports following the press conference. A network begins to emerge, but inequities appear as communication is dominated by one organization.

Intranetwork Communication, April 1 – June 30, 2023 (n = 614)



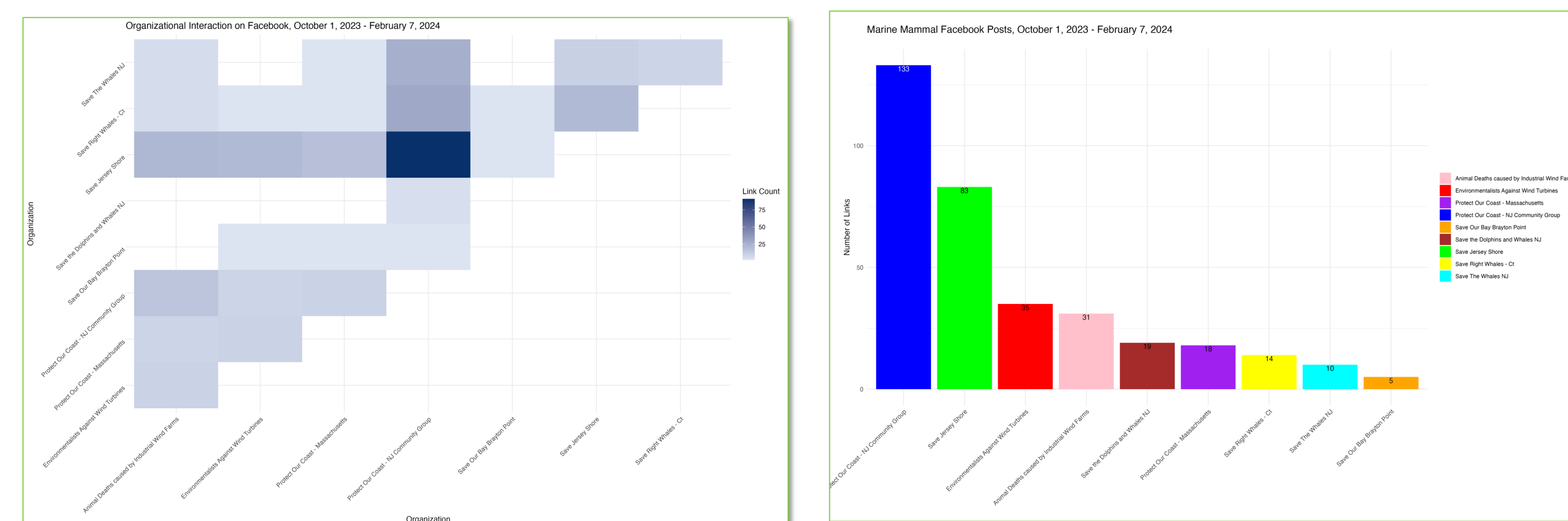
Even though communication is decreasing, the core of a smaller, nascent network remains. However, the conversation is still dominated by the Save the Jersey Shore/Protect Our Coast NJ Community Group link. Most of the other groups are now minor participants.

Intranetwork Communication, July 1 – September 30, 2023 (n = 455)



While the amount of communication is decreasing, the network looks more cohesive. More organizations are engaged in sharing misinformation about marine mammals during this period.

Intranetwork Communication, October 1, 2023 – February 7, 2024 (n = 350)



The network that emerged around misinformation is losing cohesion as discussion of marine mammals among the groups diminishes. However, pattern of dominance established by Save Our Coast - NJ Community Group remains, the result of its size, resources, and capacity.

Preliminary Results Indicate

- ✓ Although an organizational network centered on misinformation about marine mammal deaths began to take shape, it never fully coalesced. The influence of Save Our Coast – NJ Community Group, combined with limited capacity among smaller organizations, proved insurmountable.
- ✓ Misinformation served as a unifying factor within the network, spreading to the broader stakeholder community. Following the press conference, sustained media coverage led to a marked decline in public support for offshore wind energy.