Discrediting the Renewable Energy Industry's Narrative on Misinformation by "Country Folk" like you and me.

Ladies and gentlemen, farmers, and rural communities—let's lay it all bare. You've been told that those who stand against renewable energy developments are the villains of progress, accused of peddling misinformation and resisting change. But let's flip the script and see who's really spinning the narrative.

The renewable energy industry likes to present itself as the white knight of sustainability, swooping in to save the planet. But beneath this shiny exterior lies a juggernaut armed with consultants, PR firms, and selective studies—tools designed not to engage communities, but to silence them. The truth is, misinformation isn't coming from the rural voices and farmers who dare to question these developments—it's coming from the developers themselves.

This article tells a story of two competing narratives. On one side, there's the industry's claim that opposition is fueled by misinformation, casting concerned communities as obstacles to progress and who fear change. On the other, there's the lived reality of those same communities—farmers and rural residents who see their legitimate concerns about things such as property values, environmental issues, fairness, and local character (to mention only a few) dismissed by an industry focused on profit over dialogue.

Here's how the story unfolds:

- 1. The Misinformation Myth: Developers often claim opposition is based on ignorance, yet research reveals how the industry itself spreads half-truths and uses selective data to discredit valid concerns.
- 2. **The Voices of Resistance**: Farmers and rural communities aren't fighting against progress—they're fighting to protect their land, livelihoods, and way of life from poorly planned projects that prioritize profit over collaboration.
- 3. **Case Studies from the Frontlines**: Real-world examples like the Kumeyaay II Wind Project expose how inadequate consultation and dismissive tactics lead to mistrust and failed developments.
- 4. **The Industry's Playbook**: A closer look at the consultants, PR firms, and selective reporting shaping the renewable energy narrative—often at the expense of transparency and honesty.

5. **The Path Forward**: A call for developers to abandon spin and begin working with communities through trust, fairness, and respect.

This is a story about standing up—not against renewable energy, but against an industry, their developers, pundits, and advocates that often forgets the very people it's meant to serve. It's about protecting—not changing—rural communities while demanding accountability and integrity from those promising progress.



Introduction

The renewable energy sector has faced significant opposition as it expands across rural landscapes and urban peripheries. Developers frequently argue that those who oppose their projects employ misinformation to derail progress, labeling opposition as reactionary and self-serving. However, this narrative often oversimplifies the complex realities of opposition and dismisses legitimate community concerns. Drawing from the works of Dr. Viorela Dan, Graham N. Dixon, Dr. Briony Swire-Thompson, empirical evidence from various case studies, and key findings from *Thirty Years of North American Wind Energy Acceptance Research: What Have We Learned?* by J. Rand and B. Hoen (2017) and *A Case-Control Study of Support/Opposition to Wind Turbines: Perceptions of Health Risk, Economic Benefits, and Community Conflict* by J. Baxter, R. Morzaria, and R. Hirsch (2013), this dissertation challenges the assertion

that misinformation by opponents is the primary barrier to project development. Instead, it reveals how the industry's claims of misinformation often obscure systemic issues in engagement and accountability.

1. Misinformation in Renewable Energy Narratives

1.1 Developer-Led Narratives

A 2024 report by Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, *Developer Practices and Perspectives on Community Engagement for U.S. Renewable Energy Siting* (Nilson et al., 2024), highlights that developers frequently cite misinformation as a significant barrier to project approval. Developers argue that opposition is primarily fueled by misconceptions about health, safety, and environmental impacts. However, information from various studies suggests that this claim could be strategically deployed to discredit opposition and shift attention away from systemic failures in developer practices [Nilson et al., 2024] . For example, the "decide-announcedefend" (DAD) model often employed by developers systematically excludes communities from meaningful participation, fostering resentment and resistance that developers may then dismiss as misinformed.

Rand and Hoen (2017), in their study *Thirty Years of North American Wind Energy Acceptance Research: What Have We Learned?*, reinforce this critique, noting that opposition to wind energy projects is rarely driven solely by misinformation. Instead, they identify a broad spectrum of concerns, ranging from procedural fairness to environmental and economic impacts. Their review emphasizes that framing opposition as misinformed overlooks the nuanced and context-specific nature of community resistance [Rand & Hoen, 2017].

1.2 Industry Motivations

Dr. Briony Swire-Thompson's research on misinformation correction (*Correction Format Has a Limited Role When Debunking Misinformation*, 2021) highlights how misinformation can be strategically weaponized, not only by opposition groups but also by industries seeking to control narratives. Similarly, Baxter et al. (2013), in their study *A Case-Control Study of Support/Opposition to Wind Turbines: Perceptions of Health Risk, Economic Benefits, and Community Conflict*, found that framing opposition as misinformed often serves to delegitimize community concerns about procedural fairness and local autonomy. They observed that even when residents were provided with factual information addressing health risks associated with wind turbines, opposition persisted due to unresolved tensions over fairness and equity [

Baxter et al., 2013] . This duality complicates the discourse, as the industry's portrayal of misinformation often serves its own interests.

2. Understanding the Landscape: Misinformation in Renewable Energy Development

You just don't know, what you don't know, until you figure out that you know this.

2.1 Community Engagement: A Flawed Starting Point

Research reveals that renewable energy developers often adopt a "decide-announcedefend" (DAD) model in their engagement practices. As highlighted in a 2024 study by Robi Nilson and colleagues at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, developers frequently finalize critical project decisions, such as site selection, before engaging with the affected community. This approach minimizes meaningful input from local stakeholders, treating engagement as a formality rather than a collaborative process.

The study also found that developers allocate less than 0.1% of total project costs to community engagement, in stark contrast to substantial expenditures on permitting and land acquisition. This limited investment fosters distrust among communities, reinforcing perceptions that their concerns are secondary to profit-driven motives.

2.2 Sources of Opposition

Opposition to renewable energy projects is multifaceted, often rooted in environmental, cultural, and procedural concerns. A 2022 study by Lawrence Susskind and colleagues at MIT analyzed 53 delayed or canceled projects across the United States, identifying seven primary drivers of opposition. These included:

- Environmental risks, such as habitat destruction
- Concerns over land value and property rights
- Perceptions of unfair participation and procedural injustice.

The study highlights that opposition is frequently amplified by a lack of transparent communication from developers, who may attempt to downplay or dismiss legitimate concerns. For example, in the Kumeyaay II Wind Project on Tribal lands, the developers framed the project as an economic opportunity while neglecting financial and cultural concerns raised by Tribal representatives. This approach led to project failure, exemplifying the consequences of inadequate engagement.

2.3 Narratives in Local Contexts

A 2020 study by Jack Nicholls at the University of Bristol Law School examined rural solar farm developments in the UK and their reception in two communities. Nicholls found that opposition often stemmed from narratives about the loss of agricultural land and a perceived prioritization of profit over local needs. Developers' responses— emphasizing economic benefits—were frequently perceived as disingenuous, eroding trust and undermining the democratic legitimacy of these projects.

2.4 The Discrediting of the 'Information Deficit' Explanation

Developers often cite misinformation and knowledge gaps as primary drivers of opposition, framing resistance as a product of misunderstanding. However, this "information deficit" model has been widely challenged in academic literature.

1. Rand and Hoen's Thirty-Year Analysis

In "Thirty Years of North American Wind Energy Acceptance Research" (2017), J. Rand and B. Hoen argue that opposition is rarely attributable to misinformation alone. Instead, deeper concerns about fairness, equity, and procedural justice drive resistance. Their study concluded that simply providing additional information does little to resolve these issues, undermining the effectiveness of the information deficit framework.

2. Baxter, Morzaria, and Hirsch's Case-Control Study

In "A Case-Control Study of Support/Opposition to Wind Turbines" (2013), J. Baxter et al. reinforced this perspective, finding that opposition often reflects frustrations with perceived inequities and exclusion from decision-making. Even when accurate information about minimal health risks was shared, opposition persisted because it failed to address structural and relational concerns.

Actually, these studies underscore that addressing opposition requires developers to move beyond education and engage with the broader socioeconomic and procedural dimensions of resistance. Actions that do date are seemingly are not occurring.

3. Case Studies: Examining Claims of Misinformation

3.1 The Kumeyaay II Wind Project

The Kumeyaay II Wind Project in California faced significant opposition from Tribal representatives who raised concerns about financial and cultural impacts. Developers framed opposition as rooted in misinformation, yet a detailed review of project documentation showed a lack of adequate consultation and financial transparency.

This framing deflected attention from legitimate critiques, undermining trust in the project's management (*Sources of Opposition to Renewable Energy Projects in the United States*, Susskind et al., 2022) [Susskind et al., 2022].

3.2 Findings from Baxter et al. (2013)

Baxter et al.'s study, *A Case-Control Study of Support/Opposition to Wind Turbines: Perceptions of Health Risk, Economic Benefits, and Community Conflict* (2013), provides additional evidence that opposition to wind turbines is often rooted in perceptions of procedural injustice rather than misinformation. The study revealed that health concerns, while frequently cited, were often secondary to frustrations over a lack of meaningful community involvement and inequitable distribution of project benefits. Communities felt excluded from decision-making processes, fostering resistance even in the absence of verifiable health risks [Baxter et al., 2013].

3.3 Insights from UK Solar Farm Developments

Jack Nicholls' 2020 study, *Technological Intrusion and Communicative Renewal: The Case of Two Rural Solar Farm Developments in the UK*, found that community narratives often stemmed from legitimate concerns about land use and local autonomy. Developers labeled opposition as uninformed, despite failing to address substantive issues like land degradation and profit distribution. Nicholls observed that labeling community concerns as misinformation eroded trust and undermined the democratic legitimacy of these projects [Nicholls, 2020].

4. Procedural Injustices and Information Deficits

4.1 Public Engagement Deficits

The Berkeley Lab study, *Developer Practices and Perspectives on Community Engagement for U.S. Renewable Energy Siting* (Nilson et al., 2024), revealed that developers invest less than 0.1% of total project costs in community engagement, reflecting a limited commitment to fostering genuine dialogue between developers and communities. Section 4.4 of this study highlights that most developers approach engagement as a predominantly one-way process, viewing the public as a source of information that may inform project siting or design, rather than as active participants in decision-making. This approach underscores a fundamental imbalance in the engagement process, where community voices are acknowledged superficially but rarely integrated into substantive project outcomes [Nilson et al., 2024]. Such identified deficiencies are not just logistical oversights; they also reflect a deeper systemic issue in how developers view and interact with the communities affected by their projects. The practice of treating engagement as a box to check or a hurdle to clear perpetuates a mindset in which opposition is presumed to be driven by misinformation or emotional resistance rather than legitimate grievances. This presumption is likely deeply rooted in the manner in which developers approach rural communities—as entities to be managed rather than equal partners in shaping decisions that directly impact their lives. These practices, in addition to falsely attributing opposition to misinformation, reveal how the industry's engagement model often alienates the very people it needs to collaborate with most [Nilson et al., 2024] [Baxter et al., 2013].

5.So, you might ask, how is the renewable energy industry using misinformation to fuel their own self interests?

Developer initiated misinformation arises in multiple forms, including strategic omissions, biased interpretations, and overgeneralizations. The following studies highlight how developers strategically use their own funded research to minimize perceptions of harm:

5.1 Dismissal of Independent Appraisals:

Reports such as the McCann Appraisal for Adams County, Illinois, provide meticulous analyses of property value declines due to renewable energy developments. McCann's findings include up to a 40% reduction in value for homes in the immediate vicinity of wind farms, countering the industry's claims.

Even Mary McClinton Clay, MAI, has conducted extensive analyses of property value impacts near solar farms which are contrary to the narrative often conveyed by a renewable energy developer. Her findings provide valuable evidence of the detrimental effects these developments have on surrounding properties. For instance:

- 1. Clark County Analysis: Clay highlighted that properties adjacent to solar farms face a potential decline in value of up to 70%, factoring in reclamation costs and soil compaction issues. This analysis reflects the significant financial burden borne by property owners adjacent to these developments, making such properties less attractive and marketable.
- 2. **Review of the Lone Oak Solar Farm**: Clay identified methodological flaws in reports suggesting no impact on property values near solar farms. She found that:

- Sale-resale analyses frequently omitted critical data, such as the identity of the developer as a purchaser and discrepancies in time adjustments for sales.
- Adjusted paired sales showed declines in value ranging from 11.3% to 28%, with an average decline of 13.42% across affected properties.
- 3. **Broad Studies and Peer-Reviewed Analyses**: Clay summarized findings from multiple independent and peer-reviewed studies, which collectively demonstrate consistent property value declines:
 - A University of Rhode Island study (2020) reported property value reductions of 7% within 0.1 miles of solar farms.
 - A Lawrence Berkeley National Lab study (2023) identified declines ranging from 4% to 5.8% within a half-mile radius in several U.S. states.
 - A University of Texas study (2018) concluded that properties within 100 feet of a solar farm experienced a nearly 10% reduction in value.
 - North Star Solar Farm Case Study: Clay exposed serious discrepancies in an appraisal of the North Star Solar Farm in Minnesota. The appraiser failed to account for significant sales adjustments, inaccurately represented paired sales, and omitted key transactions where developers had purchased properties at market rates, only to resell them at losses averaging 19.91% after the solar installation.

5.2 Selective Reporting:

Developers often highlight findings from studies that show negligible or positive impacts on property values while ignoring broader, contradictory evidence. For example, a study commissioned by solar developers in North Carolina claimed no measurable impacts on property values, despite independent appraisals finding significant declines in rural areas.

For my friends in Ohio, this is a particularly egregious example of selective reporting involves studies that draw property value data from questionable sources, such as online real estate sales applications. One such study (*The Impact of Renewable Energy Projects on Residential Property Values: A Review and Meta-Analysis*, 2024) relied on data scraped from an online application, raising significant questions about its validity. Online platforms often lack critical contextual details such as unique property characteristics, the accuracy of transaction records, or proximity adjustments—all of which are essential for rigorous analysis. Using such data to assess property value impacts reflects a lack of methodological rigor and undermines the credibility of findings that developers may use to dismiss legitimate community concerns.

5.3 Manipulative Framing:

In many cases, developers argue that visual buffers, community benefits, or colocation of land uses mitigate negative impacts. However, these measures often fail to address core issues like loss of rural character or diminished marketability of affected properties.

Additionally, for my friends in Ohio, this legal precedent in Ohio further underscores the importance of visual aesthetics and property values in community welfare. In *Baker v. City of Mariemont* (1999), the Ohio Court of Appeals upheld zoning laws aimed at protecting property values and community aesthetics. The court emphasized that zoning regulations can serve the public welfare by preserving economic stability and character. This case illustrates that visual impacts are not merely cosmetic concerns but integral to maintaining property desirability and economic health. Renewable energy developments that disrupt visual landscapes or fail to respect community aesthetics risk undermining these principles.

5.4 The Role of Industry-Aligned Consultants in Shaping the Narrative

Renewable energy developers frequently employ consultants to produce studies and public relations materials that align with the industry's narrative, often sidelining objectivity and critical analysis in favor of advancing their development agendas. These consultants play a pivotal role in framing renewable energy projects in a favorable light, often at the expense of transparency and impartiality. Two prominent examples of such practices involve **CohnReznick** and **Purple Strategies**.

5.4.1 CohnReznick: Tailored Solutions for Renewable Energy

CohnReznick, a consultancy firm prominently involved in renewable energy, explicitly markets itself as a trusted partner for developers. According to their website, the firm is "fully engaged in the [renewable energy] industry across all the major energy segments, delivering holistic solutions to complex problems facing renewable energy participants." While this positioning underscores their expertise in the sector, it also raises questions about their ability to maintain objectivity when producing impact assessments, feasibility studies, and financial analyses.

A key example of this is the **CohnReznick Solar Impact Study (2021)**, commissioned by NextEra Energy Resources. This study is frequently cited by developers across the United States to support claims that utility-scale solar farms have no adverse effects on property values. However, a closer examination of the study reveals several critical flaws:

1. Size of Developments Analyzed:

The mean and average size of solar developments analyzed in the study were **less than 20 acres**—a fraction of the size of typical utility-scale solar farms, which often span hundreds or even thousands of acres. This disparity undermines the study's applicability to large-scale projects, as the visual and environmental impacts of smaller installations differ drastically from those of expansive developments. For example, a small solar array on a few acres is unlikely to produce the same economic or aesthetic impacts as a 1,000-acre installation covering farmland.

2. Selective Geographic Focus:

The study concentrated on developments in urban and suburban areas, where solar projects are often located near commercial or industrial zones. This focus excludes rural contexts, where the impact on property values and community aesthetics tends to be more significant. By omitting these scenarios, the study paints an incomplete picture of solar farm impacts.

3. Developer Reliance on the Study:

Despite these shortcomings, developers throughout the United States frequently use this study to dismiss concerns about property value declines. This widespread reliance highlights the critical role of industry-aligned consultants in shaping the renewable energy narrative, regardless of the limitations or biases in their analyses.

5.4.2 Purple Strategies: The Public Relations Arm

Another influential player in shaping public opinion is **Purple Strategies**, a public relations consultancy known for conducting renewable energy public opinion polling and crafting messaging strategies. Purple Strategies has documented ties to a leading global renewable energy company, creating an inherent conflict of interest when conducting polls or presenting findings as impartial. These relationships suggest that public opinion surveys and community engagement efforts may not always reflect unbiased perspectives.

Purple Strategies' polling methodology also raises concerns about the validity of its findings. The firm often conducts surveys with as few as **150 participants**, resulting in a margin **of error of 7.5%**—a significant margin that can distort the actual public sentiment regarding renewable energy projects. Despite these limitations, developers frequently use Purple Strategies' findings to claim widespread community support, overlooking the concerns of directly affected stakeholders. This practice not only

misrepresents public opinion but also marginalizes voices critical of renewable energy developments.

5.4.3 Broader Implications for Trust and Transparency

The reliance on industry-aligned consultants creates significant challenges for fostering trust and transparency. When consultants produce work that primarily serves the interests of developers, communities perceive the entire process as biased and exclusionary. This dynamic not only erodes public trust but also reinforces opposition narratives that question the integrity of renewable energy projects.

To address this issue, the renewable energy industry must commit to greater independence and transparency in the use of consultants. Developers should:

- Engage independent, third-party firms with no financial or professional ties to the renewable energy industry.
- Publish the full methodologies and raw data used in consultant studies for public scrutiny.
- Ensure that public opinion polling and impact assessments include diverse and representative community voices.

Without safeguards, the industry's reliance on consultants like CohnReznick and Purple Strategies will continue to fuel perceptions of bias and deepen divisions between developers and communities.

6. From Collaboration to Contempt: The Role of Trust in Renewable Energy Projects

One glaring example of this strategy is how developers deflect and redirect accusations of human rights violations within the renewable energy supply chain. From forced labor in the mining of critical minerals to reports of child labor in solar panel manufacturing, these issues raise serious ethical concerns. Yet, when confronted, developers often pivot to the broader goal of combating climate change or highlight their individual commitments to ethical sourcing—without addressing systemic abuses linked to their industry. These deflections, while superficially reassuring, sidestep meaningful accountability and shift the focus away from uncomfortable truths, much like the tactics Alinsky described.

Take, for instance, **Rule 5: "Ridicule is man's most potent weapon."** Renewable energy developers have become masters of this tactic. They frequently dismiss anyone who raises concerns about a project as selfish NIMBYs (Not In My Backyard types). Have questions about your property values dropping because of a solar farm? You're clearly just resistant to change and/or progress. Worried about how a wind turbine might affect your land? Don't be so dramatic! Developers lean hard on the ridicule card, reframing valid concerns as anti-progress whining, hoping to shame people into silence.

Then there's **Rule 8: "Keep the pressure on."** Developers maintain relentless momentum, inundating opposition groups with procedural deadlines, complex documentation, and legal threats. This tactic often leaves communities overwhelmed and unable to organize effective responses. By the time residents fully grasp the implications of a project, the train has already left the station. A town grappling with zoning disputes for a utility-scale solar farm, for instance, might find itself tied up in lengthy legal proceedings while the development moves forward largely unimpeded.

Next comes **Rule 11: "If you push a negative hard enough, it will push through and become a positive.**" This one is a particular favorite. Developers love to reframe problems as opportunities. Is your farmland about to be turned into a sea of solar panels? Don't think of it as losing agricultural productivity—think of it as "diversifying your revenue stream"! Worried about wind turbines blotting your rural views? No, no, no—those are "symbols of progress." It's a brilliant tactic because it makes anyone who still objects seem ungrateful, even when they have every reason to be skeptical.

Perhaps most disheartening is the way developers employ **Rule 12: "Pick the target**, **freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it."** This tactic takes opposition leaders—often well-intentioned, local voices speaking up for their communities—and paints them as "anti-farmer," "anti-education," "anti-democracy," or even "anti-property rights." Have you ever heard someone from your town called one of these labels just because they asked for more transparency in a wind project? It's a classic example of this rule in action. Developers know that by singling out opposition leaders, they can make the whole debate seem less about fairness and more about one "difficult" person standing in the way of change and/or progress.

But here's where these Alinsky-inspired tactics really do their damage: **they destroy trust.** Research by Viorela Dan and Graham N. Dixon demonstrates that trust is one of the most critical factors shaping how communities perceive renewable energy projects [Dan & Dixon, 2021]. When developers deploy ridicule, reframe valid concerns, or target community leaders, they undermine any remaining goodwill they might have had. Communities start to see these tactics for what they are—attempts to silence dissent and push projects forward without meaningful dialogue. And once trust is gone, it's almost impossible to get back.

This erosion of trust is compounded by a lack of transparency. Section 3.1 highlighted how communities frequently perceive developers as untrustworthy sources of information. When developers dismiss concerns as baseless or paint critics as "antidemocracy" or "anti-education," they reinforce this perception, leaving residents feeling excluded and devalued. The combination of tokenistic engagement and adversarial tactics creates a perfect storm of mistrust and frustration, pushing communities further away from collaboration and toward resistance.

Developers might think they're being clever by flipping the Alinsky playbook, but the long-term consequences are clear. Communities grow more resistant, leaders become more vocal, and opposition narratives gain traction. If developers truly want to foster collaboration and mutual respect, they need to ditch the ridicule, the reframing, and the deflections—and start having honest, meaningful conversations. After all, no one likes being condescended to—especially not farmers and rural residents who already feel sidelined in decisions that impact their livelihoods.

So the next time you hear, "Solar panels? Think of them as an investment in the future!" or, "These NIMBYs just don't understand change and/or progress," take a moment to consider the playbook in action. And then ask yourself: Is this the kind of relationship-building that earns trust? Or is it just another tactic to push through a project without dealing with the real issues? Chances are, you already know the answer.

7.0 Closing Argument - The Truth Behind the Renewable Energy Industry's Misinformation Machine

Why do developers need such a massive machine of consultants, PR firms, selective studies, finger pointing, and misinformation to make their case? If their projects were as beneficial as they claim, wouldn't the truth stand on its own? Wouldn't financially backed guarantees be made to eliminate concerns? Wouldn't communities line up to welcome these developments with open arms? Instead, they seemingly hide behind narratives which frame opposition as "misinformed," while we have witnessed them routinely employ tactics from Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* to ridicule, polarize, and silence those who simply want their concerns respected.

They call you "NIMBYs." They say you're "anti-progress" or "anti-farmer." But who's really against farmers? Is it you, protecting your land and livelihood, or the developers who swoop and threaten your quality of life, and your community's character?

You've been painted as the problem, but you're not the ones distorting the facts. The renewable energy industry has built its empire on a foundation of manipulation and

selective truth. Their claims of "misinformation" are a smoke screen—a way to delegitimize your voice while hiding their own failures to engage honestly.

This is your land, your community, your future. Don't let their billion-dollar narratives make you doubt your instincts or dismiss your concerns. Developers want you to believe opposition is futile, but it's not. The only way they win is if you believe their story instead of your own truth.

The next time they tell you these projects won't hurt your land, your home, or your family, ask them to prove it—not with consultants, spin, or selective studies, but with transparency, honesty, and respect. Chances are, they can't. And that's all you need to know about who's really spreading misinformation.

Stand strong, ask the hard questions, and don't let them define what progress looks like for your community. Because progress isn't bulldozing farmland or plastering solar panels across your fields without listening—it's working together with integrity. And that's something they haven't even begun to do.

(I am neither an attorney, writer, industry expert, real estate agent/appraiser, seasoned engineer, or am I employed and/or compensated by any aspect of the fossil fuel industry. Heck, I'm barely even what someone might consider a farmer as my wife owns only two horses. I am someone who is deeply passionate about what I share, human, and prone to error. Please, enjoy what I have written, but I encourage you to perform your own due diligence and arrive at you own opinion.)