

4-1-2009

Failure To Act: The Political Battle Over Climate Change and the Prospects for Effective Global Policy

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Social Sciences. Paper 1.

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Abstract

In a time of unprecedented environmental damage, two very distinct and opposing policy agendas have emerged in the EU and us. The fragmented and disconnected nature of international climate change policy stems from the myriad political, social, philosophical, and economic issues that exist and, at times, conflict, on a local, national, and international level. Using a rigorous policy model, this analysis seeks to illuminate the roadblocks that have severely undermined climate change policy efforts in the us, analyze the legislative successes and implementation failures in EU, and discuss the prospects for global climate change policy in the future.

Document Type

Capstone Project

Degree Name

Bachelor of Arts

Department

Politics/Government

First Advisor

Jules Boykoff

Subject Categories

American Politics | Environmental Policy | International Relations

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Failure To Act: The Political Battle Over Climate Change and the Prospects for Effective Global Policy

Précis. In a time of unprecedented environmental damage, two very distinct and opposing policy agendas have emerged in the EU and US. The fragmented and disconnected nature of international climate change policy stems from the myriad political, social, philosophical, and economic issues that exist and, at times, conflict, on a local, national, and international level. Using a rigorous policy model, this analysis seeks to illuminate the roadblocks that have severely undermined climate change policy efforts in the US, analyze the legislative successes and implementation failures in EU, and discuss the prospects for global climate change policy in the future.

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May 15, 2009

Failure To Act

The Political Battle Over Climate Change and the Prospects for Effective Global Policy

INTRODUCTION

In 2001, chief editor of *Science*, Donald Kennedy, wrote, “by now the scientific consensus on global warming is so strong that it leaves little room for defensive assertions.... Consensus as strong as the one that has developed around this topic is rare in science” (Kennedy 2001, 5513). The level of certainty within the scientific community is astounding, and climate change¹ is now recognized among scientists as “one of the most serious challenges facing us today” (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2009).

Despite the unified scientific consensus², climate change has evolved into a heated political battle that presents a new and precarious problem for the international community. On one hand, dominant global players such as the European Union (EU) have seemingly placed climate change at the top of the political agenda, with EU President Nicolas Sarkozy exclaiming, “you cannot want to have the rights of great economic powers...and abstain from your responsibilities. Fairness demands that all participate in the common effort, even if the developed countries must accept more stringent constraints than the developing countries” (France Warns Climate Change Triggers Global Conflict 2009). However, despite some legislative success and soaring rhetoric, the EU continues to struggle with overly ambitious goals, unclear legal framework for oversight and regulation, and strong opposition from some member states and their key industries. On the

¹ Although climate change and global warming are often used interchangeably, this paper emphasizes the important technical differences between the two terms. Climate change refers specifically to a change of climate, which is linked, directly or indirectly, to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere over a period of time (UNFCCC 1994). Climate change is a more appropriate term because it encapsulates the systemic changes in weather that will vary from region to region and emphasizes more than elevated global temperatures. This must remain conceptually distinct from the natural global warming process in which infrared radiation is absorbed by the atmosphere and maintains a habitable temperature on Earth (PCC 2007, 875).

² Scientific consensus refers to agreeing studies that have utilized traditional scientific channels (e.g. peer-reviewed papers and journal articles) to conduct research and formulate conclusions (McCright and Dunlap 2003, 359).

other hand, the United States (US) has continued to delay action on climate change, citing economic and sovereignty concerns, and declaring it best to “have the full [scientific] accounting and full understanding of what’s taking place” before acting (George W. Bush, Presidential Debate 2000).

The struggle to cultivate effective global policy has been so contentious because climate change touches on a wide range of political, social, philosophical, and economic issues. Thus, in order to discuss the prospects for global climate change policy, it is necessary to illuminate the cozy yet complex relationship between power, politics, and interests, and understand the roles that all three play in the broader policymaking process. Assessing the successes and setbacks of policy initiatives requires a rigorous policy model that will not only illuminate the power relationships that exist within policymaking, but will also account for the messy, convoluted way in which legislation is created. This theoretical model will help elucidate why two of the world’s most dominant global players have pursued such different climate change policies and how various interests have impacted and influenced regulatory decisions more than others.

Understanding the role that power and interests have played in EU and US policy decisions will help illuminate the prospects for effective and collective global climate change policy and assist in deciphering between a mere pledge for action and a nation-state’s ability to initiate change.

LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

How Policy is Made

In order to address the severity and imminence of climate change, industrialized countries will likely have to make significant changes in the way they operate and develop. Because of this, outside interests are especially concerned and involved in the legislative process, with both proponents and opponents seeking to influence policy decisions. John Kingdon presents a

policymaking model that captures both the internal and external competition among outside interests and political participants, as well as the malleable nature of policymaking. First, Kingdon distinguishes between non-visible and visible participants who play important roles in the legislative process. Non-visible participants and outside interests are understood as groups who have a concern for the way policy is fashioned, but need to go to some lengths to gain the attention of important and visible government officials. These visible participants, such as the president and vice president, are easily recognized by the general public and have greater access and input in the legislative process (Kingdon 2003, 61).

In his discussion of the broader policymaking process, Kingdon identifies three policy streams comprised of problems, policies, and politics, with each stream having important roles but different degrees of influence (2003, 19). The first stream, known as the problem recognition stage, includes groups of governmental and nongovernmental actors who seek to define certain issues as problems and alert the public about these pending problems (Kingdon 2003, 90). At this initial stage, there exists an important conceptual difference between an “issue,” which broadly refers to conditions or situations, neither of which are necessarily negative (Kingdon 2003, 109), and a “problem.” Labeling an issue as a problem implies that an issue has successfully commanded public attention, has been accepted by the public as a household term (Ungar 1992, 489), and, most importantly, is serious enough to make people want to act (Kingdon 2003, 109).

As an issue comes to be defined as a problem and grows more salient, specialists will try and act on the problem through bill introductions, speeches, testimonies, papers, and discourse (Kingdon 2003, 19). In this policy recognition stream, non-visible participants such as academic specialists, career bureaucrats and lobbyists seek to influence visible participants such as the President and Congress by proposing policy solutions and shaping the political agenda (Kingdon

2003, 199). This process leads to the third political stream known as political agenda setting. In order to ensure that their personal interests receive priority and attention from visible participants, outside interests and non-visible participants negotiate their way through the decision-making process and garner support for their interests (Kingdon 2003, 162). Every so often, these three streams converge to create a policy window, allowing new reformative legislation to move through the system that might otherwise have been rejected (Kingdon 2003, 19).

Kingdon's theory accounts for the different degrees of power and influence that are embedded in any political system, and his model mirrors the convoluted way in which policy is created. These are important factors that are often overlooked by other policy theories that tend to promote parsimony and rigidity over complexity and flexibility. Richard Hofferbert's theory of convergence is an example of an overly parsimonious analysis. Hofferbert analyzes policymaking in terms of converging social and political factors, such as historical events, socioeconomic conditions, mass political behavior, and elite behavior, which ultimately merge and form policy (Sabatier 1991, 150). Unlike Kingdon's theory, which highlights the internal competition among the three political streams and their participants, Hofferbert's theory fails to account for the complex way in which different actors and policymakers vie for political influence and agenda-setting power.

Kingdon's model not only accounts for the dispersion of power within the political system and the array of participants that are involved policymaking process, but it encourages the use of broad analytical tools to understand how myriad forces shape political outcomes. This is especially important in climate change policy where various political, economic, and social forces compete to shape and influence political decisions. In this sense, many competing theories

fall short yet again because of their failure to accept the role that temporary yet important decision makers play in any given issue. Rational choice theory is an example of an overly reductive approach to policy theory in its reliance on a single decision maker and its assumption that policy solutions are both obvious and limited in number. Rational choice theory declares that decision makers are faced with a series of consequences and alternatives, and will choose the one that generates the best result for attaining the desired outcome (Stone 2002, 234). By favoring an overly simplistic assessment of policymaking, rational choice theory glosses over the very elements that Kingdon's model highlights. Kingdon's emphasis on the internal and external competition among participants provides a sound assessment of how policy is created, and provides a workable framework to move forward and analyze the role that power and influence play within the policymaking process.

How Policy is Shaped, Altered, and Influenced: A Discussion About Power

Power and influence are ubiquitously associated with the policymaking process as interests compete to construe issues in a certain light and shape the political agenda. A discussion concerning the central role of power—in terms of access, in terms of structural and institutional preferences, in comparison to other individual and group interests, etc.—within the policymaking process will elucidate how certain interests have gained a stronger foothold over others, and why particular ideas experience greater policy success.

Robert Dahl's theory of shared power among groups proposes a very literal understanding of causal power (Dahl 1967, 24). Dahl's notion relies exclusively on observable and measurable qualities (1991, 33), including physical, persuasive, manipulative, and coercive (1991, 40). Although many criticize Dahl's idea of power for being overly simplistic and narrow, it has great analytical application for understanding power and influence within politics and its spillover

effects into society. Essentially, the idea of causation—the power to get someone to do something you want, or to keep someone from doing something you don’t want—plays an incredibly central role in the policymaking process, where interests constantly lobby in support or opposition of various issues.

Causation has even greater implications when individuals and groups seek to limit the scope of knowledge and awareness of others. In Dahl’s view, individuals and groups are “limited by their own awareness of their opportunities for exercising influence” (1991, 25). Thus, by exerting influence and controlling how others perceive (or fail to perceive) the opportunities in front of them, interested groups and individuals can get a leg up on others in the policymaking process. This has immediate ramifications for the public when individuals fail to realize the issues and debates within the political arena, and thus remain passive and, at times, complacent.

James Manley accepts Dahl’s notion of observable power and its causal nature, but argues that Dahl’s theory overlooks the vast structural inequalities that inherently favor certain interests (Manley 1983, 372). In his critique, Manley argues that Dahl’s pluralism assumes that the public simply needs to act in order to fix the vast social and economic inequalities that arise under the American capitalist system (1983, 378). This overly simplistic assumption of how power dynamics operate in a capitalist system is a significant limitation to Dahl’s power theory but is also severely underdeveloped in Manley’s critique.

Bachrach and Baratz address this same point by introducing a more discrete form of power that confronts Manley and Dahl’s reliance on causal power. The authors argue that power can be exercised “by confining the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous” (Bachrach and Baratz 1962, 948), thereby alienating the public from issues that could potentially be detrimental to their preferences. However,

Bachrach and Baratz still rely on measurable forms of power that result in “actual, observable conflict” (Lukes 2005, 23). Steven Lukes argues that power operates very omnisciently and often unseen. He writes, “*A* may exercise power over *B* by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants” (2005, 27). Lukes explains that “the supreme and most insidious exercise of power” rarely involves conflict or causality, and is instead the power to prevent people from “having grievances and shaping their perceptions...in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things” (2005, 28).

Lukes’ argument shares many similarities with Michel Foucault’s discussion of structural and unverifiable power. Foucault concedes that power does include Dahl’s notion of rigid and observable conflict (Foucault 1977, 206) but, more importantly, power is often “omnipresent and omniscient” and “subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way” (Foucault 1977, 197). Foucault’s notion of structural, institutionalized power has important implications for the policymaking process where political decisions are inextricably linked with and influenced by economic and political conditions and financial interests. Thus, as issues circulate the policy streams and various interests seek to promote or dispel them, Foucault would argue that issues that are compatible with a capitalist-driven political economy receive structural preference even without the help of outside interests. This is especially important for climate change and environmental issues, where the idea of governmental regulation and intervention clash with the prevailing free market ideology that inherently receives priority in the political system.

How Problems Fluctuate and Attenuate

Although theories of policymaking and power will be the guiding principles in the analysis of climate change policy, an important but peripheral theory involves understanding how issues

come to be defined as problems and how problems linger in the public arena. Anthony Downs presents the idea of an issue attention cycle in which news stories sequentially move through five stages of social awareness. This model depicts issues as first existing outside public attention then coalescing into a social crisis when a natural disaster generates social alarm. After a surge in public awareness, a gradual decline in public interest occurs, followed by feelings of boredom and discouragement when the public realizes the high costs and sacrifices necessary to make a substantial change. An issue eventually moves into a prolonged limbo with “spasmodic recurrences of interest,” where public attention remains higher than before but is no longer a primary social problem (Downs 1972, 40).

Hilgartner and Bosk identify many problems with this orderly succession, arguing that it overlooks relationships among problems and does not take into account the degree to which social problems are embedded within a “complex institutionalized system of problem formulation and dissemination” (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 55). Hilgartner and Bosk contend that social problems arise from competing public arenas, and it is within these arenas that social problems are “discussed, selected, defined, framed, dramatized, packaged, and presented to the public” (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 59). All arenas have a carrying capacity, such as column inches, minutes of air time, funding, etc. that limits the number of social problems that can be addressed at a single time (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 59). Individuals are also subject to carrying capacities and are often preoccupied with issues of “master status,” which consist of day-to-day social conditions that pertain directly to them, including financial stability, employment and family. Once these master status problems have been addressed, there “may be very little surplus compassion left over for social issues with less personal significance” (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 59).

Issues are also subject to principles of selection, such as the need for drama and novelty, the danger of saturation, cultural preoccupations, and political biases, which continue to whittle down the amount and types of issues that receive public attention (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 61). This has important ramifications for a problem such as climate change, which requires constant, thematic, explanative coverage and does not have the same level of novelty and drama as other issues. More exciting issues often take priority, leaving the public less aware of the threats of climate change and less concerned about the policy debates and responses.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CLIMATE CHANGE AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

Policy and Politics

On the surface, it appears that the US lags behind the EU considerably when it comes to precautionary environmental legislation and ambitious climate change policy. And, while the EU deserves credit for the strides it has made in environmental protection, the notion that the EU is a global frontrunner while the US remains a laggard state is a drastic oversimplification that overlooks the limitations that are embedded in both the EU and US' approach to climate change. The difficulties that have surfaced under the EU's approach stem primarily from power struggles within a complex national and supranational political system, where coordination, implementation, authority, and oversight remain limited due to competing interests and authorities. The US on the other hand struggles both with the initial policymaking process as well as power issues, where key stakeholders and participants continually seek to influence, and at times, undermine, the problems, policy, and politics streams and shape the political agenda. Analyzing the players and processes involved in policymaking and highlighting the power relationships that exist within these processes will help explain both the successes and setbacks

of EU and US climate change policy, and will illuminate the subtle yet important issues that remain entrenched in this problem.

Unlike the US, the EU has created a legal framework that recognizes the environment as a European concern and seeks to harmonize environmental health with economic growth (Vig and Axelrod 1999, 73). Initially these environmental standards were incidental and peripheral, developing from early trade agreements such as the European Coal and Steel Community (1951), the European Economic Community (1957), and the Treaty of Rome (1957) (Vig and Axelrod 1999, 73). Although none of these treaties specifically mentioned environmental protection, they left room for the Environmental Council to restrict imports, exports, and production on the basis of human and environmental health (Hildebrand 2002, 16).

The Paris Summit in 1972 marked the beginning of actual environmental policy in the European Community (EC) with a set of concrete measures for the next two years (Hildebrand 2002, 18). This momentum persisted from 1972 to 1987 with the enactment of five Environmental Action Programmes (EAPs) that focused on achieving the Summit goals (Hildebrand 2002, 20), and the passage of over 150 pieces of environmental laws (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000 10). Environmental legislative efforts reached its pinnacle in 1987 when the Single European Act acknowledged that the environment was a common concern integral to the health and progress of Europe (Vig and Axelrod 1999, 74), and gave the environment a strong and formal legal basis (Hildebrand 2002, 20). This legal framework, coupled with several environmental disasters and problems such as Chernobyl and air and water quality issues, helped solidify public support and strengthened the concept of the environment as a collective social concern (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 9).

Against this glowing legislative backdrop, it appears that the EU has the essential framework to aggressively pursue stringent environmental regulations. However, the policy successes of the 1970s and 1980s were soon confronted with the reality of weak oversight, broad rhetoric, and varying levels of commitment among member states (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 10). This can be seen in the significant decrease in the number of proposed and implemented pieces of environmental laws since 1992 (Vig and Axelrod 1999, 84), as well the wavering commitment from the European Council (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 10). Additionally, between 1975 and 1980, the Council, which was instructed by the Paris Summit to draft environmental goals and objectives, met only twice for environmental issues (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 10).

On an analytical level, the disconnect between legislation and implementation demonstrates the complex yet subtle power struggles that exist within the EU's unclear and vague legal framework. These power struggles are especially apparent during times of economic crisis or hardship, where commitment to the environment immediately becomes secondary to economic stability. Using Manley's notion of structural power, it is recognized that economic concerns and interests enjoy elevated levels of influence and prestige within developed political economies, and are thus more effective at shaping the political agenda (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 46). This is exceptionally true during crises, as demonstrated during the economic shock of the 1970s. Financial strains placed great pressure on policymakers to act swiftly and effectively, not only giving industry and business interests an opportunity to influence policy, but also resulted in a considerable drop in the scale and pace of environmental legislation (Hildebrand 2002, 21).

Manley's idea of preferential, structural power applies to the another problem associated with EU climate change policy, where businesses have a clear and substantial influence on

environmental policymaking at the state level, and are then able to prevent action from occurring at the supranational level (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 46). Dahl's notion of causal power also comes into play, where local industries are able to promote their interests over EU interests, causing member states to pledge commitment to supranational environmental goals while protecting local economies and industries (Bailey 2007, 437). This causal power is especially apparent under the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), where key local industries have aggressively lobbied their state governments to ensure that their businesses will not be overly burdened by pollution and emission laws. In response to industry pressure, states continue to safeguard local interests by over allocating pollution credits and failing to monitor and penalize non-compliance (Bailey 2007, 437).

A third problem that has seriously hindered the EU's success in policy implementation is the internal limitations of the EU political system. Although the Environmental Commission is a formally recognized branch of the European Commission, there is no clearly defined area of exclusive competence and no framework to implement, maintain, or oversee an effective mitigation program (Grant, Matthews and Newell 2000, 107). This, in turn, invites conflict between local, regional, national, and supranational interests when common policy goals must be reached. Similar to the issue of state interests over EU interests, this issue has also surfaced under the EU ETS when the Environmental Commission sought to exercise its power by rejecting member states' National Allocation Plans (NAPS) during the first and second phases of the EU ETS. In response to the Commission's exertion of authority, states fought back and filed complaints with the European Commission arguing that the Environmental Commission has no legal basis to reject state NAPS (Bailey 2007, 438). This internal battle has continued to stall the

EU's progress towards its domestic and international climate goals, and remains a significant hurdle for future regulation.

The three main problems of durability amid economic troubles, state interests versus EU interests, and internal failures illuminate the significant power struggles that create a great disconnect between what EU seeks to accomplish and what it can actually do. As Grant et al. explains, "there is evident tension that will have to be confronted between the rhetoric of the EU, which still makes it the most progressive Annex I negotiating bloc, and the internal failure to find policies to meet the international leadership commitment" (2000, 108). As the EU grapples with these competing interests and seeks to reconcile what it can, another major player in international climate change efforts has opted to sit out altogether while the rest of the developed world addresses this global problem.

Although the US has emerged as a laggard country in domestic and international environmental efforts, this was not always the case. From the early 1960s to the mid 1980s, the US led the way in terms of stringent and precautionary measures and most European states lagged behind considerably. These included strict amendments to the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (1962), the Endangered Species Act (1966), stringent vehicle emission standards (early 1970's), a ban on DDT (1971), the American Toxic Substances Control Act (1976), the prohibition of CFCs in aerosol propellants (1977), and a partial ban on food additives under the Delaney Clause of the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (1985) (Vogel 2003, 559–566). This momentum began to dissipate in the late 1980s and 1990s, however, with a political and ideological shift away from environmental protection and a turn towards pro-industry, anti-regulation philosophies.

McCright and Dunlap argue that this shift in political support provided an avenue for visible and non-visible participants to organize and mobilize against the environmental movement and

undermine the policy steps that were leaning in support environmental regulation (2003, 360). They explain that the 1994 Republican takeover in Congress allowed conservatives who were sympathetic to industry and free market capitalism to promote the anti-climate change campaign inside Washington (McCright and Dunlap 2003, 360). Sheldon Ungar points to an important preceding event that primed these skeptic efforts. Ungar argues that after peak public attention towards the environment following the record high temperatures in the summer of 1988, the American public largely “eradicated the lingering memory of the hot summer” and removed environmental health from their primary concern (1992, 494). This touches on Hilgartner and Bosks’ notion of a master status issue where concern for climate change and the environment diminished as the physical and immediate effects faded. This decline in public attention allowed politicians to shove environmental issues to the margins of the political agenda and enabled climate skeptics to initiate a concerted backlash against environmental policy efforts (Ungar 1992, 494).

McCright and Dunlap empirically demonstrate how skeptic interests penetrated the three policy streams by documenting a precipitous increase in skeptic publishing capacities, television and radio advertisements, policy forums, congressional hearings, and ad hoc projects (2003, 356). Between 1990 and 1997 conservative think tanks circulated 224 documents on global warming, sponsored policy forums, public speeches and press conferences, and perhaps most notably, delivered testimony at eight major Congressional hearings on climate change (McCright and Dunlap 2003, 356–358). Oklahoma Republican Senator James Inhofe epitomized the cozy ties between skeptics and prominent members of Congress when he took the Senate floor in 2003 and, with no scientific training or background, concluded that climate change is “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people” (Inhofe 2003).

On one level, these tactics embody Dahl notion of causal power, where politicians and outside interests were able to influence the policy streams, successfully frame climate change as a non-problem, and shape political decisions. First, the increase in skeptic projects between 1990 and 1997 demonstrates a measurable shift of influence within the political system. Additionally, there is an undeniable link between skeptic presence in the media, which peaked in 1995 and 1996 (McCright and Dunlap 2003, 365), and the fervent political opposition towards Kyoto that surfaced in 1996 and 1997.

On another level, the rise in skeptic presence also touch on Manley's discussion of structural power. Skeptic influence throughout the 1990s coincided with a decline in the presence of elite scientists—or scientists who utilize traditional scientific methods and undergo the peer revision process (McCright and Dunlap 2003, 364). Because of the opportunity presented by the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress, the political climate was very receptive to the skeptics' agenda and aided in the dissemination of their claims (McCright and Dunlap 2003, 364). The structural power that facilitated skeptics' efforts had the opposite effect on scientific and environmental claims and successfully pushed their goals to the periphery of the political agenda.

Bachrach and Baratz and Lukes' ideas of limiting the scope of awareness also come into play, where outside interests controlled how climate change was presented to the public, thereby inconspicuously shaping the public's perception and concern. White House insider Frank Luntz pioneered the art and execution of these tactics by manufacturing an aura of uncertainty around the issue of climate change. As demonstrated in his 2003 memo entitled "Winning the Global Warming Debate," Luntz wrote, "the scientific debate is closing (against us) but is not yet closed. There is a window of opportunity to challenge the science.... Most Americans want more information...it is our job to provide that information" (Luntz 2003). By deliberately but

discreetly confusing the public and skewing scientific findings, skeptics embodied the form of power that Lukes calls the “supreme and most insidious” (2005, 28). Skeptics were able to shape public perceptions about climate change in such a way as to get the public and the media to “accept their role in the existing order of things” without their knowing (Lukes 2005, 28).

Media and Discourse

Climate skeptics also found a powerful ally in the US media, which was instrumental in translating and disseminating skeptic claims and shaping public perception (Boykoff and Rajan, 2007). Robert McChesney argues that the US media has evolved into a capitalist-driven business, and has subsequently given rise to a string of macro-level journalistic codes that essentially determine which stories become news (McChesney 2004, 88). W. Lance Bennett explains that these norms not only affect what is deemed news, but also how the news is presented (1996, 375). Furthermore, Andrew Kohut points out that certain stories are avoided if they are too complex, long, or boring, if the editor or publisher disagrees, or if they run counter to the desires of the corporation (2000, 43).

These external, macro-level limitations have given rise to internal, micro-level norms within journalism. Personalization, dramatization, and novelty are used to select topics that will capture public attention (Boykoff and Roberts 2007, 12) and stories that focus on the competition between personalities, provide entertainment, or have a new angle will often be selected over issues that require extensive investigation or thematic analysis (Boykoff and Roberts 2007, 12). Furthermore, stories that could potentially saturate the public with redundant claims will most likely be avoided (Ungar 1988, 71). Once topics have been selected, journalists will often rely on the viewpoints of officials or authorities when presenting news, and will report competing opinions equally in order to present objective coverage (Bennett 1996, 375).

Media as a capitalist-driven business has compounded these journalistic norms and provided ample opportunity for the same power tactics that are used within the policymaking process to also be employed within society. Because skeptics successfully dramatized and politicized climate change by introducing “competing” viewpoints and latching on to prominent politicians, the media failed to provide constant, accurate coverage of climate change. These principles of selection and power tactics helped create an illusion that climate change was an unresolved political issue rather than a widely accepted social and scientific problem. With the shift in political climate, a sympathetic Congress, and a capitalist-driven media, climate change skeptics were able to “achieve approximate parity with some of the most renowned experts in the field” (McCright and Dunlap 2003, 366). This shift has proven detrimental to domestic and international efforts to combat climate change and has had a significant impact on the US’ standing in the global arena.

METHODOLOGY

As demonstrated in the literature review, climate change issues are closely linked to a range of interests—everything from scientists to the media to industries to policymakers. In order to understand how and to what degree these different interests have shaped policy decisions in the EU and US and to determine how different levels of influence and power operate within the policymaking process, it is necessary to analyze the historical, social, political, and economic issues that are embedded in climate change. Designing a case study that compares the EU and US along all of these lines serves as the best tool to “illuminate a decision or a set of decisions” that have led to different climate change agendas in the EU and US (Yin 1994, 12). Additionally, utilizing the two-case study research method provides the opportunity to understand how different problems, interests, and influences interact in political systems, as well as identify how

various social and political philosophies have subtly guided policy decisions. Many of these important issues could potentially be overlooked using only a single-case study, thereby providing limited analysis and incomplete conclusions.

In designing the two case-study project, there are many countries that could be compared to the US. However, the EU was selected because of its predictabl[e] different[ces]” with the US, which is an important feature in the two-case study design (Yin 1993, 5). As a collective, the EU–27 is a dominant global player and is comparable to the US in terms of Gross National Product (GNP) (Workman 2007), oil consumption, and GHG emissions (Vogler 2005, 837). Unlike the US, however, the EU–27 is also a leader in domestic and global environmental regulation (Vogler 2005, 838). The EU’s international competitiveness and ambitious climate change agenda serves as an effective comparative model to not only analyze the different climate change agendas but to also understand the limitations, failures, and prospects of both the EU and US’ approaches.

The two case study method provides the necessary comparative tools to understand how and why the EU and US pursued different climate change agendas, but it is also necessary to clarify why the explanatory two-case study method is preferable to an exploratory or descriptive case study. Because of the inextricable link between policy decisions, economic priorities, and social philosophies, it is necessary to trace the “operational links” that exist between these factors (Yin 1994, 6) and identify their connections to current legislative debates and decisions. Drawing the link between historical developments and current issues is a trademark of an explanatory case study and provides a broad and flexible framework for understanding the EU and US’ justifications for their respective climate change agendas. This is preferable to exploratory case studies, which focus on the “feasibility of desired research procedures,” and subsequently overlook important historical events, social developments, and political decisions (Yin 1993, 5).

It is also favorable to descriptive case studies, which only “describe phenomenon within its contexts” and fail to account for broader background analysis or future implications (Yin 1993, 5).

Critics of the case-study method argue that the case study method limits prospects for greater scientific generalizations, requires extensive time commitments, and is prone to selection bias (George and Bennett 2005, 23). While these criticisms have merit, they represent one side in the game of trade-offs. First, the purpose of a case study is not, as statisticians prefer, to characterize a specific population. Instead, it seeks to generalize about theories, concepts, and relationships, subsequently promoting richness over parsimony (George and Bennett 2005, 22). Additionally, although selection bias can be problematic, it can actually be an asset in a case study by promoting a stronger research design. By analyzing cases that address particular concerns and share similar outcomes, the case study method provides a focused analysis and highlights a range of important variables (George and Bennett 2005, 23). Given the complex and multifaceted nature of the research question, the explanatory two-case study method will be an essential tool to explore the role that power, politics, and interests play in EU and US policy decisions. While such a method inevitably entails extensive and diverse research, the need for a “high degree of explanatory richness” (George and Bennett 2005, 34) vastly outweighs the benefits of broad generalizations or overly focused conclusions.

CASE STUDY: EXPLAINING EU AND US DIVERGENCE

At the onset of Kyoto negotiations, the US, the EU, and other participating countries faced considerable uncertainty in regards to a global emissions trading program. Never before had an international coalition sought to create a market for pollution and work collectively to mitigate climate change (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007, 26). Moreover, the EU and the US faced the

possibility of significant economic ramifications given both the magnitude of their respective economies as well as their significant contribution to global GHG emissions (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007, 26). Despite the high level of economic risk embedded in the Kyoto Protocol, the EU and 183 other countries signed and ratified the agreement (UNFCCC 2009), creating an unprecedented global policy window in which the problems, policy, and politics streams came together to address the short-term and long-term threats of climate change. It now remains to be determined why the EU not only pursued Kyoto, but implemented even more stringent domestic regulations, while the US opted out entirely.

Analyzing four important factors—worldviews, political institutions, economic interests, and public opinion and the media—will help illuminate the subtle but important differences that guided EU and US policy decisions. While no one factor can account for the policy divergence, each offers important explanatory insight that can be used to collectively explain the different policy approaches.

Worldviews

The most appropriate place to begin is by examining the fundamental social, political, and philosophical differences between the EU and US. Although broad and intangible, these worldviews can be thought of as the normative ideas and fundamental differences between nations, states, and nation-states that subconsciously guide decision-making processes (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007, 26). Understanding the differences in worldviews can help expound prevailing social, political, and economic philosophies, illuminate the role these philosophies play in the policymaking process, and explain why certain countries are more receptive to various ideas more than others.

Heightened concern for the environment in the EU can be partially attributed to Europeans' personal experience with severe levels of pollution (Grant, Matthews, and Duncan 2000, 8). Extreme levels of waste and poor air and water quality posed a direct threat to human health in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and Europeans continue to retain a sense of living memory associated with the dangers of a polluted environment. This lends important public support for the environment and helps construe it as a common political and social concern (Grant, Matthews, and Duncan 2000, 8). Additionally, as an integrated, supranational political entity, the EU is more accepting of international institutions and multilateral coalitions such as Kyoto (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007, 26).

The EU has also adopted the Precautionary Principle as both a general and compulsory principle of EU law and environmental policy. The Precautionary Principle, which was formally signed into law under the Maastricht Treaty, states "parties should take measures to protect public health and the environment, even in the absence of clear, scientific evidence of harm" (Raffensperger and Tickner 1999, xxiii). This principle, which is premised on preventative action and rectifying environmental damage at the source, requires a higher level of governmental oversight and regulation, and presents a drastically different philosophy than what is traditionally accepted in the US.

Unlike the EU, the US has not accepted the environment as a common political, social, and economic concern. While both Europe and the US share a history of environmental disasters and threatening levels of pollution, Americans tend to view such events as geographically isolated and fail to retain a sense of living memory. Additionally, environmental regulation clashes with the prevailing free-market ideology that emphasizes individual competition, limited government intervention, and sustained economic growth (Brewer 2003, 154). Internationally, the US views

multilateral institutions as a threat to state sovereignty, and perceives coalitions such as Kyoto as a hindrance to economic growth and an impediment on the free market (McCright and Dunlap 2003, 353). These worldviews have helped guide decisions like Kyoto, where state sovereignty and economic prosperity were pitted against, and ultimately prioritized over, collective obligations and international consensus.

Taken together, the difference in worldviews serves as a strong explanatory factor for the different levels of environmental concern and divergence in climate change policies. The EU's personal experience with pollution, combined with an acceptance of governmental regulation, the Precautionary Principle, and international coalitions, makes the EU more receptive to international and domestic efforts to reduce emissions (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007, 26). In the US, the emphasis on sustained economic growth has been an underlying reason for the US' reluctance to accept climate change as a serious problem. Additionally, skepticism of international treaties has served to frame efforts such as Kyoto as a threat to the American way of life rather than as a prospect for long-term well-being (McCright and Dunlap 2003, 393).

Political Institutions

The political systems in the EU and the US both embody the pluralist theory of shared, diffused power among groups and political branches. Although both institutional designs seek to disperse the decision-making power among governmental bodies and include outside interests, there is an inherent and irrefutable limit to this inclusive system when power and influence come into play. Power relationships among groups and policymakers are especially prevalent in the environmental arena where the political economy naturally tends to work against regulatory ideas. Power and influence have been key factors in both undermining environmental efforts and

pushing for regulatory legislation to remain on the political agenda, and continue to be a central part of both the EU and US policymaking processes.

In theory, the EU's institutional system is designed to balance state and supranational interests, providing the opportunity for policymakers and participants to interact and move within and between the two governments. However, much of the actual decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of the Council of Ministers, which is made up of democratically elected representatives from each member state (Vig and Axelrod 1999, 75). Unlike the European Commission, which primarily proposes legislation, and the European Parliament, which participates in the decision-making process, the Ministers have the power to commit their state governments to new EU policies (Vig and Axelrod 1999, 76). The Council's comparatively more powerful and central role in implementing and monitoring policy has proven problematic at times due to its tendency to favor national politics while the Commission and Parliament are more strongly linked with supranational goals (Vig and Axelrod 1999, 77).

This lack of cohesion is especially apparent in environmental legislation because of the different levels of capacity, commitment, and concern among member states. For example, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands have been the strongest supporters of ambitious climate change goals while Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain have remained reluctant to carry out EU policies (Vig and Axelrod 1999, 77). Additionally, due to the lack of a strong, recognizable authority and the continual battle between states and the Environmental Commission, it has proven difficult to ensure that Council members enforce EU environmental goals (Bailey 2007, 438).

The US also has a highly diffused system of power in its pluralistic model, and, like the EU, it requires cooperation across several branches of government (Vogler 2005, 837). Similar to the

EU, the US struggles with Congress's binary obligation to both the federal government and local constituents, which has served to limit avenues for cooperation and has greatly favored the use of veto power (Harrison 2007, 97). Generally speaking, when legislation receives negative constituent feedback, policymakers are more inclined to side with the voter base and work against Congress and the Executive branch. Such was the case with climate change during the Clinton years. While Clinton personally supported Kyoto, Congress's dual interests essentially pitted the Senate, their constituents, and their key industries against the Executive's agenda, and, with the passage of the Byrd-Hagel resolution, virtually eliminated any hope for US participation (Harrison 2007, 97).

One aspect of the EU's political system that has aided environmental efforts is the role and nature of political parties. Although the EU, as a supranational entity, differs from traditional parliamentary systems, its structure still provides the opportunity for numerous political parties (Dahl 2002, 56), which fosters coalitions within government and provides greater minority representation (Dahl 2002, 61). Broader representation has been especially beneficial for member states looking to push environmental interests. Strong concern for the environment in Austria, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway has given rise to the Green Party at both the state level and EU (Vogel 2001, 557), giving the environment a crucial political ally. The US, however, relies on a "first-past-the-post" electoral system, which strongly favors the two major parties and greatly diminishes the opportunity for third parties (Dahl 2002, 61). Unlike the EU's multiple-party system, the two-party system greatly centralizes power within one majority group, and legislative proposals and decisions strongly reflect the ideology of the party that gains the greatest number of seats (Dahl 2002, 61).

The differences in political representation have also impacted non-governmental participation. On the surface, environmental NGOs have a much more visible and purposeful role in EU policymaking and, unlike the US, receive direct funding from the Environmental Commission (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 51). Although this connection has given ENGOS a more legitimate role in EU policymaking, their influence is almost entirely confined to the problems and policy streams (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 50). Similar to the US, powerful business interests still have greater access to heads of government and have more impact on policy decisions in the politics stream (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 51).

While the differences between the EU and US' political systems are not a direct cause of the divergence in climate change policy, they are useful in explaining why the EU has been able to achieve such great policy successes and why the environment continues to receive greater priority than it does in the US. Additionally, the comparatively more influential role that business interests play in both EU and US political systems helps illuminate the continued implementation failures in the EU and the difficulties associated with the creation of policy in the US.

Economic Interests

The central and important role that economic interests play in environmental policy in presents another collision between rhetoric and results, and serves as a strong explanatory factor for both the divergence in climate change policies and the continued struggle to either create policy in the US or implement policy in the EU.

Although the EU has the framework and political support to pursue its climate change goals, aggressive lobbying from industries and businesses at the state level has significantly hindered environmental progress at the supranational level (Bailey 2007, 437). This problem is easily spotted again under the EU ETS, where member states continue to protect their key interests at the

expense of EU climate goals. In the first phase of EU ETS, only Germany and Slovenia did not allocate more pollution allowances than they actually emitted, while Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Slovakia each allocated allowances more than 25 per cent above recent emission calculations (Bailey 2007, 436).

The internal power struggles that continue to undermine the EU's environmental progress are even more of an issue in the US because the US trails behind the EU so considerably in terms of policy creation and implementation. Similar to many industries in the EU, US businesses saw Kyoto not as an opportunity, but as a direct threat that would undermine their competitive advantage both domestically and abroad (Harrison 2007, 112). However, unlike the EU, the political stream in the US played a very crucial role in elevating and legitimizing skeptic claims and furthering industry interests.

The cozy relationship between industrial interests and the political stream stemmed partly from President George W. Bush's personal ties with the Texas oil industry and Vice President Cheney's time as CEO of the world's largest oil field support company (Harrison 2002, 104). These close links can be seen empirically through a rise in skeptic presence in the political arena. Heavy polluters such as the fossil fuel, aluminum and cement industries funded conservative think tanks which, in turn, published policy studies and policy analyses that were written primarily for policymakers (McCright and Dunlap 2000, 508). These policy studies, which were often written by lawyers, lobbyists, and consultants rather than scientists, sought to discredit scientific findings, frame climate change as liberal propaganda, and highlight the economic harm that would arise due to environmental regulation (McCright and Dunlap 2000, 511). By injecting political ideological and rhetoric into the problem of climate change, skeptics and sympathetic politicians in the policy stream successfully politicized climate change (Ungar 1992, 494),

causing a long and contentious debate that never occurred at such a high degree in the EU (Harrison 2007, 96).

Public Attention and the Media

Public attention and the media serve as important contributing factors in the different approaches to climate change, but unlike the other three arguments, they have played more of a facilitating role rather than a direct and causal one. The impact that public opinion had on climate change policy is not immediately clear because an overwhelming number of polls actually point to a high level of public concern for climate change in both the EU and US³. However, focusing solely on public opinion can be quite misleading. First, polls gauging public concern for climate change or support for government decisions imply that people are paying attention to policy decisions and understand the issues. Furthermore, public concern may appear substantial when presented alone, but in relation to other issues such as the economy, security, immigration, and health care, concern for climate change plummets (Pew Research Center 2007)⁴. Thus, although gauging the level of public concern for climate change can be useful, a more relevant question is the degree to which voters are actually paying attention to their governments' climate policies (Harrison and Sundstron 2007, 6).

Many public opinion polls in the US indicate widespread confusion concerning the Bush Administration's stance on Kyoto. A 2002 poll conducted by the Program on International Policy

³ Brewer found that two-fifths of US respondents considered climate change to be a very serious problem and believed it is already having an effect, and 75% of respondents 'strongly favored' or 'somewhat favored' ratifying the Kyoto Protocol (Brewer 2003, 151). A World Public Opinion poll found that 94% of Americans believe that the US should reduce emissions at least as much as other developed nations (WorldPublicOpinion 2005a). A Gallup poll found American support for the environment, even at the expense of economic growth, was highest between 1997 (66%) and 2000 (70%), compared to 61% in 1984 and 49% in 2008 (Gallup 2008). The Eurobarometer survey found that three-fourths of Europeans feel climate change is a 'very serious' problem' and 61% reported having already taken 'some kind' of action (2008, 80). Reiner et al. found that over 90% of respondents in Sweden, US, UK, and Japan accepted that climate change was a problem, and over 80% believed they had a responsibility to look out for the interests of future generations, even if it made the current generation worse off (2006, 2097).

⁴ Among Republican respondents, climate change is rated as least important on a list of 23. Among Democrat respondents, climate change is rated fifth least important on a list of 23. And among Independents, climate change is rated third least important on a list of 23.

Attitudes (PIPA) found that 48% of respondents incorrectly answered that Bush favored the Kyoto Protocol, and 42% said that he opposed it. Two years later, PIPA found that 42% of the American public still believed that Bush favored Kyoto, while 48% said that he opposed it. In 2005, the same poll found that the public was still evenly divided with 43% saying he favored it, and 43% saying he opposed it (WorldPublicOpinion.org 2005b). Furthermore, in the wake of the US' decision to pull out of Kyoto, a 2002 Pew Research poll found that 44% of US respondents disapproved of Bush's decision, while 83% disapproved in Britain, 89% in Italy, 87% in Germany, and 85% in France (Pew Global 2001).

Related to this lack of political awareness is the problem of social confusion—an issue that occurs in both the EU and US. Reiner et al. found that respondents in the UK, Sweden, and Japan correctly identified causes of climate change two to three times more often than US respondents (2006, 2095). Results from a Eurobarometer survey show that Sweden, Norway, Finland, and the Netherlands feel best informed about causes and issues associated with climate change, with relatively strong feelings in the UK and Luxemburg. However, six in ten respondents in Romania, Portugal, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, and Turkey typify themselves as poorly informed on causes and ways of fighting climate change (Eurobarometer 2008). Using the data from the Eurobarometer, the European Parliament and the European Commission concluded first that although many Europeans are “highly concerned about climate change and willing to take action, there is a lack of knowledge and information about how to do it,” and secondly that there are “Europeans who do not know what the European Union actually does to fight climate change” (2008).

In the US, the striking degree of public confusion, and the widespread mystification concerning the causes of climate change led to a general state of inattention and bafflement. This

provided an opportunity for skeptics to influence climate change policy. Although misunderstanding and inattention existed in the EU, a more attentive public helped counteract the confusion and was more effective at monitoring government decisions. This can be partially attributed to Europeans' worldviews towards the environment and their history of pollution. This living memory continues to shape perceptions towards the environment and, at a minimum, keeps environmental issues on the political agenda.

The variation in public attention is inextricably linked to the differences in media coverage in the EU and US. Comparing climate change reports in the US and UK, Boykoff and Rajan found that the US media has been more critical of scientific claims, specifically that anthropogenic activities have resulted in elevated levels of greenhouse gases (2007, 208). In a content analysis from 1988 to 2002, Boykoff and Boykoff found that 53% of articles appearing in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* gave equal attention to the claims put forth by climate skeptics and scientists, thereby presenting the two claims as equally legitimate and sound (2004, 131). Additionally, in a 2005 study, Carvalho found that the media's portrayal of climate change generally, but not always, correlated with the government's stance, subsequently fostering greater support for regulation in European media and more skepticism of climate change in US media (2005, 20). This tendency was highlighted in the European media's response to Bush's decision to withdraw from Kyoto. 'Liberal' and 'conservative' newspapers throughout Europe heatedly echoed European leaders' criticism of Bush's decision to abandon Kyoto.

These content analysis studies point to a causal link between media coverage and public perception. While this relationship has proven quite detrimental to climate change efforts in the US over the last decade, there is new evidence of a move towards more scientifically-sound

reporting. In a 2007 content analysis, Boykoff discovered an “evolutionary” shift in US media coverage of climate change, one that presents a more scientifically accurate account of climate change rather than a balanced and informationally-biased report (2007, 6). The same study found that the UK media has consistently provided accurate climate change reports over the last decade that reflect scientific findings rather than social or political commentary (Boykoff 2007, 6).

These findings indicate that climate change coverage in the US is beginning to resemble European, specifically UK reporting, by providing more accurate coverage. Additionally, these findings point to a change in national sentiment as climate change becomes more socially and politically salient. Stronger, more accurate coverage of climate change could act as a catalyst in a shift in national opinion and lend important support to federal climate change initiatives.

THE FUTURE OF CLIMATE CHANGE REGULATION: KINGDON’S POLICY WINDOW

It is by now abundantly clear that a range of power mechanisms have greatly influenced the climate change agendas pursued by the EU and US and an array of cultural, social, political, and economic factors have contributed to the divergence. However, this descriptive analysis stops short of any of prescriptive discussion concerning the future of global climate change regulation. Given the monumental threat of climate change, it is important to understand how past developments continue to affect the future of domestic and international mitigation efforts, and how certain events can render the US and the global community ripe for environmental change.

In Kingdon’s discussion of the policymaking process, he focuses on a critical juncture where the problems, policy, and politics streams merge to create a policy window in which a new political agenda emerges along with abundant but temporary opportunity for reform (Kingdon 2003, 20). Kingdon explains that these windows are opened by the appearance of compelling problems known as focusing events or by changes in the political stream (Kingdon 2003, 20).

The recent election of Barack Obama as the next US president, the current economic crisis, the recent surge in gas prices, and past natural disasters provide ample analytical opportunity to discuss very real possibilities for a shift in US climate change policy.

The biggest change that lends the significant support to the prospect of greater US participation has taken place in the politics stream. In November 2008, Obama strongly affirmed his administration's stance on climate change, declaring "now is the time to confront this challenge once and for all. Delay is no longer an option. Denial is no longer an acceptable response" (Broder 2008). Obama has made it clear that he not only seeks to re-engage the US with Kyoto talks (Dreyfuss 2008, 21–28), but that "a new chapter in America's leadership on climate change will strengthen our security and create millions of jobs" (Broder 2008). Obama has stated that his "number 1 priority" is to "turbocharge the economy" by building "a new alternative-energy economy" (Klein 2008).

Obama's rhetoric directly links economic stability with a healthy, sustainable environment, which Kingdon calls a coupling event (2003, 201). Kingdon explains that when a pressing problem demands attention and a policy proposal is coupled to the problem as one of its solution, a policy window occurs and brings the new administration's initiatives and philosophies to the forefront (2003, 201). This new link between the environment and the economy, which coincidentally resembles the European mentality (Avosetta Conference 2002, 3), represents an important shift in US environmental economics, and demonstrates the Obama Administration's long-term commitment to this issue.

This major shift in the politics stream strongly indicates greater support for domestic and international climate change regulation. However, there have also been a handful of focusing events, which, as Kingdon explains, can also initiate the emergence of a policy window. The

spike in summer gas prices can be considered one of these focusing events. In June 2007, the national average price of gas was just under \$3.10 per gallon. One year later, gas had increased more than a dollar to a national average of \$4.12 per gallon (EIA 2008). Public discontent over the price of fuel soon made energy a salient issue in the summer presidential campaigns and quickly initiated a response from Democrats and Republicans in Congress (Johnson and Davey 2008). While Senate Democrats sought to provide tax incentives for renewable energy sources (Andrews 2008), House Republicans pushed to relax restrictions on offshore drilling (Hulse, and Herszenhorn 2008).

Although the responses from both Democrats and Republicans demonstrate the problem of pet solutions, where political players seek to use a shift in public mood to promote personal agendas (Kingdon 2003, 203), there was a stronger undertone of urgency inside and outside of Washington. While some public outcry was appeased with a temporary but immediate drop in the price of gas, there was a general sense that society's dependence on foreign, non-renewable oil was both problematic and potentially detrimental. The public's demand for comprehensive change has put pressure on policymakers in the policy stream, which can potentially force Congress to work with Obama and develop a systematic change in energy policy.

Additionally, the current financial crisis, which could temporarily postpone climate goals, also has the potential to initiate a fundamental shift in energy and environmental policy. The economic downturn has "hit Americans where it really hurts"—in basic expenses such as the daily commute, home heating, grocery bills, etc. (Goldman 2008). This has given the public the impression that the "system isn't working" (Leahy 2008), and, like the spike in gas prices, has increased public awareness and strengthened demand for a response from the federal government. As Anthony Leiserwitz, director of the Yale Project on Climate Change, explains,

“if the system is perceived to be broken, then people are more open to change things to make things better” (Leahy 2008). Leiserwitz believes that the current economic failures and recent energy crises can cause people to “open their eyes to the subtle and dramatic impacts of climate change,” which “will become what is known as a focusing event...and result in huge societal shifts” (Leahy 2008). The volatility and uncertainty associated with the current financial situation can help solidify the public’s demand for cheaper and sustainable sources of energy, and also lend important external support to the politics stream and ensure that Obama’s climate change agenda is realized.

While the policy and politics streams have become thoroughly absorbed in these serious social, economic, and environmental concerns, grassroots efforts continue to grow and mobilize. This activism is aimed at capturing the attention of visible and non-visible participants in the politics and policy streams and ensuring the passage of a climate change bill in Congress (Burdick 2009). February 2009 welcomed the largest youth-led climate change conference in Washington DC, with more than 10,000 protestors marching to generate awareness and support for climate change legislation (Block 2009). While many of the marchers were students and concerned citizens, the event also attracted key political participants such as renowned scientist James Hansen, author Bill McKibben, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and other members of Congress (Block 2009). This success and unity has buttressed existing efforts within the problem stream to capture the attention of policymakers and has given climate change an important and stable foothold within the legislative process. The effects of this increased mobilization are starting to fructify with the recent unveiling of a draft climate change bill by House Democrats in March, 2009 (Broder 2009). This draft bill, which has yet to garner any Republican support, is aimed at mitigating greenhouse gases and reducing the nation’s dependence on oil. Although it is

in the preliminary stages, this new initiative leaves many questions unanswered, including how to distribute credits and how the revenue should be spent (Broder 2009).

The spike in gas summer prices, the financial crisis, and the increasingly visible climate change movement have successfully engaged all three policy streams. These focusing events, coupled with the shift in the politics stream lend significant support to the prospects of a policy window. However, there have also been several natural disasters that can be construed as focusing events, but they differ from economic events in significant ways. First, although environmental scares can and often do capture the attention of key participants in the problems and policy streams as well as community members in the impacted area, they do not generate widespread public concern in the same way as economic events. Principles of selection often diminish the opportunity for environmental events to remain in the public eye because the public loses attention after the event subsides.

Another limiting aspect of environmental focusing events is that the link between a shift in weather patterns and climate change is not always made. For example, although climate change is not directly or solely responsible for fuel shortages, the spike in the price of gas painfully highlighted society's reliance on a non-renewable fuel source and elevated the public's interest in alternative fuel for the sake of their savings and economic well-being (Krauss 2008). The link between the economy and the environment has been strengthened by Obama's economic plan where he points to sustainability as an engine for economic recovery. This was not the case with Hurricane Katrina. While Katrina evoked concern, it exemplified what Hilgartner and Bosk call the "complex institutionalized system of problem formulation" (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 55). The environmental problems embedded in Katrina were not substantial enough to receive steady, consistent, and accurate media coverage, and were eventually dropped in favor of more exciting,

novel stories. This is not to say that natural disasters have no impact on the political agenda, but they often struggle to initiate concern and urgency beyond the problem stream.

Taken together, Obama's stance on climate change, coupled with the public's discontent towards the price of fuel, and the uncertain economic conditions all point to a policy window in the near future. The three streams that Kingdon explains must converge in order to initiate a policy window are indeed coming together. The political stream and its visible participants such as Obama and Biden are pushing for a new climate change agenda, which has been the missing link in getting the US on board with Kyoto and GHG reductions. The problems stream has introduced serious focusing events that have ignited widespread concern and awareness, initiating a shift in public sentiment that not only accepts, but demands action from the federal government. Finally, visible and non-visible participants in the policy stream have joined the growing grassroots efforts and have brought the issue of climate change into policy discussions. Taken together, the conditions have been met for a policy window to open in which the US is ready to initiate a new phase in domestic and global climate change policy.

Although it is very likely that a policy window will initiate renewed US involvement in global climate change initiatives, this also marks the start of an even greater problem. Similar to the difficulties facing the EU's climate change goals, the US and the Obama Administration must reconcile what it pledges to do and what it can actually accomplish. Analyzing how the current economic crisis and other pertinent issues have impacted the EU's progress towards its goals will help illuminate whether the pledge to ambitiously and proactively address climate change is merely rhetoric or whether this truly marks a fundamental shift in global climate change policy.

At the Climate Change Summit in Brussels in October 2008, then EU president Nicolas Sarkozy refuted rumors that the EU would regress from its ambitious climate change goals,

declaring, “the climate package is so important that we cannot simply drop it under the pretext of a financial crisis” (EU ‘Holds Firm’ on Climate Goals 2008). At that same time, however, representatives from countries such as Greece, Portugal, Italy, and the former Soviet bloc (EU ‘Holds Firm’ on Climate Goals 2008) as well as representatives from traditional environmental frontrunners such as Germany argued that their countries could not afford to enforce tough emissions targets on their key industrial sectors (Jacob 2008).

Grant et al. explain that EU climate change policies face significant hurdles, especially when placed in the context of the current economic crisis, due to even greater resistance from member states, a possible shift in public support and priorities, and a volatile economic market (2000, 10). They argue, “it is important to be aware of the limits of what could be achieved at a time of severe economic turbulence characterized by the phenomenon of ‘stagflation,’ defined as minimal growth and high inflation” (Grant, Matthews, Newell 2000, 10). Although the industrialized EU-15 is currently on target to meet its collective goal of cutting GHG emissions by 8 per cent for the 2008–2012 period, there is still the problem of sub-par performance from the less industrialized EU-12, who have projected emission increases for their 2006–2010 period (EU-15 on Target... 2008).

This disconnected progress is further exacerbated by the current economic crisis. With the larger European economies, including Britain, France, Germany, and Spain already in a recession, and Central and Eastern Europe on the verge of a downward spiral as the flow of credit continues to dry up, these economic strains could very easily undermine the progress that has been made and further alienate the developing EU states from collective climate change goals (Schwartz 2009). Ultimately, short-term emission reductions during periods of economic

stability will mean very little if the broader trend is towards emission increases during periods of economic hardship.

Although the prospects of continued EU leadership on climate change goals may not be as bright as they were at the height of environmental legislation in the 1970s, the EU has shaped its national and international identity around its commitment to the environment (Grant, Matthews, and Newell 2000, 53). This alone indicates that, although the EU's goals and objectives may run up against significant hurdles, the EU is intent in maintaining its role as an international leader on environmental issues. Thus, while the policy window in the EU has grown smaller over time, environmental issues still remain an integral part of European culture and politics. Because of this, the EU's climate change goals will continue to receive the necessary political support to solidify their place on the EU agenda, which also lends important legitimacy to climate change talks at the international level.

CONCLUSION

Kingdon's policy model sheds light on the significantly intricate and extremely malleable way in which climate change policy has been created, shaped, altered, and implemented. This policy framework provides a better understanding of the prospects for future global climate change policy as well as the social, political, and economic hurdles that threaten to undermine and diminish its efficacy. However, while Kingdon's model helps clarify climate change as a policy issue, there is a deeper, more theoretical problem at the heart of climate change. Broadly speaking, climate change confronts the traditional way in which international problems are addressed. Conventional international problems are generally tangible conflicts such as trade disputes, territory issues, and resource ownership that take place within state borders and are dealt with at the nation-state level (Weiss 1999, 99). Climate change, however, confronts these

traditional notions by transcending fault, causality, responsibility, jurisdiction, and authority, and poses a direct threat to all. Thus, in order to truly analyze, understand, and address climate change, it may be necessary to alter the way the international community deals with international issues and ask whether or not the traditional political players, i.e. nation-states, governments, political parties, and policymakers can really be at the forefront of a successful solution.

If truly effective approaches to climate change require fundamental structural changes in the way developed societies operate, it is hard to conceive that the traditional players who depend on those very social structures and institutions will initiate any sort of drastic change. For example, since transportation is one of the leading causes of global GHG emissions, a significant social, economic, and political shift in the way cars and planes are produced and used is required in order to reduce emissions. However, given the comparatively more powerful role of the road, oil, air traffic, and car industries, combined with social tendencies favoring private rather than public transportation, the likelihood of massive investments in public transportation, a swift shift towards smaller, fuel efficient cars, and widespread public acceptance is minimal at best.

Using Foucault's idea of structural and social power, the traditional decision-making entities that would usually be at the forefront of policy creation and implementation are too strongly attached to the social, political, and economic structures that have acted as impediments to the problem of climate change and environmental issues for so long. As Hein-Anton Van Der Heijden explains, "the tried-and-true tested ways of dealing with climate change will be exhausted soon. Political parties have lost their credibility, and environmental and social movements seem to be the only social actors representing the widespread fear of the public" (2008, 62).

Although the traditional political and economic players will most likely continue to be at the forefront of climate change decisions, many scholars have posited normative visions for the way climate change policy should be approached. Jurgen Trittin believes that the role of the nation-state is gradually declining in primacy as powerful non-state actors such as NGOs and multinational corporations (MNCs) exert their presence in the international arena (2004 28). He argues that in the case of climate change, "nation-states must recognize that their importance as a source of national identity is coming to an end. They must even advance this on-going process constructively to save our planet...we need people who think globally and people with a sense of global responsibility" (2004, 27).

Der Heiden echoes this sentiment by pointing out that the global community and nation-states have reacted to climate change by creating a weak global environmental regime. He envisions truly effective climate change policy stemming from a "transnational civic environmental movement" that can "take over the roles and functions that were formerly performed by political parties" (2008, 61). Additionally, the prevailing methods of mitigating climate change, which take root in traditional capitalist theory, presents a significant challenge to the conventional role of the nation-state. As Bailey explains, on one hand, effective international carbon trading requires nation-states to accede to a higher regulatory authority and, at the same time, places a significant level of trust in the private sector with the nation-states assuming a role of market manager (2007, 431). Thus, if prospects for a global carbon market are to be realized, the nation-state could conceivably be forced to take a significant step back from its traditionally central role.

Although these normative visions are only guiding principles and conceptualizations of the best approach to climate change, they offer considerable insight into the future of global climate change regulation. Given that climate change issues will continue to hinder, limit, and shape the course of local, national, and international growth, it is important to understand both the ideal and realistic opportunities to address this issue. Although the construction and implementation of climate change policy is central to this broad problem, looking beyond basic policy and power issues and questioning the prevailing methods of international problem solving will be instrumental in shaping the future of international discourse and decisions concerning climate change.

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