

Book reviews

Global Commons, Domestic Decisions: The Comparative Politics of Climate Change

Kathryn Harrison and Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom

Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010, 323 pp. (inc. index),
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This volume tackles the complex topic of the cumulative influence of countries' domestic politics on the shape and effectiveness of the climate change regime. Recognizing the potential for a tragedy of the commons created by rising GHG emissions, this work explores how progress made so far in fighting climate change can be best explained.

The prism through which the subject is approached is explicitly state-centric. The contributors each tell a particular story about the development of climate policy by reference to the political economy of a particular jurisdiction: six nation states (Australia, Canada, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States) and the European Union. The progress is evaluated by means of a two-pronged yardstick, with chapters looking both at developments in the ongoing negotiations under the aegis of the UNFCCC and at the formulation of domestic mitigation policy. The volume does a good job of distinguishing between various political processes in the international arena—the construction and adoption of legal instruments such as the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol—and ratifying commitments domestically, making domestic policy to achieve internationally agreed-upon targets, and implementing those policies.

On the one hand, the book points out that progress has been significant, with the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol, the first and so far only international instrument legally binding parties to reduce their emissions—an event of historical significance. On the other hand, the book concedes that the evidence for sustained action for cutting emissions is only rarely encountered and by no means sufficient to match the recommendations of the IPCC. With this tension in mind, the volume tellingly makes the point that even in situations framed in terms of moral imperatives, the scale and distribution of costs among various actors still matters a great deal.

In order to make sense of the uneven progress towards comprehensive climate action, the contributors delve into the self-interest of policymakers, the role of ideas in bringing about action,

the exercise of power through institutions, and the pressures brought upon governments in the context of the international negotiations.

Evidence is presented in favour of the hypothesis that increased pressure from voters will raise policymakers' willingness to ratify treaties (the Japan example) and establish progressive policies targeting climate change (European Union), while increased compliance costs have the opposite effect (United States, Australia). Yet the editors aptly conclude that the force of public opinion can be curtailed by its shallowness (Japan, Australia), while even strongly objecting business interests, at least in democracies, may have to bow to public feeling once they are expressed forcefully enough at the voting booth (European Union).

In terms of ideas, the work distinguishes between scientific knowledge and normative principles. The case studies recognize that powerful actors may manipulate either of these to suit their own needs in a manner that can be deleterious to the formulation of effective policy (United States). They also acknowledge that norms do not act in isolation but may require explicit trade-offs, such as in the case of the obligation to fight climate change versus the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) in the case of China, or between CBDR and the US's interpretation of the concept of "fairness" in balancing the respective responsibilities of developed and developing countries to mitigate emissions.

Perhaps the book's greatest strength lies with its treatment of domestic political institutions in the policy-making process. It concludes that in first-past-the-post systems, environmental issues need to become important to a high enough share of voters before they are reflected in policy (Canada, United States), while proportional-representation systems allow Green parties to thrive (German Bundestag, European Parliament). Yet even there, Green-party views are reflected only to the extent that the legislative branch is actually allowed to exercise power (Russia, Australia). The impact of particular personalities is vividly explored in numerous examples (Vladimir Putin, Al Gore, George W. Bush, Takeshita Noboru, Koizumi Jun'ichirō, and Jean Chrétien), eloquently making the case that changing a leader can be critical to policy-making—especially in systems where power is highly concentrated.

The conclusions drawn in the book on the "vertical concentration of authority", that is, the relationship between coordinating units (federal governments, European Commission, etc.) and their constituent elements (states, provinces, EU member states, etc.), are complex. Wealthier units typically drive policy forward (Germany in the European Union, California in the United States), while those burdened with a carbon-intensive economy and higher abatement costs (Alberta and Ontario in Canada; Portugal, Spain, and Greece in the European Union in the early 1990s) typically oppose action. The inner rules of the game of such complex polities can curtail the possibilities for advancing policy, as shown by the weakness of the Canadian federal government or the limitations of the European Union in the areas of energy and taxation.

Finally, the editors' conclusions about the international negotiations offer some sobering suggestions for the future. Even though a kind of "liberal environmentalism"—characterized

by the polluter-pays principle, market-based approaches, and an emphasis on sustainable development—has shaped the substance of the Kyoto Protocol, it may not necessarily resonate with domestic actors, especially as very real trade-offs still need to be made domestically. The unpopularity of the Protocol's flexibility mechanisms in the United States comes to mind.

Complementing the thematic areas, the breadth of the case studies in the book comes as a pleasant surprise in a field that is often dominated by discussions of the high politics at the annual COPs, or the domestic politics of the most important emitters, such as China and the United States. Addressing countries such as Australia, Russia, and Japan is a welcome addition to the field, the last country particularly so.

Tiberghien and Scheurs' chapter on Japan very helpfully enumerates the nation's most important actors—the Keidanren, the country's large business federation, and the national corps of civil servants, especially the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Environment, and Economy, Trade, and Industry, with very little input from the country's NGO community. The blow-by-blow account of Japan's engagement in the international negotiations, especially in the wake of President Bush's repudiation of the Kyoto Protocol, serves to highlight the concerns particular to Japan in the field of climate change; namely, the tension between, on the one hand, the desire to assert itself diplomatically by making a contribution to world governance and, on the other hand, the overriding imperative that the international competitiveness of this resource-poor nation be maintained. The transition from the relatively stolid action on climate change under the business-dominated Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to the seeming revolution heralded by the epochal 2009 election which ushered into power the DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan) is also captured faithfully.

The description of Japan suffers somewhat from not sufficiently exploiting the drivers behind the climate policy of the country's political parties, but also the relationship between the Tokyoite politicians and civil servants. It seems that the authors believe by default in the existence of a kind of "Japanese climate leadership", yet evidence for this is thin. If one probes deeper into the substance of Japanese domestic politics one might find only a very shallow commitment to progressive action even amongst the most proactive actors. At the time of writing, this is highlighted by Japan's scepticism regarding a second Kyoto commitment period.

It is judiciously pointed out in the book that the climate agenda was picked up by the LDP's powerful Takeshita Noboru in the early 1990s to divert attention away from his ongoing corruption scandals. The authors also correctly mention that the Kyoto Protocol was ratified only when the LDP, shell-shocked from electoral losses throughout the 1990s, found itself isolated in the Diet, with the ambivalent Prime Minister Koizumi having his hand forced by his coalition partner, the Clean Government Party. The book notes that the new direction in Japan's climate policy stems from the electoral promises of the DPJ.

However, the work stops short of making the next logical connection: that Japanese climate policy is viewed by lawmakers merely instrumentally, as a means to preserve or enhance their

image and influence, without much thought for the ends of the policy. In fact, when comparing the ratification episode under Koizumi with Prime Minister Asō's reluctance to produce a strong pledge for 2020 it becomes apparent that Tokyo politicians' concerns lie with daily Diet politics and their country's international competitiveness first and foremost, with very little room left for climate.

Another important omission is the close relationship between management and unions that is peculiar to Japan. While strong DPJ support among unions had been a decisive factor in the 2009 elections, this peculiar relationship would eventually force the DPJ to backtrack from its nominally challenging policy package. This shows yet again the shallowness of the commitment to tackle problems related to climate, and the proclivity of Japanese politicians to use the issue merely as a bargaining chip.

Granted, the DPJ flip-flopping on climate occurred well after the publication of the book. At the time of its electoral victory in 2009 the spectacular collapse of the LDP-dominated political system led many commentators to believe that a qualitative change had taken place in Japanese politics. However, a lack of vision as well as incompletely thought-through electoral promises continue to be the most notable features of politics in Tokyo, leading to an unambitious political package—a far cry from what “climate leadership” would presuppose.

This case study on Japan has implications for the whole of the book. Analysts should take heed that climate change is only one field among the many that animate politics. Furthermore, this policy field is still experiencing rapid and unpredictable change. Writing this review in 2011, it is an eerie feeling to read future-tense references in the book to the Copenhagen COP; it brings home the fact that one should be cautious about making predictions about the future, and as well be sensitive to the role of political institutions and the context they are embedded in.

Harrison and Sundstrom's volume presents a rich tapestry about seven of the world's largest emitters. Its contribution to understanding how institutions may enable or hamper action is a valuable contribution to the discipline. As a result, they open up new and interesting avenues for research. Probably foremost amongst them is the distinction between multiple access points serving, in the case of the EU, as constructive multilevel leadership reinforcement, but, in the case of the United States, as a surfeit of veto players. This reviewer would suggest that institutions can act as conduits for action only as long as the underlying stakeholders' continually evolving attitudes allow. Perhaps a future researcher can build on the findings in Harrison and Sundstrom's book to try to establish how institutions can be used reflexively to positively impact these underlying attitudes—something direly needed today in view of the decidedly patchy record in climate mitigation policy the world over.

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Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives

Jane McAdam

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Climate-change-induced displacement is an area of growing concern and importance to many nations and societies. So far the global strategies against climate change have largely concentrated on mitigation techniques with little enthusiasm shown for complementary adaptation practices. The migration of people due to changes in their physical environment from climate change has been looked upon as a security challenge instead of an adaptation strategy. Jane McAdam's collection of essays with its multidisciplinary approach is a welcome addition to the existing corpus of literature in the area. The contributors are leading experts in the field and their opinions are significant for guiding well-informed policy.

The book has multiple themes. The chapters by Graeme Hugo, Jon Barnett and Michael Webber, and John Campbell present arguments from a geographical standpoint. Hugo stresses the importance of analysing the various factors influencing the decision to migrate; after all, "most people adjust to environmental change without moving" (p. 23). It is unlikely that the poorest of the poor will migrate, due not only to lack of resources but lack of knowledge about alternatives. This view is shared by Barnett and Webber in their analysis on "barriers to migration" (p. 41). It is important for future research to take into consideration existing patterns of migration that may act as pull factors for the largely lower-middle classes to undertake short-distance journeys to improve their incomes and positively influence the adaptive capacity of "those left behind" (p. 44). It is quite unlikely that climate change will result in large-scale intercontinental migrations in the near future, and most of the international migration will be witnessed between countries of the global South, especially between countries that are more populous and have ethnic similarities. Ironically, these are also the countries that have been most resistant to bilateral or multilateral arrangements on refugees and migrant workers. India and Bangladesh, whose border presently accounts for 3.5 per cent of recorded total global migration, do not have a bilateral migration treaty and have not ratified any major international convention on refugees or migrant workers. Campbell's chapter examines voluntary and forced community relocation as an adaptation strategy. He considers the case of internal and international relocation and argues that transplantation of a community can pose a serious loss to a group's "identity", for it is "highly unlikely" to succeed in transplanting the culture, traditions, and customs of the group.

The second broad spectrum of arguments is legal, pertaining to cross-border migrations and statelessness and the moral and ethical underpinnings of human rights. Walter Kälin expertly analyses the current legal regime governing refugees and migrants, as well as the legal implications for people fleeing sudden-onset disasters, slow-onset disasters, climate-change-related violence and conflict, and designated areas of high risk such as sinking states. McAdam, in her

chapter, focuses on Pacific island states and the legal implications of statelessness. Both authors underscore the normative gaps in the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The Convention was not, of course, drafted for people displaced by climate change, nor can it, in its current form, provide a suitable framework for dealing with people displaced by natural disaster or gradual environmental change. McAdam also focuses on states whose territorial basis will physically disappear and shows that relocation is a much more complex process than simply securing territory for those displaced (p. 105). She introduces questions of international legal status, the nationality of the people forced to relocate internationally, and governments-in-exile, arguing persuasively that the appropriate doctrines and practices in the current international order are significantly lacking.

The chapters by Roger Zetter and Peter Penze offer moral arguments that would “provide some form of protection for people whose lives are made vulnerable” (p. 144). Zetter deploys the theory of restorative justice and reasons that the “locus of responsibility for funding protection apparatus lies with developed countries” (p. 147). He further emphasizes the need to create or strengthen adaptive mechanisms at the local level to arrive at feasible and globally acceptable solutions. Penze’s chapter on an international ethical responsibility towards climate refugees argues in favour of a positive responsibility to reduce “radical inequalities” (p. 161), while also providing compensation based on existing tort law models and the polluter-pays principle. His discussion on adopting a global insurance regime as “an inter-state system providing compensation to affected states for climate-related damages” (p. 167) is particularly interesting and could serve as a model for future action, notwithstanding the likely difficulty of convincing governments to agree to such arrangement. If a market-based carbon-mitigation mechanism continues post-2012, funding in the form of an adaptation fund or carbon tax could be developed. Another challenge for the international funding of adaptation measures is determining the priority action areas to ensure that donor agencies do not overlook local community needs and choices.

Lorraine Elliot’s chapter on “Climate Migration and Climate Migrants: What Threat, Whose Security?” critically examines the international rhetoric in portraying “climate change as a threat multiplier, overstressing societies’ adaptive capacity and creating or exacerbating political instability and violence” (p. 179). She argues that the dramatic claims alleging the mass migration of millions of people “run the risk of narrowing the policy focus to one of defence against the threat, rather than seeking to address the causes of insecurity” (p. 188), thereby undermining the real issue of human protection and well-being.

In addition, the volume acknowledges the pertinent health issues. Global temperature rise is likely to increase vector-borne disease, and sudden migrations may cause drastic changes in nutritional levels and general well-being. Anthony McMichael and his co-authors emphasize the need for further research “to more clearly understand the sources of risks to health and the likely optimal intervention points” (p. 218).

Climate Change and Displacement should be read by anyone interested in this area. The book provides a good understanding of existing legal regimes and institutions and their limitations. It

considers innovative solutions that could be turned into international responses. Its one shortcoming, which it shares with other works in this area, is that it does not consider one of the major hotspots of climate-induced migration, namely South Asia, where the problem of inter-country migration is made more complex by unregulated border migration and high population density in the most vulnerable areas.

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