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Politics in a warming world: introduction

1.1 Introduction

To understand the ebb and flow of the climate change issue in national and international contexts requires an appreciation of the way in which political power is exercised by different groups in pursuit of their aims and objectives. (O'Riordan and Jordan 1996:78)

This book is concerned with explanations of the content and formulation of international climate policy; the way in which one might account for the efforts of the international community to engage with the question of human interference with the global climate system. In an attempt to understand the nature and scope of international climate policy from a new perspective, discussion focuses on the political impact of four sets of non-governmental actors[1] whose importance has not been conceptualised in a developed manner in the literature on global warming. The terms non-governmental and non-state actors are used interchangeably throughout the book and refer to actors that are not officially part of national government.

The four groups of non-state actor looked at in relation to the politics of global warming are Working Group 1 of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), the mass media, the fossil fuel lobbies and environmental pressure groups. These non-governmental actors in particular, have been chosen as a means by which to challenge predominant explanations in the literature on global environmental politics, which generally lack analysis of these actors. Hence the purpose of this book is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to redress the imbalance in the international relations literature on global environmental politics towards state-centric analysis of 'regimes'[2] as the key location for explanations of political outcomes. It does this by focusing upon the importance of sub- and trans-state non-governmental actors. In so doing, the need for inter-state analysis is not negated, rather an argument is made that analysis of NGOs in the politics of global warming raises important challenges to conventional thinking about the sources of political outcomes in global environmental politics.

[1] For a lengthy discussion of the definitional issues that attend any attempt accurately to describe NGOs, see Willetts (1993).

[2] The definition of an international regime applied throughout the book is the widely used Krasner (1983:2) definition of 'sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of International Relations'.

In part, it remains wedded to the regime project of explaining regime formation, maintenance and change. But it focuses far less upon the institutions themselves and the way in which they can influence state behaviour, and looks instead at what have, until now, been considered contextual factors or externalities.[3] Hence it does not seek primarily to challenge the authority of the claims made about inter-state bargaining (although appropriate criticisms are levelled), but rather the ability of regime approaches to account for the range of influences upon international climate change policy, without attempting to include analysis of domestic and transnational non-governmental actors and the influence they may bring to bear upon the course of international politics.[4]

The second key purpose of the book is to embellish existing explanations of the political dynamics at work in relation exclusively to climate change. The argument is developed that the politics of global warming require broader approaches to understanding international cooperation than are provided by regime theoretical accounts. Analysis of the interaction of actors both inside and outside narrowly defined institutional settings can contribute towards such an understanding. The book therefore attempts to show how analysis of NGO actors may be particularly pertinent to explaining the politics of global warming.

Looking at the issue of global warming in specific terms enables a better understanding of 'how issue areas shape the relative power of NGOs' (Haufler 1995:110). This is important in respect of the first goal of the book (examining how NGOs are influential). Case study approaches are also necessary in order to explore fully the power relations that characterise a specific issue area such as global warming (the second goal of the book). Problem structures differ according to the issue in question and generalising accounts of international cooperation need to be made more sensitive to this. As Snidal notes, 'analysis of the formation and development of international political regimes cannot be studied without an appropriate understanding of the strategic structure of the underlying issue area' (Snidal 1985a:941).

1.2 Why these actors?

Non-governmental actors per se have not received extensive attention within the discipline of international relations (IR) (Willetts 1993). Besides general references to their importance, there has been 'little emphasis on theorising NGOs as non-state actors in the IR literature' (Elliott 1992:1), nor empirical documentation

[3] In many cases the assumptions are implicit (Smith 1993) given that, as Young (1989a:9) notes, 'much of the growing literature on international regimes consists of descriptive accounts of specific institutional arrangements'.

[4] It would appear to be fair to do this on the basis that regime theory sets its goal as explaining behaviour in a 'given issue area of International Relations' (Krasner 1983:2).

of their activities. There are a number of explanations for the lack of academic attention to the impact of NGOs at the global level. One is that NGOs are not considered to be powerful in the way that states are. They do not generally possess many of the resources that are traditionally considered to confer power upon actors on the global stage. Such resources are assumed to be an ability to mobilise violence, to control territory or a population, and economic power (Goldmann and Sjöstedt 1979; Willetts 1993). Under such a narrow definition of power, the place of states is privileged over other actors (Elliott 1992). The wider point is that NGOs are not thought directly to address the sorts of security issue that are traditionally of concern to international relations specialists. Moreover, the arena of foreign policy-making is considered to be largely immune to non-state pressures, as one of the least open sectors of government policy. That states set the boundaries within which these actors operate, and that most NGOs are too 'weak' to have an impact on world affairs are further perceptions that explain the neglect of NGOs in IR (Haufler 1995:96). Willetts (1982:18) uses a quote from Reynolds and McKinlay to make this point: 'As far as INGOs are concerned it is evident that the consequences of the activity of many of them are trivial. ... They may serve in some degree to alter the domestic environment of decision-makers, but with some exceptions their effect either on capabilities or on objectives is likely to be minimal, and in no way can they be seen themselves as significant actors.' NGOs are thought to matter only in issues of 'low politics', and even then only on terms and conditions established by states (Waltz 1979:94–5). Further, the scope, scale and variety that characterise the NGO phenomenon provide any potential researcher of their importance in international politics with a daunting task.

Given this background, there are few precedents for the study of NGOs in global politics. Despite the attempt by transnationalist/complex interdependence scholars (Keohane and Nye 1977; Nye and Keohane 1972) to put non-state actors onto the intellectual map, analysis of NGOs is not yet an accepted feature of the international relations discipline. It is perhaps especially ironic that IR thinkers from this transnationalist school who sought to place the importance of NGOs on the agenda of the discipline, lost sight of their importance when they came to look at regimes (Putnam 1988; Vogler 1995). Hence whilst Nye and Keohane (1972:x) decry the fact that transnational actors have 'often been ignored', when it comes to regime analysis their own work lacks any attempt to integrate NGOs (Keohane 1995). Risse-Kappen (1995:7) notes in this respect that the first debate on transnational relations in IR 'essentially resulted in confirming the state-centred view of world politics'.

Hence whilst there is, in some quarters, acknowledgement of the role of NGOs as political actors (Caldwell 1990; Carroll 1988), there have been few attempts to 'ascribe to them any major importance in determining international political outcomes' nor, more importantly, to 'acknowledge a need to rethink models of International Relations' (Elliott 1992:10). Regime analysis is largely silent on the role of non-state groups at the global level (Risse-Kappen 1995). Young's defining

text, *International Cooperation* (1989c), devotes less than one of 236 pages to their importance.[5] Even here the discussion centres on the way in which 'international regimes ... give rise to non-governmental interest groups' (Young 1989:78), and not the way in which NGOs may shape the institutions and practices of the regime.

Elsewhere NGOs are emphasised in order to draw attention to ways in which they may strengthen states' capacity to cooperate (P. Haas 1990a; Young 1989c). It is argued that NGOs strengthen and reinforce regime functions by performing 'watch-dog' (ibid.; Wettestad 1995) functions in helping to ensure compliance, and from applying pressure on 'laggard' states (Porter and Brown 1991). As actors in their own right, however, NGOs remain unimportant in these conceptualisations. Attention to the ways in which NGOs may bring about changes in the behaviour of states, or set agendas, is lacking. In Young's conceptualisation, NGOs are reactive to agendas already established by regimes and the governments party to them. It is assumed, moreover, that whilst 'powerful groups do sometimes succeed in exercising considerable influence over the shape of social institutions at the domestic level', at the international level the key actors are always 'dominant states or coalitions' (Young 1989c:69). The assumption is that states dictate the terms of participation and influence for NGOs (Raustiala 1996). There is very little sense in which the relationship might run both ways.[6]

More recent work on NGOs falls into the same trap. Arts (1998:56) argues that

> there are of course mutual connections and interactions, but it would go too far to see the NGO–state relationships at global level as one characterised by interdependence. States are definitely dominant in the international arena and, moreover, their governments are the formal policy and decision-makers. Therefore their dependence on NGOs is generally quite limited. Whereas states at national level have recently handed over formal competencies to private players in accordance with the neo-liberal ideology, such is hardly the case at global level.

Such an approach reduces the complexity of NGO power to a narrow range of impacts on formal policy outcomes produced by those within the policy arena. Less determinable patterns of influence are rejected in favour of 'hard evidence' of outcomes that will always be easier to equate with state intervention and power. For Arts (1998), power is exercised by and upon those within the policy arena only. Indeed he claims that all influence is conditional on a 'friendly' government carrying an NGO proposal on its behalf. 'This is a prerequisite for any NGO influence' (ibid.:231). Anything other than global level activity (narrowly-defined) is excluded from Arts's analysis.

[5] For Young (1989c:53) NGOs 'seek to ameliorate well-defined [presumably not by them] problems rather than assume any major role in restructuring the institutional arrangements prevailing in international society'. Their significance therefore derives from the contribution they make 'toward the development of a richer texture of institutional arrangements' (ibid.:54).

[6] One possible exception to this is the work of Peter Haas. Much more is said about this in Chapter 3 of this book.

This project inverts, then, the conventional understanding of state–NGO relations, where the latter are defined and constrained in their influence by the state in a linear and unproblematic way by taking NGO actors as the starting point. It explores the relations between NGOs and the state in a way that is sensitive to the power of both. It goes beyond seeking to determine which is more influential: the state or NGOs, as if they are not interdependent. By focusing on NGOs, the role of the state in restraining or enabling the power of these actors is not downplayed. Rather, it is a dynamic process rather than a static one-way flow of influence from non-state actors to the state that is the subject of this enquiry.

Strictly non-state-actor analysis, in abstraction, would perhaps not develop our thinking very far. The forms of NGO influence looked at here are in many ways defined by the state and the impact of NGOs upon *international* politics; the forms of leverage of different groups of actor in relation to the state. This is the most appropriate way of emphasising their importance to traditional scholars of international relations, who have become accustomed to overlooking non-state actors and privileging the state in their analysis. As a first step towards a more meaningful inclusion of the importance of non-governmental actors in explanations of international environmental politics, this strategy is justified.

Each chapter is intended to assess ways in which the political role of these groups may be important for explaining the international politics of climate change. This prompts discussion of wider questions about 'influence' as a political concept and the networks of influence of which non-state actors are a part. Unlike the argument of some writers that the policy impact of transnational actors does not vary systematically with the types of actor involved (Risse-Kappen 1995), it is argued here that the political influence of different actors needs to be thought about in distinct ways. In relation to each group of actors considered, the relevant chapter reviews the influence of a broad range of actors in that sector of non-state activity. The breadth of analysis of these various actors, combined with the brief to explore the politics of global warming, limits the application of the study as an insight into the functions of these actors in broad terms. But it does say something useful about their importance to the policy debate on global warming. Coverage of a range of non-governmental actors is considered desirable in order to demonstrate the different types of political influence that are at work in global climate politics. Further, within each group of actors explored in the book, a diversity of players are touched upon to show how seemingly similar groups can have very different forms of influence.

The particular groups of non-governmental actor have been chosen for different reasons in each case. It is sufficient here merely to review the principal reasons for their inclusion in the book.

In the case of the *scientific community*, the focus of Chapter 3 is Working Group 1 of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The work of Peter Haas on 'epistemic communities', which focuses on the role of knowledge-based scientific communities in enhancing international cooperation, is employed extensively in this chapter. It is one of the few attempts by regime scholars to consider in

any detail the impact of NGOs upon international policy. Global warming, in particular, is characterised by a dependence upon scientists to define the responses to the issue (Skolnikoff 1990), such that the scientific community potentially has a key role to play in the problem's resolution.

With regard to the *mass media*, very little has been written on the nature or political impact of the mass media's coverage of environmental issues, and even less their coverage of global warming. There is nothing in the literature on global environmental politics on what analysis of the mass media might bring to explanations of policy. Chapter 4 seeks to redress this deficit by drawing on work in media studies to show how the media can influence the course of political events by framing debate in a particular way. In regime terms, this can be thought of as looking at the 'stories which generate problem-setting and set the directions of problem-solving' (Jönsson 1995:211).

In relation to the discussion both of the influence of the scientific community and of the mass media, emphasis is placed on the way in which 'control' of knowledge and meaning is an important power resource. It brings to the fore discussion of the importance of the perception and interpretation of problems, and the actors that are in a position to inform these. It attempts to go beyond an assessment merely of how 'institutions establish the range of discourse and available options' (ibid.:715) and looks instead at how non-governmental actors have a role to play in framing policy debates.

The role of industrial groups in general has received scant attention in the international relations literature, and consideration of the political role of the *fossil fuel lobbies* is equally lacking in the literature on global warming. By drawing out connections between the interests of these lobbies and the interests of states in relation to the climate issue, Chapter 5 posits three levels of influence in relation to the power of the lobbies, two of which relate not to outward and observable lobbying, but to the power of their presence in other areas of government policy, and to the structural influence that they are in a position to exert over states' climate policy strategies. The study of the influence of key corporate actors informs our understanding of the degree of manoeuvrability open to states in their deliberations on climate policy. The neglected issue of regime prevention features highly in this chapter.

The final 'actor' chapter (Chapter 6) deals with *environmental pressure groups*, which have received far more attention in the literature on global environmental politics. The chapter is centrally concerned with those pressure groups that have devoted considerable lobbying energy to the issue of climate change at the international level. It explores the opportunities and constraints that environmental NGOs have been able to exploit, or have been forced to adapt to, in their efforts to mobilise action on the issue of climate change. The potential for influence is shown to differ widely according to the nature of the group in question and the context in which it is operating.

Each of the chapters includes an analytical breakdown of the policy process, with the exception of Chapter 4 on the mass media, where only a focus on agenda-setting

is appropriate.[7] This is intended to ensure that the analysis is sensitive to the multifaceted and dynamic nature of political influence: the way it changes over time in different situations. The breakdown used is (1) agenda-setting, (2) negotiation-bargaining and (3) implementation, and is broadly compatible with similar formulations by Boehmer-Christiansen (1989), Haas, Keohane and Levy (1993), Young (1989a) and Young and Osherenko (1993).[8] There is some overlap between the different stages identified. All three stages can exist simultaneously so that, for example, whilst negotiations are proceeding on the eventual form of a protocol at the international level, convention obligations are still being implemented nationally, and interest groups are pressing upon government departments their preferred proposals for any protocol that may emerge internationally. Broadly speaking, however, *agenda-setting* refers to the phase of problem and interest definition in response to an issue, principally at the national level in the first instance. It describes the process where interested parties are called upon, or mobilise themselves, to participate in the debate on how a government should respond to a 'new' problem. Temporally, this stage covers the whole preglobal negotiation period.

Negotiation-bargaining refers to the stage of the policy process when agreement has been reached on the need for internationally coordinated response mechanisms. This phase is characterised by bargaining over suitable settlements and how burdens should be distributed between states. This is the stuff of regime theorising. Finally, there is the *implementation* stage, which is often neglected in writing on international cooperation (Greene 1996), when policies are put in place to meet obligations agreed upon in international fora and treaties are ratified. The focus once again is primarily on the national level.

Each chapter contains a short section on *structural factors* and *bargaining assets* particular to the group of actors in question. This serves to focus attention on the particular situation of this group of actors in the debate, and deals with the positional influence of the group at a general level. It offers a framework for understanding the specific forms of influence, which are then drawn out in the main body of the chapter.

The two terms might be differentiated in the following way. *Structural factors* are, for example, the relations of dependency that exist between the state and the suppliers of energy – the fossil fuel utilities – or states' dependency on the knowledge generated by scientific experts. Structural power in this sense relates to Susan Strange's use of the term: the power to establish the context within which others make decisions (Strange 1988). It also describes enduring positional influence, as opposed to temporary or fortuitous influence. *Bargaining assets* refer to points of leverage that groups are able to use to advance their position with governments. Examples include environmentalists' claims that they represent public concern about the environment,

[7] Unlike the other actors analysed in this book, the mass media are not prominent players during the negotiating or implementation stage, so the regime breakdown is less useful in this instance. The analysis in Chapter 4 focuses on the broadly conceived agenda-setting stage of the policy process.

[8] Though agenda-setting for these writers takes place at the international level.

or the media's access to public audiences, which confers significance on the way in which they represent the global warming issue. The distinction is not absolute, but it serves to clarify the structural relationships and points of leverage that provide a context for understanding specific forms of influence that operate in the politics of global warming.

1.3 Why global warming?

The issue of global warming[9] has been chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, the regime is still at what may be considered an embryonic stage of development. It therefore provides an opportunity to offer a more refined account of the politics that will enhance, or militate against, future efforts to grapple with the problem.

Secondly, global warming and the political and economic problematics that underlie it simultaneously provide one of the most interesting, but also complex, environmental problems facing the international community. Interesting, because of the political challenges that are thrown up in terms of the scale of international cooperation that will be required to address the threat. Complex, because of the way in which global warming is part of, and interacts with, so many other issues on the international agenda, such as deforestation, international aid and a series of North–South relationships.

Global warming is unique in a number of senses compared with other environmental problems the international community has faced. The *problem structure* of global warming gives rise to particular sets of political relations that need to be understood in a focused and issue-specific way. Problem-structural approaches emphasise how the characteristics of an issue help to determine the probability of regime formation and change (Breitmeier and Dieter Wolf 1995; List and Rittberger 1992). Although this notion is not a new one and borrows from Lowi's (1964) work, the approach has not been emphasised in the literature on global environmental politics, though O'Riordan and Jaeger (1996) briefly discuss the idea in their work on climate change.

Skolnikoff (1990) implicitly subscribes to a problem-structural approach by identifying four special features of the global warming issue that together make it a particularly intractable issue to resolve. Firstly, there is the fact that the problem is inextricably related to so many other issues on the global agenda. Secondly, the difficulty of estimating the physical and socioeconomic impacts of the problem discourages a sense of urgency in dealing with the problem. Thirdly, the truly

[9] The terms 'global warming', 'climate change' and 'global climate change' are used interchangeably in this book to refer to the same scientific phenomenon. It is acknowledged, however, that the terms are politically loaded. Environmental pressure groups and the mass media, for example, seem to prefer the term 'global warming', because the term has a more emotive or dramatic resonance. The scientific community and the fossil fuel lobbies seem to prefer the term 'global [climate] change', because it sounds less alarming.

global nature of the problem requires the cooperation of a diverse range of political actors and interests, complicating the likelihood of finding solutions acceptable to all. Finally, political responses to the issue of global warming are argued to be dependent to a greater degree than other issues upon the advice of scientists. For Skolnikoff (ibid.) this may have the effect of delaying the prospect of meaningful political action, since consensus within scientific communities is reached only very slowly.

More than most other environmental issues, global warming goes to the heart of the modern industrial economy. Energy, especially reserves of cheap fossil fuel energy such as coal, oil and gas, drives economic growth in the contemporary global economy. Most problematically, the largest and most powerful states and regions in the global economy (the US, Europe, Australia and China) are sustained by the profligate use of cheap and readily available reserves of these resources. Hence unlike the issue of ozone depletion, with which it is often compared (Benedick 1991c; Rowlands 1995; Sebenius 1991), global warming relates to basic patterns of production and consumption, and potentially their transformation. As Rowlands (1995) notes when comparing the two issues, confronting global warming is about dissipating business and not different business, less about the replacement of offending substances or the creation of substitutes (as is the case with ozone depletion) and more about reduced output and changes in entrenched patterns of behaviour. The scale of resistance and inertia that an effective, long-term solution to global warming needs to confront are vast and unlike anything witnessed to date in addressing other environmental problems. Because of this, Lunde (1995:52) notes that 'global warming has a stronger scent of "high politics" than any other environmental problem'.

This leads to the third answer to the question 'why global warming?', and to the question 'why non-governmental actors and global warming?' Given the nature of the interests that are aligned against further action on global warming, the threat that global warming poses to the conventional operation of industrial economies and governments' reluctance to face up to these challenges, analyses of non-governmental actors becomes pertinent as a means of locating the potential sources of change and catalysts to government action. The scientific community, environmental groups and the mass media, by raising public awareness and putting pressure on politicians, can create momentum which, in relation to other environmental issues, has been successful in bringing about policy changes at government level. The activities and pressure for change that the actors examined in this book are capable of generating, may play a critical role in determining the nature and degree of policy response that is developed at the international level.

Many of the key obstacles that analysts have identified as standing in the way of further resolution of the global warming issue can also be better understood from an NGO perspective. Hahn and Richards (1989:446) note, for example, that 'A coordinated strategy aimed at prevention would require both a much greater consensus on the scientific aspects of the problem or a much greater level of public concern than currently exists.' Assuming they are correct, actors that may be in a position to

activate public demands, or contribute to policy-relevant scientific understanding become central to an understanding of the surmountability of these obstacles.

1.4 Methodology

Part of the problem in attempting to construct an analysis that captures the political dynamics at work in environmental politics is that, as Elliott (1992:6) notes, 'Assessments of influence and success often rely on the perceptions of NGOs which may overstate the case, or of governments which may wish to play down NGO influence or to claim successful NGO initiatives for themselves.' One way of tackling this difficult problem is to make clear the limits of simply recording the opinions of key actors through questionnaires and interviews, and to explore the issues through conceptual and theoretical lenses in order to obtain a broader picture. It is not enough to rely on the opinions of the actors involved, or observed accounts of actor interaction.

The analysis in this book goes beyond an examination of politics within the formal decision-making circle. Direct observation benefits from integration with analysis of a more conceptual nature that addresses issues of non-participation, exclusion and agenda-setting. Such a conceptual framework is provided by the work of Bachrach and Baratz (1962) and Crenson (1971); what is often referred to as the second-dimensional (non-observable) approach to power (Lukes 1974). Accounting for the political origins of inaction, which is part of the brief here, is an imprecise exercise prone to a range of charges from positivist policy analysts.

Criticism of an approach that explores 'non-issues' and tacit power is grounded in negation of the idea that there necessarily is an explanation for inaction. For pluralist analysts of the policy process (Dahl 1961, 1963) there are non-issues only where there is non-interest. In other words it is assumed that a particular policy course is not pursued or a particular type of issue not raised because there is insufficient organised political interest on that issue. This is the view that 'sources of political neglect are not themselves political' (Crenson 1971:130).

For Dahl (1963:52), the major methodological problem with second-dimensional approaches is that 'seemingly well-placed observers can be misled by false reputations; they may attribute great power where little or none exists'. Yet if influence is perceived by decision-makers and can be said to have informed their decisions, then regardless of whether that influence can be directly and unquestionably attributed to an actor, it nevertheless helps to account for an outcome, which is the goal here. The section entitled 'Reconfiguring political influence' in Chapter 2 deals with these issues at length. This section only explores the methodological issues involved in researching influence in a way that goes beyond the mere association of stimulus and response.

The approach here is not to reject analysis that focuses strictly on actions, but to draw attention to the importance of tacit, less observable influence. The reputation for being powerful may of itself obstruct action on an issue, but that is not to say