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978-1-107-07439-2 - Political Opportunities for Climate Policy: California, New York, and the Federal Government

Roger Karapin

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Political Opportunities for Climate Policy

Analysis of climate change policies has focused mainly on the prospects for international agreements or on how climate policies should be designed. Yet effective domestic climate policies are essential to any global solution, and we know too little about how and why such policies are adopted. *Political Opportunities for Climate Policy* examines in depth the causes of effective climate policies in the United States, using a statistical analysis of all fifty states and long-term case studies of California, New York, and the federal government. In this book, Roger Karapin analyzes 22 episodes in which policies were adopted, blocked, or reversed. He shows that actors and events have positively affected climate policy making, despite the constraints presented by political institutions and powerful fossil fuel industries. Climate policy advocates have succeeded when they mobilize vigorously and astutely during windows of opportunity – which opened when events converged to raise both the awareness of problems and the political commitment to address them.

ROGER KARAPIN is Professor of Political Science at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York, and is Editor-in-Chief of *Polity*.

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Hunter College and the Graduate Center

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To those who work for effective climate policies

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This book argues that actors and events have positively affected U.S. climate policy, despite institutional and other structural constraints on it. Administrative capacities, political culture, fossil fuel endowments, and air pollution problems strongly affected what could be achieved, but they did not determine the outcomes. Environmental organizations, environmentally minded elected officials, segments of business, and other members of broad advocacy coalitions also influenced the adoption of policies. They have done by mobilizing vigorously and astutely during windows of opportunity that opened in the framework of structural factors – when events converged to raise both the awareness of problems and the political commitment to address them. Timing matters.

These actors have had success not only in leading states such as California and New York, but also sometimes at the federal level. Climate policy making in the United States extends back at least to the 1970s, in the form of energy efficiency and renewable energy policies, and forward to emissions trading in the Northeast and the wide-ranging regulatory measures of California's Air Resources Board and the federal Environmental Protection Agency since the mid-2000s. These four decades of activity present a rich mixture of successes and failures, from which we can learn about the conditions under which actors can make a difference. After climate policy advocates made a strategic retreat to the state level in the first decade of this century and then the Obama administration put a renewed focus on federal climate policy, this is a good time to re-examine climate policy making by both the federal government and the leading states.

I think this book will make some fresh contributions to an increasingly studied field. While most work in political science focuses on the international level of climate policy, this book examines state and national policies. Even after the landmark agreement in Paris in December 2015, the domestic climate policies of the major economic powers – adopted largely through domestic processes – will

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continue to be the core and basis of any global solution. While most writing about climate policies argues for why they should be adopted and how they should be designed, this book instead looks at what makes them more likely to be enacted. There are many good policy proposals available, but our understanding of how to get them adopted lags far behind our knowledge of how to craft them.

While most analyses of domestic climate policy making have focused either on structural factors or on actions and events, implicitly debating their relative contributions, this book includes both viewpoints and explicitly sets them against each other. It draws out a synthesis that acknowledges the importance of structural constraints and drivers, and the partial dependence of future paths on past ones – while also delineating the ways that problems and politics have converged to create windows of opportunity and that actors have stepped forward to use them. It seeks to avoid the pitfalls of structural determinism and intentionalism, by recognizing that actors can make a difference but only when conditions are right. Finally, while most observers despair that U.S. climate policies are too weak to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate, this book is comparatively upbeat. Many major and minor successes of the past have been overlooked, and we will have chances to repeat and build on them. If we can do so, we will at least be able to *reduce* global warming and its effects compared to business as usual – the path of inaction.

* * *

This book originated in my search for what was working relatively well in climate policy and policy making. That led me initially to Germany, to a cross-national view of the problem, and to a focus on the effects of policies on greenhouse gas emissions. As a newcomer to the study of environmental politics, I received early support and encouragement from Martin Jänicke and Miranda Schreurs at the Free University of Berlin, and from other comparativists whom I met in Germany, especially Ian Bailey, Andreas Duit, Detlef Jahn, Helmut Weidner, and Rüdiger Wurzel. Miranda gave me many opportunities to present my work in progress, and Martin Jänicke reminded me to avoid too much pessimism when studying environmental policy outcomes. When I turned to cases in the United States, I benefited from the encouragement of Christopher Borick, Robert Denning, Kathryn Harrison, Daniel Mazmanian, and Barry Rabe. Dan also suggested path dependence as part of the explanation of the California case and is kind enough to consider me a Californian by birthright despite my long absence from the Golden State.

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Abbreviations

AB 32	Assembly Bill 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act
ACEEE	American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
BTU	British Thermal Unit
CAFE	Corporate Average Fuel Economy
CARB	California Air Resources Board
CCES	Center for Climate and Energy Solutions
CEC	California Energy Commission
CO ₂ eq	CO ₂ equivalent
CPUC	California Public Utility Commission
EDF	Environmental Defense Fund
EPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
KWh	Kilowatthour
mpg	Miles per gallon
MT	Megatons
NRDC	Natural Resources Defense Council
NYSERDA	New York State Energy Research and Development Authority
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PURPA	Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act
RGGI	Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative
RPS	Renewable portfolio standard
UCS	Union of Concerned Scientists