

The Politics of Environmental Performance

As the world faces the prospect of climate change, nuclear disasters, and water scarcity, it is clear that environmental degradation is an increasingly serious challenge with economic and social consequences. In this book Detlef Jahn analyzes political processes in a macrocomparative study in order to estimate the role of politics in the field of environmental performance in 21 OECD countries over the last three decades. His model demonstrates various styles of politics used to combat environmental degradation. He finds that economic and environmental performance are still closely linked and that moving toward a service society does not by itself solve the environmental challenge. The close relationship of these areas was made strikingly clear in the economic crisis of the new millennium. He argues that economic globalization fosters environmental deterioration and undermines efforts in domestic politics and international coordination to improve the environmental record.

Detlef Jahn is a professor of comparative politics at the University of Greifswald, Germany, and a permanent fellow at the KFG “The Transformative Power of Europe” at the Free University Berlin. He is a board member of the Institute for Climate Protection, Energy and Mobility (IKEM) and of the Bertelsmann Foundation’s Sustainable Government Index (SGI). He has published in *International Organization*, *Socio-Economic Review*, *European Journal of Political Research* and *Weather, Climate and Society* of the American Meteorological Society. He is also the author of *New Politics in Trade Unions* (Dartmouth, 1993).

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The Politics of Environmental Performance

*Institutions and Preferences in
Industrialized Democracies*

Detlef Jahn

Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität Greifswald



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For Marieke, Jip, and Jara
Für meine Eltern Günter und Margot Jahn

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Preface

This book has taken a very long time to finish. However, it was an exciting intellectual journey, which took me to many interesting places where I had the chance to meet many stimulating and supportive colleagues. I started out around twenty years ago with the intent to find out what determines the environmental performance of the most advanced industrial and democratic countries in the world. If the environmental challenge can be managed anywhere, the major OECD countries are potentially able to do so. However, the research was a minefield. It started with the dependent variable. Finding reliable data for a long period on environmental records even for the most developed countries is far from easy. Fortunately, I could use the data archive of the environmental unit of the OECD to fill data gaps. But difficulties remained. A research trip to Australia showed me that environmental problems are different in different places. I was impressed to hear that savanna burning, a tradition on the Australian continent for thousands of years, has a tremendous impact on the environment (Latz 1995). But can we, as the OECD did in the early environmental data compendium, include that in the environmental performance record of Australia? Because plants, animals, and humans need this controlled burning of large areas to survive and because there is no immediate profit motive for doing it, I decided to exclude these emissions from the Australian environmental performance record.

Another interesting aspect of Australia's atmospheric emissions is that they emerge mainly from two hot spots: Mont Isa and Kalgoorlie. I decided to travel to Kalgoorlie and stayed at the home of a judge. Kalgoorlie has gold and nickel mines, which generate astonishing levels of air pollution. There were no efficient environmental protections and the smelting furnaces were simply turned down when the wind blew the emissions to Kalgoorlie or Perth, the latter some 600 kilometers to the west. Some claimed that the emissions are noticeable even in South Africa. No matter, Australia is large and sparsely populated, but its environmental impact is substantial and has global consequences.

Another research trip took me to New Zealand – a wonderful country when considered superficially. However, when we think about the fact that the flora and fauna have changed almost completely in the short period of human settlement, one may draw a different conclusion. New Zealand was covered by rain forests and jungles and changed from a biodiversity hotspot that could support many unique species such as the flightless kiwi (the national bird), which is now threatened with extinction, to a landscape resembling the Scottish Highlands with some spectacular mountains. Similar to Australia, New Zealand has a lifestyle in which nature has a high use value but environmental protection does not rank high on the political agenda. As we will see, New Zealand's environmental performance is actually the worst of all countries included in this study.

The trips to Australia and New Zealand effectively convinced me that countries have their own unique environmental problems. Judging these two countries with European standards is not adequate. Therefore, I developed country specific environmental performance indices to take care of these special national environmental problems. This is a novel approach in environmental studies.

Aside from the dependent variable, over the phases of this project, I became more interested in having a more elaborate analytical approach. Macrocomparative studies have to simplify. Nevertheless, recent developments such as the veto player approach by Tsebelis (2002), or the median mandate model by McDonald and Budge (2005), or the minister model by Laver and Shepsle (1996) have greatly advanced macrocomparative analysis. For the development of my approach, a visit to George Tsebelis at UCLA was most instructive. I shifted my analysis from a simple partisan approach to an agenda setting power approach, which is an interactive model for agenda setters and veto players. To apply this model, I needed to define ideological positions relevant for environmental performance and the basic decision-making structure of various political systems. I could not use a standardized model because agenda setters and veto players work differently in various countries. Therefore, considerable research effort has been spent on elaborating this model and collecting information and data for all the countries included in this study.

Furthermore, in the course of my analysis, I felt that many key variables were poorly developed or not sufficiently updated. Others were created for cross-section analysis and are not suitable for times-series–cross-section analysis, which will be applied in this study. As a consequence, I devoted considerable effort to developing special indices of corporatism, the impact of climate and weather conditions, the strength

of new social movements, and domestic and international environmental institutionalization. Furthermore, in order to test whether there are party-specific elements at work in environmental politics, I developed a way of identifying ideological party dimensions.

Another factor that is often problematic is the modeling of time. It seems absurd that highly sophisticated data analysis uses a standard of $t-1$ for all independent variables. Why should the effect of veto players, governments, corporatism, economic openness, EU membership, etc., have exactly the same time lag in all the countries and all years? Seeking a resolution to this problem, I use a method of identifying optimized lags. However, this method takes considerable calculation power. Running some analyses on standard statistical modeling programs took more than a week before obtaining results. However, on the positive side, this delay in getting results leads to fewer trial-and-error analyses and a firmer orientation toward deductive testing of theoretical assumptions.

I began this project when I was a research professor at Nottingham Trent University two decades ago. I would like to thank Chris Bellamy and my research assistants at that time, Rebecca Whale and David Luckin, in the United Kingdom. Back in Germany, the project was sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG) for ten years. During the course of research I became increasingly interested in the impact of international factors on domestic politics and policy outcomes. Provoked by some international relations scholars who claimed the denationalization of politics, I dived into diffusion research. This research interest was supported by a research grant from the Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung and cooperation with Bob Franzese of the University of Michigan.

In the initial period Kathrin Deadlow, Bertram Welker, and Stefanie Korte were the research assistants for these projects. Later on, the team grew, and I am indebted to many student assistants who, I believe, still think that it was a crazy job to collect all these data over and over again. I also thank Thomas Behm, Kati Kuitto, Christoph Oberst, Konrad Rux, and Douglas Voigt, who helped with elaborating the concepts and arguments developed in this research and who commented on the manuscript several times. At the end, I finished the work with my current team at Greifswald University. I thank Nils Düpont, Jan Helmdag, Sebastian Stephan, Martin Rachuj, and Anne Sammler.

I used a lot of time, sabbaticals, and research grants. Besides those mentioned previously, I have to thank the Hanse Institute for Advanced Study (Delmenhorst, Germany) for a one year grant, the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University (Stockholm, Sweden) for a six month grant, and the Center for European Studies at New York University for a lengthy research stay.

I received invaluable support from Myriam Linister (OECD Paris) and Heino von Meyer (OECD Berlin), who did everything possible to make data available for me. The visit to Australia was only possible with the very kind invitation of Francis Castles at the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. Without the help of Ton Bührs from Lincoln University, I could never have explored the environmental politics of New Zealand to the same depth. George Tsebelis was a kind host and very stimulating discussant at UCLA. During my research, it became obvious that the United States has, among other environmental challenges, severe problems with water consumption in the Southwest. I learned a lot about water management in desert cities during my stay at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. Dennis Pirages and Steven Parker took the time to teach me a lot about this issue. I also wish to thank Ted Gurr for his comments at a presentation of this project in Las Vegas, which motivated me to finish the book. A great thanks goes to Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse for giving me the time and resources to finish the project as a research fellow at the Kolleg Forschergruppe (KFG) at the Free University Berlin where Ashley Gongaware fought to make this manuscript readable for an English speaking audience.

I also received very helpful remarks and suggestions on several aspects of this topic from Robert Franzese, Lori Poloni-Staudinger, Gary Marks, Lisbeth Hooghe, Marko Joas, and Roger Karapin and two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press.

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Last but not least, I learned from my young children, Jip and Jara, that veto players can also be agenda setters. Even if their interest has been to set the agenda away from finishing this book, I thank them for opening my mind to other important things in life. I dedicate this book to Marieke, who had to take on the burden of a stressed husband many times and to our children, Jip and Jara.

The data used in this book and many supplementary tables, figures, and analyses are available from the following web page: <http://comparativepolitics.uni-greifswald.de>.