



Seizing policy windows: Policy Influence of climate advocacy coalitions in Brazil, China, and India, 2000–2015



Solveig Aamodt^{a,*}, Iselin Stensdal^b

^a CICERO Center for International Climate Research, Pb. 1129 Blindern, 0318 Oslo, Norway

^b Fridtjof Nansen Institute, P.O. Box 326, 1326 Lysaker, Norway

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ABSTRACT

What drives the development of climate policy? Brazil, China, and India have all changed their climate policies since 2000, and single-case analyses of climate policymaking have found that all three countries have had climate coalitions working to promote climate policies. To what extent have such advocacy coalitions been able to influence national policies for climate-change mitigation, and what can explain this? Employing a new approach that combines the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) with insights from comparative environmental politics and the literature on policy windows, this paper identifies why external parameters like political economy and institutional structures are crucial for explaining the climate advocacy coalitions' ability to seize policy windows and influence policy development. We find that the coalitions adjust their policy strategies to the influence-opportunity structures in each political context—resulting in confrontation in Brazil, cooperation in China, and a complementary role in India.

1. Introduction

Three major developing economies—Brazil, China, and India—have all adopted significant changes in their climate policies since 2000, radically raising their domestic mitigation ambitions. The three are defined as developing countries under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and have not had binding obligations to mitigate climate change under the Convention. What, then, drives climate-policy development in these countries? Recent studies have noted the scant scholarly attention from comparative politics in the political science literature on climate change (e.g. Keohane, 2015; Purdon, 2015; Steinberg and VanDeveer, 2012). They encourage using comparative methods to explain and systematize the empirical complexities of climate-policy development (Purdon, 2015; Steinberg and VanDeveer, 2012). Single-case analyses of climate policymaking in Brazil, China, and India find coalitions of policy actors working to promote climate-policy change in all three (Aamodt, 2015; Carvalho, 2010; Lele, 2012; Never, 2012; Stensdal, 2014, 2015). Contributing to the emerging field of comparative environmental politics, we analyze and compare the role of climate-advocacy coalitions in policy processes in Brazil, China, and India. Our research objective is to explore to what extent these advocacy coalitions managed to influence national climate-mitigation policies between 2000 and 2015, and what can explain their influence.

Brazil, China, and India accounted for 35% of the world's

greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2012 (CAIT, 2016). Although grouped together under the UNFCCC, they differ significantly in their developmental paths, resource endowments, and political systems: all important factors for GHG emission trajectories and mitigation possibilities. With the Paris Agreement's bottom-up framework, understanding domestic climate-policy development has become increasingly important, and single-case analyses have examined climate and environmental policy in Brazil (e.g. Aamodt, 2015; Hochstetler and Keck, 2007; Viola and Franchini, 2012), China (e.g. Conrad, 2012; Marks, 2010; Stensdal, 2014), and India (e.g. Dubash, 2009; Fisher, 2012; Isaksen and Stokke, 2014). Of comparative studies Harrison and Kostka (2014) compare energy-efficiency measures in China and India; Hochstetler and Kostka (2015) compare state-business relations in renewable electricity in Brazil and China; and Surana and Anadon (2015) compare financial resource mobilization for wind energy in China and India. However, few studies have compared climate-policy processes in these three countries, as this study does. Zooming in on specific aspects of climate policymaking in these three large and complex countries, our comparative analysis brings together new and existing knowledge on advocacy coalitions in climate policy processes in Brazil, China, and India, 2000–2015. Combining the well-established Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) with insights from comparative environmental politics, and the literature on policy windows, we identify factors that enable or constrain the influence of climate advocacy coalitions. We

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: solveig.aamodt@cicero.oslo.no (S. Aamodt), iss@fni.no (I. Stensdal).

employ the ACF's main analytical concepts in a new comparative context, and provide feedback on its applicability in comparative studies of large developing countries, a research need highlighted by the ACF's own developers (Henry et al., 2014).

Our qualitative comparative analysis of primary and secondary data sources shows that climate coalitions in all three countries were influential in the initial development of comprehensive climate policies—also in Brazil, despite heavy opposition from established agribusiness and energy-sector coalitions. External subsystem parameters like political economy and institutional structures are crucial for explaining the coalitions' policy influence and the endurance of policy change. Climate coalitions appear to adjust their policy strategies to the influence-opportunity structures in each political context, resulting in confrontation in Brazil, cooperation in China, and a complementary role in India.

2. Theory and method

Comparative environmental politics seek to combine environmental policy studies with comparative politics theory and method (Purdon, 2015; Steinberg and VanDeveer, 2012). Comparative politics operates with three main strands for explaining policy change: interest-based approaches, institution-based approaches, and cognitive approaches, 'interests, institutions, and ideas'; the literature on comparative environmental politics recommends employing a combination of these in empirical studies (Harrison and Sundstrom, 2010; Purdon, 2015; Steinberg and VanDeveer, 2012). However, in analyzing policy processes in non-Western countries, it is important to recognize that the traditional theoretical assumptions dominant in political science analyses have been developed largely in North American and Western European contexts (Dodds, 2013; Khan, 2010; Purdon, 2015; Steinberg, 2012; Tickner, 2003). Steinberg (2012) argues that the conditions for policy change in many developing countries differ from what most Western policy theories assume.

Research on climate policy in Brazil, China, and India has identified complex coalitions of climate-policy actors, consisting of scientists, NGOs, politicians, bureaucrats, and businesspersons (Carvalho, 2010; Never, 2012; Stensdal, 2014). We find the ACF's focus on policy processes within policy subsystems over time (at least a decade) suitable for encompassing this variety of policy actors. Although developed for analyzing policy processes in the US pluralist tradition, the ACF, unlike many other approaches to policy analysis, does not assume a democratic political system (Henry et al., 2014; Weible et al., 2009). The framework has been modified several times and applied in various case-studies in developing countries, but has been criticized for being Western-biased in its assumptions. Henry et al. (2014) argue that combining the ACF with other theoretical approaches is a fruitful way to retain the framework's strengths while improving its ability to analyze non-Western cases. Constructing a comparative framework to account for interests, institutions, and ideas in the case-countries, we find it particularly relevant to combine key ACF concepts with insights from institutionalist and political economy traditions in comparative politics. Of course, in a comparative analysis, some details must be sacrificed in favor of clear, comparable variables with explanatory value (Henry et al., 2014), making it difficult to employ the ACF to its full depth in our study.

2.1. Analytical framework

Within the ACF, a policy subsystem "consists of actors from a variety of public and private organizations who are actively concerned with a policy problem or issue [...], who regularly seek to influence public policy in that domain" (Sabatier, 1998, p. 99). The climate-policy subsystems in our case-countries are relatively new compared to other subsystems like energy and agriculture; and climate-policy change can be expected to be more difficult if it conflicts with

established interests in other subsystems (Underdal, 2000). We expect the borders between subsystems in our cases to be blurrier than the ACF assumes: firstly, because climate policy transcends established borders between economic sectors (Underdal, 2000); secondly, because the endurance of climate-policy change often requires linkage to policy processes in other subsystems (Steinberg, 2012).

The ACF holds that subsystem policy actors coordinate their activities and form *advocacy coalitions* based on perceived correspondences in policy beliefs (Matti and Sandström, 2013; Orach and Schlüter, 2016; Sabatier, 1998). *Policy core beliefs* guide how actors perceive reality and policy options; *secondary beliefs* are perceptions of which policy measures and regulations are appropriate (Sabatier, 1998; Weible et al., 2009). Beliefs are formed through *interests* and ideological values (*ideas*); and formal and informal organizations often institutionalize beliefs (March and Olsen, 1998; Sabatier, 1998). Through *policy-oriented learning*, coalition members use information and knowledge to improve their understanding of the policy-area and promote their policy objectives (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999). Actors will tend to disregard knowledge that contradicts their core beliefs (Sabatier, 1998). We expect that policy actors and coalitions use scientific knowledge to inform themselves and others, and to frame their policy preferences

In the ACF, *external subsystem parameters* and *external subsystem events* are exogenous variables that influence policymaking and enable or constrain advocacy coalitions. Following Gupta's (2014) argument that the parameters are too broadly presented, we find it necessary to un-cap the external subsystem parameters and specify expected causal relations. We expect two main types of parameters to constitute barriers and drivers to climate policy change. First, material parameters like energy resources, GHG emissions, and climate-friendly technologies frame policy actors' political and economic reality, influencing their economic interests and ideas of how the world looks and should look: their policy beliefs and preferences (Bang et al., 2015). Second, political economy factors, particularly state–market relations and the state's political settlement (see below) are important political parameters (Hochstetler and Kostka, 2015; Khan, 2010; Purdon, 2015). We expect state–market relations, together with the material parameters, to influence who has the capacity for climate mitigation and who bears the costs and benefits of mitigation policy, again influencing coalition formation and subsystem overlaps. For analyzing the *institutional* factors for policy development, Khan introduces the concept of *political settlement* to describe how not only the formal rules of the political game, but also informal structures and political-cultural practices set "the context for institutional and other policies" (2010, p. 4) in all countries, and how clientelist relations are particularly relevant for understanding policy change in developing countries. We expect the political settlements to constitute important opportunity structures for coalition influence in our cases. However, the state is seldom a unitary actor (March and Olsen, 1998); and, in line with Gupta's (2014) findings from India, we expect the opportunity structures to vary between subsystems.

As for external subsystem events, the policy studies literature maintains that most political systems are dominated by political and institutional mechanisms that uphold the status quo. *Policy windows* are periods in subsystem development when policy change is more likely (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Kingdon, 2003; Sabatier, 1993; Thelen, 1999). Policy development is path-dependent, but if policy actors succeed in utilizing a policy window, the institutional development may switch track (Steinberg, 2012; Thelen, 1999). Actors must use the opportunity before the window closes. External events may or may not open policy windows, depending on the system's material and political parameters. The ACF highlights changes in socio-economic conditions, public opinion, or government as main external events (Sabatier, 1993). Because climate change is a global challenge that requires domestic policy change, the "two-level-game" between global governance and domestic policy processes is particularly strong regarding climate policy

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