International organizations, advocacy coalitions, and domestication of global norms: Debates on climate change in Canada, the US, Brazil, and India

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ABSTRACT

National climate policies are shaped by international organizations (IOs) and global norms. Drawing from World Society Theory and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), we develop two related arguments: (1) one way in which IOs can influence national climate policy is through their engagement in mass-mediated national policy debates and (2) national organizations involved in the policy process may form advocacy coalitions to support or oppose the norms promoted by IOs. To examine the role of IOs in national policy debates and the coalitions that support and oppose them, we use discourse network analysis (DNA) on over 3500 statements in 11 newspapers in Canada, the United States (US), Brazil, and India. We find that in the high-income countries that are high per capita emitters (Canada and the US), IOs are less central in the policy debates and the discourse network is strongly clustered into competing advocacy coalitions. In the lower-income countries that are low per capita emitters (Brazil and India), IOs are more central and the discourse network is less clustered. Relating these findings to earlier research, we suggest that the differences we find between high and low per capita emitters may be to some extent generalizable to the relevant country groups beyond our four cases.

1. Introduction

National climate policies are shaped by international organizations (IOs), treaties, and the policy norms that these promote (Meyer et al., 1997; Schofer and Hironaka, 2005; Hironaka, 2014). The relevant actors include intergovernmental organizations, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Greenpeace, as well as treaties, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The promoted norms include the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change, principles such as common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), and the obligation to define national emission reduction targets and submit them to the United Nations (UN).

However, countries differ substantially in how they have embraced climate policy norms promoted by IOs. Much research has investigated climate change politics in the international arena (e.g., Roberts and Parks, 2007; Roberts, 2011; Stoett, 2012), but less comparative work focuses on understanding national differences in climate change policymaking (Purdon, 2015) and the role of IOs in different political economic contexts.

One way in which IOs can influence national policymaking is by engaging in public policy debates in different countries. IOs publish reports, such as the IPCC assessment reports, organize public events, such as the UN Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings that become global media events, and issue recommendations for national governments. These reports, events, and recommendations are often followed by approval or resistance by national-level organizations active in the

climate policy debate, resulting in political disputes in arenas such as the national mass media over the arguments put forth by IOs Fig. 1–4.

In this paper, we address two questions: (a) how central IOs are in mass-mediated national policy debates on climate change in different countries and (b) what kinds of advocacy coalitions support and oppose the global norms promoted by IOs. Our method, discourse network analysis (DNA), enables us to analyze these debates from a network perspective and assess these two issues.

Our theoretical framework combines the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) with the idea of domestication of global norms developed in the world society literature. The world society literature directs our attention to the role of IOs in national policy processes, and the concept of domestication highlights that various organizations at the national level may seek to ally with or oppose IOs and the norms they promote (Alasuutari and Qadir, 2014; Alasuutari, 2016). The ACF offers systematic tools to analyze alliances and opposition, by focusing on how organizations group into coalitions based on shared value priorities and policy preferences (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1988).

Our empirical material consists of more than 3500 statements in the most widely read newspapers in Canada, the United States (US), Brazil, and India. In terms of absolute country-level emissions, all four countries are major emitters due to their sheer size, which renders them important actors in global climate change politics. In terms of per capita emissions, however, the countries form two distinct groups. According to the latest World Bank data (2014), India's emissions per capita are a mere 1.7 tons, closely followed by Brazil at 2.6 tons. Canada (15.1 tons per capita) and the US (16.5 tons per capita), in contrast, are among the world's highest emitters. Per capita emissions are closely linked with per capita income levels, with middle-income India and Brazil emitting considerably less than high-income Canada and the US. Thus, this set of four countries enables us to compare differences in national policy debates between high- and middle-income countries. This is relevant for two reasons. First, existing research has shown that IOs tend to play stronger roles in policy processes in lower-income countries than in high-income ones (Frank et al., 2007; Longhofer and Schofer, 2010). Second, the global norms concerning these two sets of countries are different: more cuts are required from high-income countries (Annex I countries under the Kyoto Protocol) than middle- and low-income ones (non-AnnexI countries). This may contribute to differences between the two country groups in the levels of opposition faced by IOs.

We find that IOs are less central in the debates in the high-income countries that are high per capita emitters (the US and Canada), where they are embedded in a conflictual discourse network that is strongly clustered into competing advocacy coalitions supporting or opposing global norms. In the middle-income countries that are low per capita emitters (Brazil and India), IOs are more central and the discourse networks much less conflictual, with less opposition to global norms on climate change.

2. Analytical framework & research questions

Our analytical framework combines the ACF literature with the world society literature on the domestication of global norms. The world society literature focuses on the role of IOs in national policy debates and highlights that domestic actors may contest or defend the norms promoted by IOs. The ACF literature provides the tools to analyze how the domestic organizations that contest and defend the norms promoted by IOs form into coalitions—which the world society literature has not addressed. Thus, the two theoretical literature streams, combined into a single analytical framework, enable us to delineate the role of IOs and their supporters and opponents in national policy debates that is not possible with either theory alone.

The world society literature has shown that IOs are important drivers of environmental policymaking, including climate change policy, at the national level. The literature has analyzed environmentalism as a set of global cultural norms, embedded in a global environmental

regime composed of interstate institutions and treaties, institutionalized environmental sciences, and international civil society organizations (Meyer et al., 1997; Schofer and Hironaka, 2005; Hironaka, 2014). The extent to which a country adheres to these norms is affected by its degree of integration in the world society: the more international treaties a country participates in and the more international NGOs are present, for instance, the more likely a country is to enact ambitious environmental policies (Schofer and Hironaka, 2005).

We argue that one way in which IOs can influence national policymaking is through their role in policy debates in national mass media. Research on media coverage of CC has shown that this is particularly true of the climate change debate, where the publication of the IPCC fourth assessment report in 2007 and the UN COP 15 conference in 2009 have been important drivers of public debate across the world (Schäfer et al., 2014). This observation leads to the following question:

RQ1: How central are IOs in mass-mediated national climate policy debates in different countries?

While the world society literature has demonstrated that countries do indeed follow global cultural norms and implement global organizational models, it has rarely encompassed how global norms are often subject to heated debates, where national organizations both defend and oppose these norms. Noting this gap, Alasuutari and Qadir (2014) suggested that more research should address what they term "domestication of global norms." The idea is that global policy norms do not simply diffuse but that national political actors have a paramount role in the process as these global ideas are "made part of national political discourse and practices" (Alasuutari, 2016, p. 21). When a global policy problem becomes a salient issue for national policymakers, domestic organizations compete to frame it in political arenas, including the mass media (Alasuutari, 2016). This focus on framing has produced interesting insights into how global norms enter national contexts. We add to the domestication perspective by drawing on the ACF (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1998; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014), which argues that organizations aiming to influence policymaking in a particular policy domain form competing advocacy coalitions based on shared core beliefs. These include value priorities, elemental causes, and preferred solutions (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014).

A limitation of the ACF literature has long been that the framework has largely been applied to policy processes at the national or subnational level. Cross-country comparative applications are rare (see, however, Ingold et al., 2016). Furthermore, ACF studies focusing on national policy subsystems do not usually acknowledge the role of IOs in advocacy coalitions (two exceptions are Litfin, 2000 and Sewell, 2005). The ACF should more often incorporate the external context of policy subsystems (Henry et al., 2014).

Thus, we contribute to the world society literature on the domestication of global norms by examining the role of advocacy coalitions in the domestication process and to the ACF by engaging in a comparative study on the role of IOs in advocacy coalitions. We argue that the relative strength of coalitions that defend and oppose global policy norms is an important factor determining what kind of national policy response results from the domestication process. Thus, our second research question is the following:

RQ2: What kinds of advocacy coalitions defend the global norms on climate change in the mass-mediated policy debates in different countries, and what kinds of coalitions oppose these norms?

It is worth noting that this paper focuses on actors—the positions of IOs and national organizations in the discourse networks. Therefore, less attention is paid to the content of the specific claims. In Table 3 in the material and methods section, we do present the most contentious and consensual issues debated in each country, but this is mostly to render transparent our coding scheme and the set of claims upon which our network analysis relies. In the analysis section, we discuss the content of the claims only to the extent that it is necessary for understanding how actors group into coalitions in the discourse network. Why certain issues become the foci of contestation or consensus in each