Climate Pipeline Project Conference 2024
Politics and Government

Harvard Weatherhead Center for International Affairs
April 26, 2024

Belfer Case Study Room S020, CGIS South 1730 Cambridge St

8:15 – 9:00 **Breakfast**

9:00 – 9:10 **Welcome and Opening Remarks by Robert Keohane and Dustin Tingley**

9:10 - 10:25 **Panel I: Community Transitions**

Zuhad Hai (Princeton), Supplying Compensation: Political Distortion in Adjustment Funding for Coal Communities (with Alexander F. Gazmararian)

Social Programs and the Political Consequences of Extractive Industry Dominance: Evidence from Central Appalachia, Elizabeth Thom (Harvard University)

Implementing Just Transitions in Fossil Fuel Communities through Emerging Climate Infrastructure Industries, Celina Scott-Buechler (Stanford University)

Discussion Opener: Professor Stephen Ansolabehere

10:25 – 10:40 **Coffee break**

10:40 - 12:10 **Panel II: Business and Politics**

Sayumi Miyano (Harvard University), Selective Hearings: The Use of Information from International Organizations in U.S. Energy Policy

Hayley Pring (Oxford University), Industry Support for Renewable Energy: Bad for Business or a Comparative Advantage?

Nicolas Lippolis (Columbia University), National Oil Companies and the Political Economy of Energy Transitions: Evidence from Brazil and Angola

Johnathan Guy (UC Berkeley), Low Carbon for the Short Term? Incumbency, Hold-Up, and Time Horizons in the Context of the Energy Transition

Discussion Opener: Professors Layna Mosley and Peter Rosendorff

12:15 - 1:30 Lunch

1:30 – 3:00 Panel III Governance

Rodrigo Fagundes Cezar (Fundação Getulio Vargas), Private Sustainability Governance and (Ir)responsible Political Engagement (with Yixian Sun)

Austin Beacham (UC San Diego), Extraction, Green Mobilization, and Conservation: Natural Resource Dependence and Protected Area Designation

Jittip Mongkolnchaiarunya (George Washington University), Epistemic Exclusion in Climate Science: Why We Grow the Wrong Trees

Fiona Bare (Princeton University), Climate of Confusion: Informational Barriers to Climate Finance Negotiations

Discussion Opener: Professor Paasha Mahdavi

3:00 – 3:10 Coffee break

3:15 - 4:45 Panel IV: Parties and Politicians

Aleksandra Conevska (Harvard University), When are parties 'good' for the environment? Green party influence on environmental policy (with Can E. Mutlu)

Claudia Zwar (Hertie School), When Do Green Parties Matter? Green Party Bargaining Leverage and Climate Policy Stringency (with Christian Flachsland and Mark Kayser)

Kathryn Baragwanath (Harvard University), The Greener Gender: Women Politicians and Deforestation

Antonio Valentim (Yale University), Climate Change and political entry: Evidence from Brazilian Municipal Elections (with Guilherme Fasolin)

Discussion Opener: Professor Matto Mildenberger

4:45 – 5:00 Closing Remarks by Professors Leah Stokes and Page Fortna

Panel I: Community Transitions

Zuhad Hai (Princeton University)
Supplying Compensation: Political Distortion in Adjustment Funding for Coal Communities (with Alexander F. Gazmararian)

Despite the prominence of compensation as a strategy to stem backlash from groups harmed by policy reforms or economic disruption, governments often fail to provide adequate adjustment assistance. We argue that leaders may have political incentives to distort compensation funding when voters oppose the reform and the benefits of compensation are delayed. We evaluate our argument in the context of the Appalachian Regional Commission's program to help coal mining communities adjust to the clean energy transition. We collect novel grant-level data from 2007-2019 to study how much and what type of assistance coal communities received. Using a triple-differences design, we detect political distortions, where coal counties in Republican-led states are less likely to receive adjustment assistance. Public opinion data show this distortion is in line with the median voter's climate policy preferences, and there is no indication that adjustment assistance improved economic outcomes. Whether compensation is an effective political strategy depends on the incentives of leaders to offer it in the first place.

Elizabeth Thom (Harvard University)
Social Programs and the Political Consequences of Extractive Industry Dominance: Evidence from Central Appalachia

Places with ties to extractive industries in the United States are already facing the economic and social consequences of the transition away from fossil fuels. In this paper, I explore how negative shocks to the coal industry generate both material and civic-organizational declines in impacted communities. I closely examine one social program that appears especially responsive to these dynamics: Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Using qualitative methods, I explore how SSDI has become highly concentrated in areas with extractive industry ties. And I investigate why, despite receiving direct government support, many residents still feel left behind. I conduct an in-depth case study of one such community, using interviews and archival records to trace the connections between individual and community-level experiences with political attitudes and participation. I argue the political outcomes we observe in these communities are mediated by the federal government in response to their economic and social needs. While federal programs provide some support to those facing material losses, they do little to tackle the declines in civic-organizational life. In turn, these local conditions, when left unaddressed, exacerbate feelings of threat and abandonment, leading to weak partisan attachments locally, support for the populist right nationally, or total disengagement from politics.

c(Stanford University)

Implementing Just Transitions in Fossil Fuel Communities through Emerging Climate Infrastructure Industries

A just transition (JT) can deliver economic benefits to communities while contributing to climate goals. Recent passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) theoretically makes available hundreds of billions of dollars for U.S. communities to implement JT-oriented projects, but are they? Media reports indicate that these funds are primarily being targeted by the private sector, whose motivations do not always align with JT principles. Even where community engagement requirements exist for funds, there has been criticism that these requirements are ill-defined and unlikely to lead to meaningful engagement across planning and implementation. I am interested in the barriers to IRA and BIL implementation that exist for public sectors in communities, especially those whose residents financially (and, in some cases, culturally) rely on the fossil fuel industry. I focus on community-based organizations and regional networks to understand barriers and opportunities for community self-determination and just transition in the near term. I am conducting expert interviews with community leaders in three regions; the Central Valley of California, Appalachia, and the Gulf Coast, that will culminate in a cross-regional virtual roundtable to synthesize findings. I intend to compile broader findings and recommendations from these regional cases, providing insights on community and worker needs for new clean infrastructure-based industries. By humanizing and investigating the experiences of communities at various stages of economic and energy transitions, I hope to understand the needs of community-based organizations engaged in this work and jointly develop tools for communities in transition to access existing resources (such as those laid out in the IRA and BIL) while identifying resources that do not yet exist to guide future research.

Panel II: Business and Politics

Sayumi Miyano (Harvard University)

Selective Hearings: The Use of Information from International Organizations in U.S. Energy Policy

How do states utilize information from international organizations (IOs) in their domestic policy-making processes? This paper focuses on the case of the U.S., a major financial contributor to the International Energy Agency (IEA), to explore the utilization of information from the IEA and other energy-related organizations in shaping American legislative and bureaucratic energy policies. Through the analysis of texts published by American legislative and executive branches from 2005 to 2017, including press releases, speeches, and social media posts, the study first finds a notable context in which IEA is referenced: the demand for conventional fossil fuels. This implies a selective citation by the US government, especially given the IEA's pivot towards a greater focus on renewable energy sources and climate change concerns, which began around 2009. Furthermore, the paper explores the partisan variances in the utilization of these international information sources. It finds that Republican legislators demonstrate a relatively larger preference for referencing the IEA, aligning with their traditional energy policies and stances. In contrast, Democratic legislators show a tendency to draw on a broader spectrum of IOs and international non-governmental organizations, reflecting their diverse approach to energy and environmental policy. The finding implies the politicization of international information within the realms of domestic policy formation.

Hayley Pring (Oxford University)

Industry Support for Renewable Energy: Bad for Business or a Comparative Advantage?

There is a growing interest in global environmental politics on the role of corporate actors in either deepening or hampering decarbonization through lobbying activities. Yet studies have found mixed results in terms of industry and firm level support for specific targeted industrial policies. High polluters and clean companies are both actively involved in lobbying, with some high polluting firms and industries publicly supporting investment into renewable technology. What determines industry and firm support for renewable energy investment policies? Focusing on the lobbying activities of firms towards renewable energy legislation, I argue that support for policies on renewable technologies are shaped by three market and firm contexts: i) company exposure to climate-related risk at the asset-level within that sector, ii) the maturity of decarbonizing technologies relevant to the industry and ease of access to these technologies in the region, and iii) the diffusion of clean and dirty companies which in turn shapes whether large companies can expand their market share by investing in this technology at the expense of their rivals. I use three country-case studies from states with changing renewable investment markets: Japan, Australia, and the United States. I use a combination of semi-structured interviews, data from S&P Global clean energy index, and firms' shareholder earning calls to test the effect of these conditions on lobbying engagement and lobbying stances by firms on renewable policies from LobbyMap. This research underscores the importance of studying the competitive, asymmetric, and uneven dynamics shaping industry demand for climate mitigation policies within countries.

Nicolas Lippolis (Columbia University)

National Oil Companies and the Political Economy of Energy Transitions: Evidence from Brazil and Angola

Controlling over half of global oil and gas production, accounting for 40% of oil and gas investment, and with rights over two-thirds of proven reserves, the decarbonization of National Oil Companies (NOCs) will be key to determining whether the world meets its climate targets. However, they have displayed varying appetites for diversification into renewable energy. For an oil company, the decision to invest in renewable energy is far from obvious, given the much lower financial returns of the sector relative to their core business. This problem is exacerbated in the case of NOCs by their dual nature as profit-oriented firms and instruments of government policy, which arguably increases their overheads and reduces their effectiveness in smaller-scale, more competitive sectors of the economy. To identify the drivers of NOC's investments in renewable energy, this paper opens the black box of decision-making in Brazil's Petrobras and Angola's Sonangol, drawing on semi-structured elite interviews and textual analysis of secondary sources. Despite patent differences in terms of governance, technological capacity, and centrality for their respective countries' economies, the two NOCs have displayed similarities in the timing of their investments in biofuels and solar energy. I argue that the logic of renewable energy investments in the face of poor profitability must be understood with reference to the interaction between each NOC's characteristic political-economic logic, including the role of national executives, and their exposure to the greening of international finance and technical partnerships. By showing how renewable energy policy is embedded in the specificities of the domestic and international political economies, this paper contributes to the study of the political economy of climate transitions. Moreover, it contributes to the incipient literature on NOCs and climate politics.

Johnathan Guy (UC Berkeley)

Low carbon for the short term? Incumbency, hold-up, and time horizons in the context of the energy transition

When do governments incorporate new low-carbon technologies, such as wind and solar, into their electricity supply? Existing scholarship emphasizes the short time horizons of governments—particularly in low and middle-income countries—as an impediment to climate change mitigation, given the high upfront costs associated with decarbonization. In this chapter of the dissertation, I disaggregate short time horizons into two sources: 1) impatience, and 2) commitment problems. Using a simple model of hold-up, I show that, accounting for some realistic features of the dilemmas facing governments, commitment problems pose a greater obstacle. In contrast, impatience may support decarbonization because it motivates commitment. This is especially true if incumbents take advantage of three key short-run benefits of wind and solar: shorter construction times, novel producer benefits, and institutional layering. Whether incumbents are able and willing to do so depends on constituency capacities and preferences, the degree to which institutions add time costs to project completion, and constraints on the incumbent's relative control of the rents associated with the supply chains of different technologies. The argument is illustrated using a controlled comparison of India and Indonesia.

Panel III: Parties and Politicians

Aleksandra Conevska (Harvard University)

When are parties 'good' for the environment? Green party influence on environmental policy

A large body of work concludes that experience with climate extremes can shift voters away from mainstream parties and toward Green parties. This research makes the implicit assumption that Green party support may indicate a societal propensity to transform toward a greener economy. But with no existing evidence on their policy influence, whether Green parties do affect environmental outcomes remains a puzzle. To address this question, we develop one of the first game theoretic models of electoral competition where the environment is added as a second dimension in the political arena. Our model illuminates two key pathways by which Greens affect policy; (1) via their position in government (votes) and coalition opportunities, and (2) through their impact on mainstream party behavior, what we call the shadow effect of Green parties. As with any political issue, mainstream parties compete with one another, as well as with an existing Green party, over the political response to new environmental demands. Electoral competition leads Green parties to invoke a shadow effect on policy, as their potential to steal mainstream party votes can either stifle or stimulate the significance of the environment within mainstream party agendas. For example, when Greens are considered issue owners on the environment, if their vote share rises this may actually lead mainstream parties to de-emphasize the environment so they can focus on gathering votes from issues on which they are perceived as more component. These dynamics can in turn lead to less (or more) environmental policy on the agenda of the eventual government.

Kathryn Baragwanath (Harvard University)

The Greener Gender: Women Politicians and Deforestation

Women have been proclaimed as environmental leaders and as key actors in the quest to fight climate change. However, it is unclear why women are expected to be more environmentally inclined than men. In this paper, we study the effects of electing women into office on deforestation in Brazilian municipalities. We argue that in Brazil, where most deforestation is illegal, electing women into office will result in better environmental outcomes because women have differential access to networks of corruption and elite capture, which drive enforcement of environmental laws at the local level. We exploit close election regression discontinuity design and stacked differences in differences in order to establish the causal effects of electing women on deforestation. We find that electing a woman as mayor leads to significantly lower deforestation rates during the woman's time in office. In line with our theory, we show that women are significantly less corrupt than men and are less likely to receive campaign funding from agricultural and mining businesses which have interests in deforestation. Additionally, we show that these effects are not driven by differential preferences or ability (educational levels) of men and women. Altogether, our findings strongly support the theory that women's political representation reduces deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon, with evidence that women's lower likelihood of capture and corruption levels are driving these results.

Antonio Valentim (Yale University)

Climate Change and political entry: Evidence from Brazilian Municipal Elections (with Guilherme Fasolin)

How does climate change influence who becomes a politician? The repercussions of climate change, along with the associated events, often exacerbate existing political, economic, and social inequalities. We study the influence of extreme weather events on the decision to pursue a political career in Brazil, a nation that encompasses more than half of the Amazon rainforest. While the effects of extreme weather events frequently exhibit gender and class disparities, the uncertainty associated with managing a crisis might prevent those with outside options to enter politics. Leveraging a newly compiled dataset encompassing extreme weather events and candidate profiles in Brazil (1996-2020), we employ a difference-in-differences design to examine the impact of such events on the gender and quality of political candidates running for mayor. Subsequently, we utilize micro data on federal transfers, and survey data to explore potential mechanisms. By offering insights into the consequences of extreme weather events on candidate pools, our research contributes to our understanding of climate change politics, political inequalities, and their intersection.

Claudia Zwar (Hertie School)

When Do Green Parties Matter? Green Party Bargaining Leverage and Climate Policy Stringency (with Christian Flachsland and Mark Kayser)

Political parties are often overlooked in studies of net zero transitions. Despite our growing understanding of the influence of public opinion, interest groups, and institutions, we know little about the role of parties in determining climate policy. This paper addresses a specific puzzle: when do Green Parties (GP) deliver stringent climate reforms? Theoretically, the success of 'green' special interest parties should lead to better climate policy outcomes. Yet evidence of the effect of GP representation in parliament and government is mixed. We argue coalition bargaining leverage - the capacity for a GP to demand its preferred position in negotiations based on an expanded set of coalition options - is a missing link in the relationship between GPs and policy change. Building on a novel, empirical measure of leverage developed by Kayser et al. (2023) we test whether multiparty systems are more likely to implement (more) stringent climate policies when GPs increase their leverage. We measure changes in climate policy stringency using a new, harmonized cross-country database from the OECD. Our results show GP leverage is associated with greater climate policy stringency and has a stronger effect than a GP being in government or increasing its support in the polls. We only identify these patterns, however, in the electricity sector. GP leverage appears to have had little effect (so far) on policies in the industrial, buildings, and transport sectors. Our findings motivate theoretical and empirical study of the political economies of different sectors of climate policy.

Panel IV Governance

Rodrigo Fagundes Cezar (Fundação Getulio Vargas)

Private Sustainability Governance and (Ir)responsible Political Engagement

What is the relation between private governance initiatives and political engagement on sustainability issues? While some literature has suggested potential behavioral changes brought by private governance for business elites, little empirical research has been conducted to explore this question. To address this gap, we study campaign donations of shareholders of all soy-producing firms in Brazil during the national election in 2022 and test the hypothesis that shareholders of certified firms are less likely to donate to anti-environment political platforms. To do so, we developed a novel dataset on campaign finance and compared owners and shareholders of soy companies compliant with the standards of the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) with those of non-certified companies. Our results are nuanced: we find that being the shareholder of a certified farm is only associated with significantly reduced odds of donating money to anti-environment political platforms when a shareholder is the property's contact point at RTRS, but this finding does not apply to the full shareholder network of RTRS-certified farms. The results cast some doubt on the breadth of the connection between voluntary sustainability standards and environmentally responsible political engagement, although recognizing that such a correlation exists under certain circumstances.

Austin Beacham (UC San Diego)

Extraction, Green Mobilization, and Conservation: Natural Resource Dependence and Protected Area Designation

Biodiversity decline and ecosystem loss are among the gravest transnational crises facing the planet, with deep implications for climate change. What determines how different countries choose to protect nature? Previous work has argued that economic dependence on natural resources undermines green policies. I instead argue that resource dependence can lead to mobilization in favor of protection. Citizens experience the negative consequences of environmental degradation and ecosystem loss, and domestic and international green groups take notice. Although mobilization can occur across regimes, in democracies these groups more effectively advocate for protection once mobilized, helping to stem biodiversity loss. The adverse effects of resource dependence, therefore, mainly apply to less democratic countries, where extractive interests are most able to steer policymaking and mobilization is less likely to succeed. To test this argument, I employ a mixed-methods research design. I employ a novel panel regression discontinuity design at country borders for all terrestrial country-border pairs from 1992 to 2020, using new geospatial data on protected area (PA) designation over time. I find that the effect of natural resource dependence is conditional: When democratic institutions are weaker, natural resource dependence leads to less biodiversity protection. When democracy is stronger, natural resource dependence increases the likelihood that protected areas are established. I complement these results with a qualitative case study of the history of conservation in Costa Rica to explore the mechanisms. These findings highlight the mitigating role that democratic institutions can play between natural resource dependence and biodiversity protection, and have important implications for our understanding of environmental politics and the role of mobilization among various actors in shifting policy.

Jittip Mongkolnchaiarunya (George Washington University)

Epistemic Exclusion in Climate Science: Why We Grow the Wrong Trees

Why do we grow the wrong trees in the wrong places? This paper investigates this through the REDD+ initiatives under the UNFCCC that advocated for planting trees in developing countries to cool down our global temperature. The intuition behind this initiative, that growing trees in the tropics are good for fighting climate change, was naturalized by mainstream climate science in the Global North. Yet, as biologists point out, trees especially in the tropics emit gases known as BVOCs that can further exacerbate global warming. In other words, planting an enormous number of inappropriate species of trees in the tropics can even hurt rather than help the earth. This is surprising: why, given the espoused scientific commitment to pluralism as well as the interdisciplinary and global nature of climate change, are some scientific perspectives, especially biologists from the Global South, not well integrated into mainstream climate science? I show that rendering the climate as a singular legible entity from a god's eye view also erects structural barriers to more heterogenous scientific studies of local ecologies from being integrated. Moreover, because models of the climate are based on environmental assumptions and tools of the Global North, they struggle to incorporate knowledge where these assumptions do not hold – especially in the Global South, where trees are more likely to emit gases that can exacerbate climate change – leading to international policies that ironically harms, rather than helps, the planet. I illustrate these challenges to integrating knowledge on BVOCs into mainstream climate models based on 48 interviews with climate scientists in both the Global North and Global South, as well as fieldwork based in climate science labs in the U.S. and Thailand.

Fiona Bare (Princeton University)

Climate of Confusion: Informational Barriers to Climate Finance Negotiations

A massive amount of capital is required to finance the green transition and increase global resiliency to the impacts of climate change - especially in the Global South. Climate finance mobilization is increasingly a key topic of international negotiations and bilateral bargaining. However, major deals are few and investment is scarce despite supposedly aligned donor-recipient interests in mitigating global warming and the potential for positive externalities. What explains the barriers to climate finance cooperation? I provide a strategic model that shows how competition between developing countries over limited funds, in an environment with incomplete information, creates incentives to misrepresent mitigation costs, thereby undermining negotiations over financing deals. This results in lower levels of resource mobilization and less carbon emissions abatement than possible with complete information. Project data from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)'s flagship climate finance institution, the Green Climate Fund helps to motivate the model, while interviews with policymakers from both recipient and donor countries help confirm the key role of information in negotiations. This paper has profound implications for the structure of climate finance institutions, offering insights about how bargaining processes can be modified to optimize equity and efficiency in capital mobilization to combat climate change.

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