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Climate change, national politics and grassroots action: an introduction

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There is considerable cross-national variation in the patterns of adoption and implementation of policies designed to mitigate climate change. The sources of this variation are considered. International relations, economic structures, national cultures and domestic political competition are factors, often in interaction one with another. In situations of multilevel governance, sub-national actors may be significant. Grassroots activism from without the formal political process has sometimes been critical in sharpening the focus of formal political actors, and increasing their willingness to act. Climate change is a global issue, but the political action necessary to address it is inevitably local and national as well as international.

Keywords: climate change; economic interests; multi-level governance; political competition; public opinion; grassroots activism

Introduction

Climate change is a global issue, but it is one that affects, or will affect, different countries differently. In general, although the anticipated changes in climate will be greatest at higher latitudes, it is the poorest countries of the global South that will be most adversely affected, either because their already precarious ability to sustain human life will be tipped over the edge, or because, lacking the resources that make no less adversely affected countries relatively resilient, they are likely to suffer severe social, economic and possibly political dislocation.

There is, however, considerable variation in the likely impacts of climate change on the rich nations of the global North. Some, such as Canada, might benefit from warmer winters and extended growing seasons. Others, such as the United States and Australia, are expected to suffer increasingly severe droughts and more frequent extreme weather events. All may be affected, but some will

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be affected more adversely than others. Policies and public opinion do not, however, simply reflect vulnerability to climatic changes.

In this special issue, using a variety of theoretical and epistemological approaches, our contributors seek to understand what are the *drivers* behind political and policy change with respect to this dynamic and controversial issue. Much of the discussion of climate change and the human responses to it has focused, quite reasonably, on international negotiations and institutions. But there is a danger that the focus on the international may consign to a 'black box' the politics that exists at levels below the international. Climate change is both a local and a global phenomenon, and critical political drivers exist at all levels of the political system. Accordingly, all the contributors to this issue either explicitly or implicitly accept the multilevel nature of political action on climate change.

The idea that multiple levels and their interactions are important is not a new one, as is evident in the intergovernmentalist tradition that spans US federal studies and British public administration as well as many other traditions (e.g. Elazar 1972, Rhodes 1980). However a newer focus in environmental politics has been on privileging equally the different levels of political arenas as well as breaking down the dichotomy between state and non-state actors (Hooghe and Marks 2003). In this introduction, we explore some of these dynamics.

Analytical overview

National political cultures influence attitudes to and policy about climate change. Support for welfare and social democracy is associated with support for environmental protection (Witherspoon 1994, p. 135, Krönig 2010), and, by extension, with support for measures to mitigate climate change. This is not surprising when it is considered that climate change is, in the rich, industrialised countries, generally less a matter of immediate self-interest than one that will more seriously affect people in remote, poorer countries and/or future generations. Thus notions of global justice and/or inter-generational justice loom large in the discourse of those who urge action to mitigate climate change (e.g. Harris and Symons 2010, Nelson 2011, Schuppert 2011, Aitken 2012, Barry 2012, Stevenson and Dryzek 2012). Where social democratic principles have been institutionalised, as they have in many member states of the European Union, the challenges of climate change have been embraced in national public policy. In countries where welfarist/social democratic values and institutions are weaker, and where, as in the United States, there is a stronger strand of possessive individualism in the national political culture, collective action to address climate change has been more difficult to achieve.

National policies and public opinion are also influenced by the constellation of interests that flows from diverse economic circumstances, especially with respect to sources of energy and the extraction of fossil fuels. But if people and governments in countries rich in fossil fuels may be presumed to be less

enthusiastic about climate policies that would limit their exploitation of such resources, the correlation is imperfect. Even in the recent period of acute insecurity about energy resources and before the exploitation of its massive reserves of shale gas and oil, the United States was resistant to a global climate regime that it viewed as damaging to its competitiveness vis-à-vis emerging economies such as those of China and India. So too was fossil fuel-poor Japan. Despite considerable national diversity with respect to energy security, the member states of the European Union have collectively and, with few exceptions, individually, been staunch advocates of a low carbon future, as has oil- and gas- rich Norway. In Australia, a substantial exporter of coal, public opinion has generally favoured low-carbon policies, even as politicians, fearing adverse impacts upon Australia's terms of trade, or adverse mobilisations of opinion by political opponents, prevaricated over policy alternatives.

At the same time, however, many of the key political struggles occur at more local levels. When, during the G.W. Bush administration, national politics in the United States was particularly unsupportive of action on climate change, it was states and cities that provided examples and ideas for change (Bulkeley and Betsill 2003, Rabe 2008). As, for example, in interactions with the Canadian provinces and initiatives in California, the efforts of these sub-national actors even had global implications. However, this may be only a superficial reflection of a much deeper core political struggle to shape human communication and thinking about climate change that may be fought at the local level, with global implications. One actor may define another, shaping their political possibilities (Callon 1991).

It is not, of course, only governments, whether national or sub-national, that attempt to act to address the threat of climate change. National governments are constrained by conflicting interests, commitments and electoral competition, and sub-national governments are also circumscribed by what national governments will permit or fund. Given this reality, it is apparent that, if we are to take timely action on climate change, action (or at least pressure for action) will have to come from without the formal political process. Thus climate scientists, frustrated at the lack of government action on climate change, have called for grassroots, civil society action, up to and including civil disobedience, with NASA's chief climate scientist, James Hansen, remarking that, 'young people, especially, should be doing whatever is necessary to block construction of dirty (no Carbon Capture and Sequestration) coal-fired power plants' (Clark 2007). Governments may accept that climate change is a problem that requires urgent action, but, against the cacophony of competing interests, it may take shrill reminders from outside the political mainstream to remind them and to point out the inconsistencies of their policies. Moreover, governments nervous of offending vested economic interests and capricious public opinion need reassurance that they will not be punished electorally if they take action on climate change that is commensurate with the challenges it presents.

In this issue, we differentiate several dimensions. The first is the level at which the political effort takes place. Our contributors note the importance of

interstate coalitions at the global level, international institutions, national political processes, networks, political parties, advocacy groups and social movement organisations. We simplify this differentiation using macro (large interaction of actors and groupings at a fairly highly aggregated level), meso (aggregation of actors focusing on a particular issue or sector), and micro analyses found in much of the public policy literature (e.g. Atkinson and Coleman 1989). Given the importance of the public–private, state–society interaction across the various political interactions, this typology should help us differentiate the positions of the political arenas operating below the global level, as well as helping us to discern the nature of the exogenous/endogenous forces at work.

A second is the central role of knowledge and science in climate politics. This includes the on-going ‘politics of climate science/politicisation of climate science’ as observed in the public ‘debate’ about the existence of climate change initiated by climate change sceptics and deniers, public events such as ‘climategate’, the consequent divergence between the accumulating scientific evidence of anthropogenic climate change and fluctuating public acceptance of it, and the call for more explicit ‘post-normal’ forms of scientific knowledge production (Hulme 2009, Barry 2012).

A third dimension is the focus on the explanations offered for political and policy change. Here we follow the standard differentiation between explanations in terms of the three ‘Is’ – interest, ideational and institutional (e.g. Zito 2000). Although used in the study of international politics, all these approaches have been utilised to assess political action at the sub-global level. The more traditional approach to environmental change is interests-based. This, often prevalent in more rationalist and behaviouralist approaches such as pluralism, expects change to happen in conditions where coalitions of actors strive to achieve their perceived preferences and values through political action (Alford and Friedland 1985). In this perspective, whether the units are states, enterprises, groups, networks or individuals, certain actors will achieve their preferred goals for a wide range of reasons: superior political resources, stronger political motivation, greater awareness of the issue, and so forth.

Ideational explanations can employ behaviouralist theories and methodologies (e.g. Sabatier 1988), but often adopt a more constructivist, discursive stance with regard to political dynamics (e.g. Rein and Schön 1993, Dryzek 2005). Here the focus is on what shapes both individual and group actors’ approaches to politics. Ideational and discursive approaches expect that political actors follow certain discursive prompts and/or uphold certain ideas and core beliefs that shape an actor’s interests and their consequent political behaviour. Not only do the ideas define how political actors discern both the political goals and means, but ideas will also articulate which other actors constitute allies or enemies in the pursuit of such goals, informing political action (Adler 1987).

Institutionalist explanations of political action tend to focus on how institutions and other traditions and norms resist change. March and Olsen

(1998, p. 948) define an 'institution' as 'a relatively stable collection of practices and rules defining appropriate behaviour for specific groups of actors in specific situations'. The typical expectation in the literature is that institutions will tend to reward more incremental behaviour that does not threaten core norms. However, Streeck and Thelen (2005) suggest that the picture may be more complicated: the long-term impact of institutional change may be more fundamental (or transformative) than a superficial, momentary assessment might lead us to expect. Nevertheless, the very structures of government that institutionalise democracy may be barriers to the adoption of effective policies (Stadelmann-Steffen 2011).

The contributors to this special issue all choose variations of these elements. This analytical pluralism is useful for understanding the various dynamics operating in climate change politics. In the next section, we discuss the analytical positioning of the contributions as well as what the findings tell us about the configuration of domestic climate change politics across various parts of the globe.

National politics

The first contribution to this collection is Ian Bailey, Iain MacGill, Rob Passey and Hugh Compston's discussion of the politics surrounding the attempts of Australian Labor governments to introduce a carbon emissions reduction regime. Whereas others (e.g. Crowley 2007, Curran 2009) have attributed the obstacles to the introduction of an effective regime of greenhouse gas reduction to Australia's economic dependence on the production and export of primary resources, Bailey *et al.* emphasise instead the political factors, especially the political strategy and tactics of the Rudd government.

Bailey *et al.* take an interest-based approach examining how political circumstances and configurations of interests in networks induce the national political leadership to select particular climate change strategies. The network approach allows the authors to include non-state actors in their assessment of national politics. Accordingly, the policy network and political strategy explicitly embraces all three levels: macro, meso and micro.

The Rudd government basked in public approval when, on its election in 2007, it immediately ratified the Kyoto Protocol. Had the Labor government been more politically adroit in its dealing with other political parties, and had Rudd not lost his nerve at the first setback, it is likely that Australia would have had an effective carbon emissions reduction scheme in place by 2010. Ironically, his abandonment of the proposed carbon scheme so undermined Rudd's standing with the public and his party that he was replaced as prime minister by his deputy, Julia Gillard, who soon called a snap election at which she promised not to reintroduce such a scheme. When that election produced a hung parliament, she was obliged, in order to secure the support in parliament of the Greens and independent members of parliament (MPs), to renege on that promise and to introduce a carbon tax. The changing balance of competition

between parties and the internal politics of the Labor party were, then, crucial to the twisting path of climate change mitigation policies in Australia.

Political polarisation over climate change is familiar to students of US politics (McCright and Dunlap 2011), but, as Bailey *et al.* testify, it has tended to increase in Australia, a country where only a few years ago there was a consensus about the need to act to reduce carbon emissions and cross-party support for an emissions trading scheme. The extent of the division on party political lines is made clear by Kelly Fielding, Brian Head, Warren Laffan, Mark Western and Ove Hoegh-Guldberg in their contribution. Fielding *et al.* construct a more ideational framework that incorporates macro dynamics of ideology as well as micro dynamics focusing on the cognition of individual members of the political elite. To examine how Australian politicians' knowledge and beliefs about climate change, its causes and consequences, are shaped by political affiliation and ideology, in 2009 they conducted a survey of over 300 politicians at all levels of government.

Greens politicians were unsurprisingly most likely to believe human activity was responsible for climate change and to see its impacts as serious. More surprising was the fact that Labor politicians were not only consistently more likely than their conservative Liberal/National Party counterparts to blame human activity and to recognise the impacts of climate change, but they were consistently closer to Greens than to Liberal/National Party politicians.

In the intense and strident competition between Labor and the conservative parties since the 2010 Australian election, the carbon tax has been an increasingly polarising issue. With the Labor government at a low ebb in the polls and conservative politicians increasingly vocal in their scepticism about climate change itself, public support for potentially expensive action to address climate change, which had stood at 68% in 2006 and 60% in 2008, had fallen to 35% by early 2012 (Lowy Institute polls). As in the United States, some of those who are sceptical about climate change view it as a 'keystone' cultural issue in a values/cultural conflict between conservative and progressive worldviews (Hamilton 2010). Yet declining public support for a carbon tax is not simply a reflection of increasing scepticism about climate change: in 2011, 72% of those Australians polled believed that climate change was entirely or partly caused by human activity, a view shared by 79% of Labor voters and 63% of Liberal/National voters (Newspoll, 4 May 2011). Party polarisation about the carbon tax appears to have left the Australian public not less convinced about the reality and human causes of climate change, but, divided roughly along party lines, less convinced about the desirability of using fiscal measures to address it (Tranter 2011).

Australia is, like the United States, a high per capita emitter of greenhouse gases and its economic activity is notably energy-intensive (Christoff and Eckersley 2011). Again like the United States, it is a country whose conservative governments were reluctant to take unilateral action to reduce carbon emissions for fear that to do so would economically disadvantage the country by comparison with its competitors. Thus Australia, despite being permitted by the

Kyoto Protocol increase its greenhouse gas emissions by 8% above 1990 levels, followed the United States' lead, and only ratified the Protocol in 2007 after the conservative Howard government lost office.

Brazil is, like Australia, a country whose prosperity depends in large part upon its extraction and processing of mineral resources. However, unlike Australia, Brazil, as a developing country, was not obliged by the Kyoto Protocol to limit its greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, the carbon-intensity of Brazil's urban industrial economy is, thanks to the abundance of hydro-electricity and early adoption of biofuels, already relatively low (see Christoff and Eckersley 2011). Nevertheless, Brazil presents a puzzle to the analyst: its national leaders have committed the country to reducing its output of greenhouse gas emissions, even in the absence of international treaty obligations to do so, or of any binding international agreement that might ensure that it did not suffer comparative economic disadvantage by doing so.

In their contribution, Kathryn Hochstetler and Eduardo Viola argue that in Brazil, as a relatively large emitter, domestic debates about the costs and benefits of emissions reductions encouraged its adoption of policies designed to reduce carbon emissions. Hochstetler and Viola offer a macro approach that at the same time combines domestic level dynamics and global negotiating coalitions. Focusing upon shifts in actor preferences due to changes in perceived interests as well as growing concern about climate change, they examine the domestic positions of a range of key national actors as well as the impact of public opinion on electoral politics.

Until very recently, the Brazilian position started from the assertion that climate change mitigation was principally the responsibility of the already highly industrialised countries that have been historically high emitters of greenhouse gases. At the end of the last decade, this stance shifted when domestic advocates of principled, unilateral action were joined by those who saw economic advantage in taking such action. This alliance occurred partly because, with declining rates of deforestation, Brazilians began to see benefits rather than threats in the Kyoto Protocol's clean development mechanism (CDM). The other principal driver of policy change was export-oriented industrialists' anticipation that trade sanctions might be imposed by countries that had already committed to carbon emissions reductions in order to reduce the competitive advantage of those that did not. A third driver was public opinion; Brazilians have been consistently the most concerned about climate change of all the publics that have been regularly polled. It was, in the end, the circumstances of domestic political competition – notably in a presidential election in which a strong Green candidate challenged the candidates of the major parties – that tipped the balance in favour of emissions reductions policies.

Like Australia, Norway is a major producer and exporter of fossil fuels but, unlike Australia, Norway was a leader in action designed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. However, as Silje Maria Tellmann demonstrates in her contribution, policy discourses concerning carbon reduction in Norway were at best imperfectly translated into actual policy. Considering the macro national

level, Tellmann demonstrates how knowledge-based climate change discourses and ideational constructions were effectively sidelined by interests-based considerations at particular stages in the policy process. Knowledge-based discourses were much more influential in the earlier stages of the policy process, in determining how climate change was perceived as a policy problem, than in delivering policy outcomes.

Norway was, in 1989, one of the first countries to adopt a target for carbon dioxide emissions reductions and, with a cross-party political consensus about both the need for action and the use of green taxes, to devise economic measures to address it. The major parties saw that carbon taxes could advance the process of ecological modernisation by aligning sustained economic growth with a reduction in environmental degradation. Soon, however, Norway was to become an advocate of tradable emissions quotas at the expense of effective carbon taxation. This was a consequence of the Norwegian government's adoption, in international climate negotiations, of the principle that carbon emissions should be reduced most in those places and sectors where such reductions could be achieved at least cost. Since it was calculated that international agreement on tradable emissions quotas would be more cost-effective than unilateral Norwegian action to reduce emissions, economic rationalism was aligned with national economic self-interest, and Norway would be left free to increase the production of fossil fuels. Thus, when the Kyoto Protocol laid down the emissions quotas of the developed nations, Norway was, like Australia, permitted to *increase* carbon emissions, albeit by only 1%; in practice, by investing in CDM quotas, Norway has done more than it was required by Kyoto to do.

Mirroring the EU's emissions trading system (which Norway joined in 2008), and disregarding expert advice that it would be ineffective in reducing overall emissions, the Norwegian government introduced tradable emissions quotas and distributed free quotas to major historical emitters. Although Norway has since committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, its prospects of achieving that goal are heavily dependent on the still-unproven technology of carbon capture and storage (CCS) that would enable Norway to continue as a major producer of oil and gas.

From the national to the local

Japan, unlike Norway, is not resource-rich, and it is largely for that reason that Japan became a global leader in environmental innovation both to reduce pollution and, especially, to reduce its dependence on imported energy in response to the oil crises of the 1970s. Japan might therefore have been predicted to be a leader in efforts to reduce carbon emissions and to mitigate climate change. However, for reasons that Yasuo Takao explores in his article, when it comes to the adoption of climate change policies, Japanese governments have been reluctant. Takao frames the dynamics of policy change in Japan according to three dimensions that demonstrate the connection between international,

domestic and subnational politics (thus covering both macro and meso levels). In the first analytical framework (division), domestic groups and their preferences drive national politicians to take certain domestic and international stances. The second framework (interaction) views the interplay between domestic states and inter-state bargaining as mutually constitutive and therefore less coherent than the division linkage. Convergence, the third framework, encompasses the possibility that actors at one level will take actions that shape climate change politics at other levels.

The interactions of these dimensions are complex, but a combination of domestic and international political considerations has resulted in national political action on climate change being largely stalemated. This has not, however, thwarted all Japanese efforts to tackle climate change; initiatives have been taken at the sub-national level, by Japanese regional and local authorities, often in partnership with sub-national regions in other East Asian countries.

As China has become the world's leading manufacturer and, recently, the largest national emitter of greenhouse gases due to its heavy reliance on coal to generate electricity, Chinese responses to climate change will be crucial. For the moment at least, Chinese leaders are primarily focused upon continuing economic development in order to increase the prosperity and raise the living standards of a population that is still, by western standards, poor. But China is also the largest solar panel producer in the world and a world leader in wind turbine production capacity, and has ambitious goals for building 'eco-cities' (Joss 2011, Schreurs 2011). Chinese leaders are clearly alert to the potentially catastrophic implications of climate change and so, even though they have resisted an inclusive climate change agreement, have at least promised to reduce the carbon-intensity of Chinese production (Christoff 2010).

As a largely autonomous 'special administrative region' of China, Hong Kong is also anomalous in being a major international financial centre and in having the highest per capita incomes and life expectancy on the planet. As a densely settled coastal city, however, Hong Kong is especially vulnerable to the possible impacts of climate change, and Hong Kong public authorities have developed policies designed to mitigate them. But, as Maria Francesch-Huidobro observes in her contribution to this volume, Hong Kong actors are constrained in their ability to implement climate change policies. Some of these constraints are peculiar to Hong Kong, but most of the greenhouse gas-emitting activity that affects Hong Kong occurs outside its borders, much of it in the adjoining rapidly industrialising regions of China proper. Regional actors lack influence in the much larger Chinese state and lack any constitutional power to conclude international agreements to uphold more localised interests. That, of course, could also be said of individual cities and regions the world over. Thus, in some respects, Hong Kong's dilemmas are representative of those of a much larger universe of localities and of the 'multilevel governance' of climate change more generally (Bulkeley 2011).

Francesch-Huidobro uses an explicitly multilevel approach to incorporate non-state actors in addition to public authorities at all levels, particularly the

local. In contrast to most of the other contributions assembled here, Francesch-Huidobro identifies institutional dynamics as critical to concretising and legitimising efforts to address the challenges of climate change. Policy choices need to be institutionalised in a manner and process that becomes accepted by the stakeholders involved.

Grassroots action

Continuing this theme of recognising the importance of non-state actors operating at all levels, the last two contributions take a more micro approach while at the same time addressing post-rationalist approaches to beliefs and frames. Again, however, political actions at this level have significant international implications.

Lobbying by environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOS) may persuade governments of what needs to be done, but grassroots action that springs from, resonates with, and appears to move public opinion may be necessary to give governments the confidence to act. Although national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been persistent advocates of action on climate change, they have rarely succeeded in mobilising large numbers of citizens. Even when they have done so, as when Stop Climate Chaos – a coalition of environmental, aid, trade and development NGOs – brought tens of thousands of people into the streets of London, they have done so only briefly (Saunders 2008). The successful campaign by Friends of the Earth and others to get the UK government to pass the Climate Change Act 2008 was remarkable, but the forms of action it embraced were wholly conventional, with an internet-based petition the largest mass participation activity (Rootes 2011).

In Britain, in the absence of sustained mass mobilisation, the problematisation of coal-burning to produce electricity, and of aviation, was in large part the achievement of a novel campaign of direct action by a newcomer to the environmental movement scene – the Camps for Climate Action (CCA), or, as they are popularly referred to, the Climate Camps. Organised in Britain from 2006 to 2010, and emulated in several other countries, the CCA constituted the most innovative and inspiring grassroots action yet mobilised against industries accused of contributing to climate change.

However, as Raphael Schlembach, Ben Lear and Andrew Bowman argue in their contribution, despite the CCA's open antagonism to capitalism, its strategy was not so much political as 'post-political', centred on a 'scientised' conception of climate change and the remedies for the problems it presents, and working within an ethical framework that prescribed individual responsibility as the principal basis for action.

Ironically, CCA's reliance upon science as a weapon in the struggle against climate change reproduced the insistence of established environmental NGOs such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, as well as older conservation NGOs, that their positions were dictated, or at least informed, by scientific evidence. But as the latter organisations have found, claims to being science-led

have served better as claims upon the attention of policymakers and financial supporters than as rallying cries for mass political mobilisation (Rootes 2009, pp. 217–218). If CCA was represented as evidence of a resurgence of grassroots direct action, and even though it is plausibly represented as having inspired many, it is important to remember that it never actually mobilised more than a few thousand activists. As a ‘post-political’, anarchistic, autonomist intervention infused with many of the themes of the ‘new social movements’, it was not itself, nor did it trigger, the mobilisation of a mass social movement.

Just as the dominant response to climate change in mainstream national politics has been essentially one of ‘ecological modernisation’ that does not challenge the fundamentals of the capitalist economic order, so the most audacious grassroots action against climate change has been focused upon the reduction of carbon emissions to the virtual exclusion of all else. But whilst this might have been the central tendency of CCA, it was, as Schlembach *et al.* concede, contested. As Clare Saunders makes clear in her article, CCA was more plural than such an interpretation suggests.

A radically anti-capitalist strand existed within CCA, and it became especially prominent in the wake of CCA’s participation in the Climate Justice Action network protests at COP-15 in Copenhagen in December 2009. There links were also made with the more conventionally leftist Climate Justice Now!, whose slogan was ‘system change not climate change’ (Reitan and Gibson 2012). In light of those connections, CCA’s dissolution in 2011, and the subsuming of its remnants into the Occupy movement and a campaign for ‘fuel justice’ is not so surprising. Yet here again, the trajectory of CCA parallels that of environmental NGOs such as Friends of the Earth and the aid, trade and development NGOs that, since the turn of the millennium, have increasingly campaigned against climate change as an issue of global social justice (Rootes 2006, Rootes and Saunders 2007).

This is not to suggest that a convergence around fundamental critique of global capitalism is imminent. Even among the street demonstrators in Copenhagen in 2009, fewer than one in four framed solutions to climate change in terms of ‘system change’, and even fewer in terms of ‘global justice’ (Wahlström *et al.* 2012). Nevertheless, the framing of climate change as a matter of justice, rather than simply an economic challenge that can be addressed by ecological modernisation within an essentially unchanged economic and political order, raises the banner for a transformative global social movement that transcends both national politics and grassroots action on climate change.

Conclusion

Climate change may be the biggest and most fundamental challenge that confronts us, but it is inevitable that it will not be equally salient in all places at all times. Even without considering the (differentiated) impact of the global financial crisis, it is clear that the claims of vested economic interests compete with those of the global commons, and that the balance of that competition

varies from country to country and over time. Both sets of considerations influence public opinion and the attitudes and actions of politicians, and the changing balance of political competition has often been the critical factor in the shift toward adoption of climate-friendly policies, as well as, sometimes, in the shaping of public opinion about particular policy measures. However, even in countries where competing political elites contend over climate change policies, there is, mirroring (albeit unevenly) the scientific consensus on both the human causation and urgency of the problem of climate change, a large measure of agreement among the general public that climate change is a serious issue that demands a policy response. Even governments that declare good intent may be blinded by their deference to entrenched interests to the shortcomings and contradictions of their climate policies, and even if they are not, they may be reluctant to act. Mobilised public opinion may give governments confidence to act, and it often takes the intervention of grassroots campaigners and activists to alert mass media, encourage NGOs to press their advantage, and thereby mobilise public opinion. The issue may be global, but the political action necessary to address climate change is inevitably local and national as well as international.

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