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**Analysis and solutions for agenda
manipulation in international politics**

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyze agenda manipulation in international negotiations. The analysis is focused on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its conferences in the past three year. A theoretical framework of agenda manipulation is established and the conferences are analyzed through a series of comparative case studies. The theoretical framework offer insight into 1) power politics and state interest, 2) negotiation as a method to manage external relations, 3) the existing framework in which the actors try to advance their agenda and 4) the various internal and external influences on state behavior.

Keywords

Agenda manipulation, non-decision making, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, negotiation analysis

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Declaration of Authorship

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Prague, July 31, 2012

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Introduction

The abundance of interstate negotiation and the notion that negotiation between states virtually always takes place within the framework of international organizations, or are otherwise governed and affected by informal institution makes my research a relevant topic in international relations. The following thesis will hopefully contribute to the existing knowledge of the field by offering new insights and explanation to the nature of interstate negotiations.

Failed or suspended negotiations continuously prove to be a common sight in international politics of our time. This paper will hopefully help understand why negotiations between states fail and how this can be explained by the negotiating states' abuse of agenda setting. Furthermore, if the reasons and methods of agenda manipulation are discovered, perhaps the efficiency of negotiations can be improved as well.

The central problem of the research is the abusive manipulation of the agenda setting process in international negotiation. As the topic of the research is negotiation between states in international organizations, the behavior of key actors; states and institutions (both formal, like IOs and informal, such as traditions, customs and social norms) will be analyzed.

Throughout this paper I understand the "abusive manipulation of the agenda setting process" to signify the phenomenon when some actor or actors involved in the agenda setting process try to influence the agenda setting in order to block the emergence of some (or any) outcome through means institutionalized within the framework of the negotiation itself.

The framework of the negotiation can mean the rules of the international organization the negotiation takes place in, or any other rules and norms supplied by the relevant informal institutions. I will explore the significance of 1) problem delimitation, 2), different negotiation strategies 3) bias mobilization and 4) non-decision making techniques as tools to abusive agenda setting.

These four factors are key concepts to understand how and why agenda setting can be exposed to exploitation. They offer insight into 1) power politics and state interest, 2) negotiation as a method to manage external relations, 3) the existing framework in which the actors try to advance their agenda and 4) the various internal and external influences on state behavior.

The following hypotheses will be analyzed in this paper:

- 1, States, as international actors possess different capabilities to influence global politics. This discrepancy in state's power level is used to implement agenda blocking and non-decision making techniques when crucial national interest is at stake at international negotiations.
- 2, States resort to agenda manipulation because they are not only concerned by their own self-interests but also about the relative gain of other states.
- 3, Reaching agreements on global issues is more likely if actors can pressure each other from employing non-decision making and agenda manipulation techniques.

In the first chapter, I am going to establish the theoretical framework, later to be used for the analysis of the case studies. Analytical case studies are conducted about the last three United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, taking place in 2009 Copenhagen, 2010 Cancun and 2011 Durban.

In the case studies I explore how agenda manipulation is pursued through problem delimitation and negotiation strategies and how these can be utilized to divert attention away from the real causes of a problem, that is, how non-decision making can make use of problem delimitation.

In the theoretical framework chapter, problem delimitation and negotiation strategies will be designated as the first important components in successful agenda manipulation. The other elements will be presented afterwards as non-decision making and the Mobilization of Bias - following Schattschneider's term. This expression is used to explain which ideas can make it to the decision making area, and how these ideas can be talked about. (Schattschneider, 1975)

The following quote from Rochefort and Cobb links together the two components from Vesely and Schattschneider to shed light on the relation between non-decision making and problem definition: "Problem definition has to do with what we choose to identify as public issues and how we think about these concerns" (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994)

My research project is divided into a theoretical outline and an empirical case study part. Both of them are designed to enhance the mutual understanding of the relationship between the theory and practice of agenda manipulation.

In the theoretical introductory part I use a multidisciplinary approach to illuminate the interconnected relationship between various theories that can help explain the agenda manipulation at play in the selected case studies. In order to achieve this, I draw upon four key concepts tools from different disciplines and fields of study: problem delimitation, bias mobilization, non-decision making and negotiation analysis.

Analyzing *problem delimitation* helps to understand how manipulating definitions and problem areas is utilized in the agenda setting process. Various theories of power (Bachrach and Baratz, Schattschneider) are used to explain how problem delimitation can be successfully achieved.

The power theories link in the next conceptual tool: *bias mobilization*. This tool is based upon Schattschneider's theory of mobilization of bias. With the help of this concept, I try to show the influence socially constructed identities and institutions have on creating and sustaining an environment which facilitates abusive agenda manipulation.

The fourth conceptual tool is *non-decision making*. Non-decision making thrives in the environment created through bias mobilization and is an important factor for extensive agenda manipulation. By analyzing how decision making can be avoided indefinitely through different techniques of non-decision making, I want to prepare the ground for the later presented case studies.

Finally, *negotiation theory* links together the previous tools and offers some important insights into how agenda manipulation can work in international negotiations. In this part, I present a number of concepts of negotiation. I also offer theoretical explanation to why states engage in negotiation and what professional negotiators perceive as priorities in interstate negotiations.

The following methodological approach will be used in examining the above hypothesis. I start with a discourse analysis of the relevant literature about agenda manipulation, decision theory, rational choice theory, non-decision making and the concept of "power" in international relations

Data is collected and analyzed from library books, e-library sources, scholarly articles and international relations and political science journals. As case studies constitute an important

part of the thesis, empirical data collection and analysis also constitutes an important part of the research work.

Finally, I would like to present the different dimensions of my research topic. The nature of the research topic of the thesis – how agenda setting can be manipulated in international negotiations? – is sociological.

The scope of enquiry is the general cluster of all negotiations in international organizations; however the thesis focuses on specific case studies. I employ an observational mode of enquiry, trying to understand the mechanisms of agenda manipulation in negotiations through qualitative research methods.

My research is based on a poststructuralist understanding of the subjects of my study: all the factors interplaying in agenda manipulation (actors, institutions, and the negotiation environment) are essentially products of changing social meaning defined according to the interests of some dominant group. This means that my understanding of the research topic and my findings are also influenced by my ideological subjectivity and political stance.

I Establishing a theoretical background

Introduction

Constructing a theoretical framework is the first objective of the thesis. It provides the context in which the second part, the case studies can be analyzed and understood. Here several approaches will be combined together to supplement the necessary theoretical knowledge to understand the mechanisms of agenda manipulation in international negotiations.

Throughout this thesis, agenda manipulation is understood to be the method of influencing the agenda setting process in a way that is beneficial to the manipulating actor. The following definition of agenda setting is adopted: agenda setting is “the politics of selecting issues for active consideration” (Rochefort and Cobb 1994).

In this section, four approaches will be highlighted to show what roles they play in the agenda manipulation process. First in the line is problem delimitation which deals with how to define the general issue-topic in the agenda setting procedure. Proper problem delimitation is concerned with careful topic selection and those who wish to manipulate the agenda setting process can utilize it to focus attention on a specific agenda topic while diverting attention away from others.

Second, I look into the role of the negotiation process. Negotiation strategies and careful management of the negotiation process plays a crucial role in selecting some specific aspects of the main issue over others.

Third, I draw upon Schattschneider's Mobilization of Bias theory in order to show the importance socio-political biases have on issue selection and agenda manipulation. Considering the power of *a priori* (to the negotiations) socio-political biases and the resulting path dependency helps to understand why manipulating the agenda can be easier for some states than for others.

Finally, the extent to which non-decision making techniques can influence the outcome of agenda manipulation is evaluated. Non-decision making can be particularly helpful for avoiding some agenda outcomes, or halting the negotiation and thus the agenda setting process. The introduction given in this chapter will prove to be helpful during the case studies where the various non-decision making techniques and methods of the negotiating teams are analyzed.

Problem delimitation

Problem delimitation is regarded as an extremely significant process in policy analysis and is often viewed as indispensable for the success of policy implementation. It can be seen as a "multidisciplinary field of study that tries to analyze and understand causes of public policy problems" and includes several different steps: defining, structuring and modeling the problem. (Vesely, 2007)

Throughout this paper problem delimitation is considered the first step of agenda manipulation for it is concerned with defining and structuring one particular problem over

another one. In international negotiations, defining what to talk about or perhaps more importantly what *not* to talk about has great impact on how the consecutive negotiations flow, and what possible outcomes they can reach. This means that problem delimitation can be severely exploited during the agenda setting process.

Throughout the following chapters, I am going to explore how problem delimitation can be utilized to divert attention away from the real causes of a problem, that is, how non-decision making can make use of problem delimitation. After an introduction is given to non-decision making, I will look into how non-decision making can be successfully pursued for an indefinite time period.

The abuse of problem delimitation

Providing an accurate definition of a problem is the cornerstone of solving it. As such, one of the main purposes of problem delimitation is to make sure that the right questions are asked about a certain problem or issue. In theory this ensures that proper answer can be given to the emerging problem. However as we are all too often reminded: *“In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice, but in practice there is a great deal of difference.”*(Ariely, 2009)

In his book *Predictably Irrational*, Dan Ariely addresses the problem of rational choice between given alternatives. He argues that because of our irrational behavior, we often tend to focus on multiple issues at once, therefore failing to concentrate on a single immediate problem.(Ariely, 2009) Since policy making is done by human beings, irrationality is an inherent problem, and at the end of the day this can lead to inefficient policies enacted.

Another significant effect of sufficient problem definition is that that the delimitation of a policy issue can also reveal the interconnected nature of the given problem. This can help deciding what is strictly connected to, or immediately affected by it, and what isn't. It can also make clear the possible consequences of a certain policy, and can limit the amount of unforeseen side effects that may occur from pursuing a certain policy.

By purposefully ignoring or abusing the two above mentioned features of problem delimitation, policy makers can hide the interconnectedness and the consequences of policies,

or commit an error of the third type, that is, asking the “wrong” questions that don’t invoke the proper answer required to solve the original problem at hand. (Vesely, 2007)

Aside from asking the wrong questions outright, other possible problems regarding policy delimitation can also arise.

Seeking to manipulate the agenda making process, policy makers can also employ some sort of insufficient problem delimitation. Defining a policy problem clearly affects the agenda setting process by lying down the basic concepts. The way Birkland argues for this is that “the depiction of the cause of a problem strongly suggests a solution to the problem”. (Birkland, 2007)

According to E. E. Schattschneider, those who can successfully influence how a problem is pictured can also make it seem like they have the right answer for it (Schattschneider 1975). Therefore policy problem delimitation is a major instrument in manipulating the agenda setting process. Being able to influence what is on the agenda, can potentially mean being able to influence what problem solving approaches get discriminated.

Besides readily offering a given set of solutions, proper problem delimitation also helps with deciding on which levels policy makers should deal with the issues at hand. (Birkland, 2007) This increases the likelihood of successfully implementing a policy.

Agenda manipulation can take advantage of poor horizontal problem positioning. In practice if a policy maker judges it to be beneficial to practice non-decision making techniques in the agenda setting process, proposing the wrong level to address a question can result in ineffective policies regardless whether the original question put forward was wrong or right.

Negotiation tactics as methods for aspect filtering

Negotiation is the second step in the agenda manipulation process in international negotiations. While problem delimitation is concerned with how to structure an issue and what questions to ask about it, the negotiation process deals with fine tuning the specific problems in an issue area through strategic interaction of participating states.

In a broad sense, international negotiation can be defined as “as a process by which states and other actors in the international arena exchange proposals in an attempt to agree about a point of conflict and manage their future relationship”. (Jackson 2000)

Negotiation can take place for several reasons and can encompass many forms of formal and informal behavior. Jackson argues to perceive negotiation as a continuous flow, instead of a static action: “[negotiation] should not be seen as a single process or one discrete activity. It is instead a continuous set of related activities involving actors, decisions and situations.” (Jackson 2000)

States decide to negotiate to solve problems, demonstrate values, distribute resources and administer relationships. Whatever strategy is chosen for negotiations, it depends on what agreements the parties wish to reach. More than one reason can of course be present at the same time. (Winham 1979)

Writing about the experiences of international negotiation experts, Winham highlights various aspects of negotiation. First of all, it can be helpful if we understand negotiation not only as strategic interaction, but also as a form of management. „Negotiation is a tool in the management of external relations. The decision to negotiate should take account of the facts of the situation, objectives (what should be done), and policy alternatives (what can be done)” (Winham 1979)

In much of the established theory on negotiation, there exists a distinction between cooperative (inclusive) and competitive (distributive) negotiation tactics. (Odell, 2009) Either of these approaches individually, or even a combination of the two can be successful tools in agenda manipulation. Regarding them as management tools, instead of simply part of a grand negotiation strategy, provides flexibility indispensable for successful negotiations. (Winham, 1979)

According to Winham, the negotiation procedure can be divided into two parts: external and internal negotiation: “Negotiations are two-fronted, and participants should distinguish between external considerations related to the foreign government(s) and internal considerations related to the home government (and negotiating team)”. (Winham, 1979) Throughout the case studies, external negotiation, negotiation between different states will be examined more carefully. However, it must also be noted, that internal negotiations influence the outcome of external negotiation a great deal.

When defining the problems and goals of the negotiations (an integral part of agenda manipulation) internal negotiation takes place between the negotiating team and the home government and interest groups. Winham suggests that the role of interest groups is often underrated: “One such variable that affects mainly the internal side of negotiation concerns the activities of special interest groups. These activities are generally given inadequate attention in the literature, in comparison to the importance apparently given to them by practitioners. For example, [...] practitioners [are] concerned with special interest groups in all three phases of the negotiation process; specific references are made to identifying relevant interest groups, maintaining the support of such groups, and reconciling those groups that are opposed to the negotiator's policies”. (Winham, 1979). Internal negotiation helps defining a bottom line for the negotiating team.

External negotiation takes place between the different negotiating teams. From the perspective of agenda manipulation, this is where the participating states’ specific issue preferences clash, aspects of the issue area sorted out and some aspects are selected over others. Winham proposes five considerations to keep in mind when analyzing external negotiation:

- 1) What does the home government want the negotiation to achieve?
- 2) What do the other governments want to achieve through the negotiations? Are the stated and actual positions in accordance with each other?
- 3) Is there possibility for a common ground?
- 4) What are the bargaining strategies that are being employed? Are they the appropriate tool for the particular job?
- 5) Is the position of important allies well coordinated? (Winham, 1979)

Throughout the case studies, these points are considered in order to analyze the different states’ negotiation strategies.

Besides the internal-external aspects of negotiation, other dimensions should also be considered to provide a proper understanding of the role the negotiation procedure plays in agenda manipulation. The three time dimensions of negotiation Jacobs proposes are useful to show the interrelated aspects of the various theoretical approaches presented in this chapter.

Jackson defines three time dimensions in which negotiations can take place. “(1) antecedent or past; (2) concurrent or present; and (3) consequent or future”. (Jackson, 2000)

Jackson defines the first dimension as follows: “The antecedent dimension refers to all those inputs and variables which exist prior to engaging in negotiation”. In the analytical framework of this thesis, the antecedent dimension encompasses what was referred to in the introduction as the Mobilization of Bias. Our existing cognitive socio-political framework sets *a priori* conditions for the negotiation.

In the same place he defines the second, present dimension, as “[describing] a range of factors which characterize the conditions and process of a particular negotiation situation”. In this thesis’ theoretical context, problem delimitation is used to understand how these “range of factors” are selected.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework of this model presents non-decision making as an approach that shapes the outcome of agenda manipulation. The third, future dimension which Jackson defines as the aspect which “draws attention to the outcome of the bargain” is also concerned with how negotiations are shaped in the end.

While drawing upon Jackson’s time dimensions, I tried to show how the various aspects of the outlaid theoretical framework interrelate with each other. The negotiation procedure is the active driving force in agenda manipulation. States participating in international negotiations wish to propose their own agendas and propose the division of problem areas in ways that invoke solutions most preferable to them.

Active negotiation is the vessel through which states make these proposals, but other aspects such as *a priori* biases, careful problem delimitation and techniques of non-decision making can all influence the negotiation process and thus the agenda setting process and ultimately can have agenda manipulating effects.

Bias mobilization

Schattschneider's Mobilization of Bias

In the following section the environment in which agenda manipulation is practiced or sustained are further investigated. However, in order to complement the previous parts where the role of the active (or inactive) decision maker was analyzed, this time the larger framework in which non-decision making is exercised will be examined. Following Schattschneider I label this framework the Mobilization of Bias.

The mobilization of bias can be defined as the group of prevailing norms and values of society that ensures and legitimizes hegemonic culture while also helps political socialization. (Schattschneider, 1975) The mobilization of bias is present at every level of society and evolves in every social institution. (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970)

Naturally speaking, it is possible that different sets of values and norms can be present at the same time in different societies, or even at different levels of the same society. Nonetheless, these norms and values form the framework that governs every action on the respective levels or societies.

The Mobilization of Bias becomes important for the analysis of non-decision making as it fundamentally influences what issues can potentially arise to the decision making area, and those who are interested in shaping the agenda setting process are especially interested in how to control this procedure.

The political language, customs, methods and institutions all affect which questions arise, what can be talked about and what can be and needs to be negotiated. Therefore setting the rules and influencing what gets on the agenda are extremely important in promoting one's interest.

The Mobilization of Bias governs exactly this: the norms, values and customs that constitute the Mobilization of Bias control what are all the possible issues to discuss in a given society or level of the society.

Birkland proposes a similar idea that he labels "several levels of the agenda". (Birkland, 2007) He distinguishes different layers in which any idea can possibly appear. The layer in his

concept, that fulfills a similar role to Schattschneider’s Mobilization of Bias is labeled as the “systemic agenda, in which is contained any idea that could possibly be considered by participants in the policy process”. (Birkland, 2007)

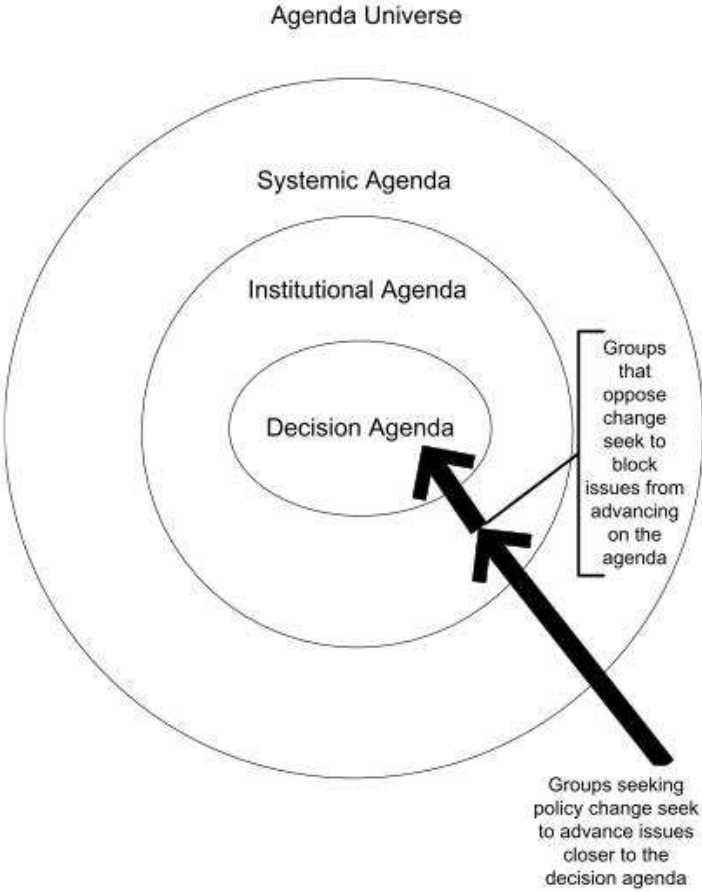


Figure 1. Birkland’s “Levels of the Agenda”. Source: Birkland, Thomas A.: Agenda Setting in Public Policy. Handbook for Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics, and Methods (2007) page 64.

However, the Mobilization of Bias also affects *how* issues can be discussed, that is, it affects the political language that is used to set the rules and the institutions that govern problem formulation. (Schattschneider, 1975) Schattschneider’s often quoted idea: “the definition of alternatives is the supreme instrument of power” sums this up neatly.

This also means that the Mobilization of Bias works in favor of the prevailing regime since those who successfully influence the available alternatives – usually this would mean the

current decision makers – can also easily manipulate who can enter the field where the alternatives are set. (Schattschneider, 1975)

In practice, it also has the consequence that those who were early on successful in setting the alternatives and handling conflicts in their own favor will have an easier time sustaining the system, than those who want to enter the system from the outside to change it. (Mair, 1997) This allows for the long time existence a certain set of rules, that is, a long term Mobilization of Bias.

While this framework forms our social conscious to a significant degree by preserving the prevailing norms, it is also important to realize that the Mobilization of Bias itself needs to be sustained.

Even though there is a quite powerful self sustaining effect it enjoys - through the ability to filter out the emerging issues that might challenge the framework - it must also be pointed out that there are other actors who can potentially affect the maintenance of the current values, norms and customs.

Media and mass-communication in particular turn out to be major contributors to an existing Mobilization of Bias. However, every other form of contemporary popular culture also play important role in supporting the Mobilization of Bias.

Media offers a mean of communication or a platform of discourse where different ideas and cultural products can be expressed and easily transmitted to masses of people at the same time. This gives media as well as popular culture an extremely important role in the agenda setting process.

Werner and Kai highlight this when they say: “despite the existence of different patterns of agenda-setting, modern societies are characterized by a distinctive role of the public/media for agenda-setting and policy-making”. (Jann and Wegrich, 2007) Moreover, in the times of mass media, the communication of values and norms (the pillars of a Mobilization of Bias) becomes really easy.

Perhaps nowadays it may seem there are more and more ideas emerging and are available in popular media, but on the other hand, these tend to be ideas that are in accordance with the ruling Mobilization of Bias. For example, even though liberal democracies highly value

freedom of speech, certain ideas that are perceived to be politically incorrect or have negative historical connotations are immediately superseded to the peripheries.

In contemporary western World relatively few try to openly promote or campaign for Nazism or Stalinism; what is considered politically correct varies from one system of Mobilization of Bias to another, but it can nevertheless be said that media generally supports the framework it exists in.

This support comes in the form of controlling the information asymmetry between different parts of society, and also the access to information in general. Media as well as other forms of popular culture can both increase or decrease information asymmetry and recognizing this is essential for this study of public non-decision making.

As Werner and Kai point out in their study *Theories of the Policy Cycle*, identify agenda setting and the mechanics of problem recognition are “tightly connected with the way a social problem is recognized and perceived on the public/media agenda.” Media content can thus help or hinder the social recognition of a given problem. (Jann and Wegrich, 2007)

The way media or popular culture affect the social recognition of certain issues is through the cycling of ideas. In practice it means that ideas present in society are picked up by media to be simplified and fed back to society in the form of popular mass culture. This is a binding force of contemporary western societies as this process reinforces the social conscious and norms, therefore it helps our socialization.

However it also means that “revolutionary” ideas are usually immediately excluded from this cycle which sustains the existing Mobilization of Bias and therefore the current distribution of power, benefits and disadvantages.

From the example of media as a building stone of Mobilization of Bias it can be seen that the purpose of this framework is to sustain an environment where certain ideas and groups are immediately excluded from the agenda and decision making process. This is essential for non-decision making as it ensures that certain kinds of answers are prevented from emerging and thus eventually becoming implemented.

On the other hand the Mobilization of Bias also provides a natural selection of which issues are to be perceived as problems and thus also generates a selection between what kind of answers can be given.

Non-decision making

Defining non-decision making

In order to successfully explain the mechanisms of non-decision making for further usage in my thesis, I will first define what non-decision making is about. First and foremost, in this paper non-decision making will be perceived as a continuous attitude of decision makers as opposed to merely being a single act.

It is also defined as a sustained course of action, instead of a simple, unrelated collection of actions of merely not deciding. Even more, throughout the paper it will be avoided to refer to non-decision making as an action of consciously not deciding on the part of the non-decision maker. Instead, I will emphasize that one of the important characteristic of non-decision making is that the non-decision maker's prime objective is to avoid taking unwanted action and to elude acting in certain undesirable situations.

From this we should see that an important feature of non-decision making is the notion that a certain actor not actually making a certain decision is not the point of interest. Decision making mechanisms are not even necessarily required in cases when we wish to investigate the non-decision making processes because the essence of non-decision making is how to prevent a particular issue from getting to the decision making arena, or how to avoid having to solve a certain problem. (Frey, 1971)

Mann however reminds us that the lack of decision making process notwithstanding, non-decision making in practice produces actual decisions and it can have very real consequences even though no one actually makes these decisions. (Mann, 1976)

Non-decision making helps us answer two questions, both of which are ultimately concerned with the distribution of power among actors involved in any given decision making situation. First, how the wielders of power try to exercise influence over the emergence of issues, and second, what consequences can unconscious decisions have, or in other words, how decisions come about under circumstances where the decision maker is not aware of the decision being made, either because of willful ignorance or a genuine information deficit.

The theory of non-decision making originates from Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz. (Mann, 1976) In their influential book, *Power and Poverty*, they investigate the theory of public decision making and issues of power relations.

To enhance the understanding of non-decision making, it must be defined what will be understood as decision throughout this paper. They define decision as a “set of actions related to and including the choice of one alternative rather than another”. (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963) Or, to put it another way: “a choice among alternative modes of action”. (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963)

In harmony with the above outlined definitions of decision, Dale Mann defines non-decision making as “a policy made without participation where participation may have been expected to occur”. (Mann, 1976) The most important concept in this definition is that non-decision making is perceived as a form of decision making technique in which participation is dissatisfactory.

As I will demonstrate later, it is a technique that points towards preserving the existing status quo. It aims at preventing the emergence of situations that would require a decision to be made. Therefore non-decision making is inherently concerned with the agenda setting process and wishes to influence it in the favor of the non-decision maker.

On the other hand it is also a technique that helps to avoid giving answers to the problems already at hand. All in all, a method to prevent change directed against the interests of those who are in power.

How non-decision making is achieved and sustained

This part is investigating the methods through which non-decision making can be implemented and pursued successfully as an ongoing general policy. The lessons from the previous chapters, problem delimitation and bias mobilization will be combined and evaluated to show non-decision making can be an effective tool in agenda manipulation.

Understanding the mechanisms behind these processes is crucial to be able to successfully localize the issue areas where non-decision making is taking place. Moreover, understanding

how they work also helps revealing the underlying interests and values. In turn, uncovering these motivations can also offer help in countering policies of non-decision making.

How non-decision making can become problematic and why decision makers would employ it?

The general idea and the underlying mechanisms were both studied in the previous sections, so now it must also be inspected why non-decision making can pose a problem in public policy and if it indeed is harmful, what would be the reason for decision makers still opt to use such techniques.

First of all it must be defined what problematic is. This study is not going to make assumptions about human nature as such but instead it accepts that as decisions are made by humans, these decisions are affected by the individual attributes and preferences of the human beings making them.

There are also no assumptions about the selfish or envious behavior decision making actors, while on the other hand the notion that actors might behave self-centered or might behave community-centered is accepted. Therefore we need to differentiate between what is problematic for the community and what is problematic for the individual actor.

It may very well happen that a decision making actor pursuing his or her own interests through non-decision making can damage the interests of the community, but it is nevertheless not taken as a starting ground for this paper. On the other hand, since the main purpose of this part is to explore the impact of non-decision making in the agenda setting process, the concerns of the public enjoy primary preference.

As outlined in the above parts, non-decision making techniques offer several ways to influence what questions arise, what answers are given to them and also how to avoid taking action.

There can be obvious negative consequences of avoiding making necessary but unpopular decisions, not implementing the necessary policy out of fear of public dislike, or simply offering an easier but inadequate answer. As the case studies in the second part of this paper

will demonstrate non-decision making can also be used to purposefully promote wrong questions to be answered with a seemingly right answer.

They will also serve as an example to show that non-decision making can have problematic consequences in public policy, as it gives decision making actors the tools to focus public attention away from issues that are important for the community on the medium or long run and instead focusing on short term goals.

Despite the possible negative consequences for the public good, non-decision making is still often encountered in the public sector. As non-decision making is a primary tool for preserving the prevailing power relations, it can be tempting for the beneficiaries of power to employ these techniques for their own personal gains even though it might damage the public interest.

Besides personal reasons such as carrier gains, outside influences can also push a decision maker to pursue non-decision making practices. As the case studies will also make obvious, lobby pressure from outside the immediate decision making area often plays a significant role in the agenda setting process through their bargaining power. Therefore they also affect the policies implemented by pursuing decision makers to give a certain answer to the emerging problems that favors the lobby group over other parts of the society.

The effects of non-decisions

How non-decision making can become a problem was discussed in the previous chapter, but the actual impacts of non-decision making can have, should also be considered.

The main problem with public non-decisions is that it aims at preserving the current status quo of the governing elite. By avoiding changing the agenda, the central issues of the current power holders are continuously preserved. This also conserves not only the possible, but also the actual answers that are given to these issues. Therefore the current distribution of power will remain unchanged as new challenges are being ignored.

This leaves little room for improvement in the quality of solutions for emerging problems. The suppression of new ideas can lead to a state of lack of innovation, where change can only

happen when problems that are not addressed on the agenda of the ruling elite get so severe outside the system that it affects the mere existence of the system itself.

No possibility for innovation also influences the effectiveness of the possible answers the governing elite can implement. As the case study will exemplify non-decision making in public policy leads to enacting ineffective policies that often fail to fulfill what public sector decision makers should do: advance the cause of the public.

II The case studies

Introduction

The following chapter on the three case studies of the Copenhagen (2009), Cancún (2010) and Durban (2011) aims to show how the previously outlined theoretical approach works in real life negotiations. Climate change is certainly a topic that affects every country, albeit perhaps through different means and to different degrees. Nevertheless, as the case studies show, all participating countries in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change had some sort of interest in the negotiations' outcome.

Although it would certainly be interesting to analyze every climate summit following the Kyoto protocol, due to limited space available and in order to remain relevant to contemporary international politics, only the last three are analyzed.

A comparative case study analysis allows the researcher to conduct in-depth analysis of separate, yet related cases, revealing changing strategies, interests and negotiation techniques used by the participants. This allows us to see ultimate focus of the research, the working of agenda manipulation, in a different perspective.

When analyzing the climate change talks in Copenhagen, Cancun and Durban, the following four groups of state actors were identified: United States, European Union, the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the AOSIS countries (Alliance of Small Island States).

Three criteria were chosen in selecting the actors: 1) their economic power, 2) the level of danger climate change poses to the state and 3) the general awareness of climate change within the countries. The last criteria can also be understood as the level of political culture of a given state as this approach has interesting implications for domestic public pressure on the government to take action on climate change. (A more in-depth discussion on the effects of public opinion pressure can be found in the “alternative approaches” section of this thesis.)

The focus in the case studies will be on the agenda manipulation actions of those countries who are the largest emitters owing to their economic power (also referred to as the *dirty*

*dozen*¹), who are the most affected by the adverse effects of climate change either due to the geographic conditions or for a lack of awareness of climate change.

The first case study is the 2009 Copenhagen climate conference that was preceded by great anticipation and enthusiasm. The climate summit was expected to deliver a new treaty to replace the Kyoto protocol after its expiration in 2012. However, due to the strictly opposing interests of the main polluter United States and China, the climate talks failed to live up to the expectations and seriously shattering the credibility of the multilateral United Nations climate change framework.

As a consequence, the following conference in Cancún in 2010 started off with modest goals, mainly aiming at restoring the credibility of the UNFCCC. Even though this goal was achieved in the end, new dividing lines emerged between the participating countries.

The 2011 Durban climate summit was conducted under extreme pressure, as the expiration of the Kyoto protocol became more and more of a reality. Despite the initial negotiation deadlocks between the largest emitters, a roadmap for a legally binding new treaty was pushed through and thus the conference ultimately was regarded as a success.

The case studies will extensively build upon relevant contemporary press releases and media coverage in order to establish the factual background.

Case study on the Copenhagen Climate Summit 2009

Overview of the Copenhagen Climate Conference

The United Nations Copenhagen Climate Conference took place December 7-18 in Copenhagen with the goal to create a successive climate change control regime for the period after the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012.

¹ The term is based on the presentation by Anthony Leiserowitz, retrieved from the following website: <http://environment.yale.edu/climate/research/literacy-on-climate-change/>

The outcome of the Summit was widely considered to be a failed opportunity in Western media. The Guardian signaled the dissatisfaction saying: “The UN climate summit reached a weak outline of a global agreement in Copenhagen tonight, falling far short of what Britain and many poor countries were seeking and leaving months of tough negotiations to come.” (Vidal et al. 2009)

The Copenhagen Accord that was drafted on the last day of the summit is a non-binding agreement which came to be regarded as a weak political declaration. The signing members declare that they “recognize the scientific view that the increase in global temperature should be below 2 degree Celsius”, and that they “recognize the critical impacts of climate change” while they also agree that “a comprehensive adaptation programme including international support” is needed to be set up in order to help the adversely affected countries. (The Copenhagen Accord, 2009)

The Accord also doesn’t propose any legally binding obligations, however it does contain a chart into which participating countries can list their “quantified economy-wide emission targets for 2020”. (The Copenhagen Accord, 2009)

Even though climate change is a global issue, many of the participating countries – mainly the most significant CO₂ emitter developing nations like China, India, Brazil and South Africa and also the United State – were reluctant to think in global terms and tried to promote their own national interests.

On the other hand, those third world developing nations, who are also among the most threatened and vulnerable countries simply lacked to bargaining power to be able to successfully promote their national interests despite those being based on putting a stop to global warming. They were also faced with the problem of which major player to support.

It was clear that any aid for coping with climate change would come from the West for these countries. (Ramesh, 2009) Meanwhile China, India and the other major emitters of the third world tried to gain the support of these countries by emphasizing the difference between “survival emission” of the developing world and “lifestyle emission” of the developed world, thus pointing at the responsibility of the West. (Ramesh, 2009)

The European Union found itself in a somewhat ambiguous situation regarding what interests to pursue given that despite it shows continuous commitment towards fighting climate change

as a whole, some of the member countries didn't agree with the methods, or had voiced skepticism.

The EU members in 2007 “endorsed an integrated approach to climate and energy policy and committed to transforming Europe into a highly energy-efficient, low carbon economy”, while a “unilateral commitment that Europe would cut its emissions by at least 20% of 1990 levels by 2020.” was also made.(European Commission, 2009)

Despite the policy plans however, the EU faced some internal discord over climate change issues. Vaclav Klaus, president of the Czech Republic, voiced his disbelief over the true threat climate change poses when he said "manmade climate change has become one of the most dangerous arguments aimed at distorting human efforts and public policies in the whole world". (Randerson, 2009) Czech Republic fulfilled the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the term previous to the Copenhagen conference.

In addition other member states signaled concern over the European carbon trading system, also known as ETS. Poland depending mainly on coal as fuel for its industry threatened to veto the ETS as it could make them dependent on Russian energy supplies. (Worthington, 2009)

Despite there are some conflicting interests between the member states the European Union has long been “showing the way forward through its strategy to fight climate change and the policies that it already implements or has proposed to the member states and the European Parliament”. (European Commission, 2009) Combating climate change, adopting more responsible ways to use its natural resources while promoting renewable energy sources are the main interests of the EU as they encourage innovation and enhance economic growth. (European Commission, 2009)

Comparative analysis of state negotiation strategies

This chapter is aimed to demonstrate that the domestic issues and policies of the participating countries were transferred to the international arena and to present that far-reaching attempts at agenda manipulation were employed in abundance in order to achieve domestic goals.

A look at the applied non-decision making methods will show that different domestic interests clash between states. This meant that cooperation was only possible for countries that shared common domestic policies towards climate change. If they wanted to successfully cooperate, the issues states recognized as problems were to be delineated similarly and their answers also had to be identified in the same way for these issues.

In order to analyze the non-decision making techniques, a three step approach will be applied. First the groups of actors with similar interests and domestic policies are identified. Second the answers that were given for the problems arising from the clash of domestic policies and how these answers relied on the successful application of non-decision making techniques for each group is presented.

The particular advantages and disadvantages for the different problem delimitations are then shown along with which actors were successful in appropriately defining the problems.

The chapter aims at arguing that successful problem delimitation is one that points towards solving the problem meaning that different problem delimitations of different actors could all be successful even though the climate conference as a whole was not perceived as an overall success as it did not end with taking global action. The difference between the overall success versus the favorable outcome of the conference for each individual player will be emphasized.

The international clash of interests meant that a successful global problem definition doesn't immediately mean a clear way for global policy implementation. China was successful in pursuing its goals while, the EU and the US (Obama in particular) and minor developing countries proved to be the losers of this clash.

The key relations and interests of the 3 main actors are presented underneath.

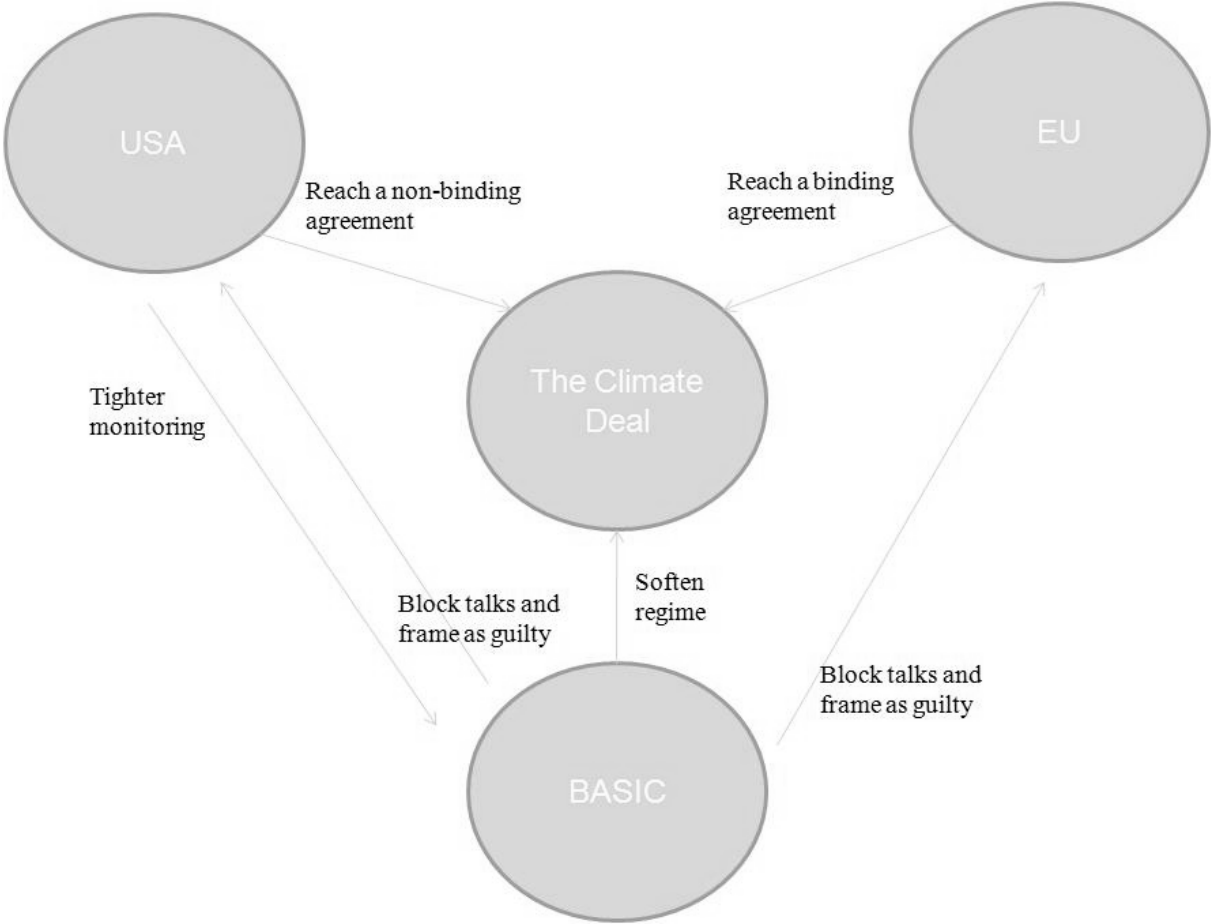


Figure 2. Country relations and interests towards each other and the Climate Deal at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference

The first set of participating countries that had similarly identified interests and domestic policies are Brazil, China, India and South Africa (BASIC). They all share similar domestic

policies regarding the energy sector: massive investments in renewable energy sources, incentives for more efficient energy usage and strong domestic regulations. (Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency Partnership, 2010) Both in India and Brazil renewable energy sources contribute to around 9% of their total energy generation, while in China and South Africa this contribution is below 5%. (*Ibid.*)

At the same time, they still mostly rely on fossil energy sources in order to fuel their soaring industries and to be competitive on the international market. They together account for approximately one third of Earth's total CO₂ emission. (United Nations Millennium Development Goals Indicators)

Therefore their main agenda was how to avoid the implementation of a legally binding global emission control regime that potentially could penalize them. This also meant that the basic goal of these actors was contradictory to the aim of the Climate Summit.

China also pursued another important goal that the other members of the BASIC countries did not share. As a main competitor for leadership in a desired multilateral world, China wanted to ensure that the United States and the European Union are seen as incapable of successfully handling the challenges of global climate change that they cause in the first place with their "lifestyle emission".

The BASIC countries realized that they share similar interests with the United States in that they both wanted to avoid the construction of a legally binding CO₂ emission reduction framework. However they also realized that they can't cooperate openly with the USA, therefore they looked for various techniques that first hindered the progress of the climate talks and then made sure that it will be the developed countries who will be blamed for the failure of the conference.

In order to achieve this, they emphasized the difference between the West's "lifestyle emission" and the developing nation's "survival emission". Displacing attention is a classic non-decision making technique in which "two parties are engaged in acts unacceptable to each other, [and] if media attention can be focused on the acts of one, then those of the other can be treated as of little consequence" (Judge, 1997)

With criticizing the West for its „lifestyle emission“ the BASIC countries also managed to promote an extremely simplified view of the causes of global warming and also to create a scapegoat of the developed countries. Over simplification and scapegoating are other methods

of non-decision making. The former one is used to force through “an agenda in which it is convenient to exclude categories and especially the relationships between them”, while in the latter one, the non-decision maker tries to attribute “inability to act effectively to the actions of some other group”, in this case the western countries. (Judge, 1997)

The careful usage of these techniques made it possible for the BASIC countries to shift the blame to the developed countries and to not reach a binding agreement on CO₂ emission cuts.

The kind of problem formulation the BASIC countries followed proved to be successful. They acknowledge the problem global warming poses but environment consciousness and economic growth was differentiated with the latter taking priority. They successfully identified that the main problem for them would be to fall victim to a legally binding international regime that can hinder their economic development.

This approach eventually contributed to the failure the Copenhagen Summit ended with. However it does not mean that the problem delimitation itself was not adequate, as it still pointed towards the solution of the issue these countries identified as the primary problem: how to sustain their economic competitiveness and growth in the face of continuous pressure from the Western countries.

The second set of actors is the AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States). These states are of the most vulnerable ones to the adverse effects of climate change, therefore their main issue was to reach an agreement with the major polluters about capping CO₂ emissions in a reasonable time frame.

They argued that global warming must be stopped, and in order to do that, the emission of greenhouse effect gasses needs to peak in the following decade. However they had the least bargaining power and were dependent on the other actors.

In this complex situation, they faced several questions. Who to support, who can better help their survival, the developed world, or the BASIC countries? Should they sign the agreement so that they can benefit from the western funds even though this agreement does not ensure the possibility to stop global warming in any reasonable time?

The main problem formulation of small island states was based on the threat global warming poses for their mere existence. It was obvious from the beginning that the outcome of the

conference depended on whether the United States and China can reach some sort of agreement about emission reduction. Therefore the problem small island states identified as such was which major player to support.

Being severely disappointed with the lack of democratic decision making and the abundance of distributive negotiation that took place during the Climate Summit, at the end of the conference, with a few exceptions, they mostly lined up behind the BASIC countries, blaming the United States for the failure.

This kind of answers that these countries came up with did not turn out to be successful, as it did not point towards the solving of their main issues. These countries failed to achieve their basic goals of creating a legally binding framework that would control CO₂ emissions and eventually stop global warming.

A successful policy could have been to help the United States and the European Union putting pressure on the BASIC countries while negotiating about the various climate aids with the developed countries.

The third set of actors was the member states of the European Union. Their main issues were to put a stop to global warming by reaching an agreement that legally binds the participating countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emission.

Achieving this would reinforce its leadership on climate change combat that it sought to take hold of. The main problem it faced was how to make the BASIC countries cooperate in order to construct a strong, legally binding deal and to avoid being framed as a scapegoat by the former group.

Despite all its effort, the European Union was not successful in reinforcing leadership or make BASIC countries cooperate because it did not succeed in transferring its policies into the international level. However, it made unilateral commitments of CO₂ emission cuts that are advantageous for fighting climate change and also for the EU economy on the long run.

The European Union's problem delimitation of the issues it was facing was fairly successful because it did contribute to solving the problems the EU perceived as such at the conference. Even though it did not manage to reach cooperation with the BASIC countries, it unilaterally

proposed its own carbon dioxide reduction targets that can potentially set an example to follow.

Employing such inclusive negotiation moves definitely pointed towards finding a solution to alleviating the problems of global warming. At the same time, as the conference itself was regarded as a failure, the European Union failed to seize the leader position it wished for in fighting climate change.

The EU also did not manage to successfully shift the blame from itself to other players, even though this would have been essential in convincing the public audience that the European Union is a serious global actor despite the failure at Copenhagen.

The fourth actor was the United States which as the second largest polluter faced a number of problems first, how to avoid the agreement on a binding deal while looking committed to fighting climate change. The other issues were how to reinforce its world leadership and how to make BASIC countries to comply with its CO₂ emission reduction monitoring demands.

To successfully pursue the above agenda, the United States also utilized non-decision making techniques. Its main goal was to hamper the construction of the climate deal by making its own participation dependent on demands that it thought would be unmet by the BASIC countries.

This non-decision making strategy of “focusing on the inaccessible [...] involves one of the parties in a decision-making arena indicating that they are prepared to go ahead 'only if everybody else agrees'. This gives the appearance of a positive approach. It is especially successful in avoiding decision-making if it is unlikely that others will agree in this way” (Judge, 1997).

During the talks the United States made it clear that its own CO₂ emission cuts were dependent on the set up of a “monitoring regime to ensure that countries do indeed cut their greenhouse gas emissions as promised. That is contentious for countries such as India and China”. (The Guardian’s Copenhagen Diary, 2009)

The US also tried to engage in the scapegoating game of the BASIC countries; however it was not able to shift the blame back on them. The United States argued that the BASIC countries are just as responsible for global warming as the developed countries. This argument over

who is to blame for climate change was a vital point in the non-decision making strategies of both the United States and the BASIC countries. Sustaining this ongoing argument ensured that everyone was more concerned about finding out who is to blame than about creating a solution that could put an end to global warming.

Similar to the European Union, the United States also achieved mixed results with its problem delimitation. They were successful in promoting their own issues to address at the conference instead of the pressing problem of climate change that was supposed to be the real issue of the conference.

This allowed the US to find ways to avoid reaching a legally binding agreement; however they were unable to appropriately react to Chinese non-decision making techniques that almost exclusively focused on the responsibilities of the United States and the European Union for global warming. The image of President Barack Obama suffered especially heavily from the continuous blame for not being ready to take sufficient actions.

Case study on the Cancún Climate Summit 2010

Introduction

In 2010, the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) took place in Cancún, Mexico from November 29th to December 10th. Many considered the COP 16 to be crucial for the sole reason that this time the whole credibility of UNFCCC was at stake here.

In the following case study I analyze the behavior of key state actors during the sixteenth Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC focusing on their main agendas and how they tried to manipulate the agenda setting process. The key actors are chosen based on relative industrial power and thus the level of pollution caused, vulnerability and susceptibility to the adverse effects of climate change while also considering how much they can influence the outcome of the negotiations. Based on these principles, the main actors to be considered are the United States, the BASIC nations, the AOSIS nations and the European Union.

After the failure of COP 15 in Copenhagen, participating members to the Framework Convention began to voice their doubts over whether the United Nations framework was indeed the right place to negotiate a new climate deal to replace the Kyoto protocol. Jairam Ramesh, Indian environment minister highlighted the credibility issue: "Cancun is the last chance. The credibility of the entire climate change negotiating system is at stake. If you do not get a set of operational and meaningful decisions at Cancun, everybody is going to get sick and tired of us."

The Copenhagen conference showed that the credibility crisis was fueled by contrasting interests in a number of issues. It was not clear whether the Kyoto protocol should be lengthened or a completely new deal should be struck. Whether a possible new treaty (if any) should have legal binding power was yet another problem that states seemed unable to agree upon. Consequently the future of Carbon Trading Markets was also disputed. The topics of intellectual property rights and technology transfer as well as green funds for developing countries were also subjects of heated discussion and discontent among the parties to the UNFCCC. (Williams 2010)

It is evident that the climate change convention framework fell in the trap of opposing agenda manipulating interests. "In the runup to Cancún, negotiators acknowledged there was no prospect of reaching a new treaty. They hoped instead for progress on the "building blocks" to a deal, such as detailed agreements on climate finance, preventing deforestation, enabling technology transfer and accounting for emissions cuts by emerging economies such as China and India." (Goldenberg 2010)

This meant that most of the large polluters were eager to downplay the expectations prior to the conference. Restoring the credibility of UNFCCC was comfortably formulated as the main issue by the largest CO₂ emitters while the most vulnerable countries struggled to put forward an emission reduction agenda necessary for their survival.

Comparative analysis of state negotiation strategies

With expectations regarding the outcome of the conference already lowered, participating states focused on promoting their own limited agendas. This is explained by the notion that for the UNFCCC parties, avoiding negative goals (losing the credibility of the Framework

Convention) was a higher priority than achieving positive goals (lower temperature increase rate).

The failure of the previous conference in Copenhagen was largely attributed to the deadlock between the United States and China, and the scapegoating game they engaged in with each other. For Cancún to be regarded as a success, both of these countries had to avoid the confrontational mood that characterized their interaction in Copenhagen. (Goldenberg 2010)

The US negotiation team was in a difficult situation because they had to show commitment towards the UN framework despite the domestic legislative situation. In the summer of 2010, the Democrat majority in the Senate failed to pass a proposed climate bill aimed at ambitious emission reductions and in November the same year the Republicans won control over the House of Representatives.

This meant that it was difficult for the US negotiation team both to make credible promises over emission reduction and to demand similar guarantees from large polluter developing countries like China and India. (Gardner 2010)

The US negotiation strategy therefore focused on emphasizing the need for a new treaty after the Kyoto protocol expires and the growing responsibility large emitter developing countries should take. Highlighting this approach is the notion that Todd Stern, US Special Envoy on Climate Change called for a “new paradigm” in climate talks. Much of their rhetoric was focused on how these countries contribute more and more to global warming and how the proportion of emissions of industrialized countries is diminishing. (Doyle 2010)

While trying to divert attention away from its own legislative shortcomings, the United State also concentrated on achieving minor successes in less vital policy areas. Establishing an emission cut verification system and increasing transparency in emission cuts (particularly in developing countries) had long been the goal of US agenda manipulation. Analysts suggested that the strategy change to concentrate on “smaller items” – instead of the previous year’s primary focus of establishing binding emission cuts – reflects “[a] part of a mind shift that U.N. negotiators may be undergoing”. (Gardner 2010)

In an effort of large polluting states to avoid negative goals and celebrate small achievements, a generally inclusive negotiation attitude was taken by many countries. Emphasis was placed

on creating more and more connecting issues in the multilateral negotiation framework, and this is how previously debated topics, such as technology transfer, intellectual property rights protection or long term/green found financing for poor developing nations could appear on the agenda.

In a controversial way, the large polluter's endeavors to restore the credibility of the Climate Change Framework through focusing on achieving smaller accomplishments benefited the smallest states, those that are the most exposed and the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. These nations often face environmental challenges such as the rising sea level, desertification, draughts brought about by extreme temperature increase, floods, and deforestation.

These nations have historically supported the extension of the Kyoto protocol and wished to promote an environmental deal that would enjoy a legally binding force globally. (Williams 2010) However, they often don't have enough bargaining capacity to be able to successfully promote their interests.

They also often have to face an unfavorable bias mobilization in environmental negotiations. As it was shown earlier, the mobilization of bias plays an important role in controlling the agenda manipulation process and the subsequent decision making practice. The established norms and values of the UNFCCC usually prove to be difficult to change for the poor and vulnerable nations.

Despite the occasional scientific skepticism, in the United Nations Climate Change Framework, it is usually accepted as scientific fact that in order to mitigate the effects of global warming, the temperature increase must not exceed 2 Celsius degrees. Scientists argue that up to this level, the consequences of climate change can be dealt with. Most participants of the UNFCCC accept this 2°C increase and it is not disputed.

My aim is not to scientifically challenge the correctness of the measurements or to dispute the need to limit temperature increase to 2°C, but to point out that there seem to be an almost magical fascination with the maximum permissible increase being exactly 2 degrees. There seem to exist a bias against any suggestions that would change this number. Many developing countries, especially the most vulnerable ones suggest that the temperature increase should be kept to even lower levels, but these efforts at changing the agenda always perish against the existing bias.

The initiative of small island nations at Cancún to limit temperature rise to 1.5 Celsius degrees remained unsuccessful in the face of the summit's humble goals: "AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States) reiterated demands that the Cancun talks should work out a legally binding treaty by the end of 2011 to limit any temperature rise to below 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial times. That target is far tougher than a 2C ceiling set by most other nations in a non-binding Copenhagen Accord agreed at a 2009 summit." (Reuters.com 2010)

The BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) met prior to the Cancún conference outside of their regular strategic cooperation schedule in order to devise a common strategy for the climate conference that would "oppose attempts by the West to foist legally binding pacts". (Varma 2010)

Attempts at downplaying the expectations before Cancún already began on this meeting: the previously quoted Jairam Ramesh, environment minister of India said at the meeting: "Prospects of Cancun are not bright. One thing is sure there will not be any agreement in Cancun. The most optimist scenario is Cancun will result in set of decisions which will set the stage for much of what will happen in South Africa. This is the most optimist scenario we can get".

Part of devising a common strategy was to submit to voluntary, unilateral emission cuts, but to avoid a legally binding deal: "We announced unilateral voluntary target to reduce our emission intensity by 20 to 25 per cent on 2005 reference levels. We are willing to internationalise this but not in a legally binding manner putting on par with developed countries" (Varma 2010)

The strategy of the BASIC countries also focused on how to avoid getting stuck in a deadlock similar to the one on Copenhagen, where the United States and China both insisted on moving forwards with the negotiations only if the other country complied with their demands while simultaneously blaming the other for the stalemate. (Goswani, 2010)

In the Cancún round, perhaps due to the absent of the threat of a legally binding deal, the BASIC countries were eager to voice their commitment to restraining their emissions. Such a roll-on roll-off strategy was common throughout the various climate change conferences. A periodical "apparent acceptance of a new perspective" can create a favorable image and send

positive signals that the negotiations are going well. Later, when attention is centered on some other issue, the commitment can be quietly toned down. (Judge 1997)

The BASIC countries were in fact very much interested in restoring credibility to the United Nations Climate Change Framework as the multi-polar approach is certainly attractive. They also have vested interest in upholding and extending the Kyoto protocol, as currently they are the relative beneficiaries of the regime. They are not legally bound to reduce emissions while their potential competitors among the developed countries (with the notable exception of the United States) were.

The future of the Kyoto protocol was indeed a focus point for much debate and sprung another round of scapegoating, this time between Japan and China. Japanese negotiators suggested that the Kyoto protocol should not be extended, but instead a more encompassing deal is required. Hideki Minamikawa, deputy of Japanese environment minister argued that the scope of a new treaty needs to be broadened as “Kyoto countries now account for only 27 percent of heat-trapping emissions”. (Doyle and Gardner, 2010)

In return, developing countries said that “breaking a pledge to extend a U.N. pact for fighting global warming beyond 2012” would mean the failure of the Cancún round. (*Ibid.*) In an attempt to shift the blame for stalling the negotiations, Chinese special representative for climate change negotiations Huang Huikang said "Some countries, so far, still don't like the Kyoto Protocol," and that "[...] they even want to kill the Kyoto Protocol, to end the Kyoto Protocol". (Campbell and Wynn, 2010)

The Japanese suggestion and the reaction from the developing world showed an obvious division between countries that wish to replace the Kyoto protocol with a new agreement (Japan, United States, and Canada) and the developing countries who wish to extend the existing agreement. (Murray 2010)

After the failure of the Copenhagen summit, the European Union was eager to reaffirm its importance in global climate change talks. Hoping to “bridge the gap” between countries in favor of a new treaty and countries supporting the extension of the current regime, the EU offered to commit to the Kyoto protocol for a second period. The EU argued that if all states –

developing countries involved – made legally binding agreements, and especially if the United States also joined, there is no need for a new treaty and the Kyoto protocol can be extended. (*Ibid.*)

With this negotiation move, the European Union essentially proposed criteria that were unacceptable to both opposing groups: “the offer effectively mirrors the negotiating position adopted by the EU at last year's summit in Copenhagen, which was comprehensively rejected by India and China on the grounds that neither country would submit to legally binding emission targets until industrialised countries such as the US agreed to significantly more ambitious targets of their own” (*Ibid.*)

The dividing line remained, but the expectations towards Cancún were already defined prior to the conference, and these expectations were mainly met.

Conclusion

Careful problem delimitation prior to the Cancún climate conference ensured that the participating countries were not hoping for a new breakthrough, but remained content with smaller achievements. In agenda manipulation and non-decision making it can be very important to celebrate even minor achievements as they can create an image of success. The Cancún round ended with the pledge to create a green climate fund for poor nations, but the specifics of where the money will come from remained uncertain.

Still, UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres said: “Cancún has done its job. The beacon of hope has been reignited and faith in the multilateral climate change process to deliver results has been restored,” and: “Nations have shown they can work together under a common roof, to reach consensus on a common cause. They have shown that consensus in a transparent and inclusive process can create opportunity for all,” and also: “This is not the end, but it is a new beginning. It is not what is ultimately required but it is the essential foundation on which to build greater, collective ambition,” (UN press release, 2010)

Emphasizing success and focusing on the future challenges to come are non-decision making techniques commonly employed throughout the various climate change conferences. The goal

at Cancún was to restore credibility to the multilateral UN framework approach, and it was achieved through proper problem delimitation and bias mobilization.

The essence of the climate change problem hasn't changed however. The main question is still who will bear the costs of climate change. The division over technology transfer, green funds carbon markets or even whether there should be a new deal or an extension of the Kyoto protocol boils down to the problem: who will pay.

During the negotiations there was an obvious focus on “the money”, i.e. how/if rich countries will pay for the poor countries. But trading carbon quotas, forest quotas or providing straight monetary benefits to compensate for environmental damage, while potentially helpful for the developing countries, will not help with climate change, meaning they will not reduce the increase in temperature, or peak emissions. The focus is diverted away from solving the problem (reduce emissions) towards coping with it (pledge money for poor countries). And even that process is slow and futile so far.

Case study on the Durban Climate Summit 2011

Introduction

The 2011 Durban, South Africa round was widely perceived as the last opportunity to secure a new climate deal before the Kyoto protocol expires in 2012. The conference where nearly 200 states participated started out amongst reports on how climate change was producing more and more devastating effects worldwide: “Two U.N. reports this month said greenhouse gases had reached record levels in the atmosphere and a warming world would likely bring more floods, stronger cyclones and more intense droughts.” (Herskovitz and Flak, 2011)

Projections released by the OECD were also unfavorable: “[...] temperatures could rise by 3-6 degrees Celsius by the end of the century if governments failed to contain emissions, bringing unprecedented destruction as glaciers melt and sea levels rise. It said an 80 percent rise in global energy demand was set to raise carbon dioxide (Co2) emissions by 70 percent by 2050 and transport emissions were expected to double, due in part to a surge in demand for cars in developing nations.” (Reuters, 2011)

The Green Climate Found, put together in Cancún, presented some hope for the poorest countries, but the debt crisis in the Euro zone meant that economic rationale could potentially override environmental pledges.

It was clear from the previous negotiation rounds that any agreement would depend on the largest polluters, the United States, China and India. Meanwhile, the dividing line between countries who wished to extend the Kyoto protocol, and countries who wanted to create a new regime still remained. Russia, Japan and Canada all declared that “they will not sign up to a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol unless the biggest emitters do too”. (Herskovitz and Flak, 2011)

In the face of these unfavorable circumstances, many thought that the Durban round would be yet another failed attempt at tackling climate change.

Comparative analysis of state negotiation strategies

During the Durban negotiation round, there was an interesting similarity in the negotiation and agenda manipulating tactics employed by the United States and the BASIC countries. Considering the previous rounds, especially Copenhagen, and seeing that these countries had some very similar interests, this was not a surprising finding.

However, this did not mean that they would form a coalition and promote their overlapping interests together. On the contrary, the previously successful strategy, based on scapegoating and rotating praise and blame was employed by both actors.

The most important shared goal was again to stall negotiations while at the same time, they were both questioning the commitment of the other to emission cuts and a possible legally binding treaty. A member of the US negotiation team was quoted as saying: “I don't think China is looking to sign up for legal obligations,” and also: "The issue for whatever point at which a legally binding agreement might be doable -- for us the foundation -- is that all major economies would need to assume obligations that had equal legal force." (Herskovitz, 2011)

Both the United States and the BASIC countries thought it would be favorable to extend the scope of the negotiations until after 2015. Focusing on a too small or large time frame can be an effective tool in agenda manipulation. The United States was “held back by domestic

politics at least until after a presidential election next year as Republicans and President Barack Obama's Democrats squabble over every attempt to pass environment legislation.” (Chestney and Lewis, 2011)

The BASIC countries would also benefit from any extension of the timeline where they don't have to be concerned with CO2 emission cuts. Jayanthi Natarajan, India's environment minister was quoted to say: "We believe strongly that we should consider the need of a further legal agreement (...) after assessing the actions of all under the 2015 review and look at the science". (Reuters, 2011)

Learning from the experience of the previous negotiation rounds, the European Union set it a high priority to avoid a deadlock between the United States and the BASIC countries. The EU also wished to reassess its importance in climate change negotiations after the failure of Copenhagen. A third goal was to restore confidence in the European Union that was lost to the Euro zone crisis. (Chestney and Lewis, 2011)

It soon became obvious that the European Union wanted to seize leadership in order to push through a deal that would impose legally binding emission cut targets for all countries. The EU argued that the situation changed since the signing of the Kyoto protocol and any deal that is not binding for the largest polluters would be meaningless. (Herskovitz and Flak, 2011)

The European Union realized that in order to push through a deal that could have legal force on the large polluters, it needed to devise a plan in which non-participation would mean public condemnation. With this move, the EU showed strong leadership which rallied the AOSIS countries to support. Together with the participation of AOSIS countries, the “road map” proposed by the EU would lead to “legally binding commitments by 2015”. (Chestney and Lewis, 2011)

Conclusion

The Durban conference was regarded as major success because the European Union managed to form a coalition which was able to pressure the largest emitters to sign up to binding emission cuts.

In this respect, the previously successful strategies of agenda manipulation by the United States and the BASIC countries failed to uphold the status quo. However, it is also possible, that accepting binding emission cuts for the future is part of a conceptual roll-on roll-off by the large emitters.

It is also questionable whether this result is favorable to the poorest and most vulnerable countries. Scientific evidence already seem to suggest that even a 2°C temperature increase can be disastrous to these countries. It is undisputed that the weakest states played a key role in reaching agreement at Durban. However, it is not certain whether it serves their interests.

III Alternative approaches

Introduction

In this chapter, I wish to present a number of alternative approaches that could well complement the previously established theoretical framework but are not strictly related to it and would not fit due to the limited space available. They offer additional explanatory power and could provide new perspectives to enhance the understanding of how agenda manipulation works in international negotiations. New approaches also mean new areas for exciting and fruitful future research.

First I introduce a constructivist approach which would bring a critical perspective to the more conventional theoretical background employed in this thesis. I believe that establishing a meta-theoretical perspective offers an intellectual challenge as well as highlights the different layers of the same problem. This approach focuses on epistemic questions: how do the visualization and speech acts of the epistemic community affect our mental images, and how public mental images affect agenda setting in politics.

The second proposed alternative approach is vaguely connected to the first one. It is concerned with the effects changing public opinion have on agenda setting. It offers an opportunity to analyze the causes and consequences of agenda manipulation based on quantitative data collection. This form of alternative explanation would be concerned with how international negotiations are perceived by the public and how their perception changes based on the outcome.

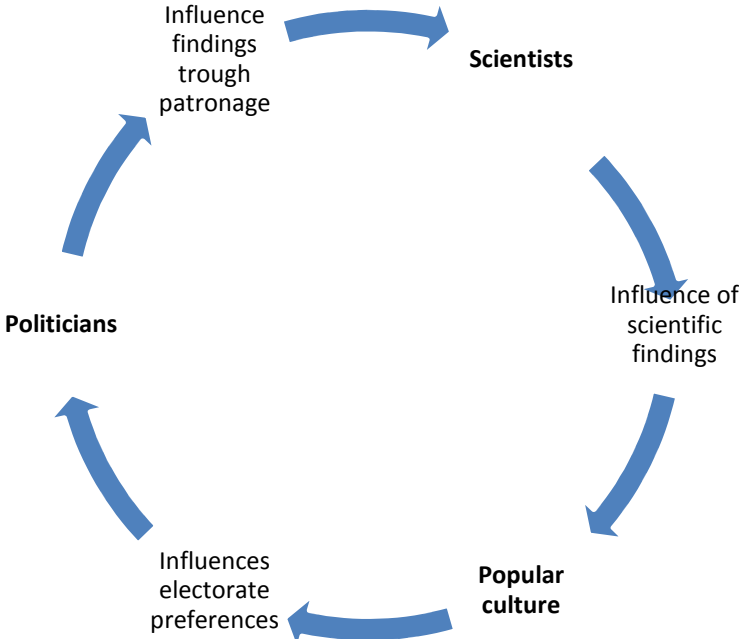
A third and final variety would be a more rigid modeling approach based on game theory. Understanding alignment decisions and negotiation strategies in international negotiations as hypergame situations provides an interesting analytical challenge. A hypergame approach is perfectly suited to explain negotiations over multiple rounds while the rigorous mathematical description of the events provides credibility and easy understanding.

The Constructivist approach

Perhaps the most important difference regarding my original research topic is that this approach makes the research more “critical studies related” it uses and emphasizes critical theories instead of conventional approaches. This alternative explanation would increase the number of theories used in the project while also allowing to “dig deeper” in selected areas to achieve a more in-depth understanding of agenda manipulation.

Keeping these considerations in mind and still trying to do research related to agenda manipulation and climate change, the new approach proposed would look into the circular link between scientists → popular culture → politicians → scientists. To be more specific: the focus of the research project is shifted to see how the findings on climate change of the scientific community influences popular culture (movies, TV series, novels, etc.) which is then consumed by the general population.

Since the research will focus on liberal democracies, the cycle goes on as the images created by popular culture influence electorate preferences, ultimately influencing politician’s behavior. The feedback loop concludes with politicians influencing the scientists (and thus their findings) through research grants, awards, etc.



Based on this new approach, new research questions can also become relevant.

- 1) Who is part of the epistemic community and how does it exercise influence over agenda setting?
- 2) How scientific findings presented in popular culture can change attitudes towards symptoms of global warming?
- 3) How does the pop culture visualization of scientific findings influence environmental agenda manipulation?
- 4) How can politicians “redraw” the above circle to directly influence popular culture?

This alternative research project would allow the researcher to analyze a piece of popular culture from the field of literature, television series or movies. After a throughout familiarization with the body of the material, an in-depth analysis could reveal the language and metaphors that are used to transfer knowledge. Analyzing these speech acts would allow the researcher to identify the “signifier” and “signified” concepts relating to climate change.

The goal of this approach would be to find out how the offered mental images can shape the social reality of the recipient (the viewer/reader), transform her/his attitudes and thus play a significant role in agenda manipulation

Considering the effects of public opinion

This second alternative explanation offers yet other insights into the mechanisms of agenda manipulation by focusing the perspective on the influence public opinion has on state behavior.

It is easy to realize that when various state actors try to manipulate the agenda setting process in multilateral international negotiations, the items states want to put on or remove from the agenda can have varying significance to the people living in those countries. If a specific issue is regarded as important among the general population, or a subgroup with exceptionally strong advocacy skills, the government has to take into account the public opinion pressure when designing its negotiation strategy.

Analyzing the effects of public opinion pressure is especially interesting in liberal democracies: as suggested by public choice theory, government officials and bureaucrats are

mostly motivated by self interest and reelection. (Gordon, 2008) Agenda manipulation and non-decision making allows politicians a way to circumvent and manage pressure from public opinion by carefully selecting the agenda topics, postponing action or reframing the problems.

Therefore, by studying worldwide public opinion polls on climate change and evaluating the level of interest citizens of various countries have in climate change, it is possible to see what interests each state has during the course of negotiations to manipulate the climate talk agenda one way or another.

If for example in a given country that the electorate is very much concerned about the effects of climate change, but the government is reluctant to act as a consequence of some other advocacy pressure, it can be argued that during the negotiations that government will likely be short on actions but not on words. That is, the government will surly support measures to be taken against climate change in its rhetoric, but will use subtle techniques to make sure that actions don't have to follow those commitments.

The shift in the level of interest in a given topic is both a driving force of state non-decisions (as it was argued before) and a consequence of it. Assessing the general awareness and interest in climate change in the following countries with the help of public opinion studies will give some insight into what do citizens from the analyzed countries think of climate change and how their perspective was altered during time.

Climate change for example gained increased international public attention with the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, but the following years saw different responses to this shift in public awareness from different governments (Lorenzoni and Pidgeon, 2006).

During the past fifteen years the European Union has been trying to take a leading role on the issue of climate change as evidenced by the European Commission's initiative setting, middle and long term policy strategy². In the United States, after the fossil fuel friendly Bush administration, Barack Obama started his presidential term by advocating the need to promote the increasing use of renewable energy sources in his inaugural address. (Randerson, 2009) Meanwhile, the other big polluter, China is working hard to establish a multilateral world order in which it sees itself as an advocate of the interest of developing countries regarding climate change.

² http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/strategicplanning/index_en.htm

Most of the developing countries are in fact the ones who are most affected by the adverse effects of climate change. At the same time, as evidenced by the presentation of Anthony Leiserowitz at the Copenhagen Climate Conference, usually there is very little awareness of the issue in these states. (Leiserowitz, 2009) The previously mentioned Gallup Poll³-based presentation also points out a very strongly distinguished North-South division on climate change awareness.

The implications of the different levels of environmental consciousness are twofold. First, in the global South, public pressure on governments may not be as strong because of the lack of awareness. In the global North however, where the electorate is more informed about climate change (as signaled by a clear majority of responses reporting awareness of climate change as well as identifying climate change as a human-caused phenomenon), they can exert greater pressure on their countries' leadership.

Therefore it would be interesting to conduct quantitative analysis on both developing and developed countries over a period of time, to see how and if different outcomes of different climate change summits shaped public opinion in one way or another.

Hypergame based alignment theories

In a future research project it could be interesting and rewarding look into how game theoretical methods can be used to model the alignment between state actors in the agenda manipulation process. Constructing an analytical model based on mathematical approach makes both the presentation of ideas and their falsification clear and easy to understand.

Utilizing well constructed game theoretical models have the added benefit of offering some clues as to what is likely to happen in a given situation in the future which can give decision makers the means to fight the obstruction of the agenda setting process in the future.

These models don't simply provide a descriptive formulation, but also help to create a better understanding of how agenda manipulation works in international negotiations. Non-decision

³ Gallup World Poll methodology: Annual surveys in over 150 countries, covering around 95% of World population. Nationally representative, typically $n=1000$. The poll contains a wide range of questions, regarding food and shelter, well-being, politics, values, environment, etc, translated into major local languages. Four questions on climate change from 2007-2009: awareness and self reported knowledge, causes (human or natural), risk perception (personal threat), national government action.

making in such situations where states simultaneously decide on some form of alignment can be seen as a hypergame problem in which actors with limited information sequentially react to the choices of each other.

Studying what methods of game theory can be used to model international negotiations could yield interesting findings and new insights. “Prisoner’s dilemma” could be one possibility since it deals with the lack of trust between the actors, while the idea of “tragedy of commons” can be used to understand environmental security as a “global public good” with all the related problems such as the free rider syndrome and other negative externalities.

Conclusion

The main goal of the master thesis was to investigate the mechanisms of agenda manipulation in international negotiations through a series of case studies. It was established that proper problem delimitation, careful selection of negotiation strategies, the existing mobilization of bias, and non-decision making methods can all contribute to successful agenda manipulation.

It was established that the ability to affect the agenda setting process does not depend only on a state's relative power. There exist certain outside conditions that are impossible to change during the negotiations and they might favor one side over another. The existence of various biases and the path dependency created by past negotiations can mean that even stronger states fail at agenda manipulation.

Moreover, as it was presented in the third case study, alignment choices and alliances can have a great impact on who defines the agenda. This means that relatively weak states can also have important bargaining power and can swing negotiation outcomes one way or another.

Analyzing the behavior of the BASIC countries and the United States showed that agenda manipulation is not only aimed at advancing a state's own interests, but negotiators are also concerned with other states' gains, and thus relative gains can become more important than absolute gains.

Perhaps the most important implication of the thesis and in particular the case study section is that it is very difficult to avoid abusive agenda manipulation and non-decision making. It was shown however, that when states can exercise credible pressure over each other, negotiations are more likely to end in a success.

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