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# Comparative Environmental Politics in a Global World

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## Questions Transcend Borders

At first glance, the Maine lobster industry and traditional forest users in western Uganda would appear to have little in common. Yet upon closer examination—and with the benefit of the right analytic tools—patterns emerge that suggest common elements of social organization and similar challenges. In each area, resource users have collectively devised rules to manage a shared resource—controlling access, defining property rights, and establishing a monitoring and enforcement regime. In Maine, coastal territory has traditionally been controlled by groups of fishers known as “harbor gangs” who operate under a strong conservation ethic and well-known norms of territoriality (Acheson 2003). In Uganda’s Echuya forest reserve, forestry officials have partnered with the Abayanda pygmy community to help monitor illegal harvesting of forest products by residents living outside the reserve (Banana and Ssembajjwe 2000).

By adopting a common conceptual currency—in this example, insights from research on common-pool resource regimes—new lines of inquiry arise. What are the rules governing ownership and use of natural resources and how are they established, enforced, and changed? Who participates in rule making? What is the relationship between local rules-in-use and official government policy? How have these local institutions responded to changes driven by technology, shifting social norms, global trade, immigration, and new government regulations?

Turning to the regulation of industrial chemicals and food additives, we might reasonably expect that government assessments of chemical risks would be similar across the countries of Europe and North America. The physiological effects of carcinogens and other harmful chemicals are, after all, identical across borders. Moreover, these countries have strong scientific communities that share professional norms and standards of evidence and have access to the same body of scientific knowledge.

Yet marked differences exist in the assessment of chemical risks even between the United States and the United Kingdom, despite their common linguistic, cultural,

and legal heritage. This variance is due in part to differences in the way that science is organized in distinct national settings. In Western Europe, groups of experts insulated from the public are called upon by policy makers to provide input on regulatory decisions. In contrast, American regulatory agencies have large technical staffs that conduct risk assessments subject to public scrutiny and judicial review. The openness of the US regulatory system is a direct consequence of that country's constitutional dispersal of power, augmented by legal provisions for citizen oversight that were included in major environmental statutes of the 1970s and 1980s. This has produced what Sheila Jasanoff terms "scientific pluralism" in the United States, with highly contested and often inconclusive debates over the scientific basis of government decisions. In response, US regulators have resorted to uniform, quantitative risk assessment methodologies that can withstand judicial challenges, whereas their European counterparts tend to rely on expert consensus (Jasanoff 1990).

These differences in the assessment of environment risks are compounded by distinct regulatory styles. Compared to the United States, the enforcement of laws governing industrial processes in Sweden, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany is more flexible and consensus-based, with greater adaptability to the circumstances surrounding specific chemicals and industries and more leeway afforded to regulatory bureaucracies (Kelman 1981; Brickman, Jasanoff, and Ilgen 1985; Vogel 2003). Cross-national differences in environmental regulation arise not only from government practices but also from the comparative strength and strategies of environmental movements and their relations to the state (Dryzek et al. 2003; Dalton 1994). Moreover, different values and concerns animate the various publics of Western industrialized countries. Genetically modified foods have encountered considerable public opposition in Canada and the European Union, where citizens are skeptical of their safety and benefits, yet these foods have become a mainstay of the American food supply with barely a nod from the public (Gaskell et al. 2006; Jasanoff 2005; Kurzer and Cooper 2007).

Operating alongside and countervailing the "pull" toward national distinctiveness are powerful pressures producing a "push" toward convergence. Harmonization of standards and approaches is promoted through international environmental treaties and their associated consensus-building processes, regional trading blocs with common environmental standards (most notably, the European Union), multinational corporations seeking uniform regulatory approaches, shared colonial legacies, and transnational networks among advocacy groups, scientists, and regulators promoting similar ideas in diverse countries (Busch and Jörgens 2005; Haas 1990; Selin and VanDeveer 2006; Garcia-Johnson 2000; Slaughter 1997; DeSombre 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Jordan and Liefferink 2004). As a window into broader processes of globalization, the global spread of environmental concerns

demonstrates that declining national insularity implies something infinitely more nuanced than homogeneity.

### Beyond “Spaceship Earth”: Engaging Complexity, Fostering Understanding

To better understand the political forces shaping social responses to industrial chemicals, forest management, and numerous other environmental problems surely counts among the most important intellectual challenges of our time. When we approach this subject by paying careful attention to domestic politics and institutions, and with an eye to cross-national comparison, we enter the realm of comparative environmental politics (CEP)—the systematic study and comparison of environmental politics in different countries around the globe. To get a handle on this vast subject requires two major analytic tasks: an appreciation for *complexity*—for the diverse and changing manner in which social actors and institutions interact to define and respond to environmental issues in far-flung corners of the globe—and the use of *theoretical tools* that enable us to make sense of this complexity. These two tasks are fundamental to the promise and challenge of comparative environmental politics, so let us begin by considering each in greater detail.

To appreciate the complexity of this subject matter requires that we revisit the seductive holism of the imagery of “spaceship Earth.” Few images have exercised as powerful a force on contemporary political imagination as that of the earth seen from outer space, first transmitted in its entirety by the Apollo 17 spacecraft in 1972. The political connotation of this image as it has been interpreted in an outpouring of cultural literature—particularly the unity and common cause of humankind and the beautiful yet finite physical underpinnings of our civilization—has left an indelible mark on our understanding of ourselves (Jasanoff 2001), one further pronounced by renewed interest in globalization. That the common cause of humanity is both an unmet aspiration and a physical reality plain for all to see suggests the hope and irony of the image.

Yet as with all powerful symbols, the success of the imagery of planetary unity lies in highlighting certain features at the same time that it downplays others. If we change our analytic lens slightly, focusing on portions of the earth rather than on the whole, the images are far from uniform. Large-scale human-induced changes can be seen from space, including huge urban centers and plumes of smoke from forest fires that obscure entire countries across the Amazon basin and throughout Southeast Asia. But some areas are markedly more urbanized than others, and some places produce little in the way of air pollution. If we switch our analytic lens to a yet more powerful resolution, what snaps into focus is an exciting array of human actions of almost endless variety. In Tehran, we find artists organizing an exhibition to publicize the plight of children hospitalized as a result of poor air quality.<sup>1</sup> In

Hong Kong, lawmakers are struggling to protect the aesthetic and environmental qualities of Victoria Harbor in the face of an intransigent planning bureaucracy and uncertain political environment following the transition from British to Chinese rule (Husock 1998). In Ecuador, Amazonian indigenous peoples are demanding approaches to conservation that respect traditional land rights and are forging transnational linkages with indigenous groups throughout the world (Brysk 2000). In both Hanford (United States) and Mayak (Russia)—the sites of the largest nuclear weapons production facilities during the Cold War—the frustrated efforts of citizens living with a legacy of radioactive waste raise important questions about the relationship between national defense and democratic control (Dalton et al. 1999).

Confronted with this diverse array of domestic political experiences, we encounter a second analytic challenge, namely, that it is easy to become overwhelmed with the details. What could Iranian scholars and activists possibly learn from political outcomes in Hong Kong? Should a student interested in community water management in Bogotá read about experiences in Dakar? Clearly, one cannot become an expert in every country; gaining a sophisticated understanding of politics in even a single country (or, indeed, in a single region or city) is a formidable undertaking.<sup>2</sup> But does this mean that we are condemned to study in isolation the cases we know best?

This challenge is well known to the broader field of comparative politics. Reflecting on the demands of making meaningful comparisons across disparate societies, Gabriel Almond wrote in 1960, “The magnitude of the formal and empirical knowledge required of the political scientist of the future staggers the imagination and lames the will. We have been accustomed to working in a dim and fitful light” (64). The answer, then and now, resides in the use of theory—the shared vocabulary, concepts, analytic approaches, and methods that enable us to make sense of this complexity and to engage in a cumulative conversation across borders. Although a theoretical orientation is needed in every area of social science inquiry, it is especially important for comparative political studies because of the geographically dispersed nature of the field research. Too often the product of research goes unnoticed because it confines itself, in its inspiration and applications, to the geographical borders in which the study was conducted.

Theory is indispensable for understanding the world, learning from it, and changing the course of events. Although familiar terrain to scholars, many students and practitioners assume that to be theoretical in orientation is to willingly detach one’s investigation from events in the real world. A theoretical approach by necessity entails abstraction from the details (see Sartori 1970; Collier and Mahoney 1993). But this is done for the purpose of greater understanding, to bring insights from a broader category of phenomena (social movements, democratization, and the like) to bear on particular cases of these phenomena—suggesting lines of inquiry, con-

cepts, explanatory hypotheses, and measurement tools. In turn, theory allows the investigator to contribute insights from the case to this broader enterprise involving a larger research community (see Wapner 2003). To be theoretical in orientation therefore means two things: to draw on and contribute to an identifiable conversation in the research literature, and to attempt to project beyond the data at hand, crafting conclusions that can be tested in other settings. Thus theory requires the use of concepts and methods that travel well, offering a medium for the exchange of ideas among contributors with diverse geographic and topical interests. This approach allows us to ask, “What is this a case of?”

To resist the facile holism of spaceship Earth yet provide a medium for meaningful comparison of the complexities: this is the core challenge of comparative environmental politics. When we do so, we can speak to questions that are not only relevant for human-environment interactions but that also address the central and enduring concerns of social science. Why are social movements more successful in some countries than in others (Dryzek et al. 2003)? Why do many political leaders choose to squander their countries’ natural wealth, seemingly against their own national interests (Ascher 1999; Ross 2001)? What processes govern the spread of policy ideas across borders (Busch and Jörgens 2005; Steinberg 2001)? Which types of policies achieve what goals—and under what conditions (Scruggs 2003; Harrington, Morgenstern, and Sterner 2004)? Will the decentralization of political power produce better social outcomes (Ribot 1999; Kingston 2001)? Can global governance objectives be achieved while respecting local autonomy (Brechtin et al. 2003)? Under what circumstances are new political parties likely to have an influence (Kitschelt 1989)?

This book is born of a sense that comparative political inquiry has a great deal to offer our understanding of such questions, yet largely as a result of the inadequate attention paid to theory, it is difficult to know where to turn. Our goal is therefore to take stock of the developing field of CEP and to identify promising new avenues for exploration with the following audiences in mind. The first consists of faculty and students in the field of global environmental politics (GEP) who would like to complement the international relations focus of their courses and research with analytic frameworks for understanding the domestic forces shaping global environmental outcomes. Alternatively, those in the field of comparative politics who would like to focus on environmental issues, or those in environmental studies and public policy who would like to better understand what comparative politics has to offer, will find here a number of useful approaches and will hopefully emerge with a clear sense of the leading edges and current gaps in the field. Finally, although practitioners (policy makers, activists, resource managers, and others) will not find a “how to” approach in these pages, our hope is that they will come away with a new understanding of the broader phenomena of which their daily experiences are a part.

In what follows, we begin by describing some of the distinctive advantages of comparative research. We then argue that comparative political inquiry has much to offer the established field of global environmental politics and should occupy a more central position in the field, alongside and in close conversation with contributions from international relations. We conclude with an overview of the book chapters, each of which tackles a distinct set of social problems and exemplifies the diversity of intellectual approaches possible within this exciting field.

### The Comparative Advantage

Why compare political systems across borders? There are many reasons for doing so, and the question is admittedly akin to asking why one might read a hundred books on a subject rather than just one. One answer comes from policy-oriented research: comparative inquiry expands the political imagination. If politics is the art of the possible, then comparative inquiry brings into view a wide array of political experiences, raising new possibilities that had previously not been considered. Portugal's advances in energy efficiency, Costa Rica's exemplary national park system, Singapore's successful anticorruption efforts—such efforts inspire, suggest models for study and emulation, and force a reexamination of our assumptions regarding political feasibility. How can it be “impossible” to achieve lower carbon emissions or habitat and species protection in one country, when these goals are being achieved through policy making and social change in other countries?

Another answer to the question “Why compare?” stems from the theoretical and explanatory aims of comparative politics. Systematic cross-national comparison helps us to understand the importance of *political context*. Nations and other geographical political units—cities, regions, states—are in many respects worlds unto themselves, representing unique combinations of actors and institutions. Notwithstanding the intensive exchange of ideas and resources across borders, these combine in distinctive ways in particular places. Political systems are “systems” in the sense that they develop system-wide norms, identities, rules, and axes of contention that affect the operation of the system components (executive-military relations, media practices, ethnic identities, social cleavages, legal traditions, policy-making styles, and so on). Path-dependent processes reinforce these self-referential tendencies of political units. Cultures “dig in,” whether these are cultures of protest (student barricades in the streets of Paris, puppet theater in Javanese villages) or the norms guiding legislative debate in the British Parliament. Party systems emerge, legacies of democracy and authoritarianism shape institutional designs, and shared historical memories infuse events (such as the adoption of biotechnology) with different meanings in different places.

These forces produce unspoken assumptions about what is normal, feasible, and right. Socialization processes imbue the citizen and scholar alike with countless such assumptions, and these are suddenly called into question when we leave the place or case we know best and enter another such world. Like foreign travel generally, comparative inquiry opens our minds, challenges our assumptions, and creates a burning desire to make sense of it all. We discover anomalies that do not fit our most cherished theories and new patterns that call out for new explanations.

Comparative research, at its best, occupies this position between theoretical generalization and an appreciation for the importance of context. As Richard Rose argues, “The study of comparative politics rejects the extremes of universalism and particularism; it assumes what may be termed ‘bounded variability.’ Anyone who engages in comparative research immediately notices differences between countries. Yet anyone who persists in wide-ranging comparative analysis also recognizes boundaries to these differences” (1991, 447). Neither sweeping generalizations nor an endless stream of unique descriptive case studies will produce accurate or useful knowledge about environmental politics around the globe.

It is equally important to clarify what comparative research is not. It is not the “practice of comparison” in any general sense. Investigations of variance across two or more cases play a central role in every field of research, from epidemiology to history to a regression analysis of congressional voting behavior. Comparative politics lays no special claim to the method of comparing two or more outcomes in order to discern broader patterns. Rather, the hallmark of comparative politics research is that it relates particular empirical instances to broader theories by making systematic comparisons across political units. Thus a single-country study that thoroughly engages a broader comparative literature represents the best of the comparative tradition in a way that a three-country study with only a passing nod at theory does not. The litmus test in each case is whether the results speak directly to the interests of those studying other topics and places.

Nor is the essence of comparative research an approximation of controlled laboratory experiments through “the comparative method,” commonly interpreted as the controlled comparison of cases. Some pioneers of the field, such as Lijphart (1971), hoped that comparative case approaches—notably John Stuart Mill’s ([1843] 1967) method of difference and method of agreement<sup>3</sup>—would provide political scientists with an analog to statistical and experimental techniques of scientific inquiry. But the controlled comparison of cases is a blunt tool for drawing conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships, especially in complex settings governed by multiple and probabilistic causation (Liebersohn 1991; Steinberg 2007; George and Bennett 2005, 163)—precisely the sorts of settings that confront students of environmental politics. The limitations of the “controlled” comparisons of cases (of which Mill was keenly aware) can be appreciated by considering a smoker and a

nonsmoker, each of whom live to be a hundred years old. Inferring that smoking is therefore causally irrelevant to longevity would require the highly unrealistic assumption that to qualify as a cause, an antecedent must be sufficient to produce the outcome in every case. It is because of the probabilistic nature of causation—with antecedents *tending* to produce particular outcomes, in ways that are highly dependent on the broader context—that experimental control and analogous methods of control in statistical analysis require large-N research designs.

Mill's methods do often serve as a valuable first step in comparative research, raising interesting questions worthy of exploration. For example, the observation that Western industrialized nations with active environmental movements vary in their responses to climate change suggests that there are other causal forces at play, beyond wealth and social mobilization, that shape national responsiveness to global environmental problems. However, identifying and characterizing those causal forces requires an alternative to controlled comparison, such as historical process tracing and other forms of within-case analysis (Roberts 1996; George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2007; Tetlock and Belkin 1996) as well as various quantitative approaches (Ragin 2008) and creative combinations of methodologies (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). As the contributions to this volume demonstrate, comparative research draws on a wide range of intellectual traditions and methodological approaches.

### **A Fresh Take on Global Environmental Politics**

By far the most prolific source of political science research on the environment has been the field of international relations. Especially since the rise to prominence of new transboundary and global-scale environmental issues in the late 1980s—from the Chernobyl nuclear accident to climate change, stratospheric ozone depletion, concern over the plight of tropical rainforests, and the rise of the discourse of “sustainable development”—international relations has provided a fertile theoretical terrain for political scientists interested in understanding and responding to these issues. As is usefully summarized in a number of reviews (Dauvergne 2005; Mitchell 2002; Zürn 1998; Paterson 2005), the challenge of motivating international cooperation on the environment in the absence of any government authority at the global level has led researchers to study topics like international agenda setting (Young 1998; Lipschutz 1991), the impact and effectiveness of international treaties (Miles et al. 2002; Hovi, Sprinz, and Underdal 2003), the influence of science on multilateral decision processes (Parson 2003; Haas 1990), and the relative roles of sovereign states and nonstate actors in responding to global problems (Betsill and Corell 2001; Wapner 1996). The result is a vibrant field that sheds light on the ways in which actors, institutions, power, and ideas shape the prospects for cooperation and the

distributive results among participants in international politics (see also O'Neill 2009; Mitchell 2010; and Axelrod, VanDeveer, and Downie 2011).

Dauvergne (2005) observes that as the field of global environmental politics has grown in confidence and independence, it has begun to expand beyond its traditional base in international relations, incorporating insights from disparate fields ranging from sociology to law, philosophy, geography, and economics. Therefore, the time is ripe to tap deeper into the comparative politics tradition and to bring its many insights to bear on environmental questions (see Kamieniecki and Sanasarian 1990; McBeath and Rosenberg 2006). Indeed, this task is long overdue. For too long, analyses of global environmental politics have been confined to international negotiations, paying lip service to the role of domestic politics and institutions without engaging in theoretically grounded empirical research on these topics. Comparative environmental politics will likely constitute one of the leading edges of the next generation of research on global environmental politics and environmental studies. It is essential, however, that this new field develop in close conversation with international relations research. At a time when the discipline of political science is witnessing increasing integration between international relations and comparative politics, we do not propose the creation of a new fiefdom. Rather, we hope that CEP rapidly matures into one major stream in the mainstream of global environmental politics. To appreciate the potential synergies, let us consider what comparative politics research can offer our understanding of collective action to protect the global environment.

### **Understanding Causal Processes**

The success of international initiatives to protect the global environment depends on our ability to produce an accurate picture of the behaviors and social relations driving environmental problems. It also demands a sophisticated understanding of what is actually required to bring about change in a given social system (Young 1999; Steinberg 2007). This requirement presents a special challenge for analysts accustomed to focusing their attention exclusively on either the local, national, or international level because—in contrast to the traditional subjects of international diplomacy, such as military relations and trade—the success of international environmental policy typically requires reforms at multiple levels of social organization. Whereas trade and arms control regimes consist of agreements among governments to change government behavior, international environmental regimes consist of agreements among governments to change private behavior within their borders. The activities driving global environmental outcomes are so heterogeneous that we cannot possibly understand the prospects for international environmental governance merely by studying diplomatic negotiations. The success of accords forged in places like New York and Geneva ultimately depends on political dynamics in

Jakarta, Beijing, Sacramento, and São Paulo. Comparative politics is ideally suited to the task of analyzing domestic environmental governance, encouraging comparative inquiry into institutions, policy-making styles, modes of social mobilization, and the origins of public preferences.

The importance of studying causal processes becomes clear when we consider the causal aspirations of multilateral environmental institutions and nongovernmental advocacy campaigns. If one goal is to change the attitudes and behaviors of policy-making elites, what do we know about the origins of elite policy preferences (Putnam 1971; Grindle 2000; Peritore 1999)? If the goal is to build capacity for environmental management in participant countries (Haas, Keohane, and Levy 1993), what does the literature tell us about the dynamics of capacity building (Jänicke and Weidner 1997; VanDeveer and Dabelko 2001)? If the aim is to institutionalize norms of sustainability in domestic systems, what determines whether new mandates become merely a document on a shelf, a short-lived burst of activity within one administration, or a long-lasting program of reform (Thelen 2002; Sikkink 1991; Steinberg, chapter 10, this volume)?

Comparative investigations into causal processes can shed light on a question of central importance to global environmental politics, namely why countries support or shun international environmental cooperation (Bernauer et al. 2010; Bernhagen 2008; Bättig and Bernauer 2009; Raustiala 1997). If a country's support for a climate treaty is partly a function of national interests, as Sprinz and Vaahoranta (1994) argue, we are left with the question of what determines those interests. Surely it is not material conditions alone. When the government of the Philippines is forming a position with respect to mandatory limits on carbon dioxide emissions, several conflicting interests are at play (Steinberg 2002, 14). The country is a vast archipelago vulnerable to rising sea levels produced by climate change, which would dictate support for strong emissions reductions. Yet strategic links to the Middle East, where many Filipino expatriates work, would suggest support for OPEC's go-slow approach to regulating fossil fuels. As a member of the G-77 coalition of developing countries, the Philippines would be wise to stand behind the positions favored by Brazil, India, and China, which dominate the G-77 and oppose mandatory limits on emissions for the developing world. Clearly, interest-based models of national support for international regimes would benefit from more systematic inquiry into domestic processes of interest aggregation, such as interagency competition, the relative roles of bureaucrats and politicians in policy formation, and interest group access to foreign policy making—all factors that have been intensively studied within the comparative politics tradition.

Comparative political analysis also has a great deal to offer constructivist and pluralist approaches to the question of national interests (see Katzenstein 1996; Moravcsik 1997). Haas (1990) makes a compelling argument that national support

for environmental treaties is affected in part by the ability of networks of concerned technical experts to shape policy makers' conceptions of national interests. Yet this approach begs the question of the causal mechanisms through which experts influence the state and why this differs across nations. The same question applies to pluralist models emphasizing the pressures exerted by social groups. Only through the comparative study of political parties, think tanks, legislatures, electoral systems, bureaucracies, and social movement influence can we begin to come to terms with the domestic origins of national interests (see Putnam 1988).

### **The Enduring Relevance of Domestic Policy**

International environmental policy making is an extremely difficult undertaking, and the need to achieve consensus among large numbers of states often hinders efforts at effective regulation. Bodansky observes, "Attempting to achieve consensus is time-consuming and difficult. Agreements tend to be inflexible, given the difficulties of gaining agreement on any changes. Moreover, agreements must either represent the least-common-denominator, and thus be weak, or must create different obligations for different states. In many cases, reaching agreement at all is impossible" (1999, 607).

Because the international system is not governed by an authoritative legal infrastructure, the most powerful nations may have the ability to torpedo agreements favored by a large majority of the world's nations (witness the US role in the Law of the Sea). Long-standing grievances in North-South relations further complicate matters, as developing countries eager to escape the legacy of colonial rule are wary of entering into agreements that would grant foreign powers a say in the management of their natural resources (Najam 2005). Both of these dynamics have visibly slowed global responses to problems like climate change. Moreover, the sheer number of international environmental commitments has produced "summit fatigue" (VanDeveer 2003) as decades of diplomatic initiatives and the burden of national reporting requirements under dozens of agreements have tempered enthusiasm for events like the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development ("Rio+20"), which is a mere shadow of the international mobilization surrounding the Rio Earth Summit in 1992.

Given these challenges, it is not uncommon for students (and more than a few professors) to emerge from courses in global environmental politics with a sense of discouragement about the prospects for positive change. Yet there are other stories and other social arenas in which the possibilities for creative institutional reform are only beginning to be explored. While North and South often seem at loggerheads in multilateral diplomatic venues, far removed from the halls of the United Nations one finds environmental officials and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from developing countries engaged in a wide range of agreements with counterparts in

the North—from the creation of innovative institutions for financing conservation to collaborations among air quality regulators. At the international level, the United States became the pariah of climate change policy in the years following the signing of the Kyoto Protocol and has a dismal record of ratifying and implementing the environmental treaties it signs (Schreurs, Selin, and VanDeveer 2009). Domestically, however, during this same period a grassroots movement for the reduction of greenhouse gases emerged at the level of American cities, college campuses, and states—many of which have adopted reduction targets more stringent than those required under the protocol (Rabe 2004; Selin and VanDeveer 2005, 2007, 2009).

The contrast between domestic initiative and international stalemate is equally apparent in the forestry sector. While the prospects for an international forestry treaty appear increasingly remote—due in no small measure to opposition from countries like Brazil that fear incursions on national sovereignty—at home, Brazil is experimenting with a system that distributes tax revenues to local governments on the basis of their success with biodiversity conservation. Demonstrating the perils of consensus-based international policy, the capstone legal instrument for protecting the earth's natural heritage—the Convention on Biological Diversity—is far too vague in its regulatory commitments to protect much of anything. Yet domestically, and with help from an array of international collaborators, numerous tropical countries are working to increase the size and effectiveness of their national parks (Brooks et al. 2004). In diplomatic venues, developing countries rightly bemoan the lack of overseas development assistance for sustainable development, yet billions of dollars in tourist revenues are pouring into nature-based tourism in these countries (Honey 2008). Many of these initiatives are experimental and suffer no fewer challenges than international regimes, though the hurdles are different. The point is that there is a world of social activity and institutional innovation beyond the corridors of international summitry.

GEP scholars have taken a growing interest in local environmental politics, particularly as it interacts with processes and discourses of globalization (Rodrigues 2000; Cooper and Vargas 2004). This interest in “rediscovering the local” (Jasanoff and Martello 2004) connects well with the goal of this book to promote greater use of the comparative politics tradition in environmental research. Yet to characterize the initiatives described earlier as principally “local” or even “nongovernmental” in nature would be inaccurate. In the conceptual repertoire of global environmentalism, the phrase “think globally, act locally” has created a habit of overlooking the level of social organization in which political authority to act on environmental problems is concentrated: the nation state. As Barry and Eckersley argue, “It would be a great pity if environmental activists and NGOs were to turn their backs on what still remains the primary and most pervasive form of political governance in the world today. Despite the changes wrought by globalization, democratic states

still have more steering capacity and legitimacy to regulate the activities of corporations and other social agents along ecologically sustainable lines in more systematic ways than any nonstate alternative” (2005, xii).

For international relations scholars steeped in traditions of state-centric analysis, a focus on nongovernmental actors has provided a refreshing alternative line of inquiry (Lipschutz 1992; Wapner 1996). And to be sure, the growth of transnational activity by nonstate actors is one of the most exciting and important developments in global environmental politics in recent decades. In the rush to document and understand this new phenomenon, however, it would be a mistake to overlook the enduring relevance of national institutions and associated political processes. According to Ostrom (1990), supportive national policy is one of the few recurring ingredients necessary for the success of local, community-based environmental initiatives. Moreover, national policy has a profound influence on the strength and impact of civil society organizations. Tax breaks for nonprofit organizations, the protection of civil liberties including the right to organize and protest, citizen access to the courts, comanagement arrangements that allow NGOs to participate in the provision of public services—all of these speak to the enduring relevance of the nation-state and the need to move beyond zero-sum conceptions of state-society relations (Steinberg 2005; Krishna and Uphoff 2004). More than any other field, comparative politics has devoted enormous energy to understanding modern states and their characteristics, preferences, impacts, social origins, and evolution. Comparative political inquiry can infuse GEP with a greater understanding of this central player in global environmental politics and its many roles.<sup>4</sup>

### **From Nonstate Actors to Social Histories**

Comparative research can also offer GEP a more complete, historically grounded account of the role of nonstate actors in global environmental politics. There is a tendency in GEP research to focus on categories of nonstate actors—scientists, NGOs, business interests, indigenous groups—disembodied from their social milieu and from the specific social histories that give rise to them and shape their strategies and demands. This analytic bias mirrors the quasi-corporatist organization of the United Nations negotiating forums and summits that are the subject of so much GEP research, where public participation is segmented into officially designated representatives of “youth,” “NGOs,” “the private sector,” and the like. The disembodied nature of research on nonstate actors is abetted by a tendency to study only the transnational component of these groups’ activities. The NGOs and indigenous groups appear on the empirical canvas only when they sit at the international negotiating table or launch a transnational advocacy campaign, and are viewed in isolation from their national cultures and histories. Nonstate participants in international politics are a small and unrepresentative subset of social actors in their

home countries (Steinberg and Garcia-Johnson 2001). There they are deeply embedded in relations with diverse organizations, demands, and expectations stemming from unique configurations of politics and history (Hsiao et al. 1999; Hunold and Dryzek 2002). We need comparative research on the sociology of national scientific and business communities, on the formative political experiences of environmental activists, and on the ways in which environmental demands—such as concern about intellectual property rights under the Convention on Biological Diversity—are shaped by long-standing social concerns like sovereign control of resources (see Mortimer 1984). A more socially grounded understanding of nonstate actors inevitably involves comparative social history and the systematic study of historical materials (Lipschutz 2001). An historical turn in GEP research would be a welcome development in a field in which the divide between the contemporary environmental era and a murky prehistory is usually placed somewhere around 1972.

Studying social actors within their social histories is necessary if we are to make sense of one of the most important recent developments in global environmental politics: the rise of popular support and mobilization for environmental causes in a wide range of non-Western societies (Lee and So 1999; Baver and Lynch 2006; Christen et al. 1998). Researchers have begun to document and analyze these phenomena, but there have been few attempts to share results across regions, to take stock of the state of the art, and to identify promising directions for future collaborative research programs. Just as the rise of new nation-states after World War II prompted research on political development and postcolonial studies, the environmental movements that have arisen in the 1980s and 1990s in developing and postcommunist economies require that we revisit established orthodoxies, like the clearly mistaken notion that environmental concern is the province of wealthy people and wealthy nations (Dunlap and York, chapter 4, this volume; Steinberg 2001). By embedding comparative social history within the field of GEP, we are also in a position to appreciate the importance of transnational exchanges of resources and ideas in the development of domestic environmental movements and to explore how these interact with changing domestic opportunity structures shaped by national processes such as democratization, economic development, urbanization, decentralization, and state building.

### **An Overview of the Book**

To take advantage of the enormous potential of comparative environmental politics research requires that we build bridges between the broader field of comparative politics and the traditional concerns of environmental studies. To this end, chapter 2 surveys the literatures in comparative politics and comparative environmental politics in order to identify actual and potential points of contact between the two.

To our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive review of the literature in comparative environmental politics.<sup>5</sup> We find a surprisingly large literature that explores domestic environmental politics around the world. We also discover, however, that it has developed in a fragmented manner and largely in isolation from comparative politics, with its enormous literature, diverse theoretical traditions, and status as one of the major fields within political science. Scholars of comparative politics, in turn, have been silent on environmental questions, foregoing the opportunity to explore the associated processes of social transformation and to engage in a theoretically informed discussion of one of the greatest challenges facing humanity today.

In the remaining chapters, the authors undertake this bridge-building task in a variety of ways, each exemplifying the “comparative advantage” of melding the general and the particular, using theoretical lenses to better understand concrete, real-world problems of politics and environmental management, and casting the results in terms that travel well across borders. Our aim is to offer readers a convenient way to sample the major intellectual currents of this new field within the covers of one volume. Given this goal, we deemed it counterproductive to impose a uniform analytic framework running throughout all of the chapters. Rather, each author was invited to contribute a self-contained overview of one dimension of the field—introducing readers to specific literatures within comparative politics and using these to shed light on environmental politics around the globe. Instructors of courses in comparative politics will find a fresh take on a number of standard topics, including democracy and authoritarianism (chapters 8 and 9), European Union enlargement (chapter 11), policy theory (chapter 10), social values (chapter 4), states and political development (chapter 3), federalism and decentralization (chapters 12 and 13), political parties (chapter 7), social movements (chapter 5), state-society relations (chapters 5 and 6), and institutional design (chapters 10 and 12). In terms of geographic diversity, the volume includes explicit treatment of industrialized countries on both sides of the Atlantic (chapters 3, 7, 11, and 13), as well as Central and Eastern Europe (chapters 8, 10, and 11) and a wide range of developing countries (chapters 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12). Those interested in specific environmental issues will find coverage of forests (chapter 12), climate change (chapter 13), water (chapter 9), land use and pollution (chapter 8), and many other topics. There are many issues and regions worthy of stand-alone chapters that we could not include without producing an unwieldy text. By adopting an explicitly theoretical orientation and applying this to real-world problems, each chapter is designed to offer conclusions with relevance far beyond the particular cases and countries discussed.

The chapters in part II provide a broad perspective on the challenge of transforming states and societies to take greater account of environmental concerns. The “greening” of state structures and social relations is an ongoing, uneven, and highly

contested process. In chapter 3, James Meadowcroft explores the history and prospects of incorporating environmental protection alongside the traditional concerns of modern states. Exemplifying the tradition of comparative macrosocial analysis (see Pierson 2003), Meadowcroft situates the relatively recent phenomenon of environmental regulation in the broader context of the evolution of the state as it has branched out from a focus on national security and economic growth to include the modern welfare state and now, perhaps, environmental sustainability. In chapter 4, Riley Dunlap and Richard York demonstrate the value of combining systematic empirical investigations—in this instance, cross-national surveys of environmental public opinion—with theoretical frameworks that facilitate cumulative learning and allow us to draw broader conclusions about the social dimensions of environmental problems. Based on an extensive review of the published research, they conclude that significant levels of environmental concern are in evidence in a wide range of countries and at every socioeconomic level within societies. These results not only require that we revisit theories positing that environmentalism is an elite concern, but also raise a host of practical questions as to why we see so much variance in institutional performance across countries whose citizens profess concern about environmental quality. Chapters 3 and 4 draw as heavily on sociological research as political science, demonstrating that comparative environmental politics, like comparative political research more broadly, need not confine itself to insights issuing from the discipline of political science.

The authors in part III look more closely at nonstate actors and social mobilization. In chapter 5, Kate O'Neill provides an overview of the stunning array of environmental movements that have arisen around the world and shows how social movement theory can help us understand their origins, aims, methods, and impacts at both domestic and transnational levels. Of course, the set of nonstate actors shaping environmental outcomes is by no means limited to environmental NGOs. A significant contribution of environmental politics research to our broader understanding of political life can be found in renewed attention to the behavior of firms and industry associations, the subject of analysis by Deborah Rigling Gallagher and Erika Weinthal in chapter 6. Traditionally, the social sciences have considered the political behavior of firms to be a relatively fixed (and therefore analytically uninteresting) function of the requirements of capital accumulation, viewed through a Marxist lens, or as regrettably influential, in the disproportionate impact of business in liberal democracies and in international economic relations (Lindblom 1982; Evans 1979). Gallagher and Weinthal find that in the environmental realm, the role of the private sector is often considerably more complex, as they demonstrate through an analysis of the movement for corporate social responsibility.

Political parties play a special role as moderators between social interests and policy outcomes, and research on their origins, strategies, and different roles cross-

nationally is well represented within comparative politics (Mair 1990; Aldrich 1995; Kitschelt 1989). Michael O'Neill demonstrates in chapter 7 that parties have been viewed by environmental movements as an important venue for translating green social concerns into green state structures. He examines this process in Western Europe, where green parties have enjoyed the most success yet face trade-offs between the need to retain support from grassroots constituencies and to strike political bargains within governing coalitions in order to have an impact on public policy.

The origin and effectiveness of public policies in diverse political settings is the focus of part IV. In chapter 8, Kathryn Hochstetler compares the environmental performance of democracies and authoritarian regimes. She reviews contributions from political theorists regarding the possibility of sustainability within democracies and compares these theoretical expectations to the empirical record, examining quantitative and historical evidence on the environmental performance of different regime types within Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. Jeannie Sowers takes a closer look at policy making under authoritarian regimes in chapter 9, asking why attempts to promote more participatory and decentralized approaches to water management in Egypt have failed despite strong support from international donors and domestic water experts. She argues that to understand the prospects for environmental policy change in the Middle East, we must disaggregate the concept of the authoritarian state, moving beyond assumptions of monolithic central bureaucracies with strong regulatory capacities and instead paying closer attention to the "local state" and the operation of political coalitions and networks across different scales. In a different take on the relationship between governing structures and environmental outcomes, in chapter 10 Paul Steinberg explores the prospects for environmental policy reform in developing and postcommunist countries, many of which are plagued by chronic political and economic instability. In industrialized democracies, system-wide "shocks" of this nature are commonly associated with opportunities for institutional innovation. Steinberg finds that in most of the world, however, where these same factors are present in excess, institution reform is inhibited unless there are mechanisms of continuity that allow for long-term "governance across governments."

Part V takes up the theme of multilevel governance. In chapter 11, Liliana Andonova and Stacy VanDeveer describe how Europeanization has shaped environmental politics and ecological outcomes in the postcommunist states of Central and Eastern Europe over their two decades of transition. They argue that international commitments, such as those found in treaties, and broader transnational socialization processes help to explain the rapid and profound influence of international institutions on domestic policy and politics in the region. However, the substantial policy convergence witnessed in the region is revealed to be something other than homogenization. Although many new member states have moved closer to

European Union standards, considerable divergence remains. In chapter 12, Arun Agrawal takes stock of what we have learned from the literature on local governance of common-pool resources, a topic that was the focus of the 2009 Nobel Prize in economics. As is the case with O'Neill's overview of environmental movements, the sheer volume and diversity of these local experiences speaks to the challenge outlined at the beginning of this chapter, namely, the need to convey an appreciation for complexity without become overwhelmed by it. Agrawal accomplishes this task by identifying recurrent themes that run across all studies of local commons and places these alongside a number of context-specific factors that warrant against hasty generalizations about the conditions under which local communities will manage resources sustainably.

The final chapter in part V, by Stacy VanDeveer and Henrik Selin, explores the ways in which federalism and multilevel governance help to explain divergence in the responses of the European Union and the United States to global climate change. GEP researchers are increasingly interested in how environmental governance plays out across multiple levels of authority, from local to national to global. Yet this research has not taken adequate advantage of the comparative politics literature on federalism and the ways in which federal institutions shape political mobilization and policy outcomes. VanDeveer and Selin argue that to explain the cross-Atlantic divergence in climate policy, we must pay attention to the federalist structure of government within the European Union and the United States. Comparative federalism can help us to understand why California's climate change and energy policies resemble those of the European Union more than those of the US federal government. Given the growing number of federalist and decentralized governance systems around the world, research on comparative environmental federalism has a rich future and further demonstrates the need to incorporate theories and concepts of comparative politics into the mainstream of GEP research.

In the concluding chapter, we return to the relationship between comparative environmental politics and the broader field of comparative politics, exploring more systematically the causes of the present disconnect between the two. Based in part on an empirical analysis of leading comparative politics journals, we conclude that the current schism is largely the result of a mutual distaste (if not disdain) between those concerned with practice (which includes many environmental politics researchers) and those interested in advancing theory (a central concern of scholarship in comparative politics). Echoing Theda Skocpol's (2003) call for "doubly engaged" social science that is both theoretically rigorous and socially relevant, we argue that the sort of bridge-building exercise advocated throughout this volume will benefit both fields. We describe a number of approaches for bridging the worlds of theory and practice, highlighting promising methodologies and research agendas that warrant further attention as the field develops.

## Notes

1. National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*, “Artists Protesting Pollution in Tehran,” Washington, D.C. (March 5, 2000).
2. Consider, for example, the empirical underpinnings of such classic works as Dahl’s (1961) study of New Haven, Connecticut, or Putnam’s (1993) analysis of regional differences within Italy.
3. Mill’s method of difference posits that if conditions present in two cases are alike in all relevant respects but one, and their outcomes differ, then the antecedent condition that varied caused the variation in outcome. Under Mill’s method of agreement, if two cases share a similar outcome but differ with respect to some antecedent, that antecedent is ruled out as a cause.
4. See, for example, Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985; Krasner 1984; Pierson 1996; and Laitin 1992.
5. A pioneering analysis by Lundqvist (1978) was necessarily limited by the small number of publications available for review at the time; a subsequent overview by Kamieniecki and Sanasarian (1990) focuses on environmental policy rather than politics more broadly. Interestingly, both articles reached the same conclusion that we do regarding the need to take fuller advantage of insights from comparative political science.

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