

# Book Reviews

Betsill, Michele M., and Elisabeth Corell. 2008. *NGO Diplomacy: The Influence of Nongovernmental Organizations in International Environmental Negotiations*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Reviewed by Jack P. Manno

State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry

It has been two decades since the scholarly claim that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were wielding significant influence on international environmental laws and institutions was first made. Since then, many studies have attempted to document and understand the role of NGOs in world environmental politics. Betsill and Corell's *NGO Diplomacy* intends to bring methodological order to determining whether, and under what conditions, NGOs influence the procedures and outcomes of multilateral agreements. Since most of the literature on the role of NGOs is understandably based on case studies, the promise of a common framework with which to analyze and compare NGO influence across these cases is a welcome one.

This framework is the most important contribution of the book. It distinguishes between influence on the process and influence on the outcomes of negotiation. It highlights the impact of NGO efforts on framing the issues, setting the negotiating agenda, and altering the position of key actors in the negotiations. It also asks researchers for the evidence that changes in the behavior of other actors was caused in some way by the information or other communication provided by NGOs. Chapter authors are asked to engage in counterfactual thought experiments to consider whether the outcomes observed could be explained without considering NGO influence. The book includes five cases, each following a common framework: the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the desertification convention, the International Whaling Commission, and forest conservation. *NGO Diplomacy* is a useful resource for anyone studying NGOs and wanting to contribute to an ongoing academic project.

While a common framework facilitates comparisons across cases and allows conclusions about NGO influence to be made with greater confidence, it can also constrain researchers, causing them to ignore some of a case's most important features. An NGO could have a great deal of *influence* but not necessarily in the way the NGO wishes. Researchers may want to ask, for example, if in a particular case the NGO influence had the desired effect. Did it influence the outcome toward the NGO's strategic objectives or not? Do some NGOs act more strategically and effectively than others? What accounts for those differ-

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ences? The world of environmental policy is replete with unintended consequences: accountability mechanisms that stifle creativity; participatory democracy that ends up transferring responsibilities to local communities without the resources to carry them out.

Given the high stakes of environmental negotiations, it is crucial to understand why we have a climate treaty that fails to protect the climate system, a convention on desertification that documents the expanding desert, a Law of the Sea that can't sustain fisheries or prevent ocean pollution, and countless non-binding statements of principles of sustainability. One of the most troubling conclusions Betsill and Corell reach in their study of NGO influence is that NGOs are more likely to influence the outputs of international negotiations if they frame their recommendations in language that is congruent with the mainstream neoliberal discourse and does not oppose powerful interests. They found that "NGO influence was highest when the political stakes were lowest" (p. 203). In other words, if NGO recommendations have no impact on the real world they are more likely to be accepted.

In addition to this key finding, the authors draw several tentative conclusions about NGO influence, some counter to widely held assumptions. They contend that NGOs did not gain influence by coordinating positions or strategies, and that NGO influence did not seem to depend on direct access to negotiations; even when excluded from the floor, NGOs were creative and effective in communicating with delegates. Environmental NGOs have their best chance of wielding influence at the early, agenda-setting stage of negotiations but less chance during discussions of specific commitments. Competition among like-minded NGOs may have little effect, but when high-powered lobbyists representing business and industry (included here as fitting the definition of NGOs) get involved they can undermine and overwhelm environmental NGO (ENGO) influence.

Their emphasis on the formal rather than the practical definition of influence follows from the authors' framing of NGO representatives as diplomats rather than the more accurate label—*lobbyists*. This frame is central to the book; witness the title. But the tact and niceties of diplomacy, when they exist, are possible because of the mutual knowledge which parties have concerning their relative power. Lobbying, on the other hand, suggests an attempt to influence decisions, particularly when one is *not* directly involved in the formal decision process. As the cases in this book demonstrate, it is the full range of lobbying tools inside and outside the formal negotiations that enhances NGOs' chances of achieving their objectives. As Stas Burgiel notes in the case on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, "as observers, ENGOs had greater freedom to comment on a variety of issues, often using simpler, more direct language than the legalese of government officials" (p. 79).

One of the great strengths of this book is its transparency. The authors explain the instructions they gave the contributing authors, and the reader can observe along with Betsill and Corell both the strengths of their approach and its

weaknesses. In the process, we learn a lot. The project succeeds in strengthening claims about NGO influence on specific negotiations. It fares less well in being able to make structured, focused comparisons about NGO influence across cases. The authors ultimately conclude that rather than examining overall negotiations, analysts should focus on specific issues within a negotiation. Doing so may make it even more difficult to compare across cases but should lead to more relevant conclusions about the effectiveness of environmental NGOs operating in the new world of global environmental governance.

Dai, Xinyan. 2007. *International Institutions and National Policies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

*Reviewed by Amanda Kirk*  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

The perennial questions asked by students of multilateralism are whether international institutions matter, and, if so, how and why do they matter? Xinyan Dai is not making a novel enquiry in her book *International Institutions and National Policies*, but she is providing a fresh and compelling answer. The usual way of addressing these questions is to focus on the “carrot and stick” of incentives for compliance and sanctions for non-compliance, with a regime’s effectiveness determined by how well these mechanisms achieve measurable indicators of progress toward the institution’s aims (e.g., a reduction in the concentration of a given pollutant or an increase in the numbers of an endangered species), controlling for factors outside the regime (e.g., the closure of a polluting industry due to exogenous economic forces). Another approach is to examine whether domestic legislation that correlates with the directives of the regime has been passed. Again, it is necessary to look for factors coincidental to the regime that could have influenced such legislation. It is here that Dai enters the fray. Her central argument is that international institutions can indirectly empower domestic constituencies to monitor and enforce compliance, a more subtle way of influencing national policies than the traditional carrots and sticks.

Dai parses her study into three distinct channels of enquiry, or puzzles, as she terms them. The first concerns the monitoring of states’ compliance with (as distinct from implementation of) treaties. Do international institutions monitor compliance, she asks, and, if so, how do they do it? The second puzzle follows from a negative answer to the first: if international institutions lack the ability to monitor and enforce compliance, what compels states’ compliance? The third and final question that Dai poses is driven by the second: how do weak international institutions influence states’ compliance?

Her approach to the first question involves describing the incentive structures built into various financial, trade, security, human rights and environmental regimes for compliance monitoring. States are self-interested actors and they can often employ domestic stakeholders to monitor compliance for them when