

# Introduction

## Climate Change Bandwagoning: The Impacts of Strategic Linkages on Regime Design, Maintenance, and Death

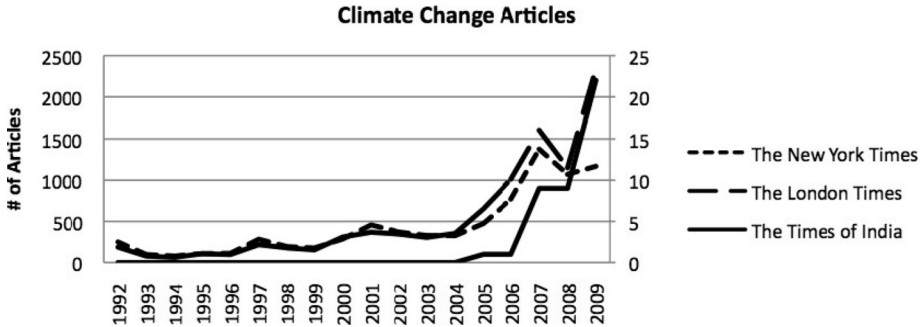
Sikina Jinnah

While international discussions began in earnest in 1992 with the creation of a United Nations (UN) convention on the topic,<sup>1</sup> global climate change politics has recently risen sharply in political importance, infusing diplomatic discussions well beyond the boundaries of the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (FCCC). For example, in the summer of 2009 alone, climate change issues featured prominently on the agenda of the US-China bilateral discussions in Washington; were the topic of a week-long UN Summit in New York; and were a central focus of the G8 meetings in both L'Aquila, Italy and Pittsburgh, USA. As a further indication of this trend, media attention to climate change issues has also risen sharply in recent years with climate change stories featuring prominently in leading newspapers across the globe (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting the extent to which climate politics have seeped across environmental boundaries, the summer of 2010 saw a wide array of intergovernmental organizations (well beyond those addressed in this special issue), from the World Bank to the World Food Programme, undertaking climate-relevant activities. Indeed, with climate politics both substantively ossifying in the UNFCCC forum<sup>3</sup> and diffusing so rapidly across so many new issue areas, some believe that a future global climate agreement may be negotiated within other high-level forums such as the G20 or Major Economies Forum<sup>4</sup> and subsequently brought to the UNFCCC for its "blessing."<sup>5</sup>

The *entrée* of climate change politics to the center stage of international re-

1. Officially the UNFCCC preparatory negotiations began in 1988. See Bodansky 2001 for a more detailed negotiation history.
2. The earlier spikes in media attention are likely explained by the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, and the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001.
3. Depledge 2006.
4. Hunter 2010, 13.
5. Jinnah et al. 2009, 6.



**Figure 1**

Climate Change Stories in the New York Times, London Times (left, 1992–2009) and the Times of India (right, 2001–2009)<sup>1</sup>

1. Data availability for *The Times of India* is limited to 2001 forward. All data was collected either directly from newspaper websites or via LexusNexus.

lations has been accompanied by a broad range of strategic linkages, which have produced various institutional interactions. It is difficult to find an international organization, corporation, NGO, university, foundation, religious organization or government agency that does not have a climate-relevant program or focus. Indeed, with over 1200 NGO and IGO observers now accredited to attend the UNFCCC negotiations,<sup>6</sup> representing over 22 issue areas,<sup>7</sup> and drawing over 20,000 observers to the UNFCCC's 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen in 2010,<sup>8</sup> it seems that everyone, from McDonald's to the Vatican is jumping on the proverbial climate change bandwagon.

Although climate linkages are prolific across various types of social organization, this special issue focuses of the wide range of ways that international regimes are strategically linked to climate change politics.<sup>9</sup> Our decision to focus on this particular aspect of climate linkages was catalyzed by the co-editors' experience observing UNFCCC (and related) negotiations over the past eight years as writers for the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*. In recent years we noticed a marked increase in regime-level linkage politics seeping into both formal UNFCCC negotiations and side events. This special issue is an initial effort at tracing and deconstructing these linkages to better understand how and why they emerge.

In this context, the contributions that follow help us to better understand both how climate change is shaping the global environmental political landscape, and is being shaped itself through strategic linkages to regimes both within and beyond the environmental realm. The contributions that make up

6. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2011.

7. Muñoz, this issue.

8. Fisher 2010, 13.

9. Some contributions, such as Detraz' (this issue) discussion of climate-security linkages do not look at formal institutions but rather at discourse more broadly.

this special issue explore when, how, and by whom regime linkages are being pursued, how those linkages are impacting regime development and function, and in turn how these changes are shaping the evolution of global environmental politics and problem solving writ large.

## Analytical and Methodological Overview

Climate change bandwagoning refers to the recent phenomenon of political actors strategically linking their issues to climate change politics for a variety of reasons. Strategic linking typically occurs by discursively re-framing issues in a way that foregrounds the climate benefits of the original/source issue. While scholars use the terms linkage, interplay, interaction, and overlap in slightly different ways to characterize and describe inter-regime dynamics, this special issue focuses specifically on the dynamics of regime linkage.<sup>10</sup>

We understand linkages in line with Young's definition, namely that "conscious efforts to make use of [regime] interplay to promote both cooperative and competitive ends constitute a domain of activities that can be thought of as the politics of institutional linkages."<sup>11</sup> Young further differentiates between formative links and operational links. The former refers to interplay that occurs during the formation (i.e. design phase), or reformation, of a regime, while the latter refers to processes involved in the day-to-day operation of a regime (i.e. regime maintenance).<sup>12</sup> Both types are examined in the various contributions to this special issue.

Selin and VanDeveer's differentiation between governance and actor linkages<sup>13</sup> is also useful in explaining how we understand the phenomenon of climate bandwagoning. They define governance linkages as structural connections between components of regimes, and actor linkages as agent-based linkages facilitated by member organizations, non-member organizations and/or individuals. Contributions to this volume focus on the latter, responding to Selin and VanDeveer's point that actor linkages, which have been largely ignored in the literature thus far, deserve more attention due to the capacity that actors have to exert influence on regime dynamics through linkage politics.<sup>14</sup>

Specifically, we understand actor linkages as strategic efforts by various types of actors to affect regime operation. The contributions herein explore the role of states, NGOs, secretariats, civil society, and broader state and civic discourse in actively managing these linkages to achieve specific strategic outcomes. Given the diversity and inconsistent use of linkage terminology in the literature, we explicitly use the term "*strategic linkages*" to reinforce that the poli-

10. Gehring and Oberthur 2009; Haas 1980; Raustiala and Victor 2004; Rosendal 2001; Stokke 2001; Young 2002b; and Young et al. 2008.

11. Young 2002b.

12. Young 2002b.

13. Selin and VanDeveer 2003.

14. Selin and VanDeveer 2003, 20.

tics we describe are not coincidental overlapping interests between regimes or structurally determined institutional interactions. Rather, they are agent-based decisions made by political actors to influence political outcomes by creating linkages to the global climate change regime. That is, these are linkages that are framed and forged by actors seeking to meet specific ends, including to funding and other resources. Juxtaposing formative and operational linkages, aimed at enhancing core regime objectives, via strategic linkages, Young suggests that:

Exploitation of institutional interplay for strategic purposes, in contrast, occurs when actors strive deliberately and predominantly to take advantage of institutional overlaps to pursue their own agendas. For those engaged in such strategic actions, the extent to which regimes solve problems whose importance is acknowledged by all parties becomes a secondary consideration. Instead, the center of attention shifts to efforts on the part of major actors to exploit interactive decision making to promote their own ends regardless of the consequences in terms of the common problem.<sup>15</sup>

In short, we are interested in how regime overlap is managed<sup>16</sup> by political actors through the creation of strategic linkages between international regimes. Despite Young's foundational work on institutional interplay that highlights the importance of strategic use of regime linkages, little attention has subsequently been focused on this aspect of linkage politics.<sup>17</sup>

Climate bandwagoning can therefore be understood as a type of strategic linkage that involves the purposeful expansion of regime mission to include new climate-oriented goals that linking agents believe will further their own agendas, regardless of whether such linkages detract from the common good. Axelrod's contribution highlights this dynamic particularly well in his demonstration of how regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) appear to pursue climate linkages in order to obscure core fisheries depletion issues by detracting attention away from unsustainable fishing practices by key member states.

Some of the contributions that follow offer praxis-relevant and normative arguments instructing on how actors should employ strategic linkages to achieve specific regime objectives. In her examination of climate change-security linkages, Detraz presents a typology of discursive frames currently employed to discuss this linkage, articulating the different policy outcomes that arise from using one discursive frame over another. Ultimately, she argues for increased use of an "environmental security" discourse to highlight the human vulnerability (e.g. livelihood, health, food security) aspects of climate change, as opposed to the resource conflict issues that would guide policy-making if an "environmental conflict" discourse were employed. Nicholson and Chong ad-

15. Young 2002a, 133.

16. Jinnah 2010.

17. Young 2002a, 132.

vocate for increased use of a human rights discourse to frame climate change issues, arguing that the human rights framework offers a guide to effective action in both legal and political arenas, and ultimately can guide us towards a more “equitable and enduring” climate politics. Similarly, McDermott et al. discuss strategic linkages between forest and climate governance through the rapidly evolving reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD+) mechanism. They argue that rather than focus on an approach that turns forests into a “perfect commodity,” actors involved in designing REDD+ should employ a logic of problem amelioration through the use of a dual effectiveness test rooted in scientific knowledge about the problems of both forest decline and climate change.

The contributions also strengthen our theoretical understanding of the nature of linkage politics more broadly. Axelrod, for example, explores the conditions under which actors choose to link international regimes, arguing that linkages between RFMOs and climate change reflect shifting missions aimed at expanding organizational constituencies and allowing major fishing countries to deflect attention from catch limits, or to increase organizational relevance. Drawing from experience with the UN Framework Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Conliffe demonstrates that some regime linkages are more likely to yield benefits to source regimes than others, and that some bandwagoning attempts may even damage a source regime’s credibility.<sup>18</sup> Extending earlier work by Levin et al.,<sup>19</sup> she presents three criteria for predicting when strategic linkages are likely to benefit source regimes. Namely, she argues that linkages must be: politically feasible for target regimes; contribute to source regime governance goals; and be supported by credible source regime knowledge. Jinnah’s contribution explores the politics of who matters in linkage politics through a case study of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD). She argues that international bureaucracies, or secretariats, are emerging as important actors in this regard.

Each contributor utilizes data collection methods appropriate to his/her individual cases. Methods range from participant observation and interviews, to document, discourse, and statistical analyses. In addition, each contributor makes complementary-theoretical arguments that are case-specific. That is, because who is doing the strategic linking and how they are doing it varies across cases, theoretical arguments emerge about, among others, regime effectiveness, overlap management, institutional design, and agency in global environmental politics. In the CBD case noted above, for example, the Secretariat played a leadership role in facilitating a shift in discourse within the CBD regarding the climate-biodiversity linkage. It did this in part by repeating and reiterating specific

18. On source and target regimes see Oberthür and Gehring 2006

19. Levin, McDermott, and Cashore 2008.

framings of the linkage through, for example, public speeches. As such, Jinnah draws from the bureaucratic politics literatures, and utilizes document and discourse analysis to uncover the CBD Secretariat's agent role in this process. Conliffe's examination of the UNCCD, it should be noted, highlights the dangers of unfettered secretariat behavior in this regard. McDermott et al. revive the literature on the importance of institutional design in environmental (and broader) problem solving,<sup>20</sup> arguing that the REDD+ design should be rethought to ensure that both climate mitigation and stemming forest decline are the central objectives of climate-forest bandwagoning.

While all cases evaluate the impacts of strategic linkages on regime operation, contributions vary with respect to the stage in the regime lifecycle that is analyzed and with respect to the directionality of linkage. Nicholson and Chong, and Detraz explore the promise for strategic linkages to human rights and security regimes respectively to shape that design trajectory of global climate politics. Jinnah and Axelrod both examine how linkage politics impact regime maintenance in the biodiversity and fisheries regimes respectively, and Conliffe discusses how the UNCCD strategically shifted linkage framings from mitigation- to adaptation-focused framings as part of its broader efforts to stave off regime death. McDermott et al. simultaneously explore how linkage politics contribute to design of an otherwise absentee regime on forests through REDD+ and how this linkage serves as the "bandwagon of salvation" for the global forest regime.

Muñoz' policy forum piece and Wapner's concluding contribution take a slightly different tack. Building a new data set that allows him to utilize NGO accreditation as a proxy for issue-specific institutional linkages, Muñoz presents an empirical analysis of NGO participation in the UNFCCC that field tests the arguments presented in the contributions described above. His analysis ultimately supports these authors' findings, highlighting in particular the role of forest- and agriculture-focused NGOs in forging strategic linkage to the UNFCCC. Finally, in stepping back from the empirically-based contributions that precede it, Wapner's conclusion reflects broadly on the benefits and drawbacks of climate bandwagoning in the context of problem solving.

The diverse selection of empirical cases in this special issue is a first cut at theorizing a phenomenon that scholars of global environmental politics have observed proliferating over the past few years. However, due to the sheer breadth of climate politics, the selection is far from comprehensive. For example, climate linkages have emerged as very important in the Montreal Protocol negotiations in recent years, with some arguing that the Montreal Protocol has done more to address climate change than the UNFCCC.<sup>21</sup> Further, climate bandwagoning is not unique to international regimes, nor is the full cast of ac-

20. See for example Mitchell 1994.

21. See Jinnah and Conliffe, forthcoming 2012 for a discussion of this linkage.

tors examined by the contributions here. The role of private actors for example is not discussed, yet corporations are increasingly engaged in climate change politics.<sup>22</sup>

These contributions do however help us to reflect on how climate change is shaping our field of study in a broad sense, and also provide rich empirical fodder to push central theoretical debates in global environmental politics forward. Most notably, these cases raise questions about how linkage politics between international regimes are increasingly actively managed by political agents. For example, these cases help us to better understand how the choice of linkage discourse and design impact regime operation and problem solving, the mechanisms by which linkages impact political outcomes, the conditions under which actors decide to pursue linkages, and how largely ignored political actors are emerging as agents in shaping linkage politics.

More specifically, these cases raise a number of questions for future research. For example, Detraz, Jinnah, and Nicholson and Chong highlight the need for systematic inquiry into the conditions under which discursive framing shapes policy outcomes in the context of linkage politics. Conliffe and McDermott et al. present similar analytical frameworks for ensuring that linkage pursuit yields positive impacts for target and source regimes. Although persuasively argued in the context of forests and land degradation, these frameworks would be strengthened through application to additional cases. Similarly, Axelrod's contribution presents a series of compelling hypotheses about the conditions under which bandwagoning will occur. These too would benefit from additional testing. Jinnah, Conliffe, and Axelrod all discuss the role of secretariats in managing linkage politics, highlighting the need for increased attention to bureaucratic autonomy and control in the international context. This focus also points critically to agent, rather than exclusively structural, determinants of regime linkage.

Finally, an emergent theme across all contributions is the illumination of a variety of rationales for, and normative assessments of, climate bandwagoning. More cynical rationales include: regime failure in other forums (forests); the need to increase organizational relevance (fisheries, biodiversity, desertification); the desire to distract attention from core regime objectives (fisheries); and tapping new financial sources (desertification). Yet, the contributions also uncover the potential of bandwagoning (when properly designed) to yield more equitable (human rights, security) and effective (forests, desertification, biodiversity) policy outcomes. Ultimately, as Wapner discusses in the concluding contribution, bandwagoning is not all good or all bad. Rather, he argues, it presents a paradox wherein problem complexity necessitates bandwagoning, yet bandwagoning simultaneously makes it harder to take policy action, presenting the danger of "regime sclerosis." The contributions in this special issue provide

22. See for example Levy 2005.



initial guidance on how we might bandwagon better as we continue to tackle not only the complexities associated with climate change, but the increasingly crowded and complex terrain of global governance more broadly.

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