

Book Reviews

Steinberg, Paul F., and Stacy D. VanDeveer, eds. 2012. *Comparative Environmental Politics: Theory, Practice, and Prospects*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.¹

Reviewed by Robert V. Bartlett
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As environmental politics became first an identifiable focus of interest and then a small subfield in political science in the 1970s, most of the initial scholarly work fit into the categories of public policy, American politics, and international relations. Subsequently, by the early 1980s there was also a “lift off” of attention to environmental matters by political theorists. Then from the late 1980s continuing to the present, dramatic expansion occurred in the quantity of environment-related research in all the fields of the discipline, including a large number of studies focusing on the politics and policies of single countries around the globe. Even today, however, excellent comparative studies well-grounded in theory are notable for their relative rarity. In nearly five decades since the emergence of environmentalism as a political movement, numerous environmental courses have been added to university curricula and many textbooks have been published, but still few of either have an explicit comparative focus. For comparative environmental politics, there continues to be a need for stock-taking, reflection, and assessment that critically examines the state and trajectory of the field. Ideally, such a survey put between two covers would also fill an ongoing need that college instructors have for a good overview comparative environmental politics text. Fortunately, Steinberg and VanDeveer have assembled such a book.

The editors of *Comparative Environmental Politics* identify several audiences for their book: faculty and students who would like to extend the study of international and global environmental politics to frameworks for grappling with domestic forces, general comparativists interested in how a focus on environmental issues might be valuable, and researchers in environmental studies and environmental policy who seek to use the tools of comparative political inquiry. Their goals for the book are to assess “leading edges and current gaps” in the field of comparative environmental politics and “to identify promising new avenues for exploration” (p. 7).

The book is considerably more coherent than is often the case for edited collections, suggesting less collecting per se and more planning, editing, and revising during its gestation. That six of the fourteen chapters are written or co-

1. This review was commissioned and edited without the participation of the *Global Environmental Politics* editors.

authored by the editors contributed to this coherence, which is achieved without imposing a standard analytic framework on every chapter. Rather, chapters slice the subject in one of five ways: (1) connections and directions, (2) states and societies, (3) movements and non-state actors, (4) institutions, and (5) multilevel governance. In spite of how these perspectives cross-cut each other, individual chapters are mostly complementary and mutually reinforcing, with remarkably little redundancy (except in some instances among the lists of references, which are separate for each chapter).

The concluding and two introductory chapters are written by Steinberg and VanDeveer, who advance the unsurprising argument that comparative political inquiry has much to offer the enterprise of achieving deeper understanding of environmental politics. The second chapter is a broad survey of comparative environmental politics to the end of identifying connections between it and the broader field of comparative politics. As the first such review published in a couple of decades, it now should be mandatory reading for researchers and in any college courses with at least a section on comparative environmental politics. Also valuable, although perhaps less so for undergraduates given its focus on doing research, are the concluding chapter's diagnoses and prescriptions for research that is both theoretically rigorous and socially relevant.

Reconnecting comparative politics with comparative environmental politics, and bridging theory and practice in the further development of both, are goals of every chapter throughout the book. James Meadowcroft offers a lucid analysis of comparative research on the environmental state and the challenges posed for successful international environmental policy and theoretical understanding of the state. Any greening of the state must occur, of course, in the context of attitudes, concerns, and values of the citizens of those states, which are examined by Riley Dunlap and Richard York in a chapter that refutes simplistic universalist theorizing about the origins and social bases of environmentalism.

Some of the earliest comparative environmental research in the 1970s and 1980s looked at environmental movements, green political parties, and business-state relations. Kate O'Neill examines the increasingly transnational character of environmental movements and networks and the continued importance of national and local perspectives. Michael O'Neill's chapter in particular demonstrates the substantial value that has been realized by applying the concepts and methods of comparative politics to phenomena such as green parties. Deborah Ringling Gallagher and Erika Weinthal use the literature of comparative environmental politics to demonstrate the complexity of regulation and business-state relations, which includes corporate voluntary environmental programs, proactive establishment of environmental best practices, and corporations as suppliers of regulatory governance and creators of social knowledge about environmental governance.

Three insightful chapters examine the effectiveness of environmental policy-making across various regime types, in different regions and local circumstances, and in the face of chronic and economic instability, arguing for a

recasting of theoretical expectations to better explain environmental performance. The literature on multilevel governance systems is comparatively analyzed in another three chapters. These explore how well scholars have been able to explain the influence of international institutions on domestic policy, the convergence and divergence of policy within federalist systems and between comparable federalist systems, and the context-specific management of local common-pool resources.

Overall, this book constitutes an exemplary review and analysis of the theories, practice, and prospects of comparative environmental politics, a field that is important in and of itself but important also because comparative political inquiry has a great deal to offer the study of environmental governance generally. It is not fully comprehensive (no book could be in only 403 pages), but *Comparative Environmental Politics* provides a solid launch platform for the debates that ought to be happening among researchers and within classrooms about what we've learned and the research agendas that ought to be formulated going forward, and it also constitutes a significant resource to inform those debates.

Pamela S. Chasek and Lynn M. Wagner, eds. 2012. *The Roads from Rio: Lessons Learned from Twenty Years of Multilateral Environmental Negotiations*. New York and London: Routledge.

Reviewed by Mark Axelrod
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In *The Roads from Rio*, reporters for the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (ENB) bring together their expertise to identify two decades of trends in global environmental negotiations. The authors report on official events throughout the life cycle of various global environmental regimes. Their purview includes negotiation of treaties and protocols, as well as conferences and meetings of the parties once those agreements are in place. They do not directly assess state actions, such as compliance behavior, outside of these official discussions. This framework plays into ENB expertise covering both treaty negotiations and subsequent meetings. For those seeking important research questions in global environmental politics, this book provides a wealth of possibilities.

As with most edited volumes, the diverse projects included in this book each deserve an individual assessment, but this review attempts instead to bring them together under one overarching framework. These chapters are bound together by a common effort to describe twenty years of change from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Together the authors chronicle the evolution of negotiating processes, participants, and issues within global environmental regimes. Unlike much work in the field,² this volume does not set out to explain these changes, but rather to

2. Gerring 2012.