

Book Review

Urpelainen, Johannes. 2022. *Global Environmental Politics: The Transformative Role of Emerging Economies*. New York: Columbia University Press.

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In *Global Environmental Politics: The Transformative Role of Emerging Economies*, Johannes Urpelainen focuses on emerging economies to explain how changes in the world economy are shaping global environmental politics in the twenty-first century. By investigating the political economy of energy and environmental policy, he demonstrates the growing roles of emerging economies that are seeing rapidly increasing energy and resource consumption as they gain affluence.

In structuring the relationship between international political economy and global environmental politics (chapter 1), one of the key strengths of this book is Urpelainen's detailed analysis of the interactions of four drivers of transformation in global environmental politics: first, the power to destroy the global environment stemming from the combination of rapid economic and population growth; second, environmental policy preferences driven by domestic factors, such as economic growth and poverty alleviation; third, institutional capacity, or a government's ability to implement policies effectively, efficiently, and sustainably; and fourth, the number of players in the global system who shape outcomes of international environmental negotiations.

Urpelainen presents transformations in global environmental politics created by these four drivers through expansive empirical analysis: comparison of the different patterns of global environmental politics in the twentieth century after the Second World War (chapter 2) and during the period between the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (chapter 3); diverging trajectories of three global environmental regimes—chemicals, biodiversity, and climate change (chapter 4); the first group of emerging economies—those that have already benefited from robust economic growth—such as China and India (chapter 5); and the second group of emerging economies at the beginning of their emergence, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Brazil, as well as the third group of the least developed countries with significant potential for economic growth, such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Ethiopia, and Tanzania (chapter 6). Although the author's definition of emerging economies remains somewhat unclear, the fact that these eleven countries combined compose 43 percent of the world population makes this study powerful.

Urpelainen begins by challenging the conventional focus of global environmental politics upon top-down commitments through multilateral treaties with binding targets and timetables. His analysis of existing research, data, and historical trends demonstrates that the traditional top-down approach will no longer work for the global system, with its increasing number of relevant players. The rapidly collapsing number of new multilateral environmental agreements—from ninety-four in the years 1990–1994 to only fifteen in 2010–2016—demonstrates the paralyzed state of conventional international environmental treaty making.

The author presents acute reflections on the key challenge of global environmental politics driven by the four drivers for achieving cooperation when the growing number of emerging economies with increasing power to destroy the environment have weak environmental preferences and low institutional capacity. He finds that emerging economies' environmental preferences remain weak due to their prioritization of economic growth and that their institutional capacity changes slowly at best due to a short history of administrative state building. Urpelainen contends that global environmental politics has become more difficult because international environmental negotiations in the twenty-first century are complicated by more heterogeneous preferences among a growing number of players. Previously, negotiations were dominated by a small number of key players, such as the United States, Europe, and Japan, with relatively homogeneous preferences focusing on green problems, including ozone depletion, deforestation, and habitat destruction, which threaten ecosystems, species, and human societies. Emerging economies shake global environmental politics by demanding more attention to the "brown" issues that impact lives of the developing world more immediately and locally, such as soil erosion and groundwater depletion, which industrialized countries have already solved through domestic policy.

Beyond the increasing complications and difficulties in negotiations due to the growing role of emerging economies, the author does not address a surprising consistency, rather than transformation, in the depth of their international environmental cooperation over time. The non-changes are exemplified by consistent success of the chemical regime, thanks to the low cost of participation by the developing countries and the continuing failure of the biodiversity regime due to the North–South cleavage. What transformations in international environmental politics have been made because of the changes in international political economy? Except for the shift of the climate regime from the traditional top-down approach to the voluntary pledge-and-review approach, Urpelainen's empirical findings contradict his main points on the transformations in global environmental politics as a result of changes in international political economy.

A more fundamental weakness of this book is Urpelainen's linear approach to economic development. He takes it for granted that emerging economies will soon succeed in economic development despite their struggles for

centuries, stating that developing countries will continue their economic development and eventually graduate to industrialized countries. The author describes the second batch of emerging economies as having remained on “upward trajectories” (231) despite many political storms and economic crises over the past decades. He also highlights signs of the takeoff stage of economic growth for the last batch of emerging economies. Urpelainen ignores the historical and persistent lack of economic development in underdeveloped countries. He is more careful about the definite growth trajectory in light of the fragility of political institutions in Ethiopia and Myanmar and the uncertainty driven by heavy economic dependence on fossil fuel exports in Nigeria and Indonesia. However, he maintains his assertion that some countries, particularly Nigeria, have managed to muddle through crises and have grown wealthier, keeping their substantial potential for economic expansion. For him, none of these concerns negate their contribution to the transformation of global environmental politics, except in a worst-case scenario.

The author also did not alert us to the possibility of varying pathways to economic development due to domestic and foreign factors as well as varying political structures. He is aware of the danger of an overly rosy picture of global environmental politics led by emerging economies, pointing out the limited applicability of China’s successful increase of institutional capacity using the authoritarian environmentalism model. Still, he simplifies the pathways of the economic growth of emerging economies, stating that most emerging economies are likely to follow, not China’s, but India’s pattern of “rapid but uncontrolled” (187) growth without much environmental protection. This oversimplification might come from Urpelainen’s exclusive focus on the behavior of governments and national policies, leaving nonstate actors and international forces aside.

This book has achieved significant steps toward restoring deserved attention to the roles of non-Western countries in global environmental politics. The author argues that the combination of rapid economic development and population growth in emerging economies will eventually shift their status in international environmental negotiations away from passive victims of environmental degradation to pivotal players who try to minimize environmental stress without compromising their right to develop. As most of his argument is based on the assumption that emerging economies will continue to thrive and that their growing populations will pursue higher standards of living, further scholarship should seek to empirically investigate the actual trajectories of both economic growth and emerging economies’ roles in global environmental politics.