

BRINGING THE MATERIAL BACK IN:

Understanding the United States Position on Climate Change

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Outline of Presentation.



- Present theoretical framework to understanding climate change policy in the US
- Incorporate data on natural resource use and national decision-making to explain US policies
- Updated version of research on US case study

Dominant perspectives on climate change policy in the United States:

- Conservative think-tanks have kept the US from regulating greenhouse gases.
- The inconsistency of domestic policy has led to US climate non-policy.
- The Bush Administration ruined climate change policy in the United States.

Alternative Perspective:

- Extensive research on natural resource dependency in local and international contexts
- Conjoint Constitution between natural resources and society
- Thus, the material characteristics of a country and a country's dependence on certain natural resources affect decision-making
- In particular, US climate change policy outcomes are the product of geographically diffuse and labor-intensive indigenous resources.

Data and Methods

- Secondary quantitative data on the energy infrastructure in the US
- Qualitative data collected through open-ended semi-structured interviews with key actors in the US debate on climate change (2000-2001)
- Data on more recent attempts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions in the US
 - the Climate Stewardship Act of 2003
 - Sub-national (state level) policies in 2006

One perspective on Climate Change Policy in the US:

“I think, in the end, there’s a large group of economic interests who are happy with the way things are today and would be perfectly happy if the world did not change. And in the end, if we’re going to deal with climate change, we must change the way in which we produce and use energy, and there are powerful economic interests who...prefer the status quo and oppose change...Underneath it all, what’s really going on here is the debate about that set of politics, and we believe we have to change: We believe that the future is in clean energy and not dirty energy.”

---David Gardiner, Deputy Chairman of the White House Climate Change Task Force during Clinton Administration, 2000

Significance of Coal Extraction and Consumption to Climate Change

- “Coal releases more CO₂ per unit of generated energy than does oil, and oil more than natural gas” (International Energy Agency 2000a: 20).
- The US produces more coal than it consumes and coal extraction is labor intensive
- Coal is extracted from 26 of the 50 US states and it is consumed in many more.

Another Perspective on Climate Change Policy in the US:

“We also have...strong concerns and interests in coal...Part of the things that the Kyoto Protocol would do would be to take out our ability to produce and utilize that coal. That would be the end of the state economy...Those elements fund a lot of the state, and we actually have seen many big benefits that have come from that”

--Dallas Scholes, the environmental legislative assistant and counsel to Senator Michael Enzi, a Republican Senator from Wyoming

More Recent Attempts to Regulate

- Climate Stewardship Act of 2003
- State-level Climate Action Plans throughout the US

The Climate Stewardship Act of 2003

- Called for reduction in carbon dioxide by 2010
- Created a market-based system of tradable allowances to achieve reduction
- Establish program of scientific research on abrupt climate change

Final Vote on the Climate Stewardship Act

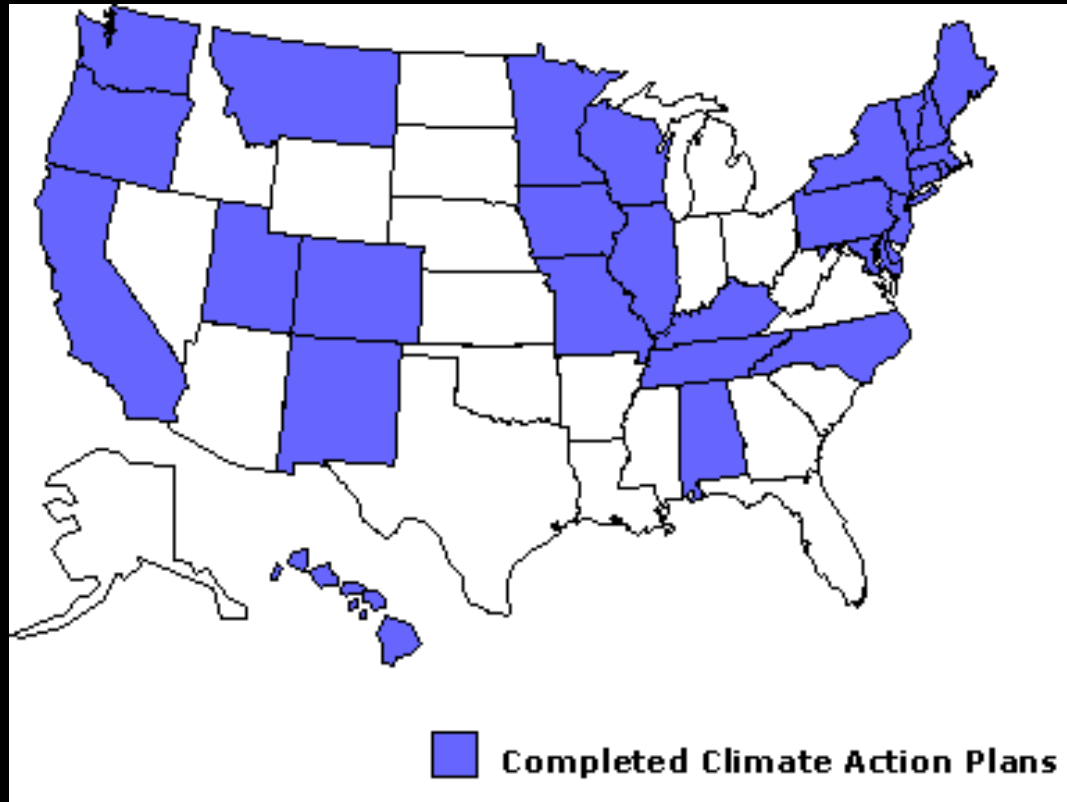
Opposition to the Climate Stewardship Act per state	Coal Dependence			Total States
	States w/o Coal Extract	States with Minor Coal (<25 million short tons)	States with Major Coal (\geq 25 million short tons)	
0 Senators Opposing	13	1	0	14
1 Senator Opposing	9 *	1	3	13
2 Senators Opposing	2	11	10	23
Total Number of States	24	13	13	50

* Two of the nine states in this category had one senator that abstained from the vote on the Climate Stewardship Act.

State-Level Attempts to Regulate

- States are developing initiatives and policies that respond to the risk of global warming:
 - Reducing emissions
 - Increasing energy efficiency
 - Encouraging investment in renewable energy
- 28 states have “comprehensive plans”
- 9 states have state-wide emission targets

Climate Action Plans in the States



Climate Action Plans with Emission Targets vs Coal Extraction

States with Emission Targets	Coal Dependence			Total States
	States w/o Coal Extract	States with Minor Coal (<25 million short tons)	States with Major Coal (≥ 25 million short tons)	
No	18	14	9	41
Yes	7	2	0	9
Total	25	16	9	50

Conclusions

- In other words, material characteristics are translated into political outcome through partisan politics.
- If alternative fuel technology were perfected and coal were no longer the cheapest indigenous fuel source, it is likely that this relationship would no longer hold: it is the *social* uses of coal that give it economic and political value.