New Directions in Climate Politics Research

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In the beginning of the 2000s, the "predominant perspective on global climate governance" was biased toward interstate negotiations (Pattberg & Stripple, 2008, 369). Gradually this focus expanded to cover transnational initiatives involving public and private actors from different levels such as cities. A dense climate governance architecture emerged, bringing together a variety of actors, norms and discourses in an overlapping way alongside the ongoing international cooperation taking place among states. The structure of this global climate governance architecture has also been debated.

Particularly after the failure of global negotiations such as COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, it has been questioned whether an all-encompassing global agreement is the right path forward to address climate change or is it more effective to opt for polycentric frameworks (Ostrom 2010). The latter gave shape to the Paris Agreement of COP21, which emphasized nationally determined paths of emission reductions aimed to limit global warming to well below than 2 degrees celcius, and to pursue best efforts to limit warming to 1.5 degree Celsius. The Paris Agreement also aims to foster cooperation among state parties and 'non-Party stakeholders' including cities and non-governmental organizations, as well as encouraging non-Party stakeholders to share information with UNFCCC. Global climate regime now relies more on voluntary state pledges than ever, which necessitates studying diverse country cases to explicate drivers and mechanisms of climate policymaking, as well as competition for power and authority over who defines solutions and causes of climate change in national contexts.

Recent contributions highlight the need for integrating intersectionality with climate justice debates (Mikulewicz et al., 2023). While existing research discussed different dimensions of climate justice (Shue 2019; McKinnon 2019; Falkner 2019). An example of such theorizing is found in Henry Shue's (2019) article, where he argued that subsistence emissions and luxury emissions need to be treated separately. For Shue (2019), "even in an emergency one pawns the jewellery before selling the blankets" (p.259). Therefore, the global climate regime should also focus on the reduction of luxury emissions first and make room for subsistence emissions by reducing their own emissions.

By highlighting the importance of differentiating the poor and their subsistence emissions and those of the rich, Shue (2019) paves the way for incorporating intersectionality in climate justice analyses. Intersectionality can bring a fresh perspective on how different dimensions of oppression and privilege interact to create divergent experiences of climate impacts, vulnerabilities and solutions (Mikulewicz et al., 2023; Tendayi Akiume 2022; Di Chiro 2019). Existing research pointed out the disproportionate burden of green energy transition and circular economy on the developing world (Nem Singh 2024). Intersectionality lens integrated to this line of research has started yielding very meaningful results across different disciplines. For example, a study by Deivanayagam et al. (2023) published by the Lancet demonstrated that racially minoritized groups, migrants, and Indigenous communities are more vulnerable towards health risks due to climate change.

Yet, while highlighting particular intersectional vulnerabilities of indigenous people and other marginalized groups, attention should be paid to overcome the portrayal of indigenous people either as "vulnerable victims in need of protection or as romanticised eco-heroes" (Di Chiro 2019: 308). In fact, while experiencing disproportionate vulnerability due to climate change, indigenous knowledge is also a powerful in addressing climate impacts as existing studies show. As Chowdhoree (2019) demonstrated in the case of Bangladesh, the tendency to address climate impacts through big structures such as permanent embankments along the river to prevent tidal inundation

into the flood plains, replacing indigenous method of building temporary earthen embankments, caused waterlogging due to rain and rivers drying up. Such an approach highlights the importance of bridging indigenous knowledge and Western scientific knowledge to better address climate change and to diversify indigenous knowledge more diversity of cases need to be studied.

Another line of future research is climate imaginaries and how they shape policies, climate activism and contestation (Pattberg and Stripple, 2008; Klüh et al. 2024). Sovacool and Brossman (2013) highlighted the importance of "imaginaries" of new technologies when they revealed that energy transitions in the past, i.e. gasoline powered automobiles, hydroelectric dams, nuclear fission, were facilitated and shaped by socially shared "fantasies" of these new technologies by easing entrepreneurs search for financing, leading to favorable legislation, and by attracting customers. In the words of Sovacool and Brossman (2013, p.211), "how people imagine energy technologies and their futures is clearly important to understanding how and why people invest in them, financially, personally, professionally, and otherwise, and it is thus a critical social facet of energy transitions." However, the dark side was that the favorable fantasies of these technologies also blinded policymakers and the public to some important social and environmental costs.

Likewise, more recently studies focused on mapping imaginings of new low-carbon technologies (Sovacool et al. 2020; Anonymized 2018). It is crucial to note that imaginaries are not only reserved for the domain of ideas. On the contrary, economic imaginaries are embedded in policies, institutions, and the economic life (Levy & Spicer 2013) while mass media plays a key role in making certain imaginaries more salient than the others for mobilizing public support for that imaginary and marginalizing others (Günay et al. 2018). Levy and Spicer (2013) found four rival climate imaginaries: "fossil fuels forever", "climate apocalypse", "techno-market" and "sustainable lifestyles" whose strength was linked to its level of alignment with the interests and identities of social groups, its alignment with the material reality and political elites' narratives of it, i.e. an economic recession, discoveries of new fossil fuel reserves, existence of subsidies, etc.

The potential impact of these imaginaries is also worth analysing (Pattberg et al. 2022). As an example of such an analysis, Madeleine Fagan (2017) warned about climate apocalyptic imaginaries as such imaginaries reproduce the modern conception of the subject that is responsible for the climate crisis in the first place. In such climate apocalyptic imaginaries, the world order as we know it has collapsed and the individual is either separated from its social context due to a breakdown of social order or there exists a "we are all in this together" message that reduces individuals to atoms thereby disregarding social inequalities that render those in the society more vulnerable towards climate change effects. Another example of studies exploring the impact of climate imaginaries is Nisbett et al.'s (2024) study, which found that the protests by groups who share a pro-climate action imaginary mobilized political will for climate policies (cf. Schaffer et al. 2022). Considering that Gavin (2010) found that the mass media tend to cover climate activism in a negative light opens up a new research question as to what mechanisms translate climate protests shaped by shared climate imaginaries to pro-climate political will.

How these imaginaries evolve in different national and global contexts (Beuret 2024) is a noteworthy research agenda, which can be developed by an inclusive climate politics literature. How neoliberalism, racism, populism can shape media coverage and framing of climate crisis and its effects on the Global North versus the climate change impacts on the "global sacrifice zones" for example remains a notable research agenda (Żuk and Szulecki 2020; Połońska-Kimunguyi 2022). What the rising far-right populists' imaginary of climate politics entail and why it is received favourably by the societies in which they emerge are also promising lines of work in this research agenda (Lockwood 2018; Paterson et al 2023).

The third line of research for climate politics literature is comparative studies, which open up new research agendas. Highly-cited research on climate politics demonstrate comparisons of large groups of actors that identifies certain patterns to be further explored in future research. William F. Lamb et al. (2021) analysed the 24 countries that were able to reduce GHG emissions between 1970 and 2018 and found that these emission reductions were largely driven by the energy sector reductions while emissions in the transport sector remained stable or increased. The finding shows that most of this emission reduction took place during the Kyoto Protocol's first phase on the one hand and on the other hand it gives a new research question for diverse national analyses as to the barriers to reductions in the

transport sector.

In a cross-national study published by BJPIR, authors (2021) found that while perceived threat from climate change increases concern about climate change, while the wealth of the country an individual resides in moderates the effects of threat perception on climate change concern. This finding opens up new research questions as to why there is such discrepancy in high-income and low-income contexts highlighting that influences on climate concern may vary according to the national context. In another highly-cited paper Narassimhan et al. (2018) compared the effectiveness of all emissions trading systems on several benchmarks drawing from the existing literature's assessments of these systems. The main contribution of this study is its demonstration of gaps in knowledge. For example, the authors could not find enough data on the assessment of how effective stakeholder engagement in these systems are. Another point raised by the authors for future research is the interaction of different climate policies with emissions trading systems. These studies point at the importance of comparative studies in climate policies (Harrison and Sundstrom 2007).

A significant area of focus is the integration of intersectionality into climate justice debates. Acknowledging how different social groups experience climate change differently based on their socioeconomic status is a key contribution to the literature on climate justice. Research has demonstrated that marginalized groups, including racially minoritized communities, women of color, migrants, and Indigenous peoples, face heightened health risks due to climate change.

Another key research direction is the role of climate imaginaries in shaping policies, activism, and public perceptions. Past technological transitions, such as the rise of gasoline-powered automobiles and nuclear energy, were driven by shared imaginaries that facilitated investment and policymaking but also blinded decision-makers to their social and environmental costs. More recent studies have mapped how low-carbon technologies are perceived and how economic imaginaries are embedded in institutions and media narratives. Competing climate imaginaries, such as "fossil fuels forever," "climate apocalypse," "techno-market," and "sustainable lifestyles," influence public discourse and policy decisions depending on their alignment with political and economic interests. Media representation plays a crucial role in reinforcing or challenging these imaginaries, affecting public support for climate action. Research suggests that climate protests mobilized by shared imaginaries can push political agendas, but the tendency of mass media to depict activism negatively raises questions about the mechanisms that translate protests into political will.

Finally, comparative studies in climate politics provide another promising research avenue, as they help identify patterns in climate policy effectiveness across different national and global contexts. Studies analyzing emission reductions across multiple countries reveal that most progress has been driven by the energy sector, while transport emissions have remained unchanged, signaling the need for further inquiry into sectoral barriers. Additionally, research on climate concern indicates that while perceived threats from climate change generally increase public awareness, the wealth of a country moderates this effect, suggesting that national contexts shape climate attitudes in complex ways. Studies on emissions trading systems also highlight significant knowledge gaps, particularly in understanding stakeholder engagement and policy interactions. The need for comparative analyses remains crucial for developing more comprehensive climate policies that consider diverse national and regional contexts.

Overall, future research in climate politics should expand on these themes by incorporating intersectionality into climate justice studies, critically analyzing how climate imaginaries shape policies and activism, and deepening comparative research on climate governance. These approaches will contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of climate politics, addressing both structural inequalities and the evolving nature of climate discourse.

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