W01 / Climate Democracy: Can Democracies Tackle Super Wicked Problems?

Topic : Wicked & Wild Problem Agenda Setting

Chair : Gilles Massardier (Cirad)

Second Chair : B. Guy Peters (University of Pittsburgh)

Third Chair : Eduardo de Lima CALDAS (Universidade de São Paulo - USP)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Contemporary governments are facing a number of extremely complex and interrelated challenges–climate change, immigration, and artificial intelligence to name but a few. Governments face difficulties in coping with problems of this sort for several reasons. One if the scale of the problems and the interconnection of a number of conventional policy domains. Another is that these types of problems require “credible commitments” by government for maintaining long-term actions to ameliorate the problems. While all governments have difficulty with these “wicked problems”, democratic governments have particular problems because of the pressures of electoral cycles, and the dangers to stability if public discontent grows over policies that impose costs on citizens.

This workshop is at the junction of two potential 'tragedies': climate change is a physical change that could be amplified by inadapted governance and democracy (Povitkina, 2018). First, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stresses the urgency of tackling climate change and mitigate, relayed by the 'Take urgent action' injunction of the 13th goal of United Nations. The second potential tragedy is that of 'super wicked problems' : the more policy failures are proven, the more the 'climate super wicked problem' becomes a 'tragedy', notably because 'time is running out' (Levin & al., 2012) because of the complexity of climate governance and to make collective ‘tragic choices’ (Calabresi, Bobbitt, 1978) : i) the implementation of climate plans is very incremental (Mushtaq, 2018): policies are path dependent (Levin & al., 2012) on bureaucratic traditions, democratic and policy styles (Peters, 2021 ; 2011), locking in older policy choices and change perspectives (Groen & al. 2022; Rosenbloom, 2018) ii) the integration of long term in today's public policies is difficult as their benefits will only accrue much later (Jacobs, 2016) iii) literature notes barriers to adaptation policy (Lee & al., 2022 ; Dupuis, Knoeffel, 2014) with the same effect.

In this context, opening up the debate about climate democracy and rapidly strengthening it becomes crucial: i) democracy is considered to be in decline (Rosavallon, 2006) and ill-adapted to the challenge of the climate emergency (Povitkina, 2018), notably because of its ‘myopia’ in front long term problems (Lindvall, 2021). Some studies conclude that 'authoritarian environmentalism' is more efficient (Gilley 2012; Mittiga, 2021). The literature treats this issue of authority in a binary way. Authoritarian environmentalism is declared more efficient than democracy as it produces outcomes more easily (China case), because it is less short-termist and exposes its leaders to less blame (Gilley, 2012). Democratic legitimacy would decrease and authoritarianism would have more secure legitimacy (Mittiga, 2021) facing long term climate issues ii) Let's not forget that Linz explained the downfall of democracies in the 1930s by their illegitimacy to solve problems quickly, and by the inability to avoid the rise of oppositions disloyal to democracy (Linz, 1978) iii) building climate democracy is then part of the response to the 'tragedy' of poor governance: by rebuilding trust in the 'reason' of public debate; by enabling a 'framing' of the climate issue, and its public policies, that is as pluralist as it is temperate and 'evidence-based', in order to counteract the misdeeds of the democracy of opinion (uncertainty in knowledge that oscillates between scientific knowledge and the so called 'fake news') ; by reconciling democratic instruments and procedures with knowledge and expertise; by reinforcing 'communicative action' to share common reasons for action, particularly in emergency situations (Wilson, 2011) ; by rebuilding trust in the institutions of representative democracy and in elected representatives' control over the complex processes of climate governance (Hulbert & al., 2016; Bednar and al., 2019; Ojha and al., 2016); by reintroducing pluralism and transparency into the latter.

However, the political variables are little studied within literature concerning climate change. In particular, the variables of political regimes, notably democracy, are relatively absent from the climate literature. Knowledge about the democratic governance processes remains too scarce to be able to think about them with the discernment their reform requires for maintaining long-term actions and tackle climate change urgently.

This workshop wants thus :

i) Establishing an empirical inventory about two crucial, but relatively uninformed, questions :

· To what extend democratic quality of policy processes (transparency of action and information,

accountability and arbitration capacity of elected officials are irremovable principles of good democratic functioning, Lindvall, 2021; Mees, Driessen, 2019) strengthens the capacity to face the climate challenge to ensure trust in democracy ?

· To what extent are the political responses made to tackle climate challenge the result of processes that are procedurally organized to be pluralist, competitive, polyarchic and enable polycentric governance in networks that include the diversity of individuals, ideas and social interests involved? What institutional innovations could amplify this democratic openness of climate policies?

ii) Describing examples of democratic innovations. The issue here is therefore to identify innovative procedural instruments for improving the democratic governance of climate policies, provide democratic solutions to the climate challenge.

ABSTRACT

This workshop deals with the capacity of democracies to tackle climate change. While all governments have difficulty with these “wicked problems”, democratic governments have particular problems because of the pressures of electoral cycles, and the dangers to stability if public discontent grows over policies that impose costs on citizens. Climate change is a 'super wicked problems', notably because 'time is running out' (Levin & al., 2012) because of the complexity of climate governance and to make collective ‘tragic choices’.

This workshop wants :

i) Establishing an empirical inventory about two crucial, but relatively uninformed, questions :

· To what extend democratic quality of policy processes strengthens the capacity to face the climate challenge to ensure trust in democracy ?

· To what extent are the political responses made to tackle climate challenge innovate to open climate process ?

ii) Describing examples of democratic innovations for improving the democratic governance of climate policies.

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Session 1

Wednesday, June 26th 10:15 to 12:00 (AULA 21B)

Permeability of the SDGs in local public policies

Jose-Manuel LEAL (University of Guadalajara)

The implementation of coordinated global climate governance is one of the biggest challenges on the international climate governance agenda. However, despite its importance in the efforts to stop the current climate crisis, it is also one of the most ignored aspects of the international environmental agenda. In this sense, the article aims to identify, and promote, the design of public policies aimed at meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from the local level. The study aims to address the gap in global governance and, through a multidisciplinary approach, to highlight the contribution of paradiplomacy to coordinated climate governance. By gathering information from local stakeholders, the present study integrates the perspective of local stakeholders, fostering applied research with a multidisciplinary approach.

Can Biden’s Disinvestment Reversal Strategies Strengthen Climate Democracy?

Christine Overdevest

The looming climate emergency poses a formidable challenge to traditional democratic structures, prompting a call for innovative governance solutions. This paper aims to assess how Biden’s recent disinvestment reversal strategies attempt to address the climate emergency.
Recognizing the potential link between domestic inequalities resulting from globalization and the rise of authoritarianism, the administration has approved billions of dollars for place-based and sectoral projects. These initiatives aim to foster inclusive domestic economic development, facilitate a green transition, and achieve other strategic goals. The paper evaluates the design of these sectoral and place-based projects from the perspective of climate justice and transition policy initiatives, exploring their potential impact on climate democracy, democratic legitimacy, and problem-solving effectiveness.

Questioning the perception that democracy is ill-equipped to address the urgency of the climate crisis, the paper argues for more focus on innovative democratic governance approaches. By scrutinizing the organizational structures of policies that bring diverse stakeholders together within specific geographical and sectoral contexts, the paper identifies a blueprint for effective climate governance.

The Biden Administration's disinvestment reversal strategies include three major initiatives: the Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs (Tech Hubs), the Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC) grants, and the National Science Foundation Regional Innovation Engines awards. The Tech Hubs, authorized by the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, aim to spur American innovation and strengthen manufacturing, with a focus on clean energy transition and strategic domestic industries. The BBBRC grants target coalitions in rural, ex-manufacturing areas grappling with decades of disinvestment and seek to create good-paying jobs through transformational investments in industrial clusters. The NSF Regional Innovation Engines awards represent the broadest investment in place-based research and development in the nation's history, focusing on harnessing national science and technology research capacity for new manufacturing efforts and linking with and deepening the support in areas already funded by the other two awards.

The paper scrutinizes these initiatives, emphasizing the role of stakeholder engagement, participation, and problem-solving effectiveness in their designs. It explores evidence-based policy processes, learning from policy implementation, and adaptive governance and flexibility as integral components of effectiveness. The

unique characteristics of each initiative, such as the focus on historically underserved communities, transformational investments, and the focus on industrial clusters and shared prosperity, are analyzed in the context of climate democracy and democratic legitimacy.

In conclusion, the paper focuses on institutional designs aimed at strengthening climate democracy, addressing the climate emergency, and promoting a fair and just transition. By evaluating the Biden Administration's recent disinvestment reversal strategies, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective governance responses to the pressing challenges of the climate crisis.

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Session 2

Wednesday, June 26th 14:00 to 17:15 (AULA 21B)

Is Policy Enough?: Governance Complexes for Complex Problems

B. Guy Peters (University of Pittsburgh)

Much of the literature on public policy is based on linear, rational models of decision-making. They also tend to consider making policy within one restricted domain, rather than considering the array of interacting policies that influence the final outcomes of a policy process. This paper will present a more complex understanding of the policy process that may be suitable for more complex policy problems. It will link that understanding of the policy process with democratic demands and the need for enhanced participation.

Can Democracy Manage Super Wicked Problems ? A research agenda for the Example of Climate Change and Food Security

Gilles Massardier (Cirad)

Can democracy build the capacity to respond quickly and effectively to super wicked, urgent, and interconnected problems? What institutional innovations offer the greatest opportunities for that? This research agenda examines two intertwined “super wicked” problems: climate change and food security and in Brazil, France and USA. The aim of the present project is threefold: 1) Drawing up an exhaustive inventory of democratic issues responding to these questions: to what extent are democracies adapted to manage such challenges? What democratic innovations are concretely invented, desired by stakeholders and needed for this adaptation? Are democracy able to tackle such urgent and embedded problems? Who are the innovators of and in democracy (what are their profiles, what institutions do they come from, what are their innovative capacity)? What do they invent (which institutional policy instruments, which procedural policy instruments, which practices...)? How do they invent (what is the innovation process)? But, on the other hand, would countries with a tradition of welfare democracy have an advantage in their ability to manage climate vulnerabilities interwoven with social vulnerabilities? From the literature and our own works, this proposal organize a first analytical framework and propose and agenda for the fieldwork and the data structured by the following seven variables : i) Balance between participation and authority remaining in policy process ii) Policy integration in a pluralistic policy process iii) Open policy process, competitive pluralism, and polyarchy iv) Trust and the quality of democracy v) Link between democratic welfare state and climate policy vi) ‘Rule of reason’, public debate and the dialogue between science and values in the framing of the climate and food policy vii) Capacity of institutional innovation for democracy 2) to provide democratic adaptation solutions for the climate and food security challenges challenge through recommendations and scenarios. The work plan is divided in three kinds of research tasks: ii) A state of the art on democracy in the context of climate and food security emergency will allow to improve the analytical model and to prepare research plans by country (choice of commodity chain, choice of local field, conception of analysis grid…) iii) The first-hand qualitative data collection in the Brazil, France and USA will permit to fill the variables table from documents and semi-structured interviews iv) the data processing and results will allow ... v) ... to elaborate guidelines for contours of future democratic society in a context of management of ‘super wicked problems’.

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Session 3

Thursday, June 27th 09:00 to 12:15 (AULA 21B)

Authoritarian power and the climate emergency: the case of the military coup in Gabon

Viala MBAZOGO MENDENE (Université de Montpellier)

This paper seeks to make a theoretical contribution to the way in which an african authoritarian regime precisely a military regime approaches climate issues. It will analyze the institutional innovations that a change of political regime resulting from a military coup can bring to climate policies.

Climate issues are now one of the biggest concerns of governments, affecting both democratic and non-democratic states. The urgency of mitigation and adaptation to climate change means that governments need to take swift action to avoid disasters that will burden future generations. In this context, research shows that polycentric governance, which is characteristic of democratic states and includes a diversity of stakeholders concerned by the problem, would improve the governance of climate change (Cole, 2011). If this polycentric governance is difficult to achieve in democratic states, would so-called authoritarian states have the capacity to deal rapidly with climate problems? In this work, we want to analyze climate governance through the military regime that Gabon is experiencing today after having been ruled for 40 years by another dictatorial regime, a dynastic regime with a single-family monopolizing political power since independence (Magnani et al, 2019), from father Omar Bongo to son Ali Bongo.

Since 2009, Gabon under the Bongo regime has actively focused its government policy on climate issues. The creation that year of a National Climate Council (CNC), followed by a National Climate Plan (PNC) in 2012, initiated sectoral strategies for mitigating and adapting to climate change. Priority sectors such as forestry and agriculture have since been a priority in the outgoing President's government policy. However, the military coup of 30 August 2023 that deposed President Ali Bongo was justified by fraudulent elections. This political coup upset the climate policy in place, with the dissolution of institutions such as the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE), and the dismissal of the Minister for the Environment and Climate, Lee White. Following the putsch, the ruling military set up a Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions (CTRI) with the aim of introducing new policies that had been poorly managed by the previous regime. Although military coups reflect political instability, the overthrow of power that put an end to the dynastic Bongo regime seems to be seen as a positive reaction against disorder (Nigro, 2013).

If we consider that democracies are myopic when it comes to climate change because they favour short-term solutions (Smith, 2017), is Gabon's new military regime taking account of the climate emergency? If so, are military leaders more efficient at managing the climate emergency? Will the political transition bring a new way of governing climate policies in Gabon in line with the economic development claimed by the current authoritarian regime? What institutional innovations in climate policy could be observed with the restoration of institutions?

This work will enable us to question the governmental actions of the new authoritarian regime in Gabon, which is now taking account of the climate emergency in its transition specifications.

Indicative bibliography

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Nigro, R. (2013). Quelques considérations sur la fonction et la théorie du coup d'État. Rue Descartes, 77, 69-81.

Cole, Daniel H. (2011). From Global to Polycentric Climate Governance. Articles by Maurer Faculty. 373.

Climate and Water: Does democratic governance give the poor a voice and choice?

Satyajit Singh (University of California Santa Barbara)

T03W01: Climate Democracy: Can Democracies Tackle Super Wicked Problems?

Climate and Water: Does democratic governance give the poor a voice and choice?

Satyajit Singh[1]

This paper brings out local voices around water that are not commonplace in the concerns around climate change discussions that have so far been carbon-centric, concern national policymaking, and global financing. The local voices around water and climate challenge the thinking of top-down governance. While appreciating the center's role, it underlines that water governance is conducted more locally and democratically. Such a locally centered perspective on water and climate challenges existing policymaking and policy design. Concerns around water and climate have begun to point out that increased water scarcity and distress impact livelihoods and challenge the survival of the poor. The combination of water stress and climate change results in significant hydrological changes that impose major economic and societal risks. It increases vulnerability across different agro-climatic zones among the most disadvantaged. It impacts various life and livelihood concerns, including drinking water, sanitation, health, irrigation and agriculture, aquaculture, forests, and commons.

This paper interrogates democratic governance not as a composite system but as a layered one at three levels - central, state, and local. Democratic debates occur at various policymaking, regulation, accountability, and implementation institutions at these three levels of government. Further, as water is not governed comprehensively but sectorally, democratic and governance structures perform differently in each sector. Understanding climate and water democracy must appreciate political struggles that take place during the inter-sectoral allocation of water – such as negotiating a more significant outlay for drinking water in a semi-arid region compared to demands by a city. Based on current evidence, it can be said that democracy alone may not be able to provide the best way forward to address concerns about climate change. Still, democracy inter-twined with environmental justice concerns may be a way forward.

The paper asserts that democratically run local government provides a platform to tackle two wicked problems of water and climate – (i) departmental silos that govern water and (ii) unequal access to this resource with policy design that centers concerns about environmental justice. This paper will bring innovative local governance solutions and policy designs that strengthen democratic processes for water democracy. It will draw from a dozen case studies focusing on the impact of water and climate on the poor in India. These cases are from different agro-climatic zones and various water uses that converge on water, local governments, and democracy. The study emerged from a participatory collaboration with local groups working with indigenous people, low-caste members, and women.

In-person presentation and participation during the workshop.

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