The Climate Change Stalemate: Ideological tensions in international climate negotiations

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Abstract

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Though support for the theory of human caused global climate change grows in the scientific community, international political action has been lagging. Despite efforts since the early 1990s, a functional, effective international climate regime has yet to emerge, and so worldwide greenhouse gas emissions grow daily. To date, the best (but ultimately failed) hope for a climate treaty came in 1997 with the Kyoto Protocol. In the Protocol’s negotiations, the United States and Germany stood out for their bold but contrary stances. Germany successfully positioned itself as the global leader in climate change mitigation while the United States cemented its position as the climate laggard. While their positions can be read easily, their reasoning cannot. How can we account for such very different positions by two of the world’s richest and most developed democracies? This thesis seeks to examine the theoretical underpinnings of each country’s climate positions in an effort to draw greater conclusions on the state of transatlantic climate policy.
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I. Introduction

While the term ‘climate change’ in today’s society refers to the scientific process of human caused global warming, the term also brings to mind a host of other scientific, political, ideological or cultural issues. To many, climate change poses the single largest global threat to the world today. For others, it represents at best a misguided use of faulty science and risks undermining valued lifestyles and industries. Still, with a growing body of scientific evidence and physical symptoms such as rapidly retreating Arctic sea ice and increasing drought and desertification in Africa, the battle to fight climate change rages on at the domestic, national and international levels.

The international climate change negotiations held by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) represent the highest level of climate change policy. First initiated in the mid-1990s, the talks bring together leaders from 192 countries to discuss international approaches to the issue of climate change (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). While the talks have produced an initial agreement, the Kyoto Protocol, the greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets set by the Protocol, which excludes the United States and China, are widely seen as insufficient for stopping the rise of carbon concentrations in the atmosphere. International negotiations have not produced the sort of far reaching consensus needed to
create a truly substantial body of international targets regulating the reduction of GHG emissions.

The science of climate change has brought to the surface deep rooted “differences in political, national, organizational, religious and intellectual between states and societies” (Hulme xxii). The uncomfortable issue of climate change, because of its implications for resource management, business culture and standard of living, has been a hard pill to swallow. Greenhouse gases come from a huge variety of small and large sources – from coal fired power plants to gas fueled lawn mowers – and so no single identifiable cause of climate change exists. This ubiquity means that nearly every group can be considered a stakeholder and thus controlling emissions has huge ramifications for business, industry and way of life.

Climate change challenges the model of economic development – that of continued expansion based on fossil fuel consumption – followed since the industrial revolution. Mitigation will require great changes in existing economic and social structures. The long timeline of climate change also breeds policy inertia. Mitigation necessitates absorbing substantial costs now for the benefit of future generations. This oftentimes makes it difficult to prod policy makers into action, especially considering the short time horizons connected to election cycles. The snail’s pace of legislative climate debate almost makes it easy to forget that climate change holds the potential for “irreversible and catastrophic change” (Depledge 20). The 2001 assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggests that, though unlikely this century, rising GHG concentrations over the next several decades could set in motion a
series of irreversible, devastating events. In the absence of present action, these events, though uncertain, continue to loom forbiddingly in our future.

This thesis examines the behavior of influential Western liberal democracies in international climate negotiations in order to understand why no effective, all-encompassing international climate treaty has been drafted to date. Using the United States and Germany as case studies, I examine the behavior of liberal democracies in international climate negotiations through the theoretical lenses of neo-realism and neoliberal institutionalism. I argue that the United States’ approach has leaned towards the neo-realist side while Germany’s behavior has traditionally followed a more neoliberal institutionalist path. By looking at the behavior of these two states through the lens of different international relations theories, I explore why they have taken such different approaches and stances towards the climate change issue and why the prospect of an effective international climate treaty continues to be dim.

The rest of this thesis is organized in three parts. Chapter II begins by explaining what I mean by the term ‘liberal democracy’ and why I chose the United States and Germany as case studies. Understanding the constraints placed upon international action by the ideals of liberal democracy is important. It illustrates why the normative debate has taken the direction it has and why a significant issue reframing will have to occur before a substantial, progressive international climate treaty can be ratified. Next, I outline the theoretical background of the case studies. These theories go a long way in explaining the actions of the two countries and feature prominently throughout the work. Neo-realism explains the historically hostile and skeptical stance the United States has taken towards climate agreements and why American politicians have broken with
Europe over the issue. On the other hand, neoliberal institutionalism helps illuminate why Germany has emerged as the international leader in climate change negotiations. Some scholars have treated the two theories as analogous, but this treatment is false. Neoliberal institutionalism and neo-realism may occasionally generate the same outcomes, but they arrive at them in markedly different fashions and for wholly different reasons. This paper treats the two as completely disconnected, although, as you will see, the two do sometimes reach the same conclusions. Thus, an occasional overlap or crossover is acknowledged.

The case studies of Chapter III will focus on the behavior of Germany and the United States in the international climate policy arena from the time just before the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 to the present day. While the climate debate certainly began long before then, I have selected, for the purpose of time and space, the Kyoto negotiations as the starting point for my analysis. Due to space constraints this thesis omits most of the details surrounding each country’s domestic climate policies and debates except as how they pertain to their international positions. As stated, I argue that each nation’s actions towards climate change on the international stage reflect their norms, values and political and commercial interests. The conclusion in Chapter IV answers the question posed in the thesis by summing up the case studies using the theories as guides.
II. Theoretical frameworks

In examining the foundations of liberal democracy and the theories of neoliberal institutionalism and neo-realism we strike at the root issues surrounding the climate change impasse in the international arena. The governments of most developed nations (and especially the United States and Europe) operate under the principle of liberal democracy, and so understanding just exactly what the term liberal democracy means is crucial to understanding the individual nation’s situation. On the other hand, though founded on similar ideals, the foreign policy of the United States and major European states diverges sharply in many key areas, and understanding these differences proves equally important.

Liberal Democracy

This thesis initially began as a study into the tensions between liberal democracy and environmentalism. Quite a bit of literature exists on the subject, particularly on whether liberal democracy – run by elected officials with short time horizons – can capably handle the issue of global climate change. However, as the research progressed it became clear that the situation is not in fact so clear cut. In particular, two things stand out. First, despite the limitations of democracy, autocracies rarely, if ever, perform better in the environmental arena because they tend to so often rely on a small network of powerful interest groups, drowning out key voices that would be present in a democracy (Faust). Furthermore, in the climate change debate, human rights issues of equity and aid
oftentimes play important roles, complementing scientific predictions. As autocracies nearly always rely on consistent abuse and neglect of human rights, no true ethical autocracy exists, and so no ethical alternative to liberal democracy exists. Thus, any Western climate regimes must work through this model.

Second, the concept of liberal democracy is fairly ambiguous, and no generally accepted definition of liberal democracy exists (Jagers 55). Democratic structures vary on a state-by-state basis. Some operate on a first-past-the-post election system for their legislatures, while others may rely on proportional representation. Ideological differences exist as well, and each state’s constitution spells out its principle values. Thus, one particular state model can never typify liberal democracy. Instead, liberal democracy should be understood as containing the elements of liberty, equality and democratically held elections. As understood by Sverker Jagers in *Prospects for Green Liberal Democracy*, a liberal democracy should be “neutral to individuals’ life plans” and promote a “plurality of political theos/goals” else it risk denying liberalism.

A liberal democratic state maintains liberty and equality, a sometimes difficult task since the two do not always cohabitate peacefully. Liberty can at times conflict with equality, for example just look at discriminatory hiring practices on the part of employers. Liberal democracy can best be understood as *limited democracy*. Where a pure democracy places state power fully in the hands of the people, the term *liberal* in a liberal democracy necessarily places limits on this state power. Thus, in a liberal democratic state, the people make the decisions under constitutionally imposed restraints on what they can elect to impose on others through state action (Jagers 56). Possibly most relevant for the environmental debate, a mutualism exists between capitalism and liberal
democracy, making it difficult to view the two separately (Jagers 16). Capitalism needs personal autonomy to thrive, and the industrial health of democratic states requires capitalism just as much as democracy. Many features of liberal theory run counter to the concepts of progressive environmentalism – individualism, the pursuit of private gain, limited government and market freedom. In a world where individuals have free reign to pursue private gain, environmental well-being oftentimes runs the risk of being sacrificed for economic gain.

It is in this light that we look at the behavior of Germany and the United States in international climate negotiations. Both are established liberal democratic states with advanced economies and a great deal of prestige internationally. However, in the context of the climate change debate, the two have diverged sharply. Between 1990 and 2005, German GHG emissions dropped 18%, while the United States saw a 16% rise. The German government has taken a direct hand in this drop in emissions. A heavy eco-tax on fuel encourages use of public transportation. The government charges producers to deal with product packaging. Subsidies encourage home solar panel use, and still more gains have come through simple energy efficiency (Blue). Thus, in the absence of American hegemony on the issue, Germany has set itself up as the international leader in climate change. Conversely, the United States, between the Senatorial opposition of the Clinton years and President George W. Bush’s outright hostility towards the Kyoto Protocol, has remained in the back of the class in regards to climate change, and American emissions, to this day, continue to increase by volume.
Neo-realism

Before beginning the case studies, it is first useful to outline the theoretical frameworks that I will use to analyze their behavior – the international relations theories of neo-realism and neoliberal institutionalism. Scholars have sometimes treated these two theories as different veins of the same idea, while some practitioners of one theory have sometimes engaged in polite, scholarly warfare with those of the other (particularly the exchanges between Keohane and Mearsheimer). Both are appropriate to the climate change dialogue, and the two do share certain characteristics and assumptions. Both “are actor-oriented, individualist theories whose practitioners follow neo-positivist standards of evidence” (Keohane, *Power and Governance* 6). Both are also “utilitarian and rationalistic” (Keohane and Martin). The two also tend to make similar forecasts about the world political economy, but it is their beliefs about human society and the reasons behind state behavior that make them different.

Neo-realism, arising out of the United States’ Cold War hegemony, sees states as the primary actors in international relations. States seek power and wealth both directly and indirectly, constructing frameworks and rules that will allow them to continue reaping the benefits of wealth and power – a “self-help world” (Vachudova). In this sense, realism ignores institutions, domestic politics and the role of ideas to the point that Robert Keohane labeled it “long on structure, short on process” (Keohane, *After Hegemony* 6). In short, neo-realism postulates a world full of competition and anarchy in which states rely primarily on themselves, cooperating only when convenient. In this world, states focus not only on their own absolute power, but more importantly on their relative gains – i.e. the accumulation of wealth and power in relation to rival states.
As neo-realism bases itself on levels of power and influence, the great powers are usually the primary object of study. This system tends to overlook both small-state behavior and the constraining effect of institutions, dismissing small states for their lack of power and claiming that institutional decisions merely reflect current power balances and that states themselves still take the primary action. The issue of institutional cooperation under neo-realist theory presents a twofold problem. First, states, being largely anarchic and mistrusting of their neighbors, have a deep fear against the possibility of cheating in international deals, for if another state cheats, then the relative power balance is thrown completely off kilter. Second and most important to the climate change argument, neo-realists thinkers deny that a state will forgo short-term gains for uncertain long-term benefits provided by institutions. Thus, the only reasons for an institution to exist in the neo-realist mindset are for a hegemonic power to impose cooperation on weaker states or if a threatening power pushes smaller states towards forming alliances (Vachudova). In sum, the state-centered theory of neo-realism focuses on the economic and security self-interest of powerful states who seek, above all, to retain their relative wealth, power and influence over others.

Neoliberal institutionalism

Neoliberal institutionalism attempts to answer the problem of cooperation in neo-realist theory by tackling the problems of cooperation and coordination through
international institutions. The theory of neoliberal institutionalism, as laid out by Robert Keohane and his students, rests upon the idea of interdependence – that states share fundamental interests and so cooperate to maximize gains. In the context of environmental negotiations, the argument that states can gain more from cooperation derives from climate change’s nature as a truly global issue and the assumption that the state’s self-interest lies in mitigation. Cooperation among states will help to offset the relative economic costs of sharp emission reductions. Also, unlike other cooperation models, the environmental negotiations do not fit well into a traditional prisoner’s dilemma model: because successful mitigation of global warming requires drastic across the board emissions, states gain nothing over the long-term by defecting. Any short term relative gains from defecting will be offset by long-term economic and social costs of global warming. States only gain if BOTH cooperate.

To maximize the gains from areas of interdependence, states come together to form international institutions. Thus, interdependence can be seen “as the context within which international institutions operate” (Keohane, *Power and Governance* 10). Unlike in neo-realist theory, cooperation does not require the dominance of a hegemonic leader after these international institutions have been established, but rather these institutions reflect the need for policy coordination and structured rules in a world of interdependence. The cooperation and rules imposed by institutions affect state behavior. Neoliberal institutionalist scholars do not always expect cooperation to work or prevail, but they do believe these institutions affect state interests and that “interdependence creates interest in cooperation” (Keohane, *After Hegemony* 8).
Just as neoliberal institutionalism theorizes why institutions exist, it also attempts to show how they affect cooperation and outcomes. This relies again on the idea of interdependence. In an interdependent international landscape, the benefits of sustained cooperation can only be attained by participation in institutions, and these institutions provide reciprocity for their members. When states can jointly benefit from cooperation, neoliberal institutionalism expects governments to form institutions. International institutions then serve to “provide information, reduce transaction costs, make commitments more credible, establish focal points for coordination,” and facilitate reciprocity (Keohane and Martin). Institutional participation both fosters cooperation as well as constrains behavior in a manner more beneficial for the entire group rather than for the individual. In this sense, neoliberal institutionalism mimics neo-realism as it treats states as rational actors operating in a post-hegemonic world in which norms and agreements cannot be hierarchically enforced by a dominant state or group of states. Rather than retreating into isolation, neoliberal institutional scholars expect interstate cooperation in areas where states have common interests.
III. Case studies

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the ideas behind these theories demonstrate the means and depth of participation by democracies in international climate talks. As will be seen from the American and German case studies, states participating in UNFCCC negotiations have rarely agreed on a common course of action. In the following case studies on state environmental behavior, I show that neo-realism characterizes US behavior while neo-liberal institutionalism predicts Germany’s. Beginning with Germany, the following pages test this hypothesis.

Germany

As far as influential environmental policy drivers go, Germany sits at or very near the top. In the international arena, German chancellors have made climate policy a top priority, and within the European Union they have consistently played a proactive role in convincing less green states to adopt and accept progressive EU policies (Bailey and Compston 145). In pushing their aggressive domestic agenda and assertive international positions, Germany has managed to achieve significant clout within the climate policy arena, and these progressive positions reflect themselves in domestic policies.

The Federal Environmental Ministry (BMU) in 2007 launched its most recent ambitious climate protection package, pledging to reduce CO2 emissions by 40% by 2020. Despite doubts about the ability to actually achieve these reductions, the policy
stands in sharp contrast to the United States, which has consistently refused any firm emissions targets (Falling Short on Climate Goals: Germany Not Likely to Achieve CO2 Reduction Targets). The main ingredients of German climate policy have been tax reforms, emissions trading and other project-based mechanisms, voluntary industry agreements and renewable energies (Bailey and Compston 147). In Germany, we see a country that, at least rhetorically, takes its climate measures very seriously. Furthermore, German governments have not been afraid to set up domestic institutions to implement and oversee these ambitious targets. A government created group on greenhouse gas emissions began work in 2000, and in 2005 the government set up another group covering Kyoto Joint Implementation (Bailey and Compston 145). Its willingness to place domestic power in the hands of institutions gives it international credit as it pursues an institutional agenda.

However, beneath this surface of intense rhetoric, ambitious targets and conspicuous pro-environmental legislation lies the truth that much of German policy has fallen short of expectations. Furthermore, and more to the point of this study, German international positions on the subject, while loud and forceful in negotiations, have been quietly watered down by interest groups within the country and by the opposition of laggard states, like the US. Despite the neoliberal institutionalist behavior of German policymakers and strong domestic actions on climate change, current realities prevent international climate change agendas from becoming fully realized, significantly diminishing the chances of seeing a progressive post-Kyoto environmental treaty brought about through German institutional intervention alone.
In the early 1990s, German per capita emissions were three times the global average and twice the EU average (Jaggard 31). Carbon dioxide emissions, the most publicized and prevalent of the GHGs, totaled just over one billion tons per year, and total GHG emissions came to just over 1.2 billion tons annually. Since then, thanks to the international reports of the IPCC and the high domestic salience of the climate change issue in German public opinion, emissions have declined sharply. From 1990 to 2005, CO2 emissions declined by 15.4% and total GHG emissions dropped 18.7% (Bailey and Compston 154). However, these emissions reductions in the early 1990s came mostly from factory closings and restructurings of old plants after German reunification that were subsequently labeled by the Kohl government as “voluntary agreements.”

Chancellor Kohl in fact proved very hesitant to pursue aggressive regulation and instead repackaged his environmental program into these ‘voluntary measures’ which looked so successful on paper. Herein lays the Kohl administration’s dilemma. By the mid 1990s, Germany had already cut carbon emissions by 12%, putting them at the forefront of the international push for reductions. However, as previously stated, these emissions came primarily from events outside of environmental efforts, and factory restructurings would not be sufficient to meet the targets set in 1995 of a 25% reduction in emissions by 2005 (Bailey and Compston 146). Furthermore, emissions throughout the West Germany were on the whole increasing, and economic growth and rising automobile use in East Germany threatened to halt the downward emissions trend. This put Germany between a rock and a hard place, as “unilaterally enacting major new policies was unacceptable on competitiveness and political grounds” (Cass 142). The German government thus increased its international push for deeper climate cooperation.
Competing tensions defined the German situation in the mid-1990s, just prior to the Kyoto Protocol. On the one hand, the German people very much supported increased greening measures and put pressure on their political leaders for Germany to take advantage of its position as international climate leader. On the other, German industry, among the most productive in Europe and the world, felt that increased regulations would hinder international competitiveness. In the business world, the concept of competitiveness is very similar to the IR relative gains theory. Competitiveness in business and industry deals with the ability to perform against firms producing the same or similar products, and success is judged not by profit only but also by market share relative to competitors.

The Kohl government had to contend with an environmentalist public and an industry lobby very keen on keeping its foothold in the market. The public wanted strong policies, but German industry would be threatened without cooperation. Only institutional cooperation on an international scale could solve both problems. In this case, Germany’s neo-liberal institutional behavior does not ignore relative gains, but rather it serves to preserve competitiveness through cooperation. Germany began to behave more assertively on the international stage, proposing an international reduction target of 15% by 2010 and prodding the European Union and its member states into stronger international environmental acts (Cass 142). This continued the German tradition of leveraging its reputation as an environmental leader to press for German policy to be adopted throughout the EU. The country has reacted warily to EU initiatives that “clashed with national preferences and policy traditions,” as in the EU’s Emission Trading System (ETS) (Bailey and Compston 159). Despite the existence of a domestic trading
mechanism today, German sentiment has generally been against emissions trading and similar market-based mechanisms. The German citizenry instead prefers direct reductions such as renewable feed-in tariffs (measures that require energy suppliers to buy electricity produced from renewables, usually at a fixed price) and similar high cost domestic measures (Galbraith).

Outside of the EU, the Kohl administration played an important role in the first international climate treaty. Signed in 1997, the Kyoto Protocol, arising out of the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP3), set in place unprecedented environmental measures to protect against global climate change. The Kyoto requirements affected all industrial nations, called Annex I parties. Developing nations, or Annex II parties, participated in the dialogue but were excluded from requirements. The Kyoto Protocol set a global target of 5% emission reductions based on 1990 levels by 2012. These targets cover a basket of six greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons (HFCBs), perfluorocarbons and sulfur hexafluoride – that would all be counted together.

Possibly because of its history of progressive environmental policy and already high percentage of emission reductions (even if they were only based on the reunification consolidation), the Kohl government found itself at the center of these Kyoto negotiations as Europe and the world saw Germany as the undisputed leader of climate change policy. The Kohl government sought to hold this standing to leverage increased international clout. In the run-up to COP3, the Kohl government proposed a CO2 reduction target of 10% by 2005 and 15-20% by 2010. At the same time, the EU held negotiations of its own to draft a common position for the conference (Hatch). The mainstream proposals in
these negotiations centered on an Irish plan for 5-10% reductions by 2005 and the French idea to have emission targets counted per-capita rather than by total overall reductions, but Germany was determined to reinforce its individual position within the EU’s institutional stance.

Germany came into the COP3 conference pushing for a 20% CO2 reduction by 2005, claiming that the EU needed to set strong targets to maintain its international position. Most Member States supported more modest reductions, while some, including Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden, claimed the right to increase emissions. Ultimately, the Commission drafted a modified directive of 15% EU wide reductions, with Germany taking on 80% of the EU’s total reductions (Hatch). This shrewd batch of negotiating perfectly highlights the neo-liberal institutional path German negotiators tend to take. By advocating much stronger targets than other Member States, Germany strengthened its own image without having to commit to the drastic cuts it came into the negotiations advocating. At the same time, the EU wide target was raised to a number in between the French and German proposals. This serves as yet another example of Germany using institutional ‘cooperation’ to its own advantage – German negotiators successfully lobbied for higher reductions that were consistent with realistic expectations while at the same time strengthening its own international image.

On the larger stage, in COP-3 negotiations, we see a Germany committed to emission reductions but willing to also have a dialogue with less environmentally advanced Member States with the ultimate goal of strengthening Europe’s hand treaty negotiations as well as solidifying its image as climate protector. Germany’s willingness to push for strong international targets came from climate change’s high level of
domestic political salience within Germany and also because international targets set at Kyoto would certainly be more modest than those set within Germany or the EU. As Germany could easily meet any international commitments, its leaders played their hand to increase international prestige (Cass 136).

Immediately after the 2007 signing of the Kyoto Protocol, further rounds of negotiations began, centering largely on enforcement and implementation prior to ratification. These post-signing negotiations would drag on for four years. Domestically, the 1998 parliamentary elections brought about a shift in German climate policy through the election of the Red-Green Coalition, a joining of the Social Democrats and Green Party. With a new government in office, Germany sought a way to effectively bring its influence to the international table. They accomplished this on multiple fronts. Most significantly, the Federal Environmental Ministry led the drive for a unilateral eco-tax on fuel use, a risky thing in a competitive international economy. Taking effect on April 1, 1999, the eco-tax gradually raised the price on gasoline, heating oil, natural gas and electricity (Hatch). Germany also took a stance on the contentious developed/developing nation controversy, of which we shall see the other side in the American case study. Basically, the bone of contention revolved around whether developing nations had a responsibility to commit to emissions reductions under the Kyoto Protocol. Going into COP3, Germany had maintained that developed countries should be taking the lead, and so emissions reductions should come mostly from domestic initiatives in developed nations. However, the power plays of the United States forced Germany into a number of compromises, some of which shrewdly turned out to be to their benefit.
The biggest compromise in the Kyoto Protocol centered on the use of flexibility mechanisms, measures that allow a state to earn reduction credits without actually reducing domestic emissions, as supplemental to domestic initiatives. Rhetorically, the Red-Green Coalition insisted that Germany and other industrialized nations should take the lead in climate change primarily via direct domestic action on a moral imperative. However the downside lies in the tendency of carbon reducing policy instruments to constrain the economy in the short-term. Renewable energies, for example, cost quite a lot before they become operational and cost-effective. As Germany already had several mechanisms in place for RES promotion, the government feared that if other countries relied heavily on flexibility, then German industry would fall behind competitively. Faced with this predicament, the German government turned to the EU and, in the run up to the November 2000 COP6 negotiations on Kyoto implementation, succeeded in pressing for an EU position calling for a 50% ceiling on the use of flexibility mechanisms. This again illustrates the neo-liberal institutional willingness to use institutional negotiations to one’s own advantage. However, when the United States dropped out of the Kyoto Protocol in November 2000 the German negotiating advantage all but disappeared. To enter into effect, the Protocol had to be signed by 55 percent of the world’s CO2 emitters based on 1990 levels, and the American absence gave countries opposed to deep cuts considerable leverage, forcing the EU to concede to no ceilings on flexibility (Australia Refuses to Rattify Kyoto; Hatch).

While this concession on flexibility mechanisms seems like a complete loss, it must also be noted that in the same time period, the European debate over an EU emissions trading scheme had been heating up. Furthermore, German industrial firms
were concerned that the scheme would include mandatory CO2 quotas on select industries. Just as environmental concerns hold a particular place in the heart of the German voter, so industry holds a firm grip on German politicians. This explains why German environmental initiatives center largely on feed-in tariffs, RES subsidies and other more expensive measures while the government has largely failed to provide incentives (such as energy efficiency tax-breaks) for industry to reduce emissions (Bailey and Compston 156).

Thus it comes as no surprise that German industrial groups reacted strongly against the possibility of industry specific CO2 quotas, and so political opinion shifted in favor of flexibility mechanisms. So, as an appeasement to certain Annex I parties, states could use joint implementation (JI), the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and emissions trading to meet targets. Joint implementation, as defined in Article 6 of the Kyoto Protocol, allows one Annex I country to earn emission reduction credits for investing in emission reduction projects in another Annex I country where emission reduction may be cheaper. The CDM allows Annex I states to earn credits for investing in emission reduction projects in Annex II, developing, countries. In the emissions trading scheme, reduction targets are expressed as levels of allowed amounts, assigned amount units (AAUs), and countries that have reduced emissions enough to have spare AAUs can sell them to countries that need more emission credits (Mechanisms Under the Kyoto Protocol).

While this seems like a capitulation on earlier German ideological stances, one must also look at the German gains in the Kyoto and EU negotiations. German influence helped drive through significant EU wide emission cuts while also securing more modest,
though no less monumental, global cuts through the Kyoto protocol. In return, Germany ‘gave in’ to flexibility mechanisms. This compromise appeased laggard states, maintained German ideological leadership and very shrewdly gave German industry a leg up, as German industry has by no means been shy of using the flexibility mechanisms. This course of events almost mimics neo-realist behavior but with one important exception – Germany accomplished these gains through cooperation and positive participation rather than through American-esque posturing.

By 2002, the Kyoto process had shifted from dealing with protocol drafting to dealing with implementation, providing another dynamic through which to examine German institutional behavior. At this time, American President George Bush had already withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol, and American efforts centered largely on justifying their climate policy in the international arena through the UNFCCC COP summits (in which the US, as a member of the UNFCCC still participated). In these rationalizations:

The US said that its climate approach is grounded in sound economic policy and noted its commitment to reduce the greenhouse gas intensity of its economy by 18% over ten years. The US claimed that economic growth is the key to environmental progress. Germany responded by calling for “absolute” emissions reductions, noting that a failure to address climate change will result in economic harm. (Bailey and Compston 135-36)

Here we see a very important shift in the German approach. In the drafting stage, Germany maneuvered chiefly through the European Union, seeing that it would have more influence if its proposals came in the form of a common position rather than as representing only Germany. However, after the American dropout from the treaty, Germany took a more active role in steering negotiations. Germany took the lead in
issues surrounding implementation and in addressing opposition from America and other non-signatory countries. Here, Germany has taken a much firmer stance by directly challenging the United States through its continued affirmation of the responsibility of developed countries to take on the initial burdens of emissions reductions. Ultimately, the German view prevailed in the Kyoto Protocol but at the expense of the United States’ participation.

In this time period, Germany already had the moral high ground as by 2002 they had achieved 19% of their 21% Kyoto reduction targets and were the world’s leader in wind energy production. German Environment Minister Jurgen Trittin solidified this position in a speech at the 2006 COP8 summit when he affirmed “Germany is prepared to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2020 by 40% below 1990 levels, provided the EU reduces its emissions by 30% and other countries adopt similar ambitious targets” (Bailey and Compston 136-37). By indicating Germany’s willingness to up the ante within the institutional framework, Trittin reinforced the German belief that emissions reductions did not have to come at the expense of economic gains. Trittin claimed that wind energy production had already created tens of thousands of jobs and suggested that further reduction targets could lead to greater EU wide job creation and market growth. This speech follows the neoliberal institutionalist line in that it expresses the hope that consensual emissions targets can provide more gains than unilateral action, recognizing the interdependence of European and international economies. However, despite the rhetorical success of Trittin’s speech, the reality of COP8 fell short of expectations (Bailey and Compston 146). The Delhi Declaration, drafted at the end of the summit, came off overall as relatively weak thanks in large part to the opposition of the
US and OPEC and serves as a reminder that consensus, though admirable, often results in watered down action.

Today, 12 years after the initial signing of Kyoto, Germany continues to leverage this leadership position towards continued international emission reductions. The results of COP13, held in Bali in December of 2007, distinctively bore signs of German influence. The Bali Roadmap set the mandate for a two year sequence of negotiations, to be completed in December 2009 on a post-Kyoto climate treaty. The Bali Roadmap set the stage for developing nations to be included in a new treaty, though the United States maintained its belief that industrialized nations should bear the lion’s share of reductions. More concretely, Germany has raised over 400 million Euros by auctioning off excess emissions credits and will use this to fund future climate measures both domestically and internationally (The International Climate Initiative of the Federal Republic of Germany). In the rounds of negotiations leading up to the Copenhagen conference, Germany plans to take the EU stance of increased targets, seeking to at least halve (but preferably reduce by 80%) the emissions of G8 countries by 2050 in order to avoid raising the Earth’s temperature more than 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels. In a press release following the G8 Conference of July 2009 in L’Aquila, the German Environmental Minister expressed hope that developed nations would again assume the lead in the December Copenhagen negotiations.

In examining German international climate rhetoric against policy reality, we find two things. First, the German public genuinely takes great interest in climate change issues and tends to react strongly to scientific predictions and extreme meteorological events. A 2002 speech by Gerhard Schroder linking the 2002 Elbe river floods to climate
change and emphasizing the need for renewable energy use was widely seen as factoring in his reelection (Jaggard 145). Second, despite the high level of public support, German industry holds an equal or greater amount of clout in the German political system. Take the automobile industry for example. The government has been unable to set even a general speed limit on German highways and has avoided pressing for mandatory fuel efficiency standards at both the national and EU level (although the EU did adopt standards for new passenger vehicles in December 2007) (Bailey and Compston 153). In the energy sector, despite the push for increased RES capacity, much of Germany’s electricity still comes from coal fired power plants, and this percentage will remain as high as 40% into 2020 (Block). These conflicting factors make for an interesting mix of policies and positions. Explicitly, we see the official German political line supporting emissions regulations being hamstrung by the industrial lobby’s grip on certain areas of policy-making and business practices.

German philosophy has focused on the UNFCCC as a process through which all will benefit through working together. Unlike the United States, Germany has never publicly doubted the scientific conclusions drawn by climatologists and others working in the field, and Germany has certainly embraced the idea of an institutional solution to climate change. Neoliberal institutionalism generally embraces the input from epistemic communities, like those of scientists, and also from non-governmental organizations (Jaggard 4). German policy shows a history of seeking a global solution within a neoliberal institutional framework. By pushing for strong EU and UN climate control measures, Germany has shown its commitment to achieving a global solution through international cooperation. However, we must also realize that their aims and objectives
have been influenced by views from multiple sectors of German society, like industry and trade, which seek to maintain their status quo as much as possible. German industry has sought to protect its own interests through political intervention, and much of the reasoning behind Germany’s strong international stance comes from its desire to not be left behind as it implements its stronger than average regulations. Germany pushes for reduction targets through international institutions in order that its own industry will remain competitive even as direct policies lower the national carbon footprint.

Recognizing both economic and environmental interdependence, German negotiators take full account of German economic interests while seeking to reduce emissions. Still, in contrast with what we shall see in the United States, though, while Germany does consider its own interests, its interests do not define its actions.

*The United States*

In a September 1, 2009 message on the preparations for the December 2009 meeting of the UNFCCC in Copenhagen, during which negotiators are supposed to draft a post-2012 climate treaty, EU Ambassador to the United States, John Bruton spoke strongly on the subject of American participation in the negotiations. In attempting to define the American political ideal, Ambassador Bruton drew on three quotes by Thomas Jefferson:

“I own that I am not a friend to a very energetic government. It is always oppressive.”

“Delay is preferable to error.”

“A wise and frugal government, which shall leave free men to regulate their own pursuits of industries and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned – this is the sum of good government.”
Ambassador Bruton then went on to maintain that though the Federal government has grown in size and power since the New Deal in the 1930s, “the accepted rhetoric of American politics remains the rhetoric of Jefferson.” This, he said, differentiates the United States from Europe and explains why agreement on climate change has yet to happen. Americans see government as creating problems, while Europeans expect government to solve problems.

This Jeffersonian outlook on government has been supplemented since World War II by America’s self-image as a global hegemon and the roles it has played in the greater world at large. As the only democratic superpower after WWII, the United States got used to being able to impose its will and play power politics in the global arena. This neo-realist behavior characterizes American international climate policy and explains its obstinacy in global negotiations. As a powerful state with global interests, the United States strives to protect these interests above all, and this includes what it sees as injurious domestic and international GHG regulations. While this explanation goes some way in explaining American opposition to strong domestic and international regulations, it must as well be noted that political support for climate action on the whole has been lower in America due in large part to a lack of public concern (Kraft 275). The American public has been intentionally misled and confused about the issue by certain industries, the right wing media and the Bush administration and fears that emission reduction actions may lower the overall standard of living. On the subject of American behavior in international climate negotiations, more literature exists than for Germany. I believe this stems from the United States’ very vocal, controversial positions on the subject. It seems more interesting to write about the dissenter. Also, because so much of Germany’s
positions are tied up with those of the EU’s, the German presence has been oftentimes behind the scenes and thus much harder to study concretely.

Aside from its Jeffersonian political leanings, American positions in regard to international climate treaties have centered on its ability to retain a relative economic competitive advantage over an increasingly up and coming Asia, specifically India and China. With this classic neo-realist concern, the normative debates in American policy debate have been over who should bear the primary responsibility for emissions reductions. Would it be the developed or developing world? Or should there be a common responsibility? Though policies have shifted from administration to administration, the American position has almost overwhelmingly been in favor of a common responsibility amongst all nations, including those in the developing world. More subtly, American negotiators, particularly in the mid-1990s, pursued the double-edged approach “of vocal support for international action while adopting a foreign policy strategy designed to delay progress in the climate negotiations and assure that future agreements would not require significant domestic action” (Cass 125). Through the neo-realist eye, America’s continued involvement in the dialogue allows it to shape more favorable agreements in such a manner that would increase its relative gains via economic competitiveness.

By the time the COP3 negotiations began in Kyoto in 1997, President Clinton had already laid out his plan for a climate agreement, introducing provisions to delay action and allow for flexible mechanisms that would let the US purchase reductions in other countries rather than take domestic action. The Clinton climate plan also called for developing states to accept requirements. Again, these measures would protect the United
States’ relative competitiveness. However, the Clinton administration faced an even bigger roadblock domestically than with anything it would encounter at the COP3 negotiations. Just before the Kyoto talks began, the American Senate unanimously passed Senate Resolution 98 (also called the Byrd-Hagel Resolution), a nonbinding resolution declaring that the United States should not sign any protocol mandating reduction commitments for Annex I countries unless developing nations would also have to meet targets. Resolution 98 also stated that an agreement would be unacceptable if it could cause ‘serious harm to the economy’ (Bailey and Compston 87). This meant that even if President Clinton signed the Kyoto Protocol, he would not be able to send it to the Senate for ratification without securing developing country participation.

For this climate plan to succeed, the administration would have needed to fundamentally change the normative debate to make all states, including Annex II developing nations, responsible for GHG reductions. It also would have had to shift reduction targets away from national responsibility and domestic commitments and towards global emission reductions and cost-effectiveness (Cass 133). At the time, the United States thought these things could be accomplished. As the (then) largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the United States stood in a strong position to shape any agreement. The Clinton administration made it clear that it could and would easily veto any agreement not meeting its minimum requirements even if it meant facing international condemnation. However, in principle, they did not want to. The administration instead tried to focus on balancing between overly ambitious commitments that faced Senatorial rejection and mediocre commitments that would alienate their partners. The Clinton administration principally wanted to use emissions trading with the developing world to
meet reduction targets (Kraft 274). This heavy use of market-based incentives would let
the administration to commit to greater reductions without taking on much more domestic
action. This policy reflected the extreme opposition from vast sectors of American
industry, the lukewarm support of congressional Democrats and absolute hostility on the
part of Republicans, who traditionally are less likely to embrace government market
interventions such as strict GHG regulations (Cass 125).

President Clinton signed the Kyoto protocol at the Conference of the Parties
meeting in Buenos Aires in November of 1998. The treaty called for the United States to
reduce its GHG emissions to 7% below 1990 levels by 2012. The March 1998
Congressional testimony of Janet Yellen, chair of the President’s Council of Economic
Advisors, best summed up the rationale behind the Clinton signature. Yellen testified that
the cost of achieving the Kyoto Protocol emissions would be relatively low and
emphasized the negotiated agreement “that would allow the United States to address the
problem in a manner consistent with continued economic growth” (Cass 166). This
method of emission reductions focused on international emissions trading, developing
country participation in said trading, using “sinks” (forests, landfills and other carbon
storage reservoirs) and domestic initiatives. Most of these initiatives would not actually
lower American emissions but would rather allow the US to be credited for reductions in
other countries. The administration planned on 75% of overall reductions to come from
emissions trading (Cass 167). This reliance on outside reductions reflected the intense
domestic objections to reductions. The best that could be hoped for were voluntary
industry initiatives and tax incentives to prompt GHG reductions, leaving the
international community to bear the weight of American reductions or face an American veto.

Additionally, the American Senate began organizing against the ratification of any treaty that did not include developing country participation and did its best to block any form of implementation prior to ratification. President Clinton, well aware that the sentiments expressed in the Byrd-Hagel resolution were still present in 1998, called the Kyoto Protocol a ‘work in progress’ and expressed hope that a compromise could be reached internationally and domestically (Bailey and Compston 88).

Internationally, negotiators from Europe and developing countries firmly opposed allowing the United States to purchase emissions reductions without initiating significant domestic action. This forced President Clinton into a delicate balancing act wherein he had to demonstrate a commitment to domestic reductions while also posturing for the Senate in regards to the developing country issue. To appease the international community, President Clinton unveiled the Climate Change Technology Initiative (CCTI), a five year $6.3 billion package of tax credits for highly efficient vehicles and homes and rooftop solar equipment and a $2.7 billion investment in energy efficiency research. The CCTI was Clinton’s attempt at demonstrating to international partners the administration’s commitment to reducing emissions. However, these measures took up only 1/10 of one percent of the 1999 Federal budget, and Congress ultimately rejected the tax credits. In Congress, the issue of developing country participation neared a breaking point, and the administration continued to play both sides. Even Vice President Gore, a global warming advocacy hero today, said that climate policy should not sacrifice growth and called for greater flexibility in the treaty. However, the Clinton administration would
not have a say in the matter for much longer, and the United States’ foreign policy would soon be taking a sharp neo-realist turn.

The year 2000 saw the election of President George Bush to the American Presidency. More of a climate change skeptic than his predecessors, President Bush withdrew the United States from the Kyoto Protocol on June 11, 2001, only five months after taking office, claiming that it would weaken the economy and create trade inequities by exempting Annex II states. Calling the Protocol ‘fatally flawed in fundamental ways,’ he instead called for voluntary reductions and additional research while at the same time pushing a fossil fuel heavy energy policy (Bailey and Compston 88). Bush’s Kyoto rejection served to alienate European negotiators, particularly Germany, even as the American Environmental Protection Agency in 2002 issued a report to the United Nations underscoring the grim consequences of human induced climate change for the United States. The report predicted an increase of dangerous heat waves, threats to alpine meadows, coral reefs and other ecosystems. The report also indicated that public health threats in the form of heat stress, air pollution and disease spread would continue to grow in the absence of firm emission reductions (Kraft 274). Largely ignoring such reports, the administration, at the behest of the energy and automobile lobbies, tried having Dr. Robert T. Watson, chair of the IPCC, replaced with someone more moderate (Kraft, 275).

The American withdrawal also served to weaken the Protocol through the ensuing efforts to bring the Americans back into the fold. These efforts largely centered on caving to certain American demands and encouraged other countries opposed to heavy commitments – namely Russia, Canada, Japan and Australia – to play their now
strengthened hands. The Kyoto Protocol went into effect in 2005 without the United States. Because the terms of the Kyoto Protocol end in 2012, negotiations for its replacement began shortly after its taking effect. In the planning stages for this treaty, UNFCCC countries negotiated the ‘Bali Roadmap’ at the COP13 summit in December of 2007. The Roadmap put in motion a two year process to agree to a post-2012 regime by December 2009 and set out for the first time an agenda that will study GHG reductions for both developed and developing nations, dropping the Annex I and Annex II designations (Bailey and Compston 57).

Although the Bush administration participated somewhat more meaningfully in these talks, they also began a series of dialogues aimed at emission reductions that would better serve the American foreign interest. In July 2005 the administration announced the formation of the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate (APP), a six nation partnership between China, India, South Korea, Japan, Australia and the United States focusing on the development of new technology to reduce GHG intensity. The APP’s focus on greenhouse gas intensity, the ratio of GHG emissions to economic output brought no new regulatory measures to the table, and any emissions reductions would be voluntary (National Goal to Reduce Emissions Intensity). Then, in September 2007, President Bush invited representatives from 15 of the world’s largest economies to Washington for a two day conference on climate change. In an address, Bush called for the world’s largest economies, developed and developing, to set a long-term emissions reduction target. At one point Bush declared: ‘By setting this goal, we acknowledge there is a problem, and by setting this goal, we commit ourselves to doing something about it’ (Bailey and Compston 89). However, this shift in rhetoric went unmatched by shifts in
policy as each new measure proposed or passed failed to contribute to any collective international action. Rather, the American administration kept up its neo-realist self interest in preserving the then current power structure.

The 1990s and early 2000s saw American international climate policy dominated by these neo-realist concerns surrounding economic security and stability. The rhetoric of the Clinton and Bush years centered on talks of voluntary measures, developing country participations and maintenance of economic competitiveness. Recognizing economic competitiveness as just an alternate way of describing relative gains, the Clinton and Bush positions can be seen as closely in line with the predictions of neo-realism. So long as American industry depends on carbon intensive operations, this will likely be the case. Just as in Germany, but to a much greater extent, powerful interest groups hold power over American legislatures, perpetuating the neo-realist characteristics of American climate policy.

European negotiators and environmentalists saw reason for hope in the 2008 election of Barack Obama to the American Presidency. In his campaign, President Obama asserted that Americans “have a moral, environmental, economic and security imperative to tackle climate change in a serious, sustainable manner (Barack Obama and Joe Biden: Promoting a Healthy Environment).” Along with this rhetorical promise, Obama proposed a long term goal of slicing American emissions to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050 and a short-term objective of reducing emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. He also pledged to re-engage with the UNFCCC and to create a Global Energy Forum consisting of G8 countries plus Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa that would complement the UNFCCC with the idea that this smaller group, responsible for a great
portion of global emissions, would be better suited to break institutional logjam. Further campaign promises included a technology transfer program and an international effort to confront deforestation.

The exhortations of President Obama resulted in 2009’s American Clean Energy and Security Act, a proposal in the United States House of Representatives to create a domestic cap and trade program. The act also deals with renewable energies, energy efficiency and carbon sequestration while granting increased power and oversight to the Environmental Protection Agency (H.R. 2454: American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009). So will these rhetorical and legislative shifts result in heightened American cooperation at Copenhagen in December 2009? In June of 2009, the American and Mexican governments issued a joint statement expressing their desire for emissions cuts among developed nations. The statement called for emissions cuts of 80% by 2050 to be complemented by a 50% reduction of emissions in developing nations (Roberts). While this statement and Obama’s campaign processes clearly signal a shift in administration ideology (the Clinton and Bush administrations would never have set specific reduction targets), the United States Congress could once again be the stumbling block. The cuts specified in the Waxman-Markey bill fall far short of what European negotiators and climate scientists say is needed to avert substantial global temperature rise, and Congress does not seem to be as ready as the Presidency to give up the neo-realist suspicion of developing nations: the bill mandates a yearly report on whether China and India are doing their fair share of emissions reductions despite the Obama administration’s assertions that China should not have to set concrete reduction targets at this point. This also illustrates a particular dilemma. Specifically, the American president’s take on the
issue, though it goes a long way towards setting the agenda, does not guarantee that his vision will be realized. Congressmen devoted to a single district will be far less inclined to see any broader picture if it affects their constituents (and thus their reelection chances) directly. So although President Obama may take a personal view that aligns more closely to neoliberalism and the German approach, the vision of the individual congressmen tends to be narrower and more shortsighted.
IV. Conclusions and theoretical implications: hope for progress?

“We, the leaders of the world’s major economies, both developed and developing, commit to combat climate change in accordance with our common but differentiated responsibilities … We support a shared vision for long-term cooperative action.” (G8 Declaration of Leaders Meeting of Major Economies on Energy Security and Climate Change)

With such heavy supportive statements for global action on climate change, it seems surprising, on the surface at least, that more direct action has yet to be taken on the part of the world’s largest countries. Only after we step back and look at the issue from a different angle can the complexity of climate change negotiations be fully understood. Climate change has moved away from being a purely physical phenomenon, towards becoming a representation of ideologies. The realist/institutionalist debate surrounding climate change is very real, and it all centers on the idea of liberal democracy. In Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World, Robert Keohane noted that “Sophisticated liberalism combines strands of commercialism, republicanism and regulatory politics. Attempts to regulate transnational activity occur as a response to economic interdependence, in the context of pluralistic democracy.” In any international regulatory debate, states will oftentimes have conflicting, sometimes competing, interests, and in any functioning liberal democracy, individuals within each state will also have conflicting and competing interests. The problem for climate change regulation in a liberal democracy is creating a compulsory concern for the environment would violate the liberal principles of autonomy and self-rule. Liberal democracy by definition allows for a multiplicity of views and interests, and forcing environmentalism upon unwilling
voters would run counter to the basic tenets of the liberal democratic system. The citizens in a liberal democracy have to *support* climate change legislation, and they will not do this so long as they are uniformed, misinformed or ambivalent about the issue.

Another ongoing difference between negotiating parties (particularly the United States and Europe) deals with the differences in the normative debate. Loren Cass claims that a greater convergence between international and domestic norms means a greater potential for the former to be integrated into the latter, and the domestic salience of international norms increases in direct proportion to the relative material interest of the state (Cass 10-12). This explains well the basis behind American and German international climate policy. The greater vested material interest a state has, the harder it will lobby to incorporate international norms into domestic policy, or vice versa. Because the climate change issue weighs so heavily on German voters, the German government finds itself in the position of having to enact strong domestic legislation while retaining international economic competitiveness. Thus we see the German push for strong international legislation. On the other hand, climate change has never been as major of a political issue for the United States, and American business groups, along with the Republican Party, traditionally oppose strong action. So the American interest has been to oppose the treaties. To understand this, we must unpack the American interest. American hesitance on the issue can be seen as a sort of public policy food chain typical of liberal democracies. First, the United States legislature, particularly the Senate has lacked will on the issue. Even the most recent bill, the Waxman-Markey legislation, has caused much partisan bickering and deadlock. This comes from a (growing) disinterest on the part of the American voter. According to an October 2009 survey by the Pew Research Center,
only 57% of Americans believe solid evidence for global warming exists, down from 77% in August of 2006. Only 36% of respondents linked global warming to human behavior, and only 35% said global warming was a “serious problem.” More worryingly for American policy, a majority of Americans, 55%, said they know absolutely nothing about cap and trade legislation (“Fewer Americans See Solid Evidence of Global Warming.”).

In contrast, a June 2009 Eurobarometer poll shows that 65% of Germans believe climate change is the most serious issue facing the world today and that 68% of Germans felt well-informed about climate change (European Commission). Although this could fill another thesis, perhaps it should be mentioned that the American media, charged with informing the citizenry, has been particularly slow to cover and/or hostile towards climate change. The fact that Americans have heard nothing about cap and trade means that the issue has not even come close to reaching the saturation it has in Europe. Political will is driven by public pressure and economic concerns. In the absence of public pressure in America, climate policy has been driven by neo-realist economic and industrial concerns. In Europe, public pressure has led to a more neo-liberal institutional approach that balances business interests and citizen concern.

It must also be realized that as the only true democratic superpower, the United States has been able to successfully play power politics virtually at will for the past 70 years or so. Aside from unilateral action, the United States has also used this leverage to create a series of international institutions. Because of these institutions, international cooperation among advanced industrialized nations since World War II has probably been more extensive than cooperation among major states than during any other period in history (Keohane, *After Hegemony* 9). Now that the United States’ absolute power is
declining somewhat and the confidence of other states is rising we have begun to see real
tensions between the actions of the international institutions and the will of the United
States. The American material interest is reflected in the neorealist international policies
it has pushed for since World War II. Chiefly, American interests in regards to climate
change center around its relative economic competitiveness. In the neorealist sense we
can view economic competitiveness along the same lines as military power. The United
States seeks to be the dominant force in international markets so that it may receive
maximum benefits. Its chief fears during the Clinton and Bush administrations were
losing ground to developing nations, particularly India and China, and for this reason
negotiators adamantly opposed any agreement excluding the two. Such an agreement
would severely threaten, in their eyes, America’s relative economic competitiveness.
President Obama has begun his administration in a more conciliatory and cooperative
tone. However, we must remember that rhetoric has changed before, and there have been
no concrete indicators of a wholehearted shift in policy. In fact, the mandate for a yearly
China and India emission reduction update only points towards business as usual. This
brings up another interesting fact – that the political interests of Congress restrain the
Presidency, and though the President controls the rhetoric, Congress controls the policy.
Further, it does not seem to matter which party holds the majority. The current Waxman-
Markey bill does not come close to resembling the ambitions of European partners
despite Congress holding a bicameral Democratic majority.

The German position in international climate negotiations reflects the multiplicity
of interests abounding in a liberal democracy. Liberal democracy is not concerned solely
with domestic autonomy, but rather the international relations take on liberal democracy
emphasizes individuals and seeks to understand collective decision making “and, in an ethical sense, promotes human rights and validates attempts to ameliorate the human condition” (Keohane, *Power and Governance* 10). Germany is a proportional representative Parliamentary democracy, meaning that the majority winners of any election will more than likely have to form coalitions with smaller parties (Jaggard 20). This system gives small groups a voice to be heard with. Thus, climate change, as a domestic concern, can achieve a higher degree of salience through small party representation, and German international positions reflect this. We see a genuine desire on behalf of German voters (in contrast with misinformed US voters) and politicians to reduce emissions, but because their emissions pale in comparison to those of the United States’, they have placed much emphasis on achieving an international emissions reductions agreement. In doing so, their behavior has followed a classic neoliberal institutionalist line of action. Germany has leveraged its individual reputation as an environmental leader to promote hefty GHG reduction targets in the European Union despite the opposition of some less environmentally minded states. Germany has assumed that a common responsibility to reduce would be beneficial for the entire organization. It only helps that common regulations throughout the European Community happen to be more than environmentally beneficial, providing jobs and revenue.

On the flip side, Germany, as a heavily industrialized country, oftentimes faces the same objections by business and industry as the United States. The difference, however, lies in the way these objections have been tackled. While the United States has approached the situation from a neorealist standpoint and has done its best to veto any sort of reductions, Germany has acted institutionally by advocating EU-wide emissions
targets. The same can be said for Germany’s participation in the UNFCCC talks with the difference being that Germany has been in the doubly influential position of having its voice heard alongside that of the EU, whose position it generally has a significant influence on. By acting through and cooperating with international institutions, Germany has been able to both affect patterns of behavior inside and outside its own borders and facilitate greater cooperation. These actions have affected the power realities surrounding the debate on climate change in a manner that promotes increased emissions regulations. What they have not done is resulted in promises that are consistently backed up by reality, and emissions cuts shortfalls will certainly have to be addressed in the near future.

Of course, political theories only explain part of the processes involved. Further research could focus on why the domestic salience of climate change has diverged in the two countries. Why do German citizens seemingly care more for the climate than their American counterparts? Explanations would likely center on education and media coverage. It appears, at least on the surface, that Germans possess a broader knowledge of the issue than the average American. More significantly though, media coverage in Germany has been more favorable towards climate action. German media reacts strongly to these issues. Notably, over 85% of the German public linked the 2002 Elbe River floods to climate change ("One year after the summer 2002 floods in Germany"). On the other hand, many American media outlets go out of their way to de-link events from climate change, as in the backlash against the hypothesis that Hurricane Katrina’s ferocity was fueled by warming ocean temperatures (Young). Whatever the domestic reasons, these two political theories do a good job of explaining the subsequent behavior of governments in acting internationally on climate change.
These two case studies ultimately show both sides of the coin when it comes to international climate negotiations, and they ultimately illustrate why an effective climate treaty in Copenhagen or at any other conference in the near future is unlikely. So long as the world’s largest per-capita emitter continues to play the neorealistic relative power game, no amount of institutional cooperation throughout the rest of the world’s liberal democracies will be able to halt a growth in global greenhouse gas emissions. And so long as any climate agreement omits developing world reduction targets, the United States remains unlikely to abandon its current negotiating positions. It is not that the United States’ motives are purely selfish and Germany’s wholly self-sacrificing but rather the manner in which they operate. United States policy – consistent with the state behavior predicted by neo-realism – focuses on short-term relative power gains over long term benefits. More specifically it revolves around the short-term costs and development implications of making drastic emissions cuts. In contrast, the neoliberal institutionalist optic of Germany and other environmentalist states assumes that cooperation will mitigate the relative costs of those emission reductions. This variance does not necessarily doom any international treaty; rather it kills any prospect that such a treaty will include the wide-ranging basket of tactics necessary to successfully thwart climate change. Battling climate change requires a level of cooperation among nations that would be difficult to achieve on any issue, let alone something so global in scale and seemingly distant in the future. In this rather depressing state of affairs we are left to draw our own conclusions on how governments can best tackle climate change, but without an ideological shift on behalf of the United States, the present efforts of Germany and its
partner states seem destined to be inconsequential alongside growing American, Chinese and Indian emissions.
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