

**DON'T TREAD ON CLIMATE POLICY: AMERICAN
NATIONALISM AND U.S. CLIMATE POLICY**

Honors Thesis

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By

Joey Wolongevicz

Dr. Steven Silvern
Faculty Advisor
Department of Geography and Sustainability

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Abstract

The United States has a turbulent relationship with both domestic and international climate change policy, fueled by American nationalism. While there are robust fields of research on both nationalism and climate policy separately, research on connections between the two has only just begun in the past few years. When that scope is further narrowed to specifically American nationalism and U.S. climate policy, the field becomes even more sparse. I argue that this void in the conversation is a significant grey area that gives anti-climate actors particular power in determining the fate of U.S. climate policy. Utilizing messaging that plays to the political hegemony of American nationalism has enabled anti-climate actors to kill, weaken, or delay indefinitely a number of important pieces of climate policy. In this paper I will compare and contrast four such policies: the Kyoto Protocol, the American Clean Energy and Security Act (cap and trade), The Clean Power Plan, and The Paris Agreement. I will identify a thread of common themes through each policy, including organized American nationalists, anti-globalism nationalist messaging, American nationalism in electoral politics, mistrust of the United Nations, and examples of American exceptionalism and isolationism. In an age where we have dwindling time to mitigate the worst effects of the climate crisis, understanding the systemic role ideologies like American nationalism play in disrupting climate policy is crucial.

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Introduction

Oftentimes, the United States is seen as a particularly unique actor in the global effort to combat the climate crisis. Both a leader and a rebel, a deal-maker and deal-breaker, the U.S. has perhaps the most influence in climate policy on the geopolitical stage. Often pivoting back and forth on its stances, the U.S. is nearly always in tension with nations like China, India, or even the European Union over climate policies, international agreements, and domestic plans. While many countries have experienced similar unpredictable domestic political trajectories due to the fluctuating nature of the climate crisis -the rapidly developing scientific consensus, emerging technology, and intensifying social pressure- the U.S. has received unique scrutiny for often going from one-hundred percent support of climate action to zero; charging forward and then leaping backwards, throwing global plans into chaos and leaving its own domestic policy in tatters. While many may attribute America's political turbulence to a progressive struggle repeatedly winning and losing battles against Republican presidents, a conservative Senate, or the powerful corporate oil and gas lobby, I argue that there is a larger, overarching factor that gives anti-climate lobbyists and politicians a significant advantage over U.S. climate policy: American nationalism.

While there are robust fields of research on both nationalism and climate policy separately, research on connections between the two has only just begun burgeoning in the past few years. When that scope is further narrowed to specifically American nationalism and U.S. climate policy however, the field becomes even more sparse. I argue that this void in academic discourse is a significant gray area that permits anti-

climate actors particular power in determining the fate of U.S. climate policy without appropriate scrutiny and accountability.

I argue that utilizing messaging that plays to the political hegemony of American nationalism has potentially enabled anti-climate actors to kill, weaken, or delay indefinitely a number of important pieces of climate policy. In this thesis, I will compare and contrast four such policies: the Kyoto Protocol, the American Clean Energy and Security Act (cap and trade), The Clean Power Plan, and the Paris Agreement. I will identify threads of common themes through each policy, including organized American nationalists, anti-globalism messaging, American nationalism in electoral politics, seeded mistrust of the United Nations, and examples of American exceptionalism, isolationism, and the “American way of life” or “creed”.

The aim of identifying these common themes throughout the four major policies is so that I can piece together a larger picture of American nationalism’s interactions with U.S. climate policy. Then, based on my conclusions, I will be able to make suggestions as to whether or not American nationalism has repeatedly led to the failure of major climate policies in the U.S.

The structure of this thesis will follow standard formatting practice. I will identify the sources I base my definitions and framing of American nationalism and other themes on in a comprehensive literature review. This literature review will also contain substantial information on the many non-academic sources that I will use in my policy case studies, such as news websites and other media outlets. In the subsequent methods section I will explain the comparison framework that I design and use to study my four climate policies as well as the practical methods I will use to perform my research.

Following methods, I will then have a section for each of the case study policies- four sections total. An analysis section will follow, where I will display the common themes and patterns of the policy timeline. Lastly, a conclusions section will end this thesis, where I will construct my final argument and make my final suggestions based on my results and analysis.

Literature Review

Introduction

It is widely known that certain actors, mainly scientific and economic groups, maintain significant influence on climate change policy across the globe. For example, the leading scientific authority on climate science, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), has been extensively cited in nearly every major international climate agreement and at all UN conventions in the past few decades, such as we saw in Paris in 2015 and more recently in Glasgow in 2021. However, even though political leaders often cite important academic actors like the IPCC, it is no secret that they are not following the science-informed path laid out for them. Thus, a significant gap has formed between scientific consensus and public policy. The core aim of this thesis is to investigate this gap by exploring the influence of nationalism in climate policy contests. Through a series of case studies focused on U.S. climate policy, I will investigate instances where American nationalist actors inhibit or block climate policy through their broad influence in the realms of government, business, popular culture, and media.

The field of academic research connecting nationalism and climate change is slim, and when narrowed to the study of American nationalism, even slimmer. However, I have found I am able to use existing literature to reasonably apply themes of nationalism to interactions between American nationalism and U.S. climate policy. These themes, such as exceptionalism, isolationism, populism and more, connect to U.S. climate policy through instances where nationalism meets climate policy in real-world applications. These applications include instances of political organizing, biased news reporting, public misinformation, public discourse, electoral organizing, lobbying, and more.

This review seeks to accomplish four points. First, establish a holistic framework for understanding nationalism as a concept. Second, establish a political and cultural context for understanding American nationalism within this framework. Third, provide examples of present conceptions of American nationalism and how it manifests in the present United States. Fourth and lastly, I will discuss the implications of this review for the topic and the thesis.

Nationalism Framework

In this section I will create a framework for understanding American nationalism based on a synthesis of three texts on traditional nationalism. Classically defined, “nationalism” is: “... a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be the nation-state. A deep attachment to one's native soil, to local traditions and to established territorial authority has existed in varying strength throughout history.” (Kohn 1957 p.9). While traditional definitions of nationalism at the scale of an individual citizen are seemingly consistent, disputes exist between academics on the occurrence of nationalism at a larger, societal scale. Hans Kohn, who is largely credited with pioneering the field of

nationalism studies, wrote of nationalism occurring as the result of tension between nations, such as the United States and Great Britain. In a similar vein, Elie Kedourie agrees that nationalism blooms from conflict, but argues that it is not a result of dispute between nations, but rather civil strife between generations housed in a single country (Kedourie 1993 p. 55). This civil conflict dealt with societal ills that the less powerful generation sought to shake off, and in the process take power back from the ruling generation. Both Kohn's conception of nationalism as a more personal "state of mind" and Kedourie's conception of civil strife tie together when considering the work of Tom Nairn, who argues that nationalism can serve "a "double inwardness" supplying both the internal needs of society as well as personal notions of identity" (Nairn 1977 p. 71). I find this dual definition compelling, and valuable to understanding a broader, more holistic view of nationalism.

Context for Understanding American Nationalism

To further understand American nationalism, I will discuss texts that frame American political culture and thus provide the context for understanding American nationalism within the nationalism framework. The holistic framework of nationalism that we have established uses a similar method as other scholarship in the broader field of political science that seeks to create a more accurate view of American identity and the foundations of American political culture. Rogers Smith, for example, argues that American political culture is not founded on *just* Lockian liberalism, as Louis Hartz and Alexis de Toqueville have argued, but on multiple traditions including republicanism and ascriptive Americanism (Smith 1993). This multiple traditions thesis is akin to Nairn's "double inwardness" whereas American political culture, which nationalism resides

within, is not created from a single source, but rather a combination of beliefs. In particular, the ascriptive Americanism that Smith writes of, a belief in inherent social hierarchies, is foundational to American political culture and contends with social prejudices and institutions that are vital to understanding a holistic, more accurate view of political culture that can better describe not only nationalism, but especially American nationalism and its multiple special qualities. As the American nationalist actors I research in this thesis exist in a space where identity and civics meet, it is useful to utilize a definition of nationalism that uses Nairn's idea of "double inwardness" to establish that nationalism satisfies both the individual, personal connection to one's nation as well as one's connection to their nation's larger societal issues and civic struggles.

Based on this assessment of the literature, I argue that it is the utility of nationalism, its bridge to civic connection and social struggle, that forms the norms and cultural signs that evolve into a personal nationalistic identity. For example, the famous Gadsden Flag, (also known as the "Don't Tread on Me" flag) was created as a nationalist political statement during the American Revolutionary War to promote American independence, but has since evolved into a symbol of national identity. It exists now not only as a flag, but as countless symbols of expression of identity such as patches, clothing, jewelry, and tattoos.

Further explorations of American nationalism tie the concept to a range of other relevant ideologies and beliefs, extending American nationalism beyond "traditional" nationalism and into something entirely separate. As international studies professor and nationalism researcher Dr. Anatol Lieven contends in the first section of his book *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism*, the United States

maintains an “exceptional nationalism” (Lieven 2012 pp.16-17). American nationalism is inherently bound up with the concept of American exceptionalism, the strongly held belief that the United States is uniquely better than other nations.

This “exceptional nationalism” and resulting “nationalist cult of American exceptionalism”, Lieven argues, is the cataclysmic result of two World Wars, the 9/11 terrorist attack, and, indeed, the country’s victory over the British in the American Revolutionary War, among other broadly unifying historical events in the nation (Lieven 2012 pp.16-19). Furthermore, Lieven continually defines American nationalism as a devotion not only to the nation but to the idea of the American Creed. This American Creed can be understood as the foundational democratic and constitutional values that make up common American beliefs about the nation (Lieven 2012 p.2). It is this “exceptional nationalism” that leads me to focus on the United States when researching this topic. I argue that the United States, not only as a world leader and global superpower, but also as the historically highest carbon-emitting nation (Gillis & Popovich 2017) has earned heightened scrutiny of its climate policies and thus of its exceptional nationalist foundations on which its climate policies rest upon.

Present Conceptions of American Nationalism

While the United States has been considered highly nationalistic, the average U.S. citizen would not describe themselves as nationalist and would likely ascribe a negative connotation to the notion. Instead, labels like “patriotic” are more common and widely accepted. (Pei 2003). Patriotism is often linked with nationalism and while there are technical distinctions between the two, Chinese-American political scientist Minxin Pei argues that in reality they are effectively the same (Pei 2003 pp. 31-32). Patriotism has

less controversial political connotations and thus is used more often than nationalism in communications. I have found examples of this “paradox” as Pei dubs it, where highly nationalistic figures and groups like Donald Trump and the Tea Party refer to themselves not as nationalists, but as humble supporters of abstract patriotic ideals such as freedom and liberty. This is a particularly insidious political manipulation, and one that enables nationalism to sneak undetected into the political discourse of important policies across the nation, including climate policies.

This political manipulation forms the most prominent limitation of contemporary American nationalism: it is formed by a common disdain, but does not have a common name. The reason contemporary American nationalism is controversial and not openly named, Pei argues, is a long held disdain for “Old World” nationalism that remains strong in modern culture. This Old World style of nationalism promoted a belief in social hierarchies and “imagined supremacy” over other nations and peoples, including races and ethnicities (Pei 2003 p. 31). As a result of this disdain for the outdated style of Old World American nationalism, its contemporary form instead views American political values and institutions as superior to other nations on the basis of political supremacy, rather than social supremacy (Pei 2003 p. 32). In Kedourie’s text, we also see nationalism forming around a desire to “shake off” old traditions and structures. When characterizing nationalist movements, Kedourie describes them as a “violent revolt against immemorial restraints ... a denunciation of decorum and measure” (Kedourie 1993 pp. 54-55). These “immemorial restraints” and disdain for Old World nationalism are rooted in a common fight against the American “elite”: powerful politicians and business figures who hold onto power. It is thus logical to assume contemporary American nationalism follows this

pattern: American nationalists do not often call themselves so publicly, but they do publicly share disdain for the supposed political elite, thus effectively organizing themselves in a shared category without drawing political ire. I will study this strategic tactic employed by American nationalists in this thesis and explore if it has been useful in building nationalist movements against climate policy.

Contemporary Manifestations of American Nationalism

To best discuss the contemporary manifestations of American nationalism in the United States, I will construct a brief history of its evolution- from its modern birth to its present form. To this end, I am employing various studies on the history of American nationalism that track its journey from a fading ideology held by a few into a powerful movement that transformed classic conservatism into a more extreme, influential, and dangerous ideology in the modern political landscape.

The background of this evolution begins in the 1980s, when Reagan conservatism was at its peak. As the Republican party shifted its focus to Reagan's preferred neoliberal policies such as austerity measures and tax cuts, another important movement was stirring under the surface. Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, two of the foremost researchers on American conservative politics, write that as Reagan's power waned, many conservatives began to find themselves on the periphery of political power. These conservatives were frustrated by the "liberal hegemony" of Democratic power in powerful institutions like the courts, media, and academia (Pierson and Skocpol 2011). As previously discussed, nationalism can form when a group of like-minded citizens seek to upend the establishment of elites that they feel do not represent their political will. Such was the case in the 1980's as these outside conservatives began to organize,

funneling capital into projects such as think-tanks and policy institutes aimed at establishing an intellectual base for their American nationalist values. This initial organizing and resource-building constructed the foundation of the contemporary American nationalist movement, and set it up effectively for future progress.

After a period of two decades of political organizing and resource-building, the present-day American nationalist movement began to emerge on the political scene in force during 2008-2010. This was a period of significant transformation, studied again by Skocpol, along with researchers Vanessa Williamson and John Coggin in their 2011 comprehensive political analysis: *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. They identified the catalyst of this transformation to be the election of President Obama in 2008. In response to Obama's liberal social spending and tax policies, an opposition interest group called the Tea Party formed. The Tea Party was a decentralized organization dedicated to building on the American nationalist movement by influencing national elections and public policy. The Tea Party forced the political establishment, through grassroots organizing and institutional lobbying, to consider their policy agenda. Their agenda was centered on an American nationalist conservatism informed by extreme libertarianism, American nativism, and white nationalism (Williamson et al. 2011). The Tea Party saw its power peak in the 2010 Congressional midterm elections, in which it was able to oust elected officials in vulnerable districts and replace them with a small but influential collection of Tea Party supporters. While the Tea Party as an organization faded out by 2012, its legacy remains, having successfully built on the American nationalist movement started in the 1980s and permanently transformed conservative politics.

The Tea Party's success in capitalizing on the foundation of American nationalism culminated not only in electoral successes, but also gains in the public policy arena. The political pressure the Tea Party exerted during the 2010 midterms awarded it with a level of power and influence that enabled it to achieve successful campaigns to destroy significant progressive policies like the Waxman-Markey cap and trade climate bill (Skocpol 2013). This momentum coincided with the rising climate denialism movement within conservative politics and enabled Tea Partiers to bring denialism to the forefront of the Republican party platform (Skocpol 2013). To achieve anti-climate policies, however, the movement had to sidestep criticism from the political status quo that would endanger its chances of success. Skocpol writes in her 2013 study *Naming The Problem: What It Will Take to Counter Extremism and Engage Americans in the Fight against Global Warming* that the conservative movement utilized its resources built in the 80s and bolstered in 2008-2009 by the Tea Party's transformation of the Republican party. What resulted was a strategic ploy to cement the anti-climate, denialism policy notion as a conservative faux academia: "They used non-profit, right-wing think tanks to sponsor and promote a cascade of books questioning the validity of climate science; and they pounced on occasional dissenters in the academic world, promoting them as beleaguered experts." (Skocpol 2013 pp. 64-67).

This faux academia, rooted in American nationalism, was widely successful in garnering political legitimacy and public acceptance and awarded the rapidly growing American nationalist conservative movement an influx of capital from private donors like the Koch brothers as well as other libertarian and Republican foundations (Skocpol 2013). Thus, the American nationalist movement, with funding and expanding resources, became a

powerful force against U.S. climate policy in the second decade of the 21st century.

The next stage of American nationalism's evolution into its present manifestation is the nation-state populism movement of the Donald Trump era that began in 2016. As Charles Post argued in a 2017 political commentary for the journal *Cultural Dynamics*, Donald Trump utilized the momentum built by the Tea Party as well as the institutional resources of the conservative establishment to further transform the Republican party and larger political landscape into one centered around a new, more extreme American nationalism. Trump's iteration of American nationalism differed from the longtime conservative establishment's. He opted for more populist rhetoric for broader appeal in a vein similar to the former Tea Party (Post 2017). This new appeal garnered Trump the support of the older white middle class who, according to Post, feared "downward mobility into the working class" (Post 2017 p. 101). Uri Friedman, journalist for *The Atlantic*, concurred in a rigorous investigation into Trump's populist rhetoric in the same year. Friedman argued that Trump began as a more traditional conservative, focusing primarily on tax cuts and deregulation, but eventually saw the potential of populist-nationalist politics and moved rapidly in that direction. To that end, Friedman recorded Trump's move into supporting stricter anti-immigration policies, anti-social spending policies, and anti-climate policies, all echoes of the policy agenda of the Tea Party (Friedman 2017). Furthermore, based on the research of populism researcher Cas Mudde, Friedman explains that Trump is not a traditional populist, but rather one who paired the "thin ideology" of populism with the "thicker" ideology of nationalism to promote his political agenda. Even though Trump lost the 2020 election to Joe Biden, his wildly successful populist nationalism maintains powerful influence over the conservative world

and the Republican party and informs the current manifestation of American nationalism.

Having established that the Trump era formed the contemporary American nationalism of populist nationalism, it is important to discuss the final piece in this evolutionary narrative: the Post-Trump era of American nationalism which began in 2019. The current American nationalism is focused on streamlining the populist nationalist brand and “detoxifying” nationalism by bringing it into the mainstream. An article by Jennifer Schuessler in the New York Times in 2019 laid out this Post-Trump American nationalism by covering what was essentially its “kickoff” event: the blockbuster National Conservatism Conference. At this conference, a host of prominent conservative politicians, academics, think-tank leaders, policymakers, and popular media figures attended a variety of events dedicated to reviving the pre-Trump American nationalism, while maintaining the energy and momentum it had during the Tea Party. Essentially, as Schuessler writes, the conservative movement is now focused on separating American nationalism from its negative connotations. “Conservatives have always prided themselves on being driven by ideas, and the big idea here was that nationalism — shorn of its darker associations — could provide an intellectual banner now that the conservatism based on free trade, libertarian economics and military interventionism that held sway for decades has run out of gas.” (Schuessler 2019). This present stage of the evolution of American nationalism marks the end of this transformative, multi-decade narrative. Overall, American nationalism has taken many forms and undergone a turbulent evolution, from the disgruntled Reagan-era

conservatives to the radical Tea Party organizers, but along every stage of its growth has continually influenced U.S. climate policy.

The implications of this narrative and review are significant for this thesis. The narrative of American nationalism proves it is a dynamic ideology, one that shifts and changes with the political and social tides. Understanding the dynamism and nuances of American nationalism is valuable as the policy case studies occurred years apart, and were each subject to different forms of American nationalism.

Conclusion

I conclude this literature review having established the four points I laid out in the introduction: a holistic framework for understanding nationalism as a concept, a political and cultural context for understanding American nationalism within this framework, examples of present conceptions of American nationalism and how it manifests in the present United States, and the implications of this review for the topic and the rest of the thesis. I reiterate that American nationalism is dynamic, and to understand its complexities requires not only an understanding of theory and the framework, but also its real-world manifestations along its historical narrative. Assessing the field of research I have employed in this review, I conclude that while academic work linking climate policies to nationalism is slim, there is still a strong basis for exploring nationalism and climate policy.

Policy Case Studies

Introduction

In this section I will explore how nationalism shaped four different U.S. climate policies: The Kyoto Protocol, The American Clean Energy and Security Act, The Clean Power Plan, and the Paris Agreement. These policies are four of the most significant attempts made by Congress and the executive branch to enact extensive legislation to reduce U.S. carbon emissions since 1997. The aim of the case studies is to present nationalist influence in the policies and their histories, focusing particularly on their discourse and outcomes. The information laid out in the case studies will be analyzed in the following analysis portion, where I will extract recurrent themes and actors.

The Kyoto Protocol (1997-2005)

In 1997, the world's governments established what is widely considered the first substantial policy aimed at combating climate change through lowering carbon emissions: The United Nations Kyoto Protocol. Adopted in 1997 and entering into force in 2005, the agreement currently has 192 parties (United Nations 2022). The Protocol was founded on the existing United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the previously established international resolution that committed member nations to taking domestic action on climate change and reporting their progress regularly to the UN.

The policy mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol were unprecedented at the time, with more stringent restrictions and penalties than previous environmental agreements. The Protocol went farther than the UNFCCC, establishing real emissions targets tailored

to each nation's emissions levels. According to the United Nations Kyoto Protocol website:

"In short, the Kyoto Protocol operationalizes the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by committing industrialized countries and economies in transition to limit and reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets. The Convention itself only asks those countries to adopt policies and measures on mitigation and to report periodically" (United Nations 2022).

The United States had a turbulent relationship with the Kyoto Protocol. During the negotiation process, the U.S. agreed to a seven percent decrease in carbon emissions below 1990 levels. President Bill Clinton signed the Protocol in 1998, but it was never sent to the Senate for ratification because of the Byrd-Hagel Resolution, a Senate resolution cosponsored by Senators Chuck Hagel (R-NE) and Robert Byrd (D-WV). The resolution, which was passed unanimously in the Senate, written in opposition to the Kyoto Protocol and established that the United States should not sign a climate treaty that would 'mandate new commitments to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions for the Annex I Parties, unless it also mandates new specific scheduled commitments to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions for Developing Country Parties within the same compliance period', or would result in serious harm to the economy of the United States (Congress.gov 2022).

The Byrd-Hagel resolution was, while not an actual law, a representation of the consensus of the Senate, having received a unanimous vote. Therefore, the resolution was pointed to by many policymakers and other actors in their opposition to the Kyoto Protocol. Senator Chuck Hagel, who drafted the resolution, said in a hearing in 1998:

“Last July, the Senate provided its advice to the Administration regarding this treaty and went clearly on the record by passing Senate Resolution 98, the Byrd-Hagel resolution, on a vote of 95 to zero. It is rare that a resolution critical of a major element of an Administration's foreign policy would receive such unanimous support in the United States Senate. Even more significant than the 95-0 vote is that this bipartisan resolution had 65 cosponsors, including 18 of my Democratic colleagues. The Byrd-Hagel Resolution was very clear. The resolution called on the President not to sign any Kyoto treaty...” (Hagel 1998). In the same hearing, Senator Rod Grams (R-MN) made a similar point: “I think this body made that point very clearly when we voted unanimously last summer on the Byrd-Hagel Resolution. I only regret that this administration saw that vote as a mere suggestion, rather than acknowledging the clear and unambiguous message that it contained” (Grams 1998).

Likely the most impactful influence of Byrd-Hagel was on President Bush, who referenced the resolution during a press release in which he affirmed his opposition to ratifying the Kyoto Protocol: “The Senate's vote, 95-0, shows that there is a clear consensus that the Kyoto Protocol is an unfair and ineffective means of addressing global climate change concerns” (Bush 2001). These statements, compounded with the unanimous vote, exemplify the Senate’s opposition to foreign climate change treaties.

Beyond Byrd-Hagel, many individual Senators took issue with the structure of the Protocol, complaining that it offered unfair breaks to developing nations like China and India, while kneecapping the U.S. economy. Senator Larry Craig (R-ID), head of the Republican Policy Committee stated that the Protocol is "designed to give some nations a free ride, it is designed to raise energy prices in the United States and it is designed to

perpetuate a new U.N. bureaucracy to manage global resource allocation" (Dewar & Sullivan 1997). President Clinton chose not to send the Kyoto Protocol to the Senate because of the unlikely chance of its ratification and the potential negative political repercussions.

The Senate was not the only chamber of Congress that opposed the Kyoto Protocol. In the U.S. House of Representatives, the Protocol faced harsh criticism from the top policymakers in the chamber. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich railed against the policy, claiming it would be disastrous for the U.S. economy and unfairly benefited less developed nations. In his statements, he appealed to his nationalist base, saying that the "the very future of the United States is at stake," (Balz 1997). House Majority Leader Trent Lott agreed with Gingrich, further establishing the Protocol as an agreement crafted by malicious international bureaucrats to weaken the U.S. economy. Lott listed five criteria that the Protocol would be judged on:

“no erosion of U.S. sovereignty, no hidden taxes, no loss of American jobs, no disadvantage for American business and no special advantage for Third World polluters” (Associated Press 1997).

Powerful American political think-tanks and media outlets sided with congressional leaders like Majority Leader Lott (R-MS) and Speaker Gingrich (R-GA). FOX News, The Heritage Foundation, The Cato Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute were key players in influencing the discourse around the treaty. The main arguments made by these actors in opposition to the Kyoto Protocol were its potential detrimental effect on the U.S. economy, a foreign challenge to American competitiveness in global markets, the alleged “special treatment” bestowed on developing countries, mainly China and

India, and finally that the Protocol somehow eroded America's national sovereignty. The Heritage Foundation lambasted the treaty as an attack on the American Way of Life with their analysts claiming that the treaty "will force Americans to sacrifice their personal and economic freedom to the whims of a new international bureaucracy" (Schaefer, Ansell, & Antonelli 1997). The Cato Institute was more blunt in their assessment, referring to the treaty as a plain "scam" that was a direct attempt by foreign powers to cripple the U.S. A Cato commenter wrote: "Kyoto would help wreck the economic engine that drives America forward while Europe lags behind. The persistent and significant differences between American and European gross economic production and unemployment are not accidents. Europe's leaders know Kyoto would "fix" that." (Michaels 2001). The American Enterprise Institute went beyond these more policy-focused claims and dipped into climate denialism. This is an excerpt from their fellow James K. Glassman, who wrote many articles on the Kyoto Protocol during his tenure: "The main problem with Kyoto, however, is that it is a drastic solution to a problem that may not exist. Scientists know very little about global warming—only that the earth has become hotter by one-half degree Celsius over the past century." (Glassman 2001). Lastly, FOX News supported both the policy side and the denialism side of the opposition by making their anti-Kyoto narrative more visible to the public and drumming up controversy.

Bush Adviser: Kyoto A No-Go Russia Slams Kyoto Protocol Russia Won't Ratify Kyoto Protocol Tactics of Global Warming Alarmists Does Science Justify Kyoto Protocol? Bush: Kyoto Would Have 'Wrecked' U.S. Economy

A series of compiled headlines from foxnews.com that featured the Kyoto Protocol from 2000-2008.

When George W. Bush was elected to the presidency in 2000, the political gray area the Kyoto Protocol had been existing in in the U.S. became very quickly black and white. Siding with conservatives and moderates in Congress as well as the corporate energy lobby, Bush announced his Administration would not seek ratification and would promptly withdraw the U.S. from the treaty. In a press release, President Bush emphasized his concerns with developing countries' roles in the treaty, especially China and India:

"This is a challenge that requires a 100 percent effort; ours, and the rest of the world's. The world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases is China. Yet, China was entirely exempted from the requirements of the Kyoto Protocol. India and Germany are among the top emitters. Yet, India was also exempt from Kyoto" (Office of the Press Secretary 2001).

In the wake of Bush's announcement, many felt his Administration was mirroring his father, former President George H.W. Bush's stance on climate. Both Administrations refused to make domestic sacrifices for climate change while decrying developing

countries as malicious. At the 1992 Rio Earth Summit Bush Sr. famously said the “American way of life is not up for negotiation”, destroying United Nations climate negotiations then, as his son would do eight years later (Aronoff 2021). President Bush’s rejection of the Kyoto Protocol was the final nail in the coffin for the policy in the U.S. Efforts to rejoin the treaty ultimately died, and the U.S. remains unaffiliated with the treaty today.

The American Clean Energy and Security Act (2009-2010)

The American Clean Energy and Security Act, also known as ACES, the Waxman-Markey Bill, and more commonly as cap-and-trade, was one of the most notable climate policies to come out of Congress in the late 2000s. The bill, H.R.2454 proposed by Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA), and co-sponsored by Senator Edward Markey (D-MA) was notoriously large and contained many policy mechanisms aimed at lowering U.S. carbon emissions. The main three mechanisms in this bill include:

“...provisions concerning clean energy, energy efficiency, reducing global warming pollution, transitioning to a clean energy economy, and providing for agriculture and forestry related offsets. Includes provisions: (1) creating a combined energy efficiency and renewable electricity standard and requiring retail electricity suppliers to meet 20% of their demand through renewable electricity and electricity savings by 2020; (2) setting a goal of, and requiring a strategic plan for, improving overall U.S. energy productivity by at least 2.5% per year by 2012 and maintaining that improvement rate through 2030; and (3) establishing a cap-and-trade system for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and

setting goals for reducing such emissions from covered sources by 83% of 2005 levels by 2050." (Congress.gov 2022).

ACES passed the House in 2009 by a narrow majority of 219 - 212. The bill was then submitted to the Senate but never brought to the floor by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV). The bill was effectively declared dead after its introduction in the Senate. The bill never made it to committee or the Senate floor for a variety of reasons, but mainly because Senator Reid knew it did not have the votes to pass. Although ACES did not become law, it leaves behind an impactful legacy that is valuable to study to understand climate policy dynamics in America.

The centerpiece of the American Clean Energy and Security Act was the cap-and-trade system, which was also its main point of controversy during the bill's run in Washington. Congress had designed a cap-and-trade system only once before, in 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act which created the Acid Rain Program (ARP). The ARP was a bipartisan program that developed an emissions cap and subsequent market trading system for emissions of sulfur dioxide, the pollutant that creates acid rain. The ARP was the first emissions-trading system in the world at its time and was extremely effective, reducing acid rain at a lower cost than other policy solutions and meeting its reduction goal three years early (Siikamäki et al. 2012). The ARP served as a model and an inspiration for ACES, which followed over a decade later.

To understand the discourse over the bill, an understanding of the 111th Congress's anatomy is essential. The 111th Congress began during the last two weeks of the George W. Bush Administration, and lasted for the first two years of Barack Obama's presidency. The Democrats held a supermajority in both chambers until Scott Brown (R-MA) was

elected to the Senate in 2010. Although they lost their supermajority, Democrats still held a trifecta, with control over the Presidency and both chambers of Congress. Key Congressional players at the time included Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, House Minority Leader John Boehner and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. Representative Waxman was the chairman of the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee in the House, and Senator Jeff Bingaman was chair of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in the Senate. It is these actors who were responsible for shepherding ACES through Congress, and are the most important political figures to analyze.

While the bill was pending in Congress, these politicians were all influenced by the Tea Party, an interest group that was setting political firestorms across the country. The Tea Party is a far-right, highly conservative, highly nationalistic group of anti-Obama Americans formed in response to the federal government's handling of the Great Recession. They were described by Theda Skocpol, an influential Harvard sociologist, as: "older white men and women dressed in Colonial costumes took to the streets in many places, carrying hand-made signs condemning Obama and his fellow Democrats as "Communists," "Socialists," and "Nazis"" (Skocpol 2013 87). The Tea Party vehemently opposed cap and trade and sought to lobby their representatives to stop the bill from passing. It was The Tea Party that famously coined the phrase "cap and tax", which would ultimately become the central smear used against the bill (Davidson 2010). Eventually the campaign became so effective that Democrats had to stop using the term 'cap' altogether. When asked about the word "cap" Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said "I don't use that. Those words are not in my vocabulary. We're going to work on

pollution” (Samuelsohn 2010). The Tea Party began targeting moderate Democrats and Republicans in the House who voted for the bill’s passage. They created the “Cap and Tax Eight” a group of eight House Republicans who voted for ACES that they accused of “selling out Americans”. Tea Party members focused on disrupting town hall events and held their own rallies, eventually amassing significant support across the country.

The Tea Party utilized a number of nationalistic rhetorical devices to achieve its policy goals and attract support from the nationalist network of think-tanks, interest groups, political action committees, and other NGO’s around the country. The key to the Tea Party’s nationalism politics is their nationalist-populist framing of the ACES debate. In classic nationalist form, Tea Party members often refer to themselves and their supporters as “the people” or “real Americans” often presenting that their side represents the true will of average, everyday American citizens. Much of their criticism against policies and politicians is that they misrepresent and misunderstand the wants and needs of “true” Americans. In an op-ed for CNN.com, Phillip Dennis, the founder of the Dallas Tea Party, wrote:

“If Republicans misread the intent of the American voter and are as fiscally reckless as they were during the Bush years, they soon will find themselves packing their bags and being replaced by a new crop of leaders who understand America will no longer tolerate reckless spending and misguided fiscal policies” (Dennis 2010).

Tea Party activists, like Dennis, hold no formal allegiance to any party, and instead a nationalistic allegiance to “the people”, framing the issues as an “us versus them”

scenario. Lisa Deaton, the founder of a Tea Party group called We The People Indiana, said: “They’re trying to use global warming against the people. It takes away our liberty” (Broder 2010).

The Tea Party, spurred on by other powerful conservative interest groups and figures, was opposed to the cap and trade bill for a number of reasons. Largely, they viewed it as an example of wasteful government spending and a waste of taxpayer dollars. They also argued that this bill would sacrifice American competitiveness in the global market by restricting domestic energy use and permitting countries they viewed as malicious, such as China or Russia, to take over and steal U.S. economic prosperity and jobs. Supporters of the Tea Party’s anti-ACES stance were popular conservative radio hosts Glen Beck and Rush Limbaugh, the former who described ACES as a “sledgehammer to freedom” (Limbaugh 2010). Powerful conservative think tanks like the Cato Institute concurred, citing that the cost of the bill would bring in zero benefits for taxpayers (Wilkinson 2009). As did the Heritage Foundation, claiming the bill It was this coalition, led by the Tea Party, that proved to be a fearsome force in the 2010 midterm elections and whose influence frightened many politicians.

The Tea Party was a largely decentralized movement with no official leader or structure, but still benefited from the participation of a network of organized nationalist actors. FreedomWorks, a conservative non-profit, was the centerpiece of this network. The organization used its status as a well-funded, popular conservative outlet to create and run the Tea Party’s website, circulate opinions and information, make public calls for petitions, and, most importantly, organize on-the-ground events for Tea Party chapters across the nation (Vogel 2009). Another powerful nationalist benefactor was the Tea

Party Express (TPE), an independent group that organized cross-country tours featuring popular politicians and celebrities to spread the Tea Party's message. The TPE was founded and run by a conservative political action committee called "Our Country Deserves Better" and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on not only their tours, but also funding electoral candidates for Congressional and state offices (CNN 2010). Sarah Palin, an oft-featured guest on TPE tours, reiterated the nationalistic "us versus them" position at a rally: "It is time to remind [elected officials] that government should be working for us, we should not have to work for the government. That's why there are more and more patriots everyday standing up and speaking out." (NPR 2010). The TPE and the broader Tea Party movement organized extensively in 2010, strategically ahead of the midterm elections, and released their political demands which they dubbed "The Contract From America". This "contract" featured ten policy demands, most of which focused on fiscal and tax policy. Number two on the contract was "Reject Cap and Trade" (Davis 2010). Overall, the Tea Party proved itself masterful at using nationalist rhetoric like "the people", "true America", "patriots", etc. to establish a nationalist "us versus them" narrative. This enabled the Tea Party to connect to the wider conservative network, spread their influence in a short amount of time, and achieve their policy goals.

The ultimate referendum for cap and trade, and what ultimately sank the bill completely, was the 2010 midterm elections. The Tea Party had wide influence across the nation, especially in more moderate or conservative districts, and some chapters were even sponsoring their own candidates to challenge policymakers who voted for legislation they opposed, like ACES. As a result of the Tea Party's momentum and organizing, more than two dozen Congressional Democrats who supported ACES lost

their seats in the 2010 midterm election (Samuelsohn & Bravender 2010). Representative Rick Boucher, then chairman of the energy subcommittee that drafted the legislation, lost his seat in the election to a Tea Party sympathetic candidate. One candidate, Matt Kirk, won a Senate seat only after he recanted his previous support for cap and trade. Joe Manchin III won his Senate seat in West Virginia with an NRA-sponsored advertisement portraying him shooting the cap and trade bill with a shotgun.



Manchin's "Dead Aim" campaign advertisement in 2010. Credit: YouTube.com

Ultimately, it was this midterm election that shattered the chances of cap and trade ever passing the Senate and becoming law.

The Clean Power Plan (2014-2019)

The Clean Power Plan, or the CPP, was Barack Obama's main environmental achievement during his two terms in office. Unable to pass any significant climate bills through Congress (like the American Clean Energy and Security Act) President Obama resorted to executive action and established the CPP in 2015. The plan was designed as "a set of rules meant to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions from the power sector by 30

percent from their historic peak" (Meyer 2017). It was managed by the Environmental Protection Agency, who had recently been empowered to regulate carbon emissions by the controversial "endangerment finding" in the 2007 Massachusetts vs. EPA Supreme Court case. The way the CPP worked was through individual emissions goals and limits the EPA assigned each state, then states were allowed to decide how to reach that goal themselves. States were required to submit their plans by 2018 and start cutting emissions by 2022 at the latest (U.S. Department of Justice 2021). The EPA's expectation was that U.S. fossil fuel emissions would be 32% lower in 2030 than they were in 2005 (Plumer 2015). The plan never went into effect however, as the Supreme Court blocked the plan in 2016 citing potential constitutional violations (Ford & Meyer 2016).

During his 2016 campaign for president, Donald Trump made it clear his agenda would include repealing much of Obama's climate policy legacy, including the Clean Power Plan. At a rally in 2016, Trump said: "Here is my 100-day action plan: Rescind all the job-destroying Obama executive actions, including the climate action plan," (Cushman 2016). To that end, the Trump Administration moved to repeal the Clean Power Plan upon his election to the White House. His appointed EPA administrator, Scott Pruitt, released a slew of new EPA rules centered around the Trump Administration's "America First" energy policy. One of these rules was an outright repeal of the CPP. Pruitt justified his decision to repeal the CPP, claiming that the original plan violated the core tenets of federalism and was an overreach of the EPA's powers (Friedman & Plumer 2017). At the signing event for the new rules, President Trump said to a group of coal miners he had staged at the event "C'mon, fellas. You know what this is? You know what this says?"

You're going back to work" (Davenport & Rubin 2017). The CPP was successfully repealed, and remains unimplemented.

Powerful think tanks like the Heritage Foundation applauded Trump's decision to repeal the CPP. These institutes and groups capitalized on Trump's decision to repeal, building a nationalist narrative that the CPP was endangering American independence, freedom, and security. Much of this narrative was built by using the nationalist-populist tactic of alienating the CPP and Obama, in an attempt to make them appear un-American. A policy analyst for the Heritage Foundation wrote that a repeal of the CPP would permit Americans to "reclaim their authority from the unelected bureaucrats whose regulatory ambitions threaten economic growth and individual prosperity" (Loris 2017). The Heartland Institute concurred, further building out a nationalistic narrative of "true" Americans, "the people", against the enemy, which in this case is Obama and climate-supportive policymakers: "By rescinding CPP, Trump is doing what he promised to do and what any president should do, putting Americans and American jobs first" (Burnett 2017). Heartland even went so far as to equate the Clean Power Plan with terrorism, claiming that the CCP "poses a far greater threat than terrorism to America's prosperity. It could well be the final nail in its coffin" (Robbins and Kalhoefer 2015). Rush Limbaugh, the most popular conservative media figure at the time, took it a step further, saying that Obama's call for personal responsibility and sacrifice for climate change meant he was calling Americans terrorists themselves: "You're destroying the planet, folks. You are worse than Al-Qaeda. You are worse than Iran getting a nuclear weapon. You! That's what he means here" (Robbins and Kalhoefer 2015). This nationalist narrative was bolstered through efforts by conservative think-tanks and organizations' wide-scale effort

to get the public to act for their cause. The Heartland Institute offers its readers an opportunity to participate in their nationalist energy agenda with a “Energy Freedom Scorecard” by which readers can assess policymaker’s energy programs to determine if they violate their American freedoms.

Furthermore, a specific political tactic used by conservative think-tanks like the Heritage Foundation and the Heartland Institute was to hone in on the coal industry to build out their nationalist narrative against the Clean Power Plan. They established the coal industry as representative of the American blue-collar working class and further alienated the Obama Administration and supporters as malicious, un-American bureaucrats who were attempting to swindle them and destroy American energy independence. Trump often utilized the coal sector as a symbol of American values and national strength, pitting the CPP as a regulation that killed the coal sector and by extension, America’s “energy dominance”. (Trump White House Archives 2020). Often Trump cited regulation like the CPP as “Obama’s war on coal” and “job-killing” (Trump White House Archives 2020). President Trump appointed a slew of former coal operatives in federal positions, including Pruitt who used to be a coal lobbyist. In conversation about the difference between Obama and Trump’s environmental positions, Luke Popovich, vice president of the National Mining Association said: “From a government whose avowed aim for eight years was to destroy the industry, we’ve understandably benefited from one that for eight months has helped us,” (Grunwald 2017). The Heartland Institute, like Trump, also continually referred to the CPP as a key policy in Obama’s “War on Coal”. In a web page entitled with the patriotic slogan “Join the fight for energy freedom” they likened the coal industry to American freedom: “Coal powered the Industrial Revolution and enabled the

United States to electrify in the twentieth century, creating the most prosperous and free nation in human history.” (Heartland Institute 2017). Additionally, the Heartland Institute wrote: “Under these Obama liberal, progressive, Democrat policies, there will be no American manufacturing renaissance. These policies amount to a declaration of war on the American economy and on blue collar working families.” (Ferrara 2015). This “War on Coal” narrative has been picked up by countless media outlets, politicians, and more in their efforts to kill the Clean Power Plan. Furthermore, this narrative was used against Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election to pick apart her climate agenda. In addition to the think tanks and media outlets, labor unions with coal interests furthered the nationalistic narrative. Ed Yankovich, vice president of the Pennsylvania and Northeast districts for the United Mine Workers union, attempted to alienate Clinton’s climate policies in the same way the Heartland Institute alienated the CPP. He said: “People look at these folks and say, ‘they’ve completely abandoned us, it’s like we don’t live in America.’ There’s a distinct bitterness about it,” (Goode 2015). Ultimately, the coal industry was used by nationalist actors like Trump and the Heartland Institute as a political stand-in for blue-collar Americans and equated the CPP to a malicious attempt by bureaucrats like Obama to harm them.

The eventual successor of Scott Pruitt and new EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler continued Pruitt’s legacy until the end of Trump’s presidency. He supported deregulation and continued the repeal process of the Clean Power Plan. Wheeler, like Trump and the fossil fuel corporations, aligned the issue with national security and global dominance, saying: "Reliable and affordable energy is the foundation of America’s strength. Without

it, our prosperity and security can fall outside our control." (Wheeler 2018). The Clean Power Plan remains unimplemented today.

The Paris Agreement (2015-2021)

Building on the legacy of the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement was the first successful CO₂-targeting international climate treaty of the 21st century. It was adopted by 196 parties at the annual UNFCCC Conference of Parties in 2015 and entered into force in 2016. This treaty established the 2°C limit for global warming, with a focus on keeping “preferably” to 1.5°C below pre-industrial levels (UNFCCC 2016). The policy mechanisms of the treaty work on a five-year cycle. By 2020, all parties were to establish their nationally determined contributions (NDC’s) which are effectively domestic climate action plans. The Obama Administration committed the U.S. to an NDC of a twenty six percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below 2005 levels by 2025, as enacted by executive order. Upon his election to the White House in 2016, President Trump fulfilled a campaign promise he made to his conservative base and began the process of withdrawing the United States from the Paris Agreement in 2017. In January 2021, after the 2020 Presidential election, President Biden reversed this decision and recommitted the U.S. to the Paris Agreement. The U.S. currently remains committed to the treaty.

President Donald Trump promised to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on his campaign trail during the 2016 presidential election. His argument was that the Paris Agreement was too costly, destroyed America’s sovereignty, gave other nations an advantage over the U.S., and eliminated industries he considered vital to America such as

coal, oil, and gas. Speaking on the issue, Trump said: “under the Paris Accord, billions of dollars that ought to be invested right here in America will be sent to the very countries that have taken our factories and our jobs away from us” (Heartland Institute 2017). According to the Trump Administration, the Paris Agreement violated its “America First” energy policy which sought to ramp up domestic production of coal, oil, and gas, and reduce energy dependence on other nations. Trump-appointed Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt said this about the treaty while discussing the “America First” nationalistic approach to climate policy: “It’s a bad deal for America...It was an America second, third, or fourth kind of approach” (Mooney & Dennis 2017). Pruitt and Trump, in their “America First” energy policy, prioritized domestic coal, oil, and gas, and removed energy regulations set by the EPA (White House Archives 2022). The Trump Administration believed that removing regulations on domestic energy production would increase American energy independence, while globalist treaties like the Paris Agreement would endanger it.



Donald Trump signs policies for his “America First” energy agenda in 2017 surrounded by coal miners. Credit: White House Archives.

The Trump Administration's rhetoric about the Paris Agreement, that the deal was a malicious attempt by other nations to effectively steal American prosperity and sovereignty, was a platform shared by other powerful nationalist actors such as interest groups, media outlets, and think tanks. The Heritage Foundation, The Heartland Institute, The Competitive Enterprise Institute, and FOX News all supported the withdrawal and opposed Obama's initial signing of the treaty. The Heritage Foundation revived the alienating "War on Coal" rhetoric they used against the Clean Power Plan, saying the Paris Agreement "would effectively decapitate our coal industry, which now supplies about one-third of our electric power. If Trump allows this deal to go forward, he will unwittingly fulfill Hillary Clinton's arrogant and dastardly promise to put every coal miner in America out of a job." (Moore and Doescher 2017). The Heartland Institute claimed if Trump "truly wants to be the champion of the American worker and American Industry he must take this opportunity to exit the agreement. If he does not, he puts the country at risk" (Orr 2017). The Competitive Enterprise Institute, yet another conservative think-tank, revived the Senate ratification argument against the Paris Agreement, claiming it should not have been signed without the Senate's approval, in a nod to the Byrd-Hagel resolution. They claimed the Paris Agreement was a threat to the Constitution and American sovereignty, utilizing nationalist framings of alienation to make their points. They wrote: "In addition to jeopardizing our prosperity and sovereignty, however, the Paris Agreement endangers the constitutional separation of powers.", and further, "Senate leaders and President Trump should collaborate to repudiate the Paris Agreement because it is the American people who actually reject it" (Lewis 2016).

Similar to Trump, Joe Biden made promises about the Paris Agreement on his road to the White House, as well. This time, upon his election, President Biden signed an executive order rejoining the U.S. to the Agreement and committing the country to rapid climate action to make up for years of stagnation under Trump. At the annual UNFCCC Conference of Parties 26 (COP26) President Biden expressed the new American position on climate and the Paris Agreement, a position Special Climate Envoy John Kerry has repeatedly called “ambitious” on Twitter (Kerry 2022). President Biden said at COP26:

“We’re also going to try to do our part when it comes to helping the rest of the world take action as well. We want to do more to help countries around the world, especially developing countries, accelerate their clean-energy transition, address pollution, and ensure the world we all must share a cleaner, safer, healthiest planet. And we have an obligation to help.”

(The White House 2021).

Biden’s rhetoric is a reversal of Trump’s, whereby instead of demonizing and alienating other countries and the UN as malicious bureaucrats, Biden seeks to help these countries and build bridges for shared climate action. The key difference between Biden and Trump’s climate agendas is that while Trump sought “nationalist” policy, only seeking to improve domestic interests, Biden sought “globalist” policies, seeking to work with the rest of the world on energy issues, as evidenced by his appearance at COP26. The executive order to rejoin the Paris Agreement remains in force and the U.S. is now back at the climate policy negotiating table at the United Nations.

Recurrent American nationalist themes

Anti-globalism

Globalism, as defined by American political scientist Joseph Nye, is: “at its core, seeks to describe and explain nothing more than a world which is characterized by networks of connections that span multi-continental distances” (Nye 2002). A key tenet of contemporary American nationalism is that “it thrives on irrational hatreds and on the portrayal of other nations or ethnoreligious groups as congenitally, irredeemably wicked and hostile” (Lieven 2012 p. 15). This irrational hatred and negative portrayal of foreign nations exemplifies a rejection of global networks and connections, and thus, manifests as anti-globalism.

Nationalist-populism

Populism is well-defined by researcher Cass Mudde in a 2017 article in *The Atlantic*. She is quoted here by journalist Uri Friedman:

“Populists are dividers, not uniters, Mudde told me. They split society into “two homogenous and antagonistic groups: the pure people on the one end and the corrupt elite on the other,” and say they’re guided by the “will of the people”” (Friedman 2017).

Nationalist-populism, or nation-state populism as termed by Trump Administration officials Jeff Sessions and Stephen Miller (Friedman 2017) is an ideology that pairs nationalist beliefs, such as national allegiance and pride, with divisive populist politics. It targets actors inside a nation as being against the nation, along with foreign actors. Miller illustrates the concept well in a 2016 Trump campaign speech:

“Everybody who stands against Donald Trump are the people who have been running the country into the ground, who have been controlling the levers of power. They’re the people who are responsible for our open borders, for our shrinking middle class, for our terrible trade deals” (Ioffe 2016).

Figure 1. Anti-globalist tactics and rhetoric used in opposition to the Kyoto Protocol, the American Clean Energy and Security Act, and the Paris Agreement



Figure 2. Nationalist-populist tactics and rhetoric used in opposition to Kyoto Protocol, The American Clean Energy and Security Act, the Clean Power Plan, and the Paris Agreement



Figure 3. Comparison of recurrent anti-globalist tactics and rhetoric used in opposition to the Kyoto Protocol, the American Clean Energy and Security Act, and the Paris Agreement

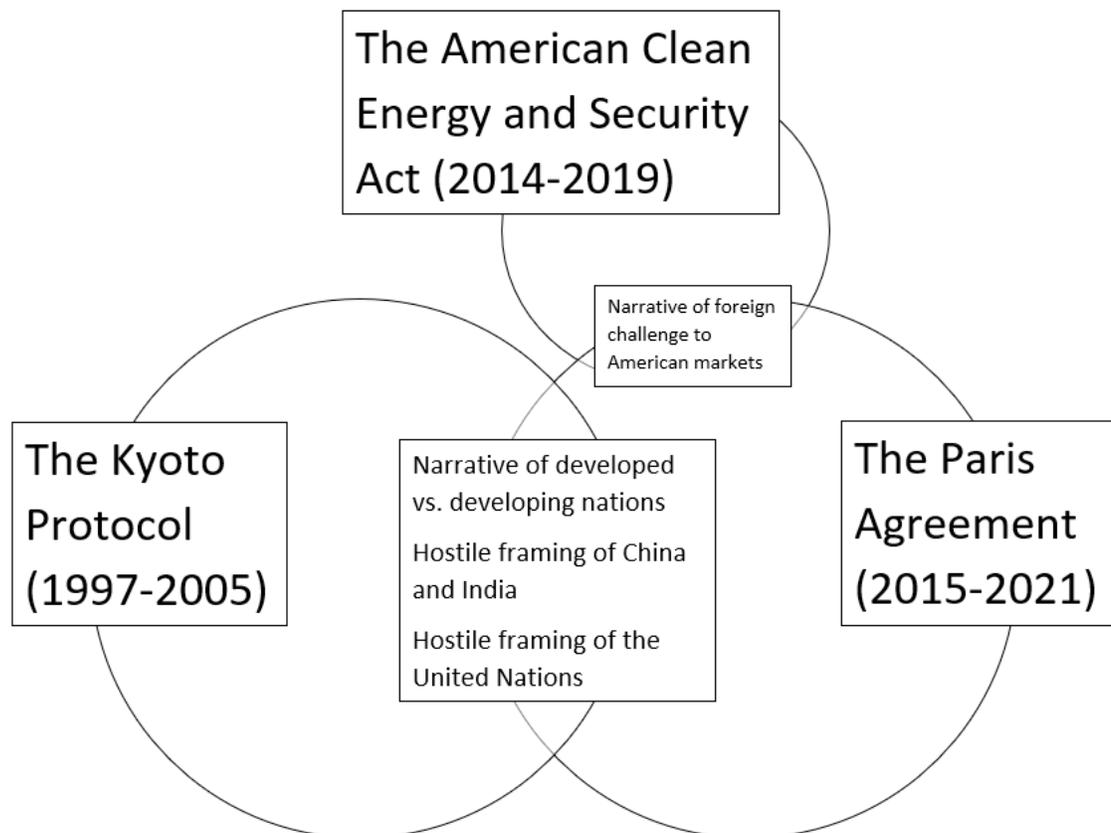


Figure 4. Comparison of recurrent nationalist-populist tactics and rhetoric used in opposition to the Kyoto Protocol, The American Clean Energy and Security Act, the Clean Power Plan, and the Paris Agreement

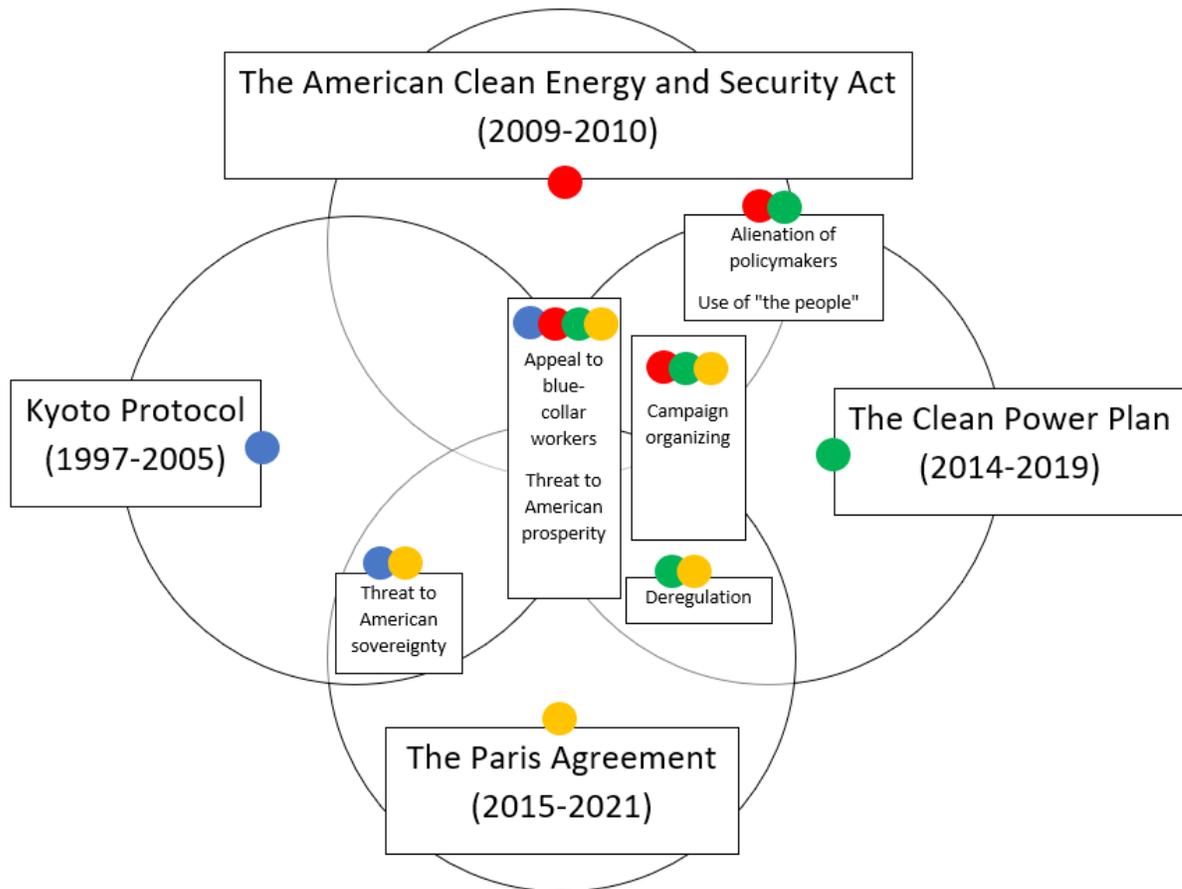


Figure 5. Comparison of recurrent identified nationalist actors in opposition to The Kyoto Protocol, The American Clean Energy and Security Act, The Clean Power Plan, and The Paris Agreement.



Analysis

Anti-globalism

Per Figure 3, it is evident that the majority of shared anti-globalist tactics and rhetoric are present in the opposition to the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. These two policy case studies share three tactics and rhetorical framings, suggesting that these two policies were subject to similar anti-globalist actions. This suggestion appears logical as both policy case studies, unlike the third study in Figure 3, the American Clean Energy

and Security Act, are global UN treaties. Therefore, the narrative of developed vs. developing nations, as well as the hostile framing of China, India, and the United Nations appear to be significant recurrent anti-globalist tactics and rhetoric employed in opposition to U.S. foreign climate policy.

Nationalist-populism

Per Figure 4, it is evident that The Kyoto Protocol, The American Clean Energy and Security Act, The Clean Power Plan, and The Paris Agreement case studies share at least two nationalist-populist tactics and/or rhetoric in their opposition. All four case studies share two tactics/rhetoric: “appeal to blue-collar workers” and “threat to American prosperity”. The Paris Agreement, the CPP, and ACES share the “campaign organizing” tactic in their opposition. The majority of shared rhetoric and tactics are tied between the Paris Agreement and the CPP. These relationships suggest that “appeal to blue-collar workers” and “threat to American prosperity” are central to nationalist-populist action against U.S. climate policy, and that campaign organizing plays a significant role as well.

Actors

Per Figure 5, it is evident that The Kyoto Protocol, The American Clean Energy and Security Act, The Clean Power Plan, and The Paris Agreement case studies share a single recurrent nationalist actor in FOX News. Conservative think-tanks are the most prevalent type of actors, with CATO, The Heartland Institute, and The Heritage Foundation present in the opposition to at least two or more policies. Rush Limbaugh and Donald Trump are the two most influential individual actors, both present in the opposition to at least two

policies. Coal affiliated groups, like the United Mine Workers Association and the National Mining Association were not broadly present, instead remaining in the CPP sphere. Similarly, the Tea Party and FreedomWorks, The Competitive Enterprise Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute all remained in their respective single policy spheres. These relationships suggest that FOX News and conservative think-tanks had the most influence in the opposition to the four policies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis asserts that American nationalism plays an important role in the outcomes of U.S. climate policy. In each of the four selected climate policies -The Kyoto Protocol, the American Clean Energy and Security Act, the Clean Power Plan, and the Paris Agreement- American nationalist rhetoric and tactics, either anti-globalist or nationalist-populist, were utilized by powerful anti-climate actors. Furthermore, each policy at one point in time either failed, was withdrawn, delayed, or bounced back and forth between presidential administrations. This thesis finds that the compromised outcomes of each climate policy run parallel to the consistent pattern of American nationalist opposition across all four case studies.

There are many gaps in the research of this thesis that future studies could benefit from looking into further. First, an intersectional analysis of the impacts of American nationalism on U.S. climate policy would illuminate a fuller picture of the situation. Factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, and income were not considered in this undergraduate thesis, but could be useful in determining potential important patterns for future study. Additionally, social issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. were

not factored in this thesis and could provide new insights into the topics at hand, especially considering the conservative actors in play. Lastly, this thesis did not consider the role of private funding and dark money, which could be beneficial for tracking the influence of nationalist actors across the policy timeline.

Ultimately, while further study is required in the burgeoning field of linking climate policy and American nationalism, there are potential uses for the research presented in this thesis. Future studies could consider the relationships and patterns presented and expand on certain tactics or rhetoric to establish a narrower thesis on their influence. For example, a researcher could delve deeper into the links between the hostile framings of China and India and the failures of the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement to make suggestions about how American nationalism functions in global climate treaties. Additionally, pro-climate actors could use this thesis to better understand the political American nationalist opposition to climate policies and surmise ways to counter it. Overall, as the climate crisis continues to intensify year-by-year, studying highly influential socio-political ideologies bound by geographic limits, like American nationalism, and how they connect to the narratives surrounding the climate crisis is more important now than ever before.

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