What is the role of transnational climate governance in the emerging climate regime?

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Countries have struggled to agree a treaty capable of shifting the world to a low emissions pathway. Unexpectedly, we have seen a huge range of action from cities, companies, provinces, regions, civil society groups, and other sub- and non-state actors. According to my own research, around 14,000 of these organizations have participated in cross border climate initiatives of some kind (Roger, Hale, and Andonova 2014). IR scholars term these "transnational" initiatives because they cross national borders but are not traditional "international" relations between sovereign states. Transnational climate governance (TCG) has attracted growing attention from scholars (Hale and Roger 2013; Bulkeley, Hale et al. 2014), as has transnational governance in other issue areas (Hale and Held 2011). Many more sub- and non-state actors may have taken action "unilaterally," meaning that the true extent of the groundswell of bottom up climate action remains unknown.

Our understanding of this phenomenon has grown quickly in recent years, but significant gaps remain, in large part because of data limitations. The crucial question of why sub- and non-state actors create and join TCG, and why TCG initiatives have proliferated to such an extent over the last two decades, remains unanswerable without a richer and more comprehensive picture of sub- and non-state climate action. I propose to create a new database to fill this gap. Like my previous work, and like the new UN NAZCA portal, the proposed database would capture the universe of transnational climate initiatives and record the cities, companies, and other actors that participate in them. But it would also offer two key improvements over these sources.

First, the database would map the evolution of TCG initiatives and their participants over time. We know that the number of TCG initiatives has grown over time, albeit unevenly (see figure 3). We also know the total picture of sub- and non-state actors' participation in TCG (see figure 4). But these existing sources present only an aggregate snapshot of TCG participants. To understand how TCG has spread around the world, we need to be able to measure which new participants, from which countries, join which initiatives in a given year. Collecting these data will allow us to turn a cross sectional dataset into a time series dataset, vastly expanding the analytic possibilities. For example, time series data would allow us to say which of the causal mechanisms the literature has identified have been most important in driving the growth of TCG. Have connections to transnational networks been the key driver? What role has socialization and competition played? Or are sub- and non-state actors mostly responding to their individual micro-incentives? What role have the domestic contexts in which sub- and non-state actors are embedded played? Without knowing the answers to these questions, we remain unable to predict how TCG may or may not continue to expand in the future.

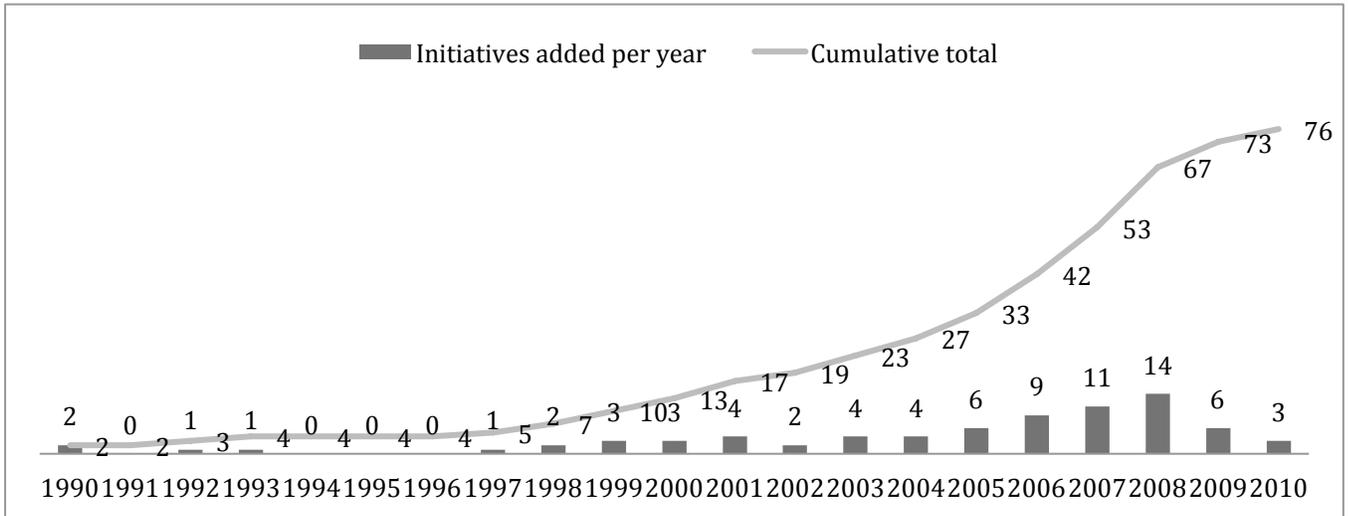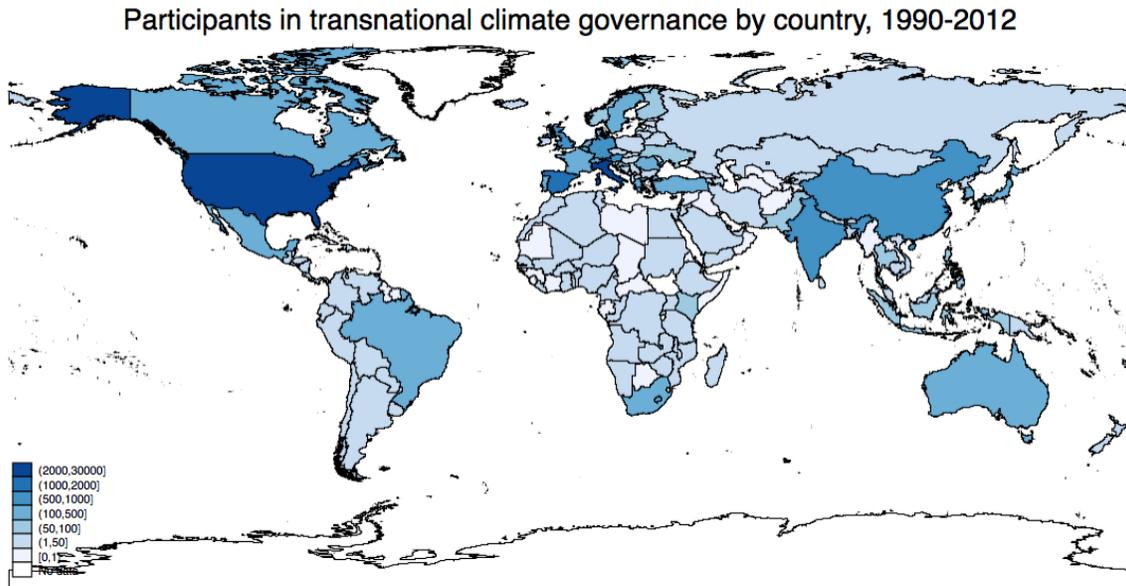Figure 1: Growth of TCG initiatives over time (source: Hale and Roger 2013)

Figure 2: Aggregate participation in TCG (source: Roger, Hale, and Andonova 2014)

Participants in transnational climate governance by country, 1990-2012

Second, we need to have a better understanding of climate actions that sub- and non-state actors take that are not necessarily linked to TCG initiatives. Existing research has looked almost entirely at sub- and non-state climate action that occurs as part of TCG initiatives, that is, actions that have some kind of international linkage. But anecdotal evidence suggests that much action by cities, companies, and other actors occurs largely independent of TCG initiatives. To properly assess the groundswell of bottom up climate action, we need to count these "unilateral" actions as well. Doing so also gives us causal leverage to analyze why sub- and non-state actors sometimes act through TCG initiatives, and why they sometimes "go it alone."

It is of course infeasible to survey the climate action (or inaction) of every single city and company in the world. Instead, I propose to conduct a "baseline" survey of climate action by sub-national governments in the two largest emitters, the United States and China, and in the 500 largest global corporations. The US sample will include all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as all the 295 cities and counties with over100,000 inhabitants. The Chinese sample would include all 34 provinces and the 247 cities and

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counties with over 150,000 inhabitants. The companies database would include the Global Fortune 500.

An expanded database of this nature, including both time series and baseline data, would be the most comprehensive overview of the universe of climate action ever produced. It would create a public resource for use by other academics and policymakers, available in perpetuity at the [Oxford Research Database Service](#). It would also allow me and my team to produce several studies aimed at publication in leading IR journals:

1. Why do sub/non-state actors take climate action? The vast new dataset would allow us to rigorously test the various causal mechanisms advanced in the literature as never before. By including both action in TCG initiatives and action outside them, we would be able to test the full range of sub/non-state climate action (at least for key countries) for the first time. I propose to produce one overview journal article looking at the entire universe of action, and then two additional articles looking at dynamics specific to cities and companies, respectively.

2. How do domestic politics condition sub/non-state climate action? While this topic has been the subject of earlier work, the previous study could not look at how changes in domestic politics conditioned participation in TCG. The cross temporal analysis the proposed database would allow would allow us to draw far stronger conclusions on the relationship between domestic politics and TCG. Additional articles on China and the United States could be added as well, drawing on the baseline datasets.

3. What is the aggregate impact of sub/non-state climate action? Finally, mapping the full universe of sub/non-state climate action will allow for a more accurate assessment of its impact on climate mitigation and adaptation. We will be able for the first time to evaluate the significance of the groundswell of sub/non-state action than has been possible thus far.