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Who is greener? Climate action and political regimes: trade-offs for national and international actors

Marianne Kneuer*

Institute for Social Sciences, Comparative Politics, University of Hildesheim, Hildesheim, Germany

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Climate change constitutes a major concern for all political regimes. The question, however, is whether different regime types show different degrees of disposition to reduce carbon emissions. Studies comparing the performance between democracies and autocracies provide us with some fundamental findings but most do not take into consideration the variety of regimes that are neither full democracies nor full autocracies. The perspective of this inquiry is one of a scholar in democracy studies aiming mainly to better understand possible trade-offs of different regime types in the context of climate change. The analysis addresses, first, the national level and discusses possible trade-offs and the difficult choices faced by democracies, autocracies, young democracies and democratizing countries in dealing with climate change. Secondly, the implications for the international level are considered, especially for democracy promoters and their policy options concerning emerging democracies and countries in transition that perform poorly in respect to climate action.

Keywords: democracies; autocracies; intermediate political regimes; climate change; democracy promotion; good governance

Introduction: recent political trends in democratization

Democracy is obviously challenged in many ways. In the last 20 years after the euphoria about the triumph of democracy several factors have created increasing concern. Firstly, there is revitalized competition between the old antagonists democracy and autocracy. This is much less a question of claiming ideological superiority than during the Cold War period, but rather one of competing value systems and one of which regime performs best in economic terms and is best able to absorb the external shocks on the global level. Secondly, there are signs of a sort of fatigue of democratic energy and symptoms of overload, in some well established as well as some young democracies. This phenomenon is linked to,
thirdly, organized forces inside countries that are resisting democratic change and reform. At the same time, the foreign posture of states like Russia and China resists the international spread of democracy and inhibit democracy promotion activities. And fourthly, there are other external factors of distress like shocks or developments on the international level that impact on the domestic level of political regimes, forcing them to modify and reformulate their strategic goals and policies.

Recent scholarly debates reflect a mainly sceptical if not pessimistic view of democratization and the promotion of democracy. This is due to three phenomena occurring since the end of the 1990s: the flattening of the third wave of democratization, meaning that the gains of democratic countries have stagnated; the resilience of the autocratic model; and finally growth in the variety of regimes between these two poles. Around one-third of all countries are neither fully consolidated democracies nor fully consolidated autocracies. Moreover while after 1989 democratization took a front seat in policy priorities, nationally and internationally, the situation has now changed. Other important global priorities are competing for primacy, including climate change and energy security – two issues which are, by the way, closely linked – and the post-2007 financial crisis.

The following discussion will concentrate on climate change as a stress factor, suggesting the need for trade-offs and confronting policymakers with ‘painful’ choices between two potentially equally important objectives: democracy or democratization on one side and climate change mitigation or prevention (i.e. carbon reduction) on the other. The perspective here is that of a scholar in democracy studies whose aim is to better understand the implications of climate change for actors on the national level and for democracy promoters on the international level. Referring to the national level the first question to be addressed is whether it makes a difference for climate change policy if a country is democratic or autocratic. And, related to that, how do countries approach climate change when they are neither democracies nor autocracies but instead belong to the considerable variety of ‘intermediate regimes’? This study compares climate change (mitigation) against regime types in a finer-grained way than is usual.

The second question asks about the implications for international democracy support. The international dimensions of climate change raise many issues: in recent years ethical questions increasingly pervaded the field, turning towards a normative debate about ‘climate justice’. And policymakers have become increasingly aware that climate policy is connected to issues like international security, human rights, and governance; that national priorities in foreign policy such as those concerning aid and trade all have to be reconsidered.

Put simply, the emergence of global climate change issues raises some challenging questions for national policymakers and could bring conflicts between their different objectives to the fore – notably between striving to promote democracy and support democratization processes abroad on the one hand, and any concern that polities in transition and young democracies may be less able to undertake and implement climate policy compared to stable autocracies. Of course conflicts among objectives in international politics are nothing new. But while the dichotomy
of idea (democratization) and interest (national security) during the Cold War may have seemed obvious, the choices have become more complicated since 1990. Democratization and climate change mitigation do not incorporate such a clear-cut binomial opposition. The implications for responsible international action and the respective policy strategies of the democracies become more complicated.

Moreover, climate change policy is closely linked to other challenges such as the current international financial crisis and to sensitive fields like national energy security, which potentially have direct or indirect impact on environmental policy. The major disaster at Japan’s Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2011 revealed that elaborate energy supply policies in other countries like Germany could crumble quickly, and this in turn will have consequences for their carbon emission and related action on climate mitigation. There may be some difficult choices for democracy promoters too, for if emerging democracies and countries in political transition perform poorly in respect of climate change should their endeavours to democratize still receive support? Or should support for governance be prioritized over democratization, meaning that the main priority would be to strengthen state capacity and improve governance (so-called good governance) instead? Are these strategies alternatives or might they be complementary, for the purpose of tackling climate change?

The next section surveys the main lines in the discourse about regime performance. The third section, based on a quantitative analysis, addresses the national level and analyses the dispositions of the different regime types and their difficult choices in tackling climate change. The fourth section concentrates on the implications for the international level and discusses the policy options of democracy promoters. The fifth and final section presents some tentative conclusions and policy recommendations.

Taking stock: performance of regimes compared and new challenges

The breadth of available research comparing the performance of democracies and autocracies provides some basic findings. Generally it is assumed that democracies outperform autocracies with respect to governance and policy outputs, especially economic performance but also in such areas as education, research and development, employment policy, and social policy.9 This applies to environmental performance too.9 There are four widely understood reasons why democracies are generally more protective of the environment. First, voters can put pressure on politicians to address environmental problems, and governments will try to respond to these demands because they want to be re-elected. Secondly, the free flow of information and the freedom of science and the exchange of knowledge benefit technological innovations for environmental solutions. Thirdly, democracies provide more effective governance (including a more professional civil service). And fourthly, democracies have a higher tendency to engage in international problem-solving. On the other hand, some macro-quantitative studies conducted since the 1990s actually show mixed results concerning the advantage of democracies in environmental policy specifically.10
The findings mentioned above refer to the group of constitutional democracies. However, most studies do not take account of the different stages of democratic development and of the development of the third wave of democratization. While the first decade after 1989 saw a significant increase in the number of democracies the pace of change slowed down markedly after the mid-1990s. Another decade later, Freedom House claimed to see a ‘pushback against democracy’ which accounted for ‘worrisome trends’, including the stagnation of some countries designated as free, setbacks for freedom in Asia-Pacific and Africa, and the entrenchment of authoritarian rule in many countries of the former Soviet Union. More recently still writers like Diamond have perceived ‘a powerful authoritarian undertow’ that was leading the world into a democratic recession. The 2010 Freedom House Survey measured the longest multiyear spate of backsliding since 1973, although the democratic revolutions taking place in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2011 and the ongoing protests in Syria and Yemen might suggest that the democratic pessimism has been overdrawn. Even so, the competing models of economically successful autocracies like China, Vietnam, and Russia must raise questions about whether they are now equally or more worthy of emulation.

The picture is even more complicated. Not every democratic transition has led to successful democratic consolidation. While the young new democracies in Central Eastern Europe can be seen as largely consolidated in the 1990s, having received that democratic hallmark from the European Union (EU) which allowed them to become members in 2004, some other parts of the world including Africa, Asia, and even Latin America have yet to achieve fully comparable democratic consolidation. Instead, there are unconsolidated democracies and what are sometimes called defective democracies, with some being described as hybrid regimes and some en route to regressing towards autocracy. Hadenius and Teorell for example calculated that less than one-quarter of the changes from authoritarian regimes between 1972 and 2003 effectively resulted in democratic government. The empirical variety of democratization results gave way to the conceptual creation of many different examples of ‘democracy with adjectives’. Remarkable efforts have been made to produce typologies for each group, with some quite different results. Although there is no consensus on definitions it is generally accepted that there is a substantial and quite diverse group of what I call here intermediate regimes, that is to say regimes that lie somewhere between full-fledged democracy and full autocracy.

Based on this it is necessary to differentiate the comparative analysis of performance into not two but three groups: democracies including some fully-fledged new democracies, autocracies, and the intermediate regimes. For the following analysis then it is important to clarify the terminology, and to acknowledge that the different indices provided by the literature for assessing regime performance actually employ their own distinctive concepts: although both the Freedom House Nations in Transit Index and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) use a continuum model, offering five different categories of
regime type, they each have their own conceptual backgrounds and premises. Although both indices can be used to go beyond a comparison simply of democracies and autocracies, the following analysis will use the BTI categories. This is because the BTI index has the advantage of measuring environmental policy and performance. Therefore the five BTI subtypes will be used here: democracies (in consolidation), defective democracy, highly defective democracy, moderate autocracy, and autocracy.19 The umbrella term ‘intermediate regimes’ used in this article thus encompasses defective democracy, highly defective democracy, and moderate autocracy. This is important to addressing the questions that ask which regimes are best equipped to overcome the challenges of climate change and take effective policy action in the form of mitigation (the reduction of the sources or the enhancement of sinks of greenhouse gases) and adaptation (reaction to climate change effects in reducing the vulnerability of natural and human systems). For the issue is not only about the contrast between democracies and autocracies, but also about the wider issue of how willing and able to adopt and implement climate change policies are different democratic and autocratic regime subtypes and the large number of intermediate regimes especially.

It is within the group of intermediate regimes that most political movement takes place – both democratic advance and retreat. At the same time, these countries include the ones that are most prone to political crisis; institutionally they are not fully stabilized, and sudden political, economic or social problems can easily upset their precarious equilibrium. And in many of these regimes the state administration appears to have only limited effectiveness; the weakness or partial erosion of the state’s capacity to exert power is an important cause of their democratic deficiencies. If fragile stateness comes together with poverty and social underdevelopment in a society with a weak tradition of civil society and rule of law, then it is reasonable to assert that democratic consolidation is unlikely to happen.20 Hence, a first argument referring to the performance of intermediate regimes is that they are prone to display deficits in institutional stability and in governance structures, contrary to the requirements of effective policymaking. The shortcomings of institutional stability and governance capabilities could influence on one side the ability to generate a consistent climate policy. On the other side it could lead to other, more pressing issues than climate policy being made a political priority. Especially developing countries, as Burnell says, may face a trade-off between pursuing democratization and taking steps to mitigate carbon emissions (and, perhaps, adapting to climate change effects as well).21 This leads to a second argument: autocracies not facing this trade-off and autocracies that happen to enjoy high institutional stability and efficient governance structures could be more likely to show a good performance in climate policy.

Comparing performance in climate policy
Regarding environmental policy, research indicates that democracies seem to provide more elements that favour environmentally protective policy action. As
a leading environmental policy specialist expressed in the 1990s, ‘That democracy in general is a better precondition for environmental policy than authoritarian rule is extremely plausible. There seems to be no need for explanation’. Nevertheless, a large number of macro-quantitative studies have been undertaken in order to better understand this correlation and, as several authors have noticed, the actual empirical findings produce varying findings in terms of the relevance and the impact of democracy for environmental policy. The mixed nature of the evidence owes at least in part to differences in research design.

Most of these studies do not consider the different stages of democratization. Burnell, who does include the likes of hybrid regimes, defective democracies, and democratizing countries, offers three points. First, he considers the argument that authoritarian regimes can sometimes be good for economic growth and development and that in certain cases they perform better than democracies. Second, economically successful democracies have energy-intensive lifestyles that fuel their carbon emissions. And finally, Burnell elaborates on the implications for developing countries that might want to become democracies. He adapts and transforms the old argument which says developing countries face a painful decision between developing the economy and building a democracy into the possibility of a new kind of choice: either pursue democratization on the one hand or take steps to mitigate carbon emission (and/or adapt to climate change effects) on the other. He observes that if a government in a developing country is to take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and if the idea of an inevitable trade-off with economic growth is accepted, then freedom from electoral competition and a concentration of power at the centre could be advantageous. This reasoning might even strengthen further the case for authoritarian rule. Moreover difficult choices can arise when countries in democratic transition or intermediate regimes may not be in a position to prioritize environmental values without risking increased political instability. Thus, if climate mitigation really is urgent, becoming more autocratic or rendering autocracy more stable ‘could prove a more effective response than a protracted, uncertain path of democratic transition’. Finally, Burnell says democratization ‘might not be good in all circumstances and could even be bad’. These claims merit close inspection in the light of the empirical record to date.

**Climate protection performance**

The complex issue of climate protection performance will be discussed step by step. First of all, looking at the outcome, namely GHG emissions, over half (32) of the 60 biggest emitters are democracies. At the same time, in terms of trends in emissions from 1990 to 2007 democracies clearly have the advantage compared to autocracies. Neumayer remarks that outcomes can be influenced by a ‘plethora of factors including natural ones most of which have nothing to do with democracy’. He suggests we should look at countries’ international environmental commitments (indicated, for example, by the signing of multilateral
agreements and international protocols). This confirms that democracies show a stronger commitment than autocracies – a finding subsequently corroborated by Bättig and Bernauer, who show that democracies are more responsive at the level of political commitment than non-democracies. However, Bättig and Bernauer go on to conclude that democracies have difficulty matching words with deeds, which weakens the positive link with climate mitigation outcomes. The most robust type of assessment of performance would, then, include both policy commitment as well as outcomes.

The Germanwatch Climate Protection Index (CPI) assesses the outcomes (emission level as well as trends) and the commitment (climate policy) of the 57 countries responsible for more than 90% of the global CO₂ emissions. The composition of the CPI weights trends (e.g. electricity, renewable energies, international aviation, national transport, private households, production and construction) at 50%, the emissions level (CO₂ per primary energy unit, primary energy per gross domestic product (GDP) unit, and primary energy per capita) at 30%, and climate policy (national and international climate policy) at 20%. On the basis of this index, five groups are identified: best, good, modest, bad, and very bad performers. In a first step that looks at the overall performance, I correlate these categories with the five regime types of the BTI spelled out earlier, and add the regime type of established democracy which by nature is not included in the BTI.

Table 1 reveals that the majority of the 57 countries responsible for more than 90% of the global CO₂ emissions are democracies, namely 25 established democracies and 15 democracies in consolidation. There are as many democracies performing in a good or modest way in climate protection as those performing badly or very badly. Table 1 also indicates that autocracies do not display an advantage in climate change policy: there are no good performers and the majority of autocracies can be found among the very bad performers. At the same time, they feature along with some democracies among the bad performers. Regarding the intermediate regimes likewise bad and very bad performers dominate, while Mexico stands out in the category ‘good’. The record of the emerging economies as a whole is interesting: an equal number belongs to good and modest performers on one side and bad and very bad performers on the other side. The differentiation in regime types however does show that the state of democracy could make a difference (while bearing in mind that correlation is not necessarily causation): among the good and modest groups there are only democracies in consolidation (Brazil and India) and defective democracies (Mexico, Indonesia, South Africa) while the bad and very bad groups include the highly defective democracy Russia, moderate autocracies (Singapore and Malaysia) and the hard-line autocracy China. This finding points to the fact that countries representing the capitalist autocratic model like Russia, China and in some measure Singapore lag far behind the democracies.

In a second step, I now extract from the overall scores of Germanwatch’s CPI the data for both national and international climate policy commitment – as
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Source: Author’s compilation on the basis of Germanwatch Climate Protection Index 2011.

Notes: Types of political regimes according to BTI 2010; the category of established democracies has been added by the author. Percentage figures rounded up or down. $N=57$. The order of countries inside a category corresponds to their score; the first mentioned country represents the best score in each category. Brackets denote countries have equal scores.
postulated by Neumayer – in order to get a more detailed picture that goes beyond just an assessment of policy outcomes.\textsuperscript{31} Again the figures are correlated to the regime types set out in the BTI.

The results in Table 2 manifest a similar overall distribution of better and worst performance for the regime type of established democracies and for the various intermediate regimes (although several countries occupy a different position for climate policy commitment). The group of democracies in consolidation is characterized by favourable commitment. But something similar also applies to autocracies including China and Iran, although Saudi Arabia is an exception that features as very bad performer. The most significant difference from Table 1 concerns China, which gains the best score of all 57 countries. Regarding the emerging economies, in the group of good and modest performers again democracies in consolidation dominate (Brazil, India, South Korea). But in contrast to the overall scores represented in Table 1 the state of democracy does not appear to make such a difference to the specific indicator of national commitment: Some cases that are nearer the democratic pole rather show less commitment (Mexico, South Africa, Indonesia) while cases nearer to the autocratic pole (Singapore, China) show more commitment. In sum, the national commitment of intermediate regimes is rather weak; and this applies especially to the defective and highly defective democracies. We now turn to international policy commitment.

The Table 3 comparison of national and international policy commitment shows the distribution of better and worse performers is almost the same for established democracies and democracies in consolidation. Regarding the autocracies the picture also is quite similar: China, Iran and Morocco show a modest commitment while Belarus and Saudi Arabia (with the worst score) lag behind. The most interesting finding is the group of intermediate regimes: their generally weak national commitment contrasts here with a better performance in international policy commitment, where a majority sits in the category of modest performance. There is a slight advantage of defective democracies against moderate autocracies. Moreover, all the emerging economies display an above average commitment on the international level.

One explanation for the differences between national and international commitment could be that it is more demanding to formulate and implement national climate action than to sign international agreements, which predisposes intermediate regimes more favourably towards the latter. A second reason could be a regime’s desire to improve its international image. And a third aspect points to national pressure on the governments, from interest groups and civil society or from constraints like dense population and high energy consumption that compel the government to agree to mitigation or prevention strategies. Thus China’s outstanding high score for national policy commitment seems to reflect internal pressure while its international commitment – still rated ‘modest’ – is lower. Russia in contrast displays low national policy commitment, possibly because of minimal internal pressure, and a higher international commitment.
Table 2. National climate policy commitment of the 57 main GHG emitting countries.

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Source: As for Table 1.
Table 3. International climate policy commitment of the 57 main GHG emitting countries.

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<tr>
<th>Established democracies</th>
<th>Democracies in consolidation</th>
<th>Defective democracies</th>
<th>Highly defective democracies</th>
<th>Moderate autocracies</th>
<th>Hard-line autocracies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Brazil, South Korea</td>
<td>Mexico, South Africa</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>China</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
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<td>UK</td>
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<td>Morocco</td>
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<td>Modest</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>India, (Taiwan, Hungary, Latvia, Slovenia)</td>
<td>Indonesia, Argentina</td>
<td>Russia</td>
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<td>Iceland</td>
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<td>Ireland (Netherlands, Belgium)</td>
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<td>Bad</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Croatia, Slovakia</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Belarus</td>
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<td>Austria (Finland, Estonia, Sweden)</td>
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<td>New Zealand</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very bad</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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Source: As for Table 1.
The aspect of governance

We turn now to governance capabilities as a variable that might explain climate protection performance. The argument to test is whether lack of institutional stability and governance capabilities influence on the one side the ability to generate a consistent climate policy and on the other side makes other, more pressing issues than climate change a greater policy priority.

For an examination first of all, I correlate the GHG emissions and governance ability on the basis of data from the Climate Analysis Indicator Tool (CAIT) and the World Bank Governance Indicator (WBGI), which actually includes evidence of democracy in its understanding of good governance, rather than allow for a clear conceptual or practical distinction between the two. The results are significant, but not particularly strong. The only non-democracy in the group of countries with effective governance and low GHG emissions is Singapore. However, non-democratic countries that appear to have effective governance such as Qatar, Brunei, and the United Arab Emirates record high levels of emission (on per capita basis, at least). Russia, China and Vietnam lag far behind (even behind some Arab countries) in terms both of emissions and governance, which supports the results found earlier. Therefore, a preliminary finding is that the assumption that democracies perform better than autocracies in climate protection remains valid, even if a few Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) democracies like the United States, Canada, Australia, and Luxembourg are among the worst performers. Singapore with its effective governance by technocratic elites supported by advanced educational structures is so exceptional that it hardly provides strong evidence in favour of the authoritarian case.

In order to obtain a broader picture for the intermediate regimes, I additionally looked at the environmental policy which is measured by the Bertelsmann Transformation Atlas in five categories: excellent, sound, fair, flawed and poor. I correlate this environmental performance with the status of democracy. A clear relation crystallizes: the less efficient the environmental policy the less democratic is the country. There are only a few excellent performers in environmental policy, encompassing the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia. Singapore as a moderate autocracy stands out in this group. The category of sound performers is dominated by democracies in consolidation and mainly contains the new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), plus Costa Rica, South Korea, Taiwan, and Mauritius. Defective, highly defective democracies and moderate autocracies can be attributed mostly fair and flawed environmental policymaking with a strong regional accent on the African continent, which points to the suggestion that the state of development plays an influential role. Autocracies range between poor, flawed and at most fair environmental policymaking, with only two more favourable exceptions (Bhutan and Singapore).

The data in the Bertelsmann Transformation Atlas make it possible to add the third indicator of governance effectiveness to the correlation of democracy status and environmental policy. Doing this produces support for the picture already
sketched, but with some new findings. The few cases of defective democracy or moderate autocracy that show excellent or sound environmental policy also display high governance effectiveness. And the same applies to the category of fair performance: most of the moderate autocracies that are included there are highly effective in governance.

In sum, the data indicates that once both governance and environmental policy are taken into account the groups that are a cause for most concern are the intermediate regimes with low governance effectiveness and low levels of development; in contrast democracies in consolidation perform better in environmental policy. Among the group of defective democracies there are regional differences in terms of vulnerability to slipping into autocracy. Fragile, defective democracies are present especially in sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Asia and in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries.\textsuperscript{34} The BTI reveals two central phenomena in respect of defective democracies. First, the state infrastructure is poorly developed; in some cases there is partial erosion of the state’s monopoly of coercion. This means that in many cases there is a lack of control and only limited capacity for policy implementation. Secondly, there is no lack of articulation of political and social interests in these countries, as would be the case in passive or even apathetic societies. However, what we do see is a lack of organizations able or willing to react to and transfer these interests into the political system, in a peaceful way. Weak intermediating structures often accompany governments that are dominated more by the strategic power calculations of the leading political actors than by an orientation towards the common good.\textsuperscript{35} This is relevant for climate change policy and the climate change debate in two ways and it implies several problems: governments are either committed to addressing climate change but unable to implement the corresponding policies, or they are not committed to climate change policies and do not respond actively to relevant pressure from their citizens or civil society organizations.

This brings us to the category of intermediate regimes and their ability to implement climate policies. Actually, in most of the defective democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America (excepting Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay) the state administrations have limited functionality. Their capacity to exercise power is partially eroded or undergoing erosion.\textsuperscript{36} There is a strong correlation between structural factors such as stateness and socioeconomic development and elite behaviour and management capability.\textsuperscript{37} To return to the argument by Neumayer regarding policy commitment, it is remarkable that the clearly very undemocratic countries exhibit even less environmental commitment than do intermediate regimes, and, as Neumayer says ‘we can be more certain that their commitment differs significantly from clear democracies than we can be for the group in between’.\textsuperscript{38}

Finally, there is the matter of regional distribution. The democracies in consolidation in Europe, namely the Central Eastern European countries, treat environmental issues with more concern than do democratizing countries in other regions. Moreover, they have better institutional capacities. Their relatively
good performance is probably connected to their membership of the EU, where environmental policy standards have formed part of the conditions for accession. Furthermore, Europeanization plays a role even after accession, which also explains the relatively favourable performance of new EU member states and the policy convergence. In short, the EU has a ‘transformative power’ regarding not just democratization but environmental policies too. This leads us to the next question: Do international actors who support the spread of democracy face a dilemma in respect of having to choose between promoting either democracy or promoting good governance, if they are interested in improving countries’ implementation of climate change policy? The next section addresses this question.

Promoting democracy or good governance: a cruel choice?

Burnell makes an important point in indicating that ‘(s)trengthening state capacity and improving governance may be more important for goals of climate adaptation and improving human security. This kind of reasoning creates a moral dilemma for democracy’s supporters’. He argues that ‘democracy is one thing, but good governance is something else’. Assuming this to be the case, there are some challenging questions for international actors. Could it be preferable to foster stable governance structures (governance capacity) and their improved functioning in the first instance, without explicitly targeting the democratization of the structures? And should good governance be prioritized over democratization? In contrast to the arguments that Burnell alerts us to, I maintain below that international actors are not actually facing such a cruel choice at all.

First, Burnell also points out that if democracy favours economic development and economic development means an increase in CO₂ emissions, then the indirect consequences for climate change appear to look quite disturbing. However, as even he admits the strong correlation between democracy and economic growth has been brought into question recently by the impressive economic growth rates of some non-democracies, and by the fact that democratization has now taken place in some low-income countries that have yet to experience a long period of sustained economic growth. Moreover, the causes for climate change should be weighted very carefully. For example, apart from CO₂ emissions, methane gas emissions are a significant part of all GHG emissions, and once the distribution of all GHG emissions and their origins in the state or level of development is investigated and figures for population growth of countries are considered as well, we get a different picture of the democracy–development–climate change nexus. In fact, right now in China we find a trajectory of comparatively high economic growth rates and large increases in material consumption for a very large population. China is investing heavily in renewable sources of energy while at the same time being a major methane producer as a result of its high demand for rice (China and India are responsible for half of the total rice production worldwide. Methane emissions have doubled in China and India since 1990). So, comparative statements based on simple equations that translate democracy first into
economic growth and then into raised GHG emissions are limited and too simplistic.

A further argument to be considered is that pushing countries towards democratization could result in stalled transitions, or a stable intermediate regime or conversely a very unstable regime that will not be able to tackle climate change and its effects. Democratization, viewed as a potentially hazardous process, may then ‘have damaging consequences for development and for the capacity to engage in climate adaptation’. According to Burnell then, in some places the policy recommendation for international actors might appear to be, first not to push hard for democratic transitions, and second to prioritize promoting good governance over promoting democracy.

There are indeed difficult problems facing democracy promoters here. But, in the writer’s view the question is not about whether to promote democracy but rather about how to do it. The question is not one of prioritizing democracy over good governance (or the converse), but rather over how democracy is promoted, and over how supporting both democracy and the capacity for good governance can be combined. Democracy promotion must be regarded as a long-term project, which includes different stages (transition and consolidation) and each stage demands different methods and strategies from the democracy promoters. Supporting democratization during the transition to democracy and during its consolidation does not (or should not) always follow the same rationale. During transition the focus is on the legal-formal aspects of institutionalization: fixing the rules of the game in the constitution, and supporting the establishment of appropriate political institutions. It is in democratic consolidation that the emphasis turns more to policymaking and the ‘normal programme’ of distributing public goods, and to deciding the direction and effectiveness of public policy including climate policy on the basis of support from the citizens. In sum, democracy promotion must be sequenced and tailored to the specific aspects of the different phases of democratic development, as well as take into account the particular and perhaps unique characteristics of the country in question.

**Good governance needs democracy**

In the strict sense, Burnell may be right in distinguishing between democracy, governance capacity and good governance. The presence of only minimal corruption, stable (but not democratic) institutions, sound public policy and its effective execution by a strong administrative apparatus can obtain in an autocratic system. But do these constitute good governance?

Good governance is generally defined as being participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and in accordance with the rule of law. The World Bank’s *World Development Report 1997*, which generated the concept of good governance, includes three basic elements: internal rules and restraints, ‘voice’ and partnership, as well as competition. Good governance assumes responsiveness to the present
and future needs of society. With these defining traits of good governance it is reasonable to doubt whether good governance can actually flourish in autocracies. The governance approach of the World Bank especially insists on the relevance of participation and responsiveness for effective policymaking and state capacity. These requisites however only democracy can provide. Voice and partnership require that citizens enjoy rights and liberties to articulate needs and interests and participate freely in political parties, interest groups and organizations. Rules and constraints require control mechanisms such as an independent judiciary and hence a division of powers. And there is a requirement for free media, *inter alia* scrutinizing public malfeasance and official misconduct. Furthermore, there is some evidence that the dispersion of power from the centre through decentralization and local or provincial self-administrative entities makes for more responsive, adequate, and efficient public policy. And finally, capacity building should not be limited to government institutions. Progress in environmental policy requires the involvement of organized non-governmental interests. Hence, capacity building must refer to societal capacities for environmental issues as well:

Capacity building for the environment in developing countries depends mainly on material and human resources, scientific, technological and administrative knowledge, open political access and policy integration, public awareness and the strength or competence of environmental organisations.

In sum, all these provisions and institutions are not usually present in autocratic systems, on the contrary, democracy and good governance are closely linked: good governance needs democracy. Therefore, it makes little sense to promote democracy without supporting functioning state institutions and state capacity as well as transparent and responsive policymaking processes, or without enhancing rules and behaviour for sound public policy (including climate policy). On the other hand, it is a delusion to aspire to good governance without the basic elements of transparency, accountability, and participation. In this case, the result would simply be efficient output performance – in other words, good performance but not good governance. Now, how would the governments and people of autocratic states react if international democracy promoters decided to support strong state capacity only or primarily? What would that mean for the international environment for democracy to advance? Would such a state of affairs not deter societies from even aiming for democracy, and discredit the very idea of democracy promotion itself?

The findings so far could be developed further. The debate about climate change protection has drawn attention mainly to output performance and governance capacity. The argument that good governance should be prioritized over democracy corresponds to that kind of output-orientated approach. However, action on climate issues is also connected to the input dimension, which means the chance of opening up new perspectives for involving citizens more strongly in the political process. For national actors as well as for democracy promoters a concentration on just output performance in climate change is misguided.
It disregards the potential contribution that citizens’ empowerment and social capacity building can make to combating climate change. This brings the discussion round to consider the type of state and society that is needed.

Contemporary thinking about the role of the state in market economies is witnessing the end of the euphoria that once surrounded the idea of deregulation. There is a shift under way that sees the state being brought back in as a problem-solver. The eco-authoritarian view exemplified by Shearman and Smith that says ‘hard environmental choices cannot be made in liberal democracies’ is in a minority. But against the background of states being forced to intervene to a significant degree during and as a result of the global financial crisis, it is not surprising that even in most laissez faire countries there are now calls for the state to play a stronger role. In Germany the ‘pendulum of the climate policy debate is moving towards the new planning state’, say Leggewie and Welzer. And in Britain Giddens advocates a return in some form to long-term government planning – he proposes a green tax and advances the idea of an ‘ensuring state’ rather than an ‘enabling state’. So the state at national and also local levels should provide an appropriate regulatory framework to guide the social and economic forces needed to mobilize against climate change, bringing environmental concern to all branches of the government.

A rather different perspective however says that the solution cannot be a return of the planning state but rather must include the revitalization of voice and participation by the people, as is advocated by Leggewie and Welzer. For them, the citizens of Western democracies must be included in the process of mitigating the consequences of industrialization. Targets such as greater resource efficiency to reduce carbon emissions can only be achieved if those who are affected also participate in the decisions. Therefore, Leggewie and Welzer believe the ‘ensuring state’ is not appropriate, for it would give support to the mentality that problem-solving can be done by the government and that an active commitment by citizens is not needed. In their view, the pressure to change popular lifestyles is exactly the factor that will present offices, town districts, communities, and social networks with new possibilities to (re)socialize concrete know-how about how to act and participate on the (local) political level, as well as about how to behave responsibly as consumers. The point of departure is that for the indispensable transformation of lifestyles (towards securing big energy savings) the inclusion of citizens is essential:

In the context of environmental and climate policy reforms, it would be naïve to solely trust solar and wind power and a ‘third industrial revolution’ and to solely trust the implementation capacity of governance structures while approaches like citizen empowerment and citizen education are touched only marginally.

Consequently it is necessary to give serious consideration to democratic participation of citizens, on the basis of linking all the different levels: local, national, regional and global level. In a similar vein Held and Hervey discuss whether the
conventional representative democracy is a ‘poor way’ and imply that we must proceed to evolve ‘democratic systems to handle the problem better’. They opt – also on the international level – for inclusive and broadly representative decision-making. In the debate about an ‘ensuring state’ they adopt a kind of middle position, understanding the state as a ‘facilitator and enabler’ rather than a top-down agency. They lend support to the idea of returning to planning but in a new sense of flexible regulation, by advocating its reconciliation with deliberation and consultation.

In sum, the established democracies must think about enhancing the inclusion and involvement of citizens in climate change policy. Innovative forms of participation, of self-regulation, networking and cooperative planning could be conceived, that would run counter to any loose talk of there being ‘democracy fatigue’. Climate change offers a chance to revitalize the participative component and to enrich representative democracy. In turn this would give a solid basis for the political legitimation of climate policies. Obviously the intermediate democracies will remain problematic in this aspect, as their structures for channelling public demands are probably less well developed and less effective (and so perhaps should attract support from the international democracy promoters). But even there an increase in pressure from environmental non-governmental organizations could force governments to respond.

And as for autocracies, climate change policy could potentially develop into a stress factor that challenges political stability and threatens the regime. Ultimately autocracies will have to find ways to channel both domestic political pressure from the bottom and international pressure to take stronger action on climate change. In the meantime their problem is a lack of input legitimacy, which can only hamper really effective climate change action. There is some empirical evidence that political opposition in autocracies can solidify around the environmental protection issue. This was the case in the Baltic States and also in East Germany, during the late Cold War era. In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania the stimulus for initial protests that eventually led to break away from the Soviet Union and political transformation was environmental in nature. Examples dating from the Soviet era are the condition of the phosphate mines in Estonia, the hydroelectric dam of the Daugava River in Latvia, and Soviet plans for the expansion of the Ignalina nuclear centre. Environmental concerns constituted a sort of ‘apolitical’ and cross-cutting issue in society that brought many people together and collective pressure on the governments. Looking at China, with its already high level of commitment to national climate change policy, similar trends may be observed. Actually the environment is becoming an arena where repressive mechanisms of control over society are increasingly being challenged.

Conclusions and policy recommendations
This study has analysed two aspects that potentially create conflicting objectives and dilemmas for national and international actors in the context of climate change policy.
action. Firstly, there are the implications for effective climate policy of comparisons between democracies, autocracies and intermediate regimes. Secondly, there is the question of whether external actors like democracy promoters should prioritize improvement in governance so as to foster effective climate action, ahead of promoting democratization.

On the first, a finding that is not entirely surprising is that on the whole democracies in consolidation do not perform worse in climate protection than established democracies. This also holds true for national and international policy commitment. While in Europe the EU is having a positive influence in this respect, Brazil, India and South Korea also count among the better performers. No evidence was found to suggest that autocracies generally perform better in terms of climate protection. Countries representing the capitalist autocratic model lag far behind, with the one exception of China’s national and international policy commitment, which looks relatively impressive especially when compared with for example the United States and Canada. The findings for intermediate regimes show different results for national and the international commitment: on the national level democratic subtypes perform better than autocratic ones, and on the international they both perform well. The argument that effective governance plays a role was confirmed. This holds true for the democratic subtypes but also for the moderate and hard-line autocracies: countries with effective governance structures are more likely to show good climate policy performance. In sum, the group of intermediate regimes with low levels of development, weak state capacities or political instability are confronted with the most dilemmas and thus face the greatest difficulty in addressing climate change.

With regard to whether good governance should be prioritized over democracy promotion, the conclusion is that this question must not be framed so narrowly. The success of democracy promotion depends in a highly significant way on how it is approached and implemented. If democratization is conceived as a long-term project with different stages demanding different methods and strategies and tackled in a sequenced way by democracy promoters, then support for installing stable political institutions and governance structures that can implement effective climate policy are not in competition. Hence, the task for the principal democracy promoters is to address climate change policy as a leading issue especially during the democratic consolidation process. It is difficult if not impossible for international actors to separate the promotion of democratic structures and procedures on the one side and support for effective governance structures and policymaking processes on the other side. Without central elements like transparency, accountability, and participation the result may be good performance, but not good governance.

It holds true for all regime types that no approach to combating climate change will be very productive if it prioritizes only output performance and acts as if the state can solve the problems without the active political involvement of the citizens. The state, of course, remains a key actor, and long-term planning perspectives are still needed. But dismissing the input dimension limits both the effectiveness of
policy and the building of society’s own capacity to act independently of the state and to hold governments accountable. The chain of responsibility from the local level via the regional and national to the international level and back has to be anchored in public awareness and applied to concrete solutions, which may well differ from level to level.

The main conclusion in respect of the connection between democracy and climate change is that placing great emphasis on output performance without dwelling on whether there is suppression of society and popular expression would be a great mistake. But maintaining a reasonable balance between input and output performance is not possible in autocracies, where essential freedoms are limited and the regime does not usually encourage an active involvement by citizens. Thus, autocracies will not outperform democracies in terms of combating climate change: in the long run they are very unlikely to be greener. Finally, it has to be emphasized again that it is the intermediate regimes who will be confronted more than either democracies or autocracies with the really difficult – the most ‘cruel’ – choices, namely between addressing different economic and political and climate change objectives. Therefore democracy promoters have no real choice but to support both good governance and democratic consolidation in these countries.

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Notes
4. I use the term ‘intermediate regime’ as a neutral umbrella term encompassing the broad variety of democratic and autocratic subtypes located between the two poles of fully fledged democracies and fully fledged autocracies. Many different terms and concepts to describe these have been coined in the literature, each one having their own theoretical and methodological understandings, of which ‘hybrid regimes’ is but one of many possible examples (Karl, ‘The Hybrid Regimes’).
5. See e.g. Gardiner, Caney and Jamieson, Climate Ethics and Harris, World Ethics.
9. Jänicke and Weidner, ‘Summary’ and Schmidt, Demokratietheorien; see also overview in Fiorino, ‘Explaining National Environmental Performance’.

11. Burnell, ‘Is Democratisation Bad?’ and Climate Change and Democratisation are two exceptions.

12. Diamond, ‘Is the Third Wave Over?’


18. Several approaches have been developed to typologize the various regimes, based around the concept of diminished sub-types developed by Collier and Levitsky, ‘Democracy with Adjectives’.

19. The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2012 slightly changed the wording of ‘democracies’ to ‘democracies in consolidation’ and ‘autocracies’ to ‘hard-line autocracies’. Freedom House’s Nations in Transit (NiT) 2011 distinguishes consolidated democracy, semi-consolidated democracy, transitional governments or hybrid regimes, semi-consolidated authoritarian regimes, and consolidated authoritarian regimes. The BTI is based on the concept of defective democracy generated by Merkel et al., Defekte Demokratie, Theorien und Probleme; Merkel et al., Defekte Demokratien in Osteuropa, Ostasien und Lateinamerika. Nations in Transit uses the concept of hybrid regimes; see inter alia Diamond, ‘Thinking about Hybrid Regimes’.


23. For an excellent overview see Saretzki, ‘Demokratie’ and Fiorino, ‘Explaining National Environmental Performance’.


25. Ibid., 20.

26. Ibid., 22.

27. Figures for 2007 based on the Climate Analysis Indicators Tools of the World Resources Institute (CAIT).

28. Held and Harvey, ‘Democracy’, 6, presents a similar picture for 2000 to 2006 where the countries with the lowest rate of increase among the 40 highest carbon emitters responsible for 91% of global carbon emissions are democracies.


31. I thank Mr Jan Burck, Germanwatch, for providing me with these data.

32. Taking Pearson’s correlation between the World Bank Governance Indicator for Governance (2008) and the per capita GHG emissions in 2005, r is 0.42.

33. BTI measures environmental policy as a sub-issue of sustainability which is part of the market economy status. It assesses how environmental concerns are taken into account in terms of macro- and microeconomic terms. Score from 1–10: Excellent (score 8.5–10); sound (6.5–8.5), fair (4.5–6.5); flawed (2.5–4.5); poor (1–2.5). The correlation can be simulated by the ‘correlations’.


35. Ibid., 90–3.

36. Ibid., 9.

37. Ibid., 9.

39. On Europeanization see Knill and Lenschow, *EU Environmental Policy*; on policy convergence see Holzinger et al., *Theorie*.
40. Grabbe, *The EU’s Transformative Power*.
42. Ibid., 33.
43. See Burnell, ‘Democracy, Democratisation and Climate Change’ (details this collection).
45. Burnell, ‘Is Democratisation Bad?’ and *Climate Change and Democratisation*, 34.
47. For example on corruption see chapter 5 of World Bank’s *World Development Report 2002*.
50. Ibid., 310.
54. Leggewie and Welzer, *Das Ende der Welt*, 41.
55. Ibid., 41.
56. Ibid., 42 (English translation by the author).
58. Ibid., 16.
59. This information is based on conversations with representatives from Germanwatch. Patrick Schröder from the China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO) generously provided me an unpublished draft of his ‘Civil Climate Change Activism in China’.

Notes on contributor
Marianne Kneuer is Professor for Comparative Politics in the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Hildesheim, Germany. Her most recent books include *Regression of Democracy?* and *External Factors of Democratization*, both with Gero Erdmann.

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