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Three scholars examine mercury, ozone and climate negotiations between developing and developed countries. They find that older alliances between developing countries have frayed, and trace these differences to energy policy, development status, and the role of the scientific community.

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SPLITTING THE SOUTH: CHINA AND INDIA'S DIVERGENCE IN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL NEGOTIATIONS

Leah C. Stokes, University of California Santa Barbara
Amanda Giang, University of British Columbia
Noelle E. Selin, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

INTRODUCTION

International environmental negotiations are usually thought of as conflicts between developed and developing countries – the Global North and South. However, as emerging economies become more important politically, economically and environmentally, this dichotomy no longer accurately describes negotiations. Examining recent developments in the mercury, ozone and climate negotiations, we argue that the developing world is diverging due to energy policy, development status, and the role of the scientific community. This brief is adapted from our article (Stokes, Giang & Selin, 2016).

ANALYSIS

Developing countries and emerging economies have historically cooperated in international environmental negotiations, often through large coalitions such as the Group of 77 (G77) plus China (Najam, Huq, and Sokona 2003). At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was negotiated, developing countries worked together to successfully argue for several principles, including common but differentiated responsibilities, wherein developed countries would take the lead. This pattern of Southern cooperation continued through numerous UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings on topics such as financing, capacity building, and targets and timetables. In the ozone negotiations, developing countries similarly took a common position on many issues. When ozone standards were being strengthened in the mid-1990s, developing countries worked together to argue that tighter controls should be contingent on increased financing (Parson 2003).

However, over time, these developing country alliances have frayed, particularly between two key emerging economies: China and India. Though China is still a developing economy, there are numerous domestic drivers for action on environmental issues, ranging from mercury pollution to climate change. On climate change, China has put in place significant domestic policies including an emissions trading system. In contrast, India has enacted less ambitious domestic climate policies, with less clarity on timetables for emissions reduction, although their NDC commitments are getting clearer over time. In the ozone regime, China has shown greater willingness to act on limiting hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). Meanwhile, India was a key player in delaying the recent Kigali agreement,

and its use of hydrofluorocarbons is expected to surge as more air conditioners come online (Hwang 2013). In the mercury negotiations, China helped push the international treaty towards greater ambition, while India resisted tougher legal language on air pollution, and only recently announced concrete plans to join the agreement in February 2018.

In order to understand how global environmental policy decisions actually get made, we need to better understand what motivates the most influential countries in these negotiations. Developing countries in particular play a very important role, and while they used to agree on most issues, this is no longer the case—particularly among the largest, most influential developing countries like China and India. Changes in India and China's negotiating positions are likely to prove critical to environmental outcomes in the future, particularly if the United States resumes a laggard position in global governance.

In our academic article, we argued that the South is increasingly split in international environmental negotiations because of differences in domestic energy policy, development status, and the role of the scientific community. In this brief, we explain this divergence empirically and explore its implications for future international negotiations.

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One explanation for the split between India and China is divergence in their domestic resources and regulatory politics, particularly on energy and air pollution. Both China and India, like most developing countries, have prioritized expanding their energy generation capacity. If the global community adopts difficult targets for emissions, whether on ozone, climate change, or mercury emissions, it could hinder the expansion of fossil based energy. Yet, China and India have vastly different future energy needs. China is essentially completely electrified and continues to keep up with new electricity demand with significant investments in renewables, while in India a quarter of the population still has no access to electricity.

The Indian government has announced plans to double power generation capacity within the next 10 years and is continuing to invest in coal as part of that effort. This reliance on coal, coupled with its domestic coal resources unique characteristics (high ash and low sulfur content), makes mercury emissions reductions potentially more costly in India. Thus, India has argued against new, stringent agreements. By contrast, China is increasingly shifting away from coal. In 2013, China installed more non-coal than coal electricity sources for the first time in recent history. In part, coal has become less viable due to rising public concerns over air pollution. Consequently, the government has imposed tougher air quality regulations, which make coal more expensive to burn. Some estimates suggest that China's coal consumption has already peaked (Qi et al. 2016). In addition, China has shown a strong ability to profit from manufacturing new environmental technology, such as solar panels, which will have new markets as countries reduce emissions.

There are also large differences in each country's domestic scientific and technical capacity. Scientific information can create shared narratives and form a basis for environmental action. For this reason, domestic scientific communities may have a strong influence on domestic regulation, and therefore on countries' positions in international negotiations. Direct input from scientists is an increasingly common part of China's policymaking process. During the Minamata mercury negotiations the Chinese scientific community highlighted the extent of China's local mercury challenges. Scientists were active and participated in developing new domestic emission standards. Some of the same scientists then served directly as part of the delegation to international negotiations. In contrast, the Indian scientific community on mercury is less developed. Domestically, there have been relatively few studies on mercury impacts, for example. Furthermore, scientists and technical experts have less influence over environmental policy. This dynamic is reflected in India's delegations to international environmental negotiations, with minimal scientific representation.

Initiative for
Sustainable Energy Policy
Energy, Resources and Environment
Rome Building, 4th Floor
1619 Massachusetts Ave, NW
sais-isep@jhu.edu
@sais_isep
www.sais-isep.org

It may be that we are witnessing a fundamental reorientation in global environmental governance, with the developing world taking a greater lead in action.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- *The international community needs to continue to invest in building scientific capacity in developing countries in order to strengthen all parties' ability to undertake ambitious environmental agreements. The UN can help lead this effort, through scientific partnerships and global environmental assessments that are credible, salient and legitimate. Bilateral scientific support can also help.*

- *Global requirements need to align with domestic constraints while also pushing countries to take on the most ambitious targets possible. International negotiators and analysts should be attentive to what is possible given domestic regulation, resources, and development constraints. In part, the NDC process under the Paris Agreement allows for this bottom-up, domestic constraint approach. A mechanism to ensure countries are meeting targets and that all these bottom-up goals add up to global progress is essential.*

- *Policymakers should be aware of linkages across different environmental policy areas, that can sometimes lead to progress and other times create challenges. In diverse international environmental negotiations, there are both co-benefits and tradeoffs. For example, air quality co-benefits and energy access issues play a role in the mercury, climate and ozone negotiations. That said, when climate issues are taken up in different negotiations, such as ozone and mercury, this can also lead to increasing conflict simply because the climate issue is such a thorny problem, with its strong tie to economic growth.*

Original article

Stokes, L.C., A. Giang, and N.E. Selin. 2016. "Splitting the South: China and India's Divergence in International Environmental Negotiations." Global Environmental Politics 16(4).

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The Initiative for Sustainable Energy Policy (ISEP) is an interdisciplinary research program that uses cutting-edge social and behavioral science to design, test, and implement better energy policies in emerging economies.

Hosted at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), ISEP identifies opportunities for policy reforms that allow emerging economies to achieve human development at minimal economic and environmental costs. The initiative pursues such opportunities both pro-actively, with continuous policy innovation and bold ideas, and by responding to policymakers' demands and needs in sustained engagement and dialogue.

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