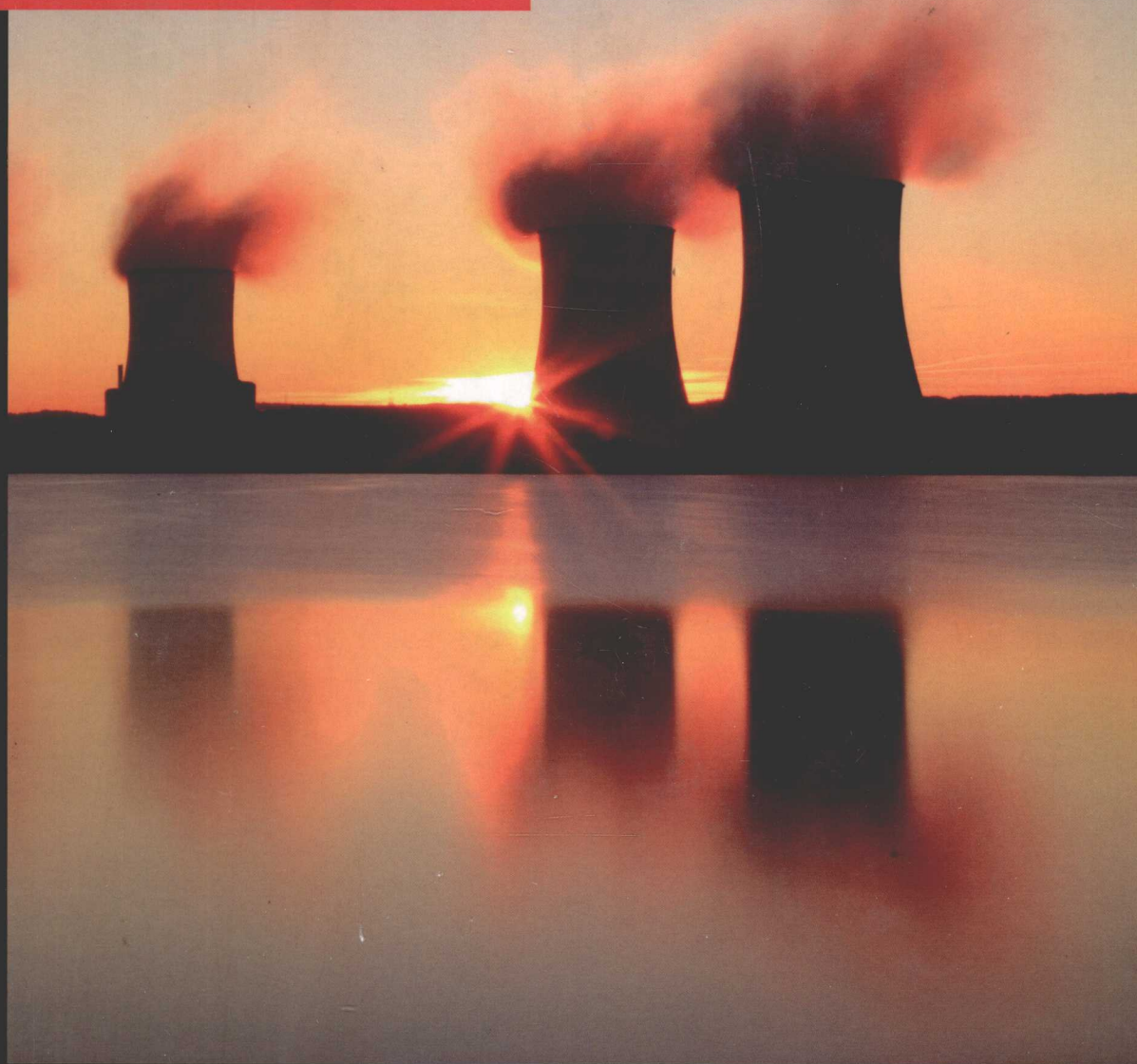




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# Routledge Handbook of Global Environmental Politics

Edited by Paul G. Harris

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# Routledge Handbook of Global Environmental Politics

This book offers readers the most comprehensive coverage of global environmental politics yet published in a single volume, including examination of key issues, policies, actors, institutions and theories. It brings together leading international academic experts to:

- Describe the history of global environmental politics as a discipline and explain the various theories and perspectives used by scholars and students to understand it.
- Examine the key actors and institutions in global environmental politics, explaining the role of states, international organizations, regimes, international law, foreign policy institutions, domestic politics, corporations and transnational actors.
- Address the ideas and themes shaping the practice and study of global environmental politics, including sustainability, consumption, expertise, uncertainty, security, diplomacy, North–South relations, globalization, justice, ethics, participation and citizenship.
- Assess the key issues and policies within global environmental politics, including energy, climate change, ozone depletion, air pollution, acid rain, sustainable transport, persistent organic pollutants, hazardous wastes, water, rivers, wetlands, oceans, fisheries, marine mammals, biodiversity, migratory species, natural heritage, forests, desertification, food and agriculture.

This is an invaluable and comprehensive resource for students, scholars, researchers and practitioners of environmental politics and policy, environmental studies, international relations, foreign policy, geography and development studies.

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# Introduction

## Delineating global environmental politics

*Paul G. Harris*

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The natural environment is in decline globally. With too few exceptions, environmental indicators are growing worse. For example, water and air pollution are now so poor in some developing countries, such as China and India, that hundreds of millions of people are forced to drink severely tainted water and breathe toxic air. Regionally, acid rain – which has been reduced in North America and Western Europe in recent decades – is on the increase in East Asia and other developing regions, putting ecosystems and agriculture at great risk. The so-called “Asian brown cloud” of smog is so vast that it spreads across the Pacific to the Americas. Coastal seas have been overfished in most oceans, and this phenomenon has extended to regional seas in both the developed and developing worlds. Marine environments are severely degraded by polluting runoff from continents, with the world’s coral reefs shrinking and ocean “dead zones” now extending along the coastlines of all continents. Wildlife around the world is under great threat, with declines and extinctions of species on the rise. These problems are exacerbated by climate change, which is manifested in rising global temperatures, very serious threats to agricultural productivity from droughts and floods, more severe weather events, new threats to species unable to adapt to environmental changes and pollution, declines in marine ecosystems due to warming waters and ocean acidification, and immeasurable dangers posed by sea-level rise, particularly for poor low-lying regions, countries and habitats. These are but a few examples of the environmental challenges that are increasing around the world.

The role that politics plays in these challenges, whether they play out within or among countries, cannot be understated. The continuing decline of the global environment can largely be put down to the failure of governments and other actors to respond in time – or at all. When we do see successes in preventing or responding to adverse environmental changes and pollution, for example in cleaner local environments in many developed countries and a handful of international successes, such as agreements among countries to curb emissions of pollutants that destroy Earth’s protective stratospheric ozone layer, they can often be put down to the willingness of governments and other political actors, including nongovernmental organizations and occasionally businesses, to negotiate and implement policies that prioritize environmental protection over short-term economic gain. Understanding and promoting these kinds of successes is crucially important, and in many cases vital, to the future of all societies and to natural ecosystems. This handbook is intended to be part of the process of promoting those successes: first to bolster basic

understanding of environmental changes and the underlying politics that shape them, and second to provide readers with a foundation of knowledge that can help them to promote new, more environmentally sustainable relationships between humankind and the natural world.

Everyone is affected by global environmental politics, often directly through feeling the impacts of the environmental changes caused by government policies, and at least indirectly through having to watch others suffer from those changes. Many people are now affected, in positive ways, by regulations and policies that have reduced environmental pollution. The manner in which human, financial and governmental resources are used to create and hopefully reverse ecological decline, overuse of natural resources and destruction of the natural environment affects the safety of the water that people drink, the air that they breathe and the nature that they enjoy and draw from to meet their individual and community needs. Global environmental politics can and will shape the climate and even the weather of the future. Sadly, for some people, global environmental politics may be a matter of life and death. For example, the failure of governments and other global actors, such as businesses and individuals, to respond robustly to the causes and consequences of climate change means that millions of vulnerable people in the poorest parts of the world will die in the future from drought-induced famine or severe weather events, and many more will die from the diseases that will spread in a warmer and wetter world.

What this means is that global environmental politics should concern everyone. Whether one is a politician, career government official, entrepreneur, activist or student, understanding global environmental politics will help achieve policy or personal goals. Without knowledge of the global nature of environmental changes, policymakers will fail to see many of the causes of those changes, and indeed the remedies for them. Without recognition that the environment permeates other policy areas, ranging from energy supplies and national security to social justice and food production, policy responses are unlikely to succeed, least of all to be cost-effective and equitable. Without realizing that both the causes and consequences of global environmental change are highly political, being influenced by the distribution of power within and among societies, those who seek to limit pollution and destruction of natural resources will not get very far. With this in mind, this handbook brings together a large group of scholars from around the world to examine these connections and to help illuminate the causes of environmental change and especially the ways that the world has and can respond to them. It is intended to be the most comprehensive treatment of the topic yet published. While the field of global environmental politics is much too large to be fully covered by a single volume, we have sought to survey as much of it as possible, thereby giving anyone interested in (or concerned about) it a solid foundation on which to continue with more in-depth analysis or study.

Before the contributors to this volume proceed to examine global environmental politics more widely, this chapter briefly delineates this important topic. It defines the topic and its related field of study by briefly looking at the *global*, the *environment* and the *politics* in global environmental politics. The chapter then distinguishes between the *practice* of global environmental politics and the *study* of it, in the process suggesting how the two do and should overlap. This chapter also introduces the topics that will follow in subsequent chapters, in the process showing how the field is both wide and deep, in many respects reinforcing the importance of global environmental politics for everyone.

## Defining global environmental politics

What is, and what are, “global environmental politics”? Global environmental politics is both an area of activity and practice, on one hand, and a field of research and study, on the other. It is

about how governments, diplomats and other actors influence the global environment, which includes local and regional environments, and how what they do is analyzed and understood by scholars, students and activists. Global environmental politics, in a plural sense, can be interpreted as the various ways in which politics are practiced in different places to alter or protect the environment. That is, there are different politics of the environment in different locations and in different issue areas. Importantly, as the term implies, global environmental politics is about the politics of the environment on a global scale.

### *The “global” in global environmental politics*

Environmental changes and associated politics occur at all geographic and social levels. Environmental changes can occur locally and be caused by what happens locally, as when local water supplies are polluted by domestic sewage or industrial effluents. In contrast, environmental problems can be global, as in the case of global warming and associated climate change. These levels of environmental change are routinely connected, sometimes intimately. For example, *global* climate change arising from emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases all around the world affects local communities and individuals directly. Global problems can have local causes. In contrast, even apparently localized environmental issues can be global problems. For example, addressing local water and air pollution in poor countries may require financial or technological assistance from affluent countries, often those far away, or from the international community, perhaps in the form of an agency of the United Nations or an international non-governmental organization.

These varying levels of environmental change, and the various levels of causality, impact and response, highlight the role of politics at all levels. We see different environmental politics depending on the location, scale or issue being addressed. For example, some local environmental problems can be addressed through local action, as occurs when a community implements regulatory measures to curb pollution or to protect local natural resources. Other environmental problems are regional, crossing provincial and national boundaries or entire oceans, requiring and sometimes receiving policy responses from a number of communities or national governments. Examples of this kind of environmental politics include responses by North American and European governments to reduce acid rain, action plans to limit pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, and management of fisheries in regional seas. Environmental problems that are more obviously global, such as stratospheric ozone depletion and global warming, require global political responses: the governments of many countries need to cooperate and collaborate to formulate and implement policy responses, and these in turn require action by many more sub-national governmental bodies as well as non-state actors that operate globally (or nearly so), such as multinational corporations and international nongovernmental organizations.

Thus, in using the term “*global* environmental politics” we mean to encompass all levels of politics (and policy) related to the environment; a global issue is clearly global, but a local one may, by definition, also be encompassed by global politics. Put another way, global environmental politics encompasses local, national, transnational, regional, international *and* geographically global environmental issues and related political activity. As such, in this volume we are interested in environmental issues at all levels and in related political activity at all levels.

### *The “environment” in global environmental politics*

Global environmental politics is the global politics of the environment. More specifically, the environment in global environmental politics is about the human dimensions of the natural

environment: the human causes of environmental change, pollution and resource use, and the human approaches to solving (or trying to solve) or preventing environmental problems and resource scarcities. The “human” here often equates to government policies and the relationships between those policies and the behaviors of individuals and industries. For our purposes, the human also includes international cooperation, often resulting in environmental treaties. This connection between environment and human society, broadly defined, highlights an important point: while global environmental politics is related to the natural environment, how we define “natural” is problematic. A purist might point out that very little of genuine nature still exists; with climate change and the spread of persistent organic pollutants, for example, nearly every part of what was once the natural world has been affected, and often utterly transformed (or destroyed), by humanity. Nevertheless, one expects that for most people “nature” can be defined as the nonhuman world, encompassing the plants, animals, minerals, air, water and ecosystems on which humanity depends for its survival and wellbeing.

Simply put, the “environment” in global environmental politics is roughly equated to “ecology” – natural systems, including humanity and all its influences – but with the important caveat that we are interested in the human–environment relationship, often in the context of governance. This means that the environment of global environmental politics is not about the built environment per se, except insofar as this affects the natural environment. This would be the case with, for example, energy use by buildings (because most of the electricity used by buildings comes from the burning of fossil fuels, which in turn contributes to air pollution and climate change) and transport infrastructure (which can greatly affect air quality and local environmental habitats). In some sense, the environment in global environmental politics is about stewardship of the natural environment. Increasingly this means stewardship of the *global* environment – of the whole planet – implying that truly global cooperation is required to ensure an environmentally sustainable future for all people regardless of where they might live.

### *The “politics” in global environmental politics*

“Politics” can be and is defined in a number of ways. It can refer to the struggle for and distribution of power, and thus resources, within and among national communities. This is routinely associated with the role of governments, notably their policies and actions for regulating behaviors in society, and the manner in which governments are chosen, the institutions from which they obtain their legitimacy, and the way that they rule. Thus global environmental politics is largely about how government policies contribute to environmental problems and about specifically environmental policies (often environmental regulations) and their effects. It is about how environmental resources and pollution are distributed in society, and the role that power and influence play in that distribution. More commonly, the politics in global environmental politics is about international cooperation related to the environment. This might include addressing transboundary, regional and global problems through international conferences of diplomats negotiating environmental treaties, efforts by governments to manage shared resources in natural “commons” areas (such as fish in the open ocean beyond territorial waters), or attempts to formulate and implement international policies on sustainable development that benefit individual countries, reduce local and global pollution, and support environmentally less harmful economic development.

Although global environmental politics routinely involves governments in some way, it is not always about governments relating to one another. It is often about non-state actors trying to influence government policies in ways that affect the environment. It may also involve struggles related to the environment by nongovernmental organizations, businesses and communities

that largely ignore governments, at least directly. At the risk of upsetting purists, one must even acknowledge that the field of global environmental politics goes beyond politics strictly defined. Scholars of global environmental politics thus include those with interest and expertise in economics, sociology and other social sciences, and even the humanities. Ultimately, the politics of global environmental politics is most often the process whereby the constellation of disparate interests – government agencies, corporations, communities and people, and some would add nonhuman species – are represented (or not) in actions that harm the natural environment or in efforts to protect it.

## **The practice and study of global environmental politics**

The field of global environmental politics encompasses both practice (or praxis) and study (and analysis) of politics and policies related to the environment. The former interpretation tends to fit definitions of politics oriented toward activities of governments and traditional political players, although increasingly non-traditional actors, such as civil society groups, often organized via the Internet, have growing importance in environmental politics at all levels. The latter interpretation of global environmental politics is oriented toward research and teaching related to the politics of the environment, although it is important to note the overlap with practice: research about global environmental politics is routinely about, and very importantly can inform, the practice of global environmental politics, and students of global environmental politics might apply what they learn to environmental activism, work in industry or service in government.

### *The practice of global environmental politics*

Global environmental politics is above all about activities – policies, actions, behaviors – that affect the environment, whether negatively (e.g., through pollution or harm to natural resources) or positively (e.g., by reducing or preventing pollution, or using resources sustainably). In its simplest form, the practice of global environmental politics includes those activities of governments that relate to the environment in some way. This might involve the work of environmental ministries, particularly when their work affects what happens in other countries, and it would include the environment-related roles and activities of political executives (presidents, prime ministers) and legislatures, notably the environmental policies, laws and regulations they deliberate, formulate and implement. It follows that the practice of global environmental politics is also about the activities of all those actors trying to influence and shape government policies related to the environment, and the responses of those and other actors to environmental regulation. Thus the practice of global environmental politics within countries includes the activities of special interests, notably corporations and, in many places, environmental advocacy groups, and the processes whereby those interests attempt to shape government policies related to the environment.

The practice of global environmental politics of course includes the actors working across national borders. For example, environmental diplomacy and the complex processes of international environmental negotiations on all manner of issues – such as fishing, whaling, ocean pollution, trade in hazardous wastes, stratospheric ozone depletion and climate change – are most definitely the stuff of global environmental politics. Indeed, some scholars of global environmental politics focus almost entirely on this aspect of the topic – what might be labeled *international* environmental politics – including the roles of important or powerful national actors (such as the United States and China), foreign policy processes (including the roles of influential politicians or diplomats and their relationships with colleagues nationally and internationally),



and the impact of international organizations and regimes (such as the United Nations and the constellation of international agreements and new practices associated with, say, biodiversity and especially climate change). In short, at least for some scholars, global environmental politics is primarily about what governments do at home and abroad to respond to environmental changes or to prevent them from happening.

### *The study of global environmental politics*

As a field of analysis and learning, global environmental politics is about trying to understand and explain the practices of governments and other actors related to the environment, especially insofar as this is associated with international affairs or transboundary environmental issues. For most scholars this involves analyzing the practice of global environmental politics, finding explanations for what happens, and conveying this knowledge to others, often to the practitioners being studied. For many scholars this includes sharing their knowledge via publications of different kinds, sometimes in the form of policy papers intended to shape (“improve”) the policies of governments, international organizations and other actors, such as corporations, and to help them arrive at policies more conducive to environmental protection. Most scholars maintain a certain level of disinterestedness in their research: they attempt to find the “truth” behind environmental policies, for example, and to convey what they have learned to the scholarly and policy communities. Other scholars and researchers have more normative objectives: they want to see the environment and natural resources protected, so their research is aimed at finding ways to make that happen, possibly including advocacy work toward that end. A few (sometimes self-styled) scholars, such as the so-called “climate skeptics” and “climate deniers,” have just the opposite objective: to use their work to *prevent* governmental regulation for environmental protection.

For many scholars of global environmental politics, their work includes teaching others what they have learned about the practices of global environmental politics, notably in college and university courses (sometimes titled “global environmental politics,” “international environmental politics” or something similar). These courses are often geared toward helping students who will join industries to better understand the role of environment in their future work, or to provide training for students who will join government ministries working on environmental and international affairs. Some teachers of global environmental politics no doubt hope that their students will become environmental activists. Regardless of their individual motivations, most of the contributors to this volume both conduct research on global environmental politics and teach about it.

### **Surveying global environmental politics**

This volume brings together a diverse group of scholars from around the world. Their contributions are organized into four parts: (I) explaining and understanding global environmental politics; (II) actors and institutions in global environmental politics; (III) ideas and themes in global environmental politics; and (IV) key issues and policies in global environmental politics. Together the contributors cover most topics in both the practice and study (or research) of global environmental politics, thereby giving readers, whether students, government officials, industry sustainability officers, environmentalists or ordinary concerned citizens, a scope of knowledge that is wider than that found in other books. Chapters describe the topic at hand in enough detail to provide a foundation for policy work and more in-depth reading and study. Most contributors also draw on their experiences to provide some assessment of real-world