Effects of Civil Society Involvement on Popular Legitimacy of Global Environmental Governance

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Abstract
Global environmental governance is widely regarded as suffering from process- and outcome-related shortcomings, above all problems with transparency, representation, and problem-solving capacity. These problems, whether presumed or real, have negative implications for popular legitimacy of (i.e. public support for) global environmental governance. One of the most frequently proposed remedies, in this context, is greater involvement of civil society. Many academics and policy-makers claim that such involvement can increase transparency, strengthen representation of otherwise marginalized stakeholders, and provide knowledge to enhance problem-solving capacity. Skeptics challenge this claim, noting that civil society organizations are not accountable to voters and often represent narrowly defined interests. Assuming that public support for global environmental governance is ultimately important for its effectiveness, we evaluate the two competing claims by examining how civil society involvement affects public support for global environmental governance. We report on three survey experiments focusing on civil society involvement in global climate policy-making. Overall, the results speak in favor of civil society involvement. Our first survey experiment shows that individuals favor civil society involvement in global climate policy-making. The second and third experiments show that individuals pay more attention to changes of the status quo than to static conditions: popular legitimacy of global climate governance decreases when civil society is excluded, and increases when civil society is added. The latter finding has implications for current debates on how to address the persistent stalemate in global climate negotiations.

Keywords: Global Governance; Climate Change Policy; Civil Society; Legitimacy; Public Opinion; Survey Experiment