

## Research Articles

# Explaining Variation in Transnational Climate Change Activism: The Role of Inter-Movement Spillover

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Civil society activism is often a highly visible feature of international climate change conferences. Many participants and observers noted the especially high volume of contentious and confrontational activism around the Copenhagen Climate Summit. As *The Guardian* advised in November 2009:

Never mind the boring old delegates at next month's climate talks in Copenhagen. . . . at events and actions around the city, the largest ever gathering of climate activists will take place which aims to create a global network that will take the environment movement forward for the next year and beyond . . . It's going to be the sort of fortnight where everywhere you look people are chained to railings with slogans written on their faces.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the high visibility of protest actions at some conferences, we know little about how and why the volume and character of this activism changes over time. This paper presents original data to document longitudinal variation in transnational climate change activism around United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings. In order to explain why some meetings feature more protest actions than others I draw attention to the important and understudied role of inter-movement spillover, which I define as the diffusion of ideas, activists, and tactics from one movement to another.

Many scholars have noted the diversity of groups present at international environmental meetings,<sup>2</sup> but existing literature has paid less attention to the processes by which groups come to engage in transnational action on environmental topics. Moreover, few studies have linked inter-movement diffusion to

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1. Van der Zee 2009.

2. Backstrand 2006; Friedman, Hochstetler, and Clark 2005; Levi and Murphy 2006; Newell, Pattberg, and Schroeder 2012; O'Neill and VanDeveer 2005; Smith and Wiest 2012.

changes in the type of collective action observed in environmental politics. This paper tackles these two issues in sequence by examining the case of the spillover of the global justice movement<sup>3</sup> to climate change activism from 2007 to 2009.

My focus on inter-movement spillover sheds light on two types of changes in transnational climate activism. First, it helps to explain variation in the level of contentious collective action around meetings of the UNFCCC. Social movement scholars would generally suggest that high levels of contention should emerge when issues are highly salient, and should accelerate in response to closing political opportunities.<sup>4</sup> This paper refines this explanation to explain how changing political opportunities can draw new actors to an issue area without inducing tactical changes on the part of longtime participants.

Second, social movement spillover can help us explain how repertoires of collective action change over time. My data suggest that collective action in Copenhagen was unusually confrontational in character and that this transgressive activism emerged through a process of inter-movement diffusion and creative adaptation of the signature tactics of the global justice movement.

This paper proceeds in four parts. I first elaborate on existing literature concerning social movement spillover and diffusion, explaining why this perspective offers insights that other approaches do not. Second, I document the spillover of global justice movement activism into the climate justice movement. To make these claims I draw on document analysis and extensive interviews with civil society groups during the time period of 2007–2012.

In a third section I show that the volume of protest expanded dramatically in 2009 and that the protest in Copenhagen was also more confrontational in character. To make this argument I created and analyzed an original dataset of protest events around climate change COPs from 1995–2012. I develop causal evidence linking the expansion of contention to the spillover process using qualitative data. I also offer evidence that radicalization did not happen and suggest why it may be unlikely to occur.

This work sheds light on an important cleavage in the international climate change movement. Understanding its origins and nature helps us predict the character of future activism, explain institutional reform within the UNFCCC, and secure civil society coordination at subsequent climate change negotiations.

## Transnational Social Movement Spillover

Social movements exist in a complex protest space. Their boundaries are not always distinct and their mobilization is often influenced by previous or

3. Della Porta 2007, 7 defines the global justice movement as “a loose network of organizations . . . and other actors engaged in collective action of various kinds, on the basis of the shared goal of advancing the cause of justice (social, economic, political, and environmental) among and between peoples across the globe.”

4. See Meyer 2004.

contemporaneous movements. Recognizing the importance of inter-movement influence, Meyer and Whittier<sup>5</sup> introduced the concept of “social movement spillover” to capture the variety of ways in which “the ideas, tactics, style, participants, and organizations of one movement often spill over its boundaries to affect other social movements.” This paper extends the concept of social movement spillover to the transnational realm, and considers that this process encompasses parallel processes of diffusion—of activists, ideas, and tactics—through relational channels.

Scholars have documented a number of prominent examples of movement spillover. Meyer and Whittier focus on how activists from the second-wave women’s movement spilled over to the 1980s peace movement, affecting the frames, tactics, and organizations of the movement.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, McAdam examines how women’s participation in the civil rights movement influenced the organizations, leadership style, and tactics of the second-wave feminist movement.<sup>7</sup>

The spillover literature overlaps extensively with a related body of work considering how the ideas, organizational practices, and tactics of one movement transfer to others through diffusion. Social movements spillover when diffusion can be observed simultaneously along a number of dimensions (e.g. individuals, ideas, and tactics). But diffusion is not an unproblematic concept. Conventionally, it has been defined as a process whereby an innovation is transmitted through interpersonal or media linkages between a transmitter and an adopter.<sup>8</sup> Diffusion should be particularly likely where similarities exist between transmitters and adopters.<sup>9</sup> But this “conveyor belt” approach has been criticized as involving an automaticity with little agency in the diffusion process.<sup>10</sup> My observations in this case suggest that diffusion between the global justice movement and the climate justice movement was more agential and adaptive than is sometimes appreciated.

We can see this in two ways. First, social movement entrepreneurs actively engaged in activities to promote the similarity of the two movements. Activists purposely established conceptual links between the issues of economic neoliberalism and climate change.<sup>11</sup> Many prominent global justice movement leaders reframed and reinterpreted their old ideas in light of their interaction with new participants and new issues. Second, climate justice activists adapted—rather than mimicked—the ideas and tactics of the global justice movement. Climate justice movement activists reinterpreted the classic summit protest to make it work in the political climate of the UNFCCC.

5. Meyer and Whittier 1994.

6. Meyer and Whittier 1994.

7. McAdam 1992.

8. See Rogers 1995.

9. Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010.

10. See Chabot and Duyvendak 2002; Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010.

11. Benford and Snow 2000.

My approach complements and contrasts with previous work that explains variation in contention as a response to changes in political opportunities.<sup>12</sup> While political opportunities can be an amorphous concept,<sup>13</sup> there are two elements that are especially relevant for this study. First, research has shown that the salience of an issue to the general public increases the use of protest strategies.<sup>14</sup> Second, political process theorists suggest that forms of collective action should vary in response to available opportunities for participation. Research specifically suggests that protest should peak when previously open opportunities for participation suddenly close.<sup>15</sup>

The political opportunities approach does help to explain a good deal of variation in this case. But this approach has two limitations for the purposes of my study. First, political process theorists do not generally consider the *process* by which contention expands and contracts. When process has been considered, scholars argue that the expansion of contention should emerge through a process of tactical radicalization in response to closing political opportunities.<sup>16</sup> I argue that political opportunities attract new actors to an issue area rather than inducing radicalization.

The second limitation of the political process approach is that it does not explain qualitative changes in the type of protest we observe. Focusing on inter-movement tactical diffusion offers a concrete explanation of the transformation of specific forms of action used in an issue area over time.

## Documenting Social Movement Spillover: From Global Justice to Climate Justice

This section documents the process of social movement spillover from the global justice movement to the climate justice movement between 2007 and 2009. My case study extends work on what Fisher calls the “merging of movements” at COP 15.<sup>17</sup> My focus on the process by which actors come to be involved in climate change politics also complements existing work by Jinnah and collaborators on “climate bandwagoning” around this important conference.<sup>18</sup>

I conducted fieldwork with groups organizing transnationally on climate change between 2007 and 2009. I interviewed more than 90 representatives of civil society groups. I also reviewed a number of internal mailing lists and analyzed hundreds of documents associated with movement organizations, although I draw on only a sample of these interviews and documents in this paper.<sup>19</sup>

12. Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 2011.

13. Meyer 2004.

14. Kollman 1998, 58; Mahoney 2008, 41.

15. Meyer 1993; Schlozman and Tierney 1986.

16. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 8, 69.

17. Fisher 2010.

18. Jinnah 2011.

19. A full description of these sources and the qualitative data collection is available online at [www.jenniferhadden.com](http://www.jenniferhadden.com).

### *Movement Bridging*

The “Global Justice Movement” refers to a broad-based collection of civil society groups—including critical NGOs, think tanks, social movement organizations, and trade unions—which organize to contest issues related to economic neoliberalism. Della Porta and her collaborators emphasize justice promotion as one of the movement’s core features, along with its characteristic mobilization of decentralized but dramatic protests around international financial institutions.<sup>20</sup> The shutdown of the 1999 Seattle WTO meeting is an iconic example of the global justice movement in action.

Despite the persistent interest of the global justice movement in environmental issues,<sup>21</sup> very few global justice organizations were actively working on climate change in the early 2000s. With some exceptions, most transnational organizing around climate change tended to come from the Climate Action Network (CAN).<sup>22</sup> CAN was founded in the late 1980s as coalition of environmental NGOs—including WWF, Greenpeace, and Environmental Defense Fund—and works primarily within the realm of scientific expertise and insider-lobbying activities.<sup>23</sup> Thus, most civil society work in the climate sphere developed apart from the global justice movement for the first part of the 2000s.

Two parallel organizing streams tried to bridge global justice and climate change issues starting in 2007: one based in Europe and the other originating from critical international NGOs and think tanks. In Europe, the timing of this shift made sense. Global justice activists were becoming increasingly frustrated with their own perceived inability to impact public discourse. Activists in the UK had an especially disappointing experience with the 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit and the “Make Poverty History” campaign, which they criticized as a public relations ploy.

The German global justice movement went through a similar process of critical self-reflection after the anti-G8 Heiligendamm mobilization in 2007. As one prominent activist put it:

In Heiligendamm we kept talking about neoliberalism and [the leaders] had already moved on. In a lot of ways, neoliberalism was already dead at that point—they were even saying that in the *Financial Times* . . . And [the leaders] were saying, “look at all the great stuff we do, we’re for the environment, we’re such good guys.” And we didn’t have any way to counter that because we weren’t where things were happening. So we started looking around . . . And as much as we were a movement without a story at that point, there was also a story without a movement: climate change.<sup>24</sup>

Global justice activists increasingly drew parallels between the causes and consequences of climate change and the global justice issues stemming from

20. Della Porta 2007.

21. O’Neill and VanDeveer 2005; Smith 2001, 7.

22. See Betsill 2000; Betsill 2008; Newell 2000.

23. See Hoffman 2008.

24. Author’s interview, Climate Justice Action, 2009.

neoliberal economic globalization. For these reasons, many prominent individuals in the global justice movement decided in early 2008 that the major international summit in Copenhagen would be an attractive venue for future mobilization.

One way that activists promoted similarity was by establishing climate change as a symptom of a broader “systemic” problem. They purposely departed from the technical language associated with the Climate Action Network and reached out to broader constituencies. For example, prior to Copenhagen activists distributed pamphlets entitled “Why Climate Change is not an Environmental Issue.” The introduction stated that:

This pamphlet looks at climate change from the angles of capitalism, militarism, nuclear energy, gender, migration, labour & class, and food production. Climate change is not just an environmental issue. It is but one symptom of a system ravaging our planet and destroying our communities.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, some international NGOs and think tanks were rethinking their engagement with climate change politics. By 2007 a group of organizations—including the International Forum on Globalization, the Indigenous Environmental Network, Friend of the Earth<sup>26</sup>, and La Via Campesina—had voiced dissatisfaction with the “limited approach” of the Climate Action Network. Many of these groups already had strong ties to the global justice movement and represented broader systemic concerns than many ENGOS within CAN.

These groups coalesced around a justice framing of the climate issue, presenting their advocacy around “a fight for social, ecological and gender justice.”<sup>27</sup> In doing so, they self-consciously linked the issues of global justice and climate change to broaden mobilization.<sup>28</sup> As one activist explained:

It was a strategic mistake of the environmental movement in the past to work on issues separately, rather than to make a systemic critique. But it’s hard because we need to come up with something that trade unions, farmers and indigenous people can all agree on and that will make these different groups understand the importance of climate change. We have to build bridges between all of these different movements. The environmental movement has been too isolated for too long.<sup>29</sup>

By employing this broader frame these groups could establish partnerships beyond the realm of traditional ENGOS. This is exactly what happened: in 2007 these groups formed an alternative coalition to CAN—Climate Justice

25. Unsigned Movement Document, 2009. Why Climate Change is Not An Environmental Issue.

26. Friends of the Earth is generally considered the ‘darkest green’ of the ENGOS (Dalton 1994). It also has the reputation of engaging the most with global justice groups. One clear sign of this is FOE’s decision to join CJN in 2007, and then its subsequent decision to leave CAN in 2008. See also Saunders 2007.

27. Climate Justice Now! 2009.

28. Scholars have also argued that ‘justice frames’ are particularly likely to broaden mobilization. See Capek 1993; Gamson 1992, 112.

29. Author’s interview, Climate Justice Now! 2009.

Now! (CJN)—that sought to broaden the climate change debate. CJN organizers deliberately recruited organizations representing people directly affected by climate change. As a result, many new CJA member organizations were based in countries in the global south, contributing to the diversity of this coalition. And in 2008 these groups began to reach out to their allies in the global justice movement, merging these two organizing streams and encouraging European global justice groups to begin planning for Copenhagen.

### *Inter-Movement Spillover*

Upon this groundwork, considerable inter-movement spillover occurred in the diffusion of individuals, ideas, and tactics between the two movements.<sup>30</sup> I focus on the first two elements here, and discuss the process of tactical diffusion in a subsequent section.

Many prominent individuals associated with the global justice movement—including Naomi Klein, Michael Hardt, and Lisa Fithian—explicitly called for mobilization at COP 15. Their calls were particularly successful because COP 15 was originally scheduled to open on the 10th anniversary of the protests against the WTO in Seattle in 1999: an iconic event for activists in the global justice movement. Klein highlighted this connection in a prominent editorial, stating in 2009:

The Seattle activists' coming of age in Copenhagen will be very disobedient. The climate conference will witness a new maturity for the movement that ignited a decade ago.<sup>31</sup>

This inter-movement diffusion was also visible in the formation of new coalitions to promote the justice-based approach to climate issues. In addition to CJN, another coalition—Climate Justice Action (CJA)<sup>32</sup>—was founded in 2008 to unite (mostly) European global justice groups. Along with their colleagues in CJN they worked actively to promote the use of climate justice language and protest tactics around the Copenhagen meeting.

What did all this spillover mean for climate politics? I focus on two outcomes. First, social movement spillover helps to explain why we see protest at some times and not others. Second, it helps to explain why we see climate activism become more confrontational in 2009. The next sections detail these outcomes.

## **Explaining Variation in Collective Action on Climate Change**

Civil society activism has been a fixture of the world of climate politics since its inception. Scholars have previously documented how civil society groups

30. Byrd 2010; Pleyers 2011; Reitan 2011.

31. Klein 2009.

32. This coalition did not adopt the name 'Climate Justice Action' until March 2009, but for simplicity's sake I will refer to it as such throughout the paper.

participate in a wide variety of non-contentious activities, including holding side events at conferences, publishing a daily newspaper, lobbying delegates, issuing reports, and giving interviews.<sup>33</sup> These actions continued over the period of this study.

Much less attention has been paid to the use of contentious tactics in the area of climate change.<sup>34</sup> I consider an event to be contentious if it aims to disrupt institutional functioning or to generate pressure on an institution through collective action outside of the political process. We know that many contentious actions—banner hanging, demonstrations, and marches—occur around climate conferences. To name a few examples, activists chained themselves to limos and buses at the first COP in Berlin, hosted a “die-in” in 1997 in Kyoto, built a “human dike” outside the 2000 conference in The Hague, and marched through the streets in substantial numbers at the 2007, 2008 and 2009 conferences. But despite the visibility of these actions as part of the COP process, these forms of activism have received little systematic study.

### *Protest Event Analysis*

Protest event analysis involves collecting longitudinal data on contentious events through systematic coding of news sources. For this project I employ protest event analysis of newspaper sources alongside coding of issue-specific daily newsletters. First, I conducted an extensive search of media sources in the LexisNexis database for each COP from 1995–2012, limiting my search to reports filed in the city in which the COP was held.<sup>35</sup> Specifically, I searched for the terms “(climate change or global warming) AND (UN or United Nations) AND (protest\* or march\* or demonstrat\*).” Because of the high number of “false positives” returned with these very general search terms, each of the returned news items was human-coded to determine whether or not it contained a relevant contentious action related to the COP, as well as for a variety of other event attributes. A full codebook with a list of all action types coded as contentious is available online.<sup>36</sup> Figure 1 shows the results of this data collection.

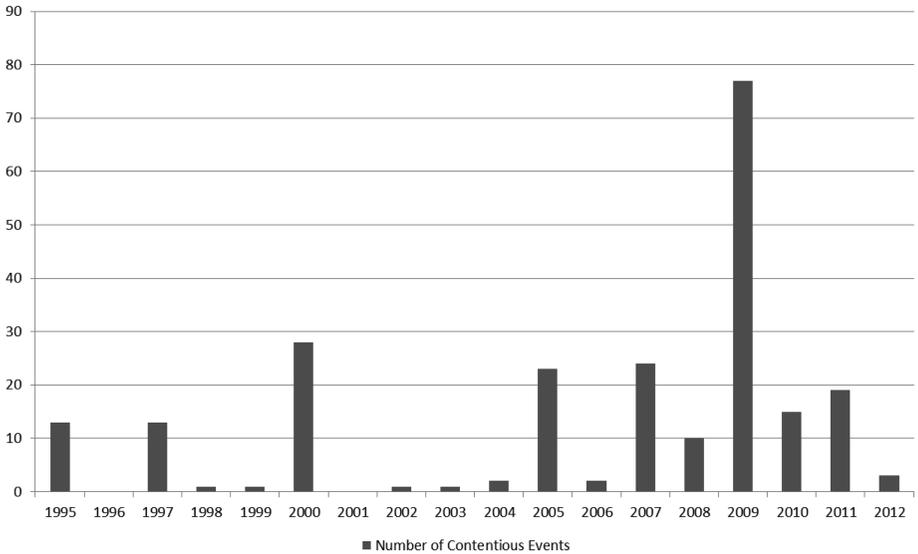
The results suggest that the amount of protest in Copenhagen was truly unprecedented. While there were 29 contentious events reported at the 2000 COP in The Hague—the second most contentious meeting—there were 77 reported in Copenhagen, for a growth of 165 percent. Most UNFCCC meetings—including the 1995, 1997, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2011 COPs—attracted

33. See Betsill 2008; Carpenter 2001; Fisher 2004; Hoffman 2008; Paterson 1996; Schroeder and Lovell 2012.

34. But see Fisher 2004.

35. Data were collected for COP 6 in The Hague, but not for COP 6 bis in Bonn. While the addition of independent media sources would be ideal, this type of reporting is not systematically available for the entire time period of the study.

36. A full codebook is available online at: [www.jenniferhadden.com](http://www.jenniferhadden.com).



**Figure 1**  
Number of Contentious Events Reported during COPs, 1995–2012

approximately 10–25 protests each. More technical meetings—including those in 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2012—experienced virtually no civil society protests.

Critics have critiqued protest analysis as subject to reporting bias: that the amount of protest reported is a function of the amount of coverage of climate change overall.<sup>37</sup> Reporting bias can be difficult to detect using media sources alone because high profile meetings attract both more coverage and more protest. To assess the extent of this bias, I coded a very different kind of publication—the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*—which provides comprehensive daily coverage of the official UNFCCC negotiations. Since this publication has consistent coverage, it is likely to have more limited reporting bias.

Analysis of this publication supports the results from my coding of newspaper sources. Analysis of the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* found that protests were uncommon at most COPs, and the only ones that were noted as having more than 3 protest events were COP 6 in the Hague with 5 and COP 15 in Copenhagen with 9. The correlation between the number of events reported for each COP from the ENB and the LexisNexis sources was 0.91, which should make us more confident that these data reflect a genuine expansion in contention.

I also gain additional leverage by comparing the number of protesters mobilized for each COP. Fisher estimates<sup>38</sup> there were approximately 5,000 protesters at the UNFCCC meeting in 2000. But in 2009, a massive demonstration of

37. Koopmans and Rucht 2002.

38. Fisher 2004, 184.

100,000 people and many smaller protest events occurred.<sup>39</sup> This again suggests that the scale of activism in Copenhagen was simply much bigger.

My data suggest preliminary support for the political process explanation, as highly salient COPs attracted more protest than more technical COPs. The correlation of protests reported and media articles about the COP is 0.84.<sup>40</sup> But *why* do highly salient COPs attract more protest? I argue that it is not because they cause radicalization but because they draw different kinds of movements, encouraging tactical diffusion.

### *Evidence of Social Movement Spillover*

The previous section established that the global justice movement spilled over into climate politics in 2009. But how do we know that social movement spillover contributes to the growth in contention we observe in the protest event analysis? Two types of evidence help with this question. First, contentious events in 2009 tended to have different sponsors than events in previous years. The press accounts reported that many of these events—and especially the most radical ones—were sponsored by “climate justice activists,” “leftist groups,” and “anti-capitalist protestors.” While press accounts are known to be partial and incomplete, these data suggest that these new sponsors contributed to the growth in contentious events.

Second, research teams using the protest survey methodology developed by Stefaan Walgrave collected individual level data at protests around COP 15.<sup>41</sup> Analysis of these surveys confirms that most participants in the largest demonstration in Copenhagen were aware of the transnational dimensions of the mobilization and that many (43.9 percent) identified with the global justice movement.<sup>42</sup> While comparable data is not available from earlier climate demonstrations, it is plausible that the greater size of this demonstration was due, at least partially, to the mobilization of the global justice constituency. The next section establishes these linkages more precisely.

## **Explaining Changes in the Repertoire of Collective Action**

Not only was there more protest in Copenhagen, but this protest was of a different character. Social movement scholars, following Charles Tilly,<sup>43</sup> conceptualize the range of action forms used around an issue as the “repertoire of contention.” Scholars also show how inter-movement diffusion can play an important

39. Fisher 2010.

40. The search terms were “(climate change or global warming) AND (UN or United Nations)” in the LexisNexis database, all major world news sources.

41. See <http://www.protestsurvey.eu/> for more information about this project.

42. Walgrave et al 2012; Wahlstrom, Wennerhag, and Rootes, 2013.

43. Tilly 1978, 151.

role in the evolution of a repertoire.<sup>44</sup> This section shows how tactical diffusion introduced a more confrontational repertoire to the politics of the UNFCCC.

### *Inter-Movement Tactical Diffusion*

Before the spillover of the global justice movement, most of the (limited) protest that occurred around the UNFCCC was of a non-threatening character. Examples might include the non-violent demonstration of activists in Poznan in 2008 or the media-friendly march of activists wearing polar bear costumes in Bali in 2007. But Copenhagen marked the emergence of a more confrontational and transgressive repertoire of climate change activism that had previously been rare.

Theoretically, transgressive contention is a subset of contentious action that can be distinguished because it comes from new actors who disrupt established routines in their protest actions.<sup>45</sup> There are two crucial differences between the transgressive protest at Copenhagen and earlier protest actions. First, contentious events at the UNFCCC have usually been mobilized *in support of* stronger climate policy from the UNFCCC.<sup>46</sup> Second, these protests have typically been sponsored by the same ENGO activists who were organizing actions inside the UNFCCC, and function as a small complement to their lobbying work. In Copenhagen, transgressive actions resulted from inter-movement spillover and tended to be highly confrontational in language and demands.

The repertoire of contention became much more transgressive around COP 15 because global justice activist called for the use of summit protest tactics against the UNFCCC. The summit protest is a well-known component of the repertoire of the global justice movement.<sup>47</sup> As Wood (2007) argues, the “Seattle tactics” associated with summit protests include four elements: affinity groups, black bloc, jail solidarity, and protest puppetry.

Global justice organizers consider these types of actions to be their strength, and looked to adapt this tactic to climate politics. As one early and influential mobilizing document explained the strategy:

Where do the strengths of the radical global movements lie both in comparison to our enemies and to our more moderate allies? Answer: in the organisation of large-scale, disruptive summit mobilisations. It is precisely in summit mobilisations that we have developed something that could be called “best practice,” where we have before achieved a substantial political effect . . . Forget Kyoto—Shut down Copenhagen 2009!<sup>48</sup>

44. See Chabot and Duyvendak 2002 on the diffusion of the Gandian repertoire.

45. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 7–8.

46. Fisher 2004; Hoffman 2008.

47. Della Porta 2007; Reitan 2007; Smith 2001; Smith 2008; Wood 2007.

48. Müller 2008.

The most striking example of inter-movement tactical diffusion was the controversial Reclaim Power action organized by the climate justice movement for December 16th, 2009. The official action concept for Reclaim Power involved four components: (1) a disruptive outside action; (2) an inside disruption; (3) a walk out from the conference center; and (4) a people's assembly "in the area of the conference center." In practice, about 3,000 activists converged in the area immediately outside the fence of the Bella Center on the day of Reclaim Power. They organized with affinity groups and engaged in protest puppetry. Although many did not arrive due to mass arrests, those that made it to the people's assembly met for about 30 minutes to discuss their solutions to the climate crisis. Activists subsequently marched in solidarity with those arrested and injured at the demonstration.

Although Reclaim Power resembled classic summit protests, it did not simply mimic the global justice movement's signature tactic. On the contrary, activists creatively adapted this bundle of tactics to suit the new circumstances. For example, activists decided not to try to shut down the Copenhagen Summit—the classic Seattle style action—but to design an action to highlight their own solutions to the climate crisis. This adaptation excluded the black bloc. But it was a deliberate attempt to be more inclusive of environmental, indigenous, and Southern groups that expressed discomfort with the global justice movement's reputation for violence and property destruction.<sup>49</sup> In this way we can see a process of mutual learning and adaptation as a result of inter-movement interaction.

Interestingly, inter-movement spillover also accounts for the other COP at which we see a high level of transgressive activism: the 2000 COP in The Hague.<sup>50</sup> At this meeting, protesters associated with the organization Rising Tide (an early global justice-oriented climate group) also aggressively tried to disrupt the institutional functioning of the UNFCCC. This included storming the building, throwing paint bombs, climbing rafters, throwing a pie in the face of the US Chief Delegate, and destroying electoral equipment. The confrontational character of these actions triggered an aggressive response by UN security, prompting many mainstream ENGOs to disavow and distance themselves from the actions.

### *The Role of Policing*

Transgressive activism is particularly likely to result in increased policing. This can be observed in the history of the global justice movement, and seems to have happened in the climate realm as well.<sup>51</sup> We can see this reflected in the protest event analysis. In most years there were virtually no arrests around the

49. Author's interview, German Climate Camp, 2009. See also O'Neill 2004.

50. See O'Neill 2004.

51. Della Porta 2007; O'Neill 2004; Wood 2007.

COPs. The 2000 COP was a notable exception, where about 21 percent of events were reported to result in arrests. This high level of police action was not to be repeated until Copenhagen where about 22 percent of events resulted in arrests. However, the scale of involvement was much greater in 2009: approximately 50–100 people were arrested in The Hague while approximately 3,000 were arrested in Copenhagen.

Activists report that security officials have been much more proactive, aggressive, and restrictive in policing protest actions around subsequent COPs.<sup>52</sup> The presence of riot police is now common. Even as the overall level of protest has dramatically decreased, events resulting in arrests were 20 percent in Cancun, 32 percent in Durban, and 33 percent in Doha. The aggressive removal of activists during the 2013 COP in Warsaw demonstrates the continuation of this trend.

Although this is not a systematic study of policing practices, these observations suggest that it was changes in the repertoire of contention that caused changes in policing around subsequent COPs. These new developments may also lead to broader reform in the way in which the UNFCCC deals with civil society actors, as the concluding section will suggest.

## Resisting Radicalization

If social movement spillover prompted growth in contention and transgressive protest, how do we know radicalization did not occur?

The event data provides a small window into this question. Political process theorists argue that protest should escalate via a process of radicalization as institutions reduce access to civil society.<sup>53</sup> This is exactly what happened in Copenhagen. Specifically, UN Security began to restrict access to the negotiations for selected groups on December 16th, and excluded virtually all civil society groups starting on December 17th.<sup>54</sup>

Did these excluded actors adopt protest in response to their limited access? My data show most protest in Copenhagen occurred *before* access was restricted. The vast majority (71 percent) of protest events occurred between December 7th and December 15th. Another 16 percent occurred on December 16th itself, and only 13 percent occurred in the two days after December 16th. Restricted access appears to have been largely a reaction to—not a driver of—the growth in contention.<sup>55</sup>

52. Author's interview, Climate Action Network, 2011. Responsibility for policing is shared between UN Security and the host country government, thus specific policing styles may vary depending on the COP location.

53. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001.

54. Fisher 2010; McGregor 2011.

55. Of course, this represents only a limited challenge to the political opportunity thesis, which has repeatedly been supported in empirical research (Meyer 2004). The two-day time span may very well have not been enough time for activists to regroup and reengage in mobilization. Because of the transnational nature of this activism, the way in which the summits circle the globe, and

The qualitative interviews suggest the reasons mainstream ENGOs have *not* significantly radicalized, even in the face of severely limited opportunities for participation. First, ENGOs working within the UNFCCC are known to be both professional and pragmatic. This strategic decision is judged to have contributed to the political efficacy of the Climate Action Network.<sup>56</sup> Although NGOs fear being co-opted by the official process, they generally accept restrictions on their behavior in exchange for opportunities for influence.<sup>57</sup> As one succinctly explained the trade-off:

Do we get played by them? Of course we do. But at a certain point you have to decide that it's worth it to try and have an influence on the outcome.<sup>58</sup>

Second, radicalization can be costly. Civil society groups risk serious institutional sanctions if they deviate from approved forms of collective action. Those that receive accreditation to attend UNFCCC negotiations agree to a code of conduct that precludes certain actions. Violations risk organizational exclusion from the venue. Association with "violent" activities also can contradict their own internal charters and may threaten organizational legitimacy with supporters.<sup>59</sup>

ENGOs take these issues very seriously. As security responded to the transgressive protests in The Hague, many groups working within the Climate Action Network (in particular, Greenpeace) made great efforts to disassociate themselves. The experience of Friends of the Earth—which was likely targeted for exclusion on December 16th 2009 as a result of its perceived involvement with the climate justice movement—illustrates that institutional sanctions have teeth.

Finally, group dynamics within the ENGO community affect the tactical decisions of individual organizations. Because civil society groups work in coalitions, they fear that the status of the ENGO community as whole may be threatened if they appear "irresponsible." Groups try to rein in other groups. This kind of peer pressure took place both over email lists and face-to-face within CAN in the final days of Copenhagen, as groups encouraged others to follow the instructions of UN Security and to vacate the building peacefully.

## Looking Forward

Inter-movement spillover plays an important role in transnational climate change politics. Conceptualizing this process helps explain the process by

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the long time lags between COPs, much momentum may be lost here in ways it would not in a domestic context.

56. Duwe 2001; Rahman and Roncerel 1994. See also Betsill and Corell 2001.

57. Willetts 1999.

58. Author's interview, WWF International, 2009.

59. Author's interview, Friends of the Earth Sweden, 2009.

which contention around climate change expands and contracts, and changes in the repertoire of contention over time. This perspective can shed light on the continued evolution of the repertoire of climate change activism—for example, the use of tactics from the global Occupy movement in 2011<sup>60</sup>—as well as to study changes in the nature of activism in other issue areas.

For the UNFCCC—an institution that has long prided itself on being relatively open to civil society participation—the expansion of transgressive activism poses a particular challenge. In the short run, activists and observers have noted that security at the COPs seems to have become more aggressive, preemptive, and restrictive with respect to the kinds of participation it allows. But the “trauma of Copenhagen” has also prompted a larger review of the UNFCCC’s policies for dealing with civil society. As the Aarhus report on COP 15 noted, an “atmosphere of distrust”<sup>61</sup> had grown between civil society and the institution. As the process within the Subsidiary Body on Implementation on “enhancing observer participation”<sup>62</sup> has not resolved many of the key issues, I suggest that social movement spillover may also contribute to future institutional reform in ways that deserve our close attention.

The politics of Copenhagen also illustrate that important divisions exist among civil society groups working on climate change. Those organizations that spilled over from global justice activism approach climate change politics very differently from longtime participants in the process. In many cases, current divisions among groups often reflect deeper differences about the role of market environmentalism, the use of transgressive tactics, and the need for global justice in the politics of climate change. While the broad-based civil society walk-out at the 2013 COP in Warsaw may signal growing frustration among mainstream ENGOs, these deeper division and strategic differences are far from resolved.

This type of cleavage is familiar to those who study the World Social Forum and the politics of international financial institutions, and it is increasingly important to scholars of international environmental politics.<sup>63</sup> While groups working on climate are undoubtedly also divided by tactics, ideology, and values,<sup>64</sup> I argue that understanding the relational processes by which they come to engage in climate politics in the first place help us understand the root of these divisions and may point to useful strategies for promoting future civil society coordination.

60. The ‘global occupy’ movement is an international movement against social and economic inequality that originated with the occupation of a park near Wall Street in New York in 2011. See <https://www.facebook.com/occupyCOP17> for its linkages with climate politics.

61. UNFCCC 2010a.

62. UNFCCC 2010b.

63. Smith et al. 2007.

64. Alcock 2008; Clapp and Dauvergne 2005; Dalton 1994; Rohrschneider and Dalton 2002; Rootes 2004.

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