

What Shapes Colombia's Foreign Position on Climate Change?

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ABSTRACT: Colombia presents a revealing and much needed case study which helps us to understand the formulation of foreign policy on climate change in rising developing countries. This paper analyzes the main factors which shape Colombia's position, and provides useful insights into the evolution of the country's international stance on climate change and the role in it of the bargaining among government agencies and interest groups. It concludes that Colombia's policy has been governed by its institutional structure, ecological vulnerability, emission abatement costs, wish to enhance its global prestige and seek benefits from international cooperation, strategic aims at the United Nations climate negotiations, and the limited influence of domestic pressure groups.

KEYWORDS: Colombia • climate change • foreign policy • climate change adaptation (*Thesaurus*) • AILAC • UNFCCC (*author*)



This submission is based on the author's undergraduate thesis, which uses Colombia as a case study to explore climate change politics in the Global South and at UN climate negotiations.

Factores que determinan la posición de la política exterior de Colombia con relación al cambio climático

RESUMEN: Colombia presenta un revelador y muy necesario estudio de caso que ayuda a comprender la formulación de la política exterior con relación al cambio climático en países emergentes en vías de desarrollo. El presente artículo analiza los factores principales que determinan la posición de Colombia y provee perspectivas útiles de la evolución de la postura internacional sobre el cambio climático y el papel de este en las negociaciones entre agencias del gobierno y grupos de interés. Se concluye que la política colombiana ha tenido fuerte influencia de la estructura institucional, la vulnerabilidad ecológica, los costos de la reducción de emisiones, el deseo de reforzar el prestigio mundial y la búsqueda de beneficios por cooperación internacional, los objetivos estratégicos de las negociaciones sobre el clima de las Naciones Unidas y la limitada influencia de grupos de presión locales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Colombia • cambio climático • política exterior • adaptación al cambio climático (*Thesaurus*) • AILAC • UNFCCC (Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático) (*autor*)

Fatores que determinam a posição da política exterior da Colômbia quanto à mudança climática

RESUMO: a Colômbia apresenta um revelador e muito necessário estudo de caso que ajuda a compreender a formulação da política exterior a respeito da mudança climática em países emergentes em vias de desenvolvimento. Este artigo analisa os fatores principais que determinam a posição da Colômbia e oferece perspectivas úteis da evolução do posicionamento internacional sobre a mudança climática e o papel desta nas negociações entre agências do governo e grupos de interesse. Conclui-se que a política colombiana vem tendo forte influência da estrutura institucional, da vulnerabilidade ecológica, dos custos da redução de emissões, do desejo de reforçar o prestígio mundial, da busca de benefícios por cooperação internacional, dos objetivos estratégicos das negociações sobre o clima das Nações Unidas e da limitada influência de grupos de pressão locais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: adaptação à mudança climática • Colômbia • mudança climática • política exterior (*Tesouro*) • AILAC • UNFCCC (Convenção-Quadro das Nações Unidas sobre Mudanças Climáticas) (*autor*)

Introduction

Despite Colombia's high ecological diversity, vulnerability to climate change, and long participation in international environmental organizations, an analysis of its foreign policy on the environment is rarely the subject of academic study.¹ Today, the Colombian government faces the challenges of illegal mining, the exploitation of fossil fuels and minerals in protected areas, and the country's increasing dependence on oil and coal. The Ministry of Environment has also undergone structural changes and significant budget cuts.² Yet despite following traditional patterns of unsustainable development, Colombia has unexpectedly acted as a leader at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and has been an advocate for a development which ameliorates climate change. Thus, Colombia's ambitious role in international environment forums raises the question of what is driving the country's foreign position on climate.

As climate change becomes more of an imminent threat to development and the fulfilment of human rights around the world, academics who specialize in international relations have taken an increasing interest in studying the politics of climate change —although perhaps they have not shifted their focus rapidly enough. Robert Keohane complains about the “slow response from political science as a discipline”, even though climate change is increasingly becoming one of the major challenges of our time (Keohane 2015).

Similarly, Dunlap and Brulle (2015) criticize sociology's failure to address the human dimensions of climate change. Traditionally, academic studies of the politics of global climate have dealt with a small number of countries, mostly from the developed world, and with a few exceptions (such as the BASIC bloc of countries, which includes Brazil, South Africa, India, and China), have ignored what is happening in developing countries, which limits our understanding of how new policies and programs emerge (Steinberg 2013), especially in the Global South. We still know little about the developing countries “own perspectives, interests, positions and approaches to climate change” (Edwards and Roberts 2015).

If we are to understand a matter of such complexity as the United Nations climate negotiations, it is essential to investigate not only the relations among the different countries but also the national context of each country's foreign policy

1 In 1987, Colombia first made an impact at international environmental forums with the participation in the Brundtland Commission of the renowned environmentalist Margarita Marino de Botero (Interview #4).

2 According to the Colombian economist Guillermo Rudas, the 1998 budget for environmental agencies was 0.74 percent of the national GDP, compared to 0.23 percent in 2014 (Semana Sostenible 2014).

on the environment but researchers are usually reluctant to open that “black box”, even though such domestic influences provide valuable insights into the relationship between a country’s economy, bureaucracy and foreign policy.

As a middle-income country with a high biodiversity which is vulnerable to climate change and whose economy depends on the export of fossil fuels, Colombia serves as a revealing and sorely needed case study of how a developing country shapes its foreign policy on climate. Despite a domestic economy revolving around extractive industries, Colombia has been responsible for an ambitious discourse about climate action and international cooperation in world environmental forums and unexpectedly acted as a leader in the campaigns to ameliorate climate change and decarbonize the global economy with new models of development.

This article investigates the main factors that shape Colombia’s foreign policy on climate change, looking at both domestic and international drivers. Why does Colombia have such an ambitious and progressive position at the United Nations climate negotiations? How do we understand today’s position in the context of more than two decades of negotiations?

The Colombian case demonstrates the ways in which the State is not a monolith, but rather a sum of its parts; it highlights the internal complexity of coordinating a national policy on climate change and the dynamic relationship between domestic and international aspects. Colombia also illustrates how middle-income countries with a limited wealth or power—in terms of *realpolitik*—can shape the course of international negotiations, build a consensus among opposing parties, bring actors together, put forth distinctive proposals, and leverage their voice. Colombia also challenges the current understanding of the North-South divide on climate change and the role of lobbying groups in shaping the national position.

As Atteridge *et al.*’s (2012) study of India has shown, analyzing the factors which most influence a country’s foreign policy on climate change can throw light on how to engage in a fruitful cooperation with other countries. In essence, an examination of policy-making is crucial for understanding the possibilities countries have for playing an important role in international negotiations on climate change and the kind of domestic actions they can take to further that end (Atteridge *et al.* 2012).

In the case of Colombia, it helps us to understand how a developing country can open windows of opportunity which can then be leveraged to further its ambitions, promote international cooperation and deal with policy gaps.

Using interest-based theory at the systemic, society, and state-centric level, I suggest that Colombia’s foreign climate policy is closely linked to its ecological vulnerability, emission abatement costs, wish to raise its global prestige

and seek benefits from cooperation, strategic aims at the United Nations climate negotiations, the limited influence of domestic pressure groups in the country and its specific institutional structures.

The article begins with an explanation of the methodology and theoretical framework of the analysis. It then provides a brief overview of the subject. Third, it explains the development of the national policy on climate change. Fourth, it speaks of the history of the country's participation in international climate negotiations. Fifth, it analyzes the relevant variables. Finally, it presents a summary and conclusion.

1. Methodological Approach

The research for this article was undertaken between June 2015 and April 2016. It is based on a) participant observation at the UN climate negotiations in 2015, mainly at the inter-sessional meetings in Bonn, Germany in June and the Paris talks in December. b) 24 interviews, some with individuals who have played a key role in the development and implementation of Colombia's domestic and foreign climate policy, and others with past and present negotiators or representatives of the civil society who work inside and outside of Colombia. In more specific terms, the interviewees included officials of the Colombian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; academics and lawyers devoted to environmental themes; and former and current members of the delegations of other countries, like Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru. In the name of confidentiality, the identity of the sources is not revealed. The interviews were semi-structured: the questions that were asked depended on the expertise and background of the interviewee, but they generally focused on the main determinants of climate policies, especially on a foreign level, and climate politics inside and outside of Colombia. The interviewees were chosen in accordance with their expertise and availability. And c) a review of academic articles, books, and reports on foreign environmental and climate change policy, along with newspaper articles, blogs, videos, briefings, official statements, presentations, and other relevant material.

I focus on Colombia because it is a novel subject of investigation and allows for an in depth study which also enables one to generalize about broader aspects of climate change policy. I use the Barkdull and Harris (2002) typology of foreign environmental policymaking; Sprinz and Vaahantoranta (1994), Lachapelle and Paterson (2013), and Hongyuan (2008) to study the national level; Harrison and Sundstrom (2007) and Genovese (2014) to study the societal level; Allison (1969) to study interest at the state level; and Steinberg (2013), Shangrita (2013), and Vieira (2013), among others, for their focus on developing countries.

2. What Explains Climate Policy?

Deconstructing a country's foreign policy requires an understanding of a variety of actors, institutions, and forces. Barkdull and Harris (2002) employ three types of interest-based theories for that purpose: systemic, societal, and state centric. The first deals with how the international system and the distribution of power within it influences policymaking. The second analyzes drivers of policy in domestic politics and the interactions and bargaining between interest or class groups. The third looks at the structure of the State in terms of bureaucratic politics and organizational models.

a. National Interest-Based Theory

At the systemic level, interest-based theory assumes the existence of self-interested actors who seek wealth and power through a cost-benefit analysis of environmental actions. Sprinz and Vaahantoranta (1994) believe that a country's ecological vulnerability and the costs it pays for pollution abatement are the two most influential factors. Countries are more likely to be active players in the international realm when compliance costs are relatively minor and their populations or ecosystems are highly vulnerable to pollution. This can be applied to climate change: a country must balance the costs of emission abatement and its vulnerability to climate impacts. The greater the impacts, the stronger the incentives to reduce vulnerability. Lachapelle and Paterson (2013) argue that the costs of pollution abatement are related to a country's economy. Thus, dependence of fossil fuels, whether for domestic energy or exports, may be a key influence on climate policy. Countries which highly depend on fossil fuels for domestic energy will find that the transition to alternative energies is more costly and less feasible and are unlikely to adopt an ambitious climate policy.

Changes in value preference —a shift in priorities, from materialistic to post-materialistic values, for example— also play a role in foreign policy. For example, India has shifted its priorities on an international level from the reduction of poverty and economic growth to a bid for global status based on less materialistic values (Atteridge *et al.* 2012).

The interests of States are shaped by values about their role in the international community. If a State publicly declares itself to be a leader in efforts to deal with climate change, it is likely to play a more active role in international negotiations than those which do not. As Fennimore (1996) says: "States are embedded in a dense network of transnational and international social relations that shape their perceptions of the world and their role in that world. States are socialized to

want certain things by the international society in which they and the people in them live” (Barkdull and Harris 2002).³

b. Society Interest-Based Theory

At the societal level, interest-based theories focus on the role interest groups play in shaping foreign policy. In places where voters do not show much interest in such issues, organized interest groups will most likely influence the government's position. Genovese (2014) argues that it is crucial to understand the impact of lobbies on international policymaking since “clashing preferences across domestic sectorial activities” are often the reason for inaction on climate change. She also notes that normative motivations shape positions, in accordance with constructivist paradigms.

Speaking of the entanglement of domestic and foreign policies, Robert Putnam describes international negotiations as a two-level game, where domestic pressure groups try to shape government policy, while governments try to satisfy them and at the same time limit the negative impacts of those concessions on foreign policy (Putnam 1988).

c. State-Centric Interest-Based Theory

At the State-centric level, interest-based theory emphasizes the role of governments themselves, independently of societal interests, that is, the structure of the State and the relationship between different branches of a government.

Graham Allison's (1969) second model of the organizational process can be applied to a foreign policy on climate change. It holds that governments consist of smaller organizations, each with its own interests, structures, and nature, which are loosely allied and that each organization “perceives problems, processes information and performs a range of actions in quasi-independence,” following broad guidelines of national policy (Allison 1969). Consequently, the acts and decisions of a government can be understood “less as the deliberate choices of leaders and more as the outputs” of these smaller and often fragmented organizations. This is usually true of climate policy when several ministries or departments of the government are responsible for it. Hongyuan (2008) applies Allison's organizational model to China's foreign policy on climate change to “solve the foreign policy coordination question” in a bureaucracy where myriad actors must coordinate their work for a policy to function.

Allison also argues that bureaucratic interests influence foreign policy-making (Putnam 1988). His third model of international politics, the governmental politics

3 An example of this has been the emergence of environmental ministries and the recent understanding of them as an essential part of a modern state.

model, holds that policies are the result of bargaining between the different players in the hierarchy of the government. These players share power but often disagree on policies. As Hongyuan puts it: “The bureaucratic politics model posits that organizational decisions about final action do not result from an orderly consideration at a macro level but, instead, reflect a sometimes messy amalgamation of choices, games, compromises, internal politics, and prior actions [...]” (2008). Allison also emphasizes the importance of specific bureaucrats, whose objectives are shaped by national, organizational, and personal goals.

3. Colombia’s Foreign Policy on Environment and Climate Change

Colombia’s heads of state have traditionally given much importance to the country’s adherence to the principles of international law. A small elite, limited to the President and an inner circle of advisors, tends to dominate foreign policy and their decisions are usually based on the interests of the administration rather than those of the State (Galán 2007). In general, foreign opinion and the country’s wish to be a major player on the international stage are more important shapers of foreign policy than domestic public opinion (Randall 2011).

In line with that, Colombia played an important role in the negotiations which resulted in several international environmental treaties, including the Protocol of Biosecurity, the Kyoto Protocol, the Montreal Protocol, and the Minamata Convention (Interview #5).

During the Gaviria administration (1990-1994) and the two following ones (1994-1998) and (1998-2002), Colombia made important reforms of its domestic environmental institutions and the integration of environmental policies into its national development plans (Rodríguez 2005). The environment also began to feature on the “new agenda of Colombian foreign policy,” which was new in the sense that it no longer followed the Cold War global alignment of East vs. West, but a North/South one and addressed new issues like drugs trafficking, human rights, technology transfer and the environment, among others (Pardo 1990).

Through Law 99 of 1993, Congress gave the Ministry of Environment the power to formulate international environmental policy together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 1994, the Ministry of Environment has had an office of international relations. Thanks to the 1992 Rio Summit, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had already established an environmental office, which continues to operate today and has continuously expanded, but more due to the efforts of its officials than an explicit government policy (Rodríguez 2005). Similarly, the role of Colombia in international environmental negotiations has heavily depended on the skills of

its negotiators and government officials in general. Their peers generally regard them as “competent and constructive,” and acknowledge their positive impact on international forums (Rodríguez 2005). However, there have been times when the country’s position has not been sufficiently consistent, mainly due to the turnover of negotiators (Rodríguez 2005). President Santos’ foreign policy has focused on positioning Colombia as an important player on the international scene, especially in environmental organizations, and consolidating its influence in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), (Ramírez 2011; Borda 2011). For example, in 2012, Colombia led the proposal to establish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has been a leader in that field ever since.

a. Development of the National Position on Climate

Colombia’s national system of coordinating climate change policies is known as the SISCLIMA. While it was not formalized through a decree until early 2016, its Committee on Foreign Affairs was already operational: it meets on a periodic basis to monitor Colombia’s international commitments and its main actors are the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, even though they depend on other agencies (Rodríguez 2005). The Mining and Energy Planning Unit (UPME), the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Housing, among others, also participate. During these meetings, participants review the agendas for future negotiating sessions and discuss the country’s position at the international climate negotiations.

Preparations for international negotiations entail requesting technical documents from the relevant agencies, meeting with different bodies of the public and private sectors and consulting other ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for weighing the opinions of the different actors and reaching a common position after bargaining with them (Interview #5). It then drafts a document which outlines the country’s priorities and positions and will guide the officials who represent the country in international negotiations (Interview #6).

The participation of the civil society has been limited up to now, because it is felt that it generally lacks the technical knowledge the delegation requires (Interview #7) and thus the government has little interest in consulting environmental NGOs (Rodríguez 2005). One reason is that Colombian NGOs have usually focused on issues like deforestation, the protection of biodiversity, and raising environmental awareness: only recently have a few begun to address the foreign policy on climate change (Tomlinson *et al.* 2010).⁴ This has caused tensions be-

4 Among the NGOs active either in climate negotiations or climate advocacy in general are the Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA), World Wide Fund for Nature

tween government officials and the leading environmental NGOs, although there are important exceptions (Interview #3).

b. Colombia at the Climate Negotiations

Colombia has traditionally negotiated as a member of the G77 + China group.⁵ Since 2012, it has also been affiliated with the Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC). During the past two decades, Colombia's role at the UNFCCC has evolved from a stricter to a less strict adherence to the principles of a country's right to autonomously develop its economy, exercise sovereignty over its natural resources and honor common but differentiated responsibilities in line with its respective capabilities (CBDR + RC).

The latter takes into account the dependence of a country's responsibility for ameliorating climate change on its rate of emissions in the past and current economic conditions. To begin with, Colombia also opposed market-based mechanisms that would give developed countries more flexibility in meeting emission-reduction targets.

With time, Colombia began to redefine its stance, distancing itself, to a certain extent, from the G77 + China group. It also began to favor forest- and- market mechanisms, especially the Clean Development Mechanism.

Since 2009, Colombia has strengthened its influence in international negotiations by moving from a focus on specific issues to a more general approach to environmental problems, a change which has been backed by the professionalism and expert knowledge of its negotiators at the UNFCCC (Personal communication with Isabel Cavalier, May 2015).

Between 1992 and 1998, Colombia's participation at the negotiations was not always constant, partly due to a limited technical capacity. However, its participation became increasingly active after that, thanks to the support of delegates from the National Academy of Science (Rodríguez 2005). Furthermore, thanks to funding from the World Bank cooperation program, the Ministry of Environment was able to establish a Climate Change Mitigation Office, which

(WWF) Colombia, Fundación Natura, Asociación Ambiente y Sociedad, and Fundación Gaviota. The latter has been involved in renewable energy projects, particularly through the installation of solar heaters and wind mills.

5 Since the beginning of the climate negotiations in 1992, developing countries have recognized common interests, given their shared vulnerability to climate change and limited ability to deal with its impacts (Williams 2005). They have also defended the principle of equity, refusing to sacrifice their economic growth to solve a problem which, they argue, has been basically caused by the unchecked development of the industrialized world (Gupta 2010), the reason for the North-South divide in climate negotiations.

marked a significant milestone in its program for the mitigation of climate change (Personal communication with Isabel Cavelier, May 2015).

Throughout the first decade of the negotiations, Colombia opposed mandatory emission targets for developing countries, arguing that it contradicted the CBDR + RC principle. Between 1992 and 1997 specifically, Colombia adopted the G77 + China position of denying developed countries the possibility of reducing their own emissions by supporting mitigation activities in other countries.

However, from 1997 onwards, Colombia's position changed drastically; by 2000, it became a strong defender of carbon markets and other market-based mechanisms despite initial opposition. This shift was partly owed to the work of the Office of Economic Studies at the Ministry of Environment (Rodríguez 2005), on the one hand, and, on the other, Thomas Black, an American economist who had advised the U.S. Congress on the design, implementation and evaluation of economic mechanisms to mitigate pollution and had an importance influence on Colombia's position between 1997 and 2000, when he led a team in Colombia which provided technical analyses, based on market mechanisms, to the Colombian delegation (Rodríguez 2005). In 1997, a new Minister of Environment, Eduardo Verano, also called for more flexibility in the UNFCCC mechanisms. After consultations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Colombian delegation adopted a pro-market stance. Since the late 1990s, Colombia has regarded market mechanisms as tools to finance sustainable development, enable natural resources to produce tangible economic benefits, and take advantage of resources that otherwise would not be available (Interview #7).

In 2007, Colombia also supported adaptation mechanisms to reduce the threat of climate change, based on assessments of vulnerability, priority actions and financial needs (UNFCCC 2008). 2009 marked a turning point for Colombia at the negotiations. After about a decade of playing an important, but limited role in specific issues like forests and market-based mechanisms, the delegation began to influence the general panorama of the negotiations at a high political level (Personal communication with Isabel Cavelier, May 2015) in two respects: in public discussions and also behind the scenes, particularly in an informal way, due, in large part, to the active participation of Andrea Guerrero, former director of the Climate Change Mitigation Office at the Ministry of Environment, who helped the negotiating parties to reach consensus at a macro level. This was evidenced by Colombia's membership in a group of thirty countries that negotiated the Copenhagen Accord and President Alvaro Uribe's attendance of the meeting of heads of state during the final hours of the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties or COP15 (Personal communication with Isabel Cavelier, May 2015).

During the COP16 in Cancun, Colombia insisted on the need to have a legally binding agreement. It also agreed to meet a net deforestation target in the Colombian Amazon by 2020, conditional on external financing. Colombia's boldest move in Cancun occurred during the final session, when it stopped Bolivia from exercising a veto on the final agreement, arguing that it was unreasonable when everyone else had assented to it (Interview #1). The delegation also led the creation of an informal coalition of "highly vulnerable countries" which successfully negotiated the inclusion of a new definition of vulnerability in the adaptation chapter of the Cancun Agreements (Personal communication with Isabel Cavalier, May 2015).

In 2011, Colombia also called for the use of a strong language in the Durban Agreement, aimed at a legally-binding agreement between the small-island states, the Least Developed Country group and the European Union (Edwards and Roberts 2015).

At the COP20 in Lima, countries like Chile, Colombia, South Korea, Peru, and Mongolia made a bold move by announcing they would be the first developing countries to contribute to the Green Climate Fund (GCF). This was unprecedented: up to then, the North-South paradigm had assumed that the developed countries would be responsible for funding the amelioration of climate change.

Throughout the COP21 in 2015, Colombia and others pushed for an ambitious measure whereby the member countries would have to report their climate plans and review their impact in a five-year cycle.

Furthermore, Colombia supported measures to establish the periodic presentation of commitments, starting in 2021, fix the limit global warming at 1.5 degrees C in the final agreement (IISD 2015) and strengthen the language on adaptation (WWF and Natura 2015). Andrea Guerrero led discussions on a global adaptation goal, linkages between mitigation and adaptation and a global vision (IISD 2015). At the COP21, the French Presidency appointed the Colombian negotiator Jimena Nieto Carrasco as one of the Co-Chairs of the open-ended group of legal and linguistic experts responsible for a technical review of the draft agreement. Colombia also played a role in the High Ambition Coalition, a group which began to be formed in 2015, when it discreetly met several times to discuss ways to "put pressure on the big emitters and strive for the highest level of ambition" (Arias Cañete 2015), but only emerged during the Paris negotiations.

At COP21 and in his government's negotiations to end the longest ongoing conflict in the Western Hemisphere, President Santos saw an opportunity to use international funds for climate change purposes to also strengthen the post-conflict stage of the peace agreement and thus launched *Colombia Sostenible*, an

initiative to win international financing for projects that would promote both aims at a municipal level.

4. Analysis

This section discusses the main independent variables which shape Colombia's foreign policy on climate change at the national, societal, and state-centric level.

a. Ecological Vulnerability

Sprinz and Vaahantoranta (1994) have cited ecological vulnerability as a main factor in a country's international environmental policy. A country with a high vulnerability is more likely to support international cooperation since it is in its national interest. In the case of climate change, Colombia's vulnerability has had a direct influence on the country's international position, especially as the public, the private sector and the government become more aware of its negative impacts in physical, economic and social terms, such as a rise in sea levels, a reduction of agricultural yields, the proliferation of new vectors of epidemics damages to housing and infrastructure and a threat to electricity generation (DNP 2010). According to the Inter-American Development Bank and the Colombian National Planning Department, the total cost of climate change impacts could be more than 8 trillion pesos between 2015-2019. Over the next 100 years, such impacts might result in an annual 0.5% decrease of the country's GDP (ECLAC *et al.* 2014).

Worries about climate change are relatively high in Colombia and Latin America compared to other parts of the world, as shown by a 2011 Gallup poll which noted that it was especially so in Colombia, Honduras and Mexico (Martins 2011). 75 percent of the Colombian respondents thought that global warming posed a serious threat, an increase of 10 percent from a 2007-2008 poll. In 2015, another poll found that 74 percent of Latin Americans thought of climate change as a serious problem compared to the global median of 54 percent (Stokes *et al.* 2015). A 2013 survey of cities and climate change found that climate change is the fifth priority of inhabitants of the Colombian capital, after security, transparency, transport, and noise (IDB 2014). Furthermore, a 2009 industry-wide opinion survey showed that 69.7 percent of Colombian businessmen believe that climate change will affect their businesses (PWC 2014).

According to the National Planning Department (DNP 2010), most disasters in Colombia are due to climatic variation, the cause of ninety percent of the emergencies reported between 1998 and 2011. The awareness of ecological vulnerability has increased in the last decade or so, especially after the severe impacts of La Niña. Between 2010 and 2011, floods resulted in a loss of 759,893 million pesos

in infrastructure, aquaculture, aviculture, and cattle. Damages to potable water infrastructure and sanitation systems totaled 525,867 million pesos, 400 municipalities were left without drinking water and more than 3.2 million people were affected. The estimated costs of La Niña amounted to 11.2 trillion pesos, equivalent to a 2.2 percent loss of GDP (DNP 2014; García *et al.* 2015). In 2011, in the light of La Niña, the NGO Germanwatch placed Colombia in third place on its global Climate Risk Index. Several of the officials and experts we interviewed agreed that La Niña was a turning point in Colombian climate change policy because it made the government aware of the gravity of climate impacts (Interview #2). Before 2011, its policy had mostly focused on market mechanisms to mitigate emissions (Interview #7): afterwards, the government acknowledged the necessity of adaptation (OECD 2014). Since then, Colombia has actively worked to make adaptation an essential part of a climate agreement and ensure that it gets as much attention as mitigation. Likewise, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has pushed for multilateral agreements with legally-binding commitments to that aim and the Colombian delegation at the UN climate talks has called for the inclusion of long-term National Adaptation Plans in countries' climate submissions (Cancillería 2014).

Nevertheless, Colombia's stance on those issues is not a direct response to public pressure but owed to the activism of the government one indication of it is found in the "voice and accountability" index of Kaufmann *et al.*, which measures how responsive domestic institutional structures (i.e. governments) are to the pressure of environmentalists and civil society, that is, "the degree to which citizens choose those who govern them and the independent role that the media plays in keeping government accountable." In 2014, Colombia scored 0.45 in the ranking, on a scale from 0 to 1 (World Bank 2015).

This shows that the government's responsiveness to public opinion or pressure from civil society is neither low nor high. Furthermore, while there is a visible environmental movement in the country, NGOs have traditionally focused on issues like mining and ecosystem protection. Only recently have some turned to climate change, with a handful tracking the country's actions at the UN climate negotiations. While some sectors of the civil society have worked to raise awareness of climate change, the level of mobilization has been very limited.⁶ In short, despite surveys showing Colombians' concern about climate change, it is the government which has taken the initiative in dealing with the country's growing ecological vulnerability.

6 This is not to say that there have not been public demonstrations which called for the government to act on climate change. For example, on September 2014, over 300 hundred people participated in the "People's Climate March" in Bogotá.

b. Costs of abatement

Sprinz and Vaahtoranta (1994) state that the costs of abating a problem is another key factor in a country's foreign position on the environmental. A country facing high costs is unlikely to pursue an ambitious policy of international cooperation unless its ecological vulnerability is very high.

This section looks into the costs of emission mitigation for Colombia will incur through international climate cooperation and analyze how this impacts the country's foreign position at the international climate negotiations. I look at the costs of abatement as related to the dependence on fossil fuels (for domestic generation and export) and the electricity matrix. I also focus on the 2015 climate plans known as the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

When it joined the UNFCCC, Colombia's economy was not as dependent on extractive industries as it is today. However, since the early 2000s, the exploitation of mineral resources has become the center of its economic growth (Zambrano 2014). Throughout the first decade of the millennium, governments actively promoted foreign direct investment in that sector.

Although Colombia is not a major oil producer, its economy is highly dependent on fossil fuels: oil, followed by coal, are its main exports. In 2013 alone, oil production accounted for 32 trillion pesos, equivalent to 21% of national revenues (*El Espectador* 2014). In 2014, the Colombian Petroleum Association said Colombia could triple its reserves over the next 15 years by exploiting non-conventional deposits.

Similarly, the Mining and Energy Planning Unit is planning to expand coal production by 2019, in order to maintain the country's position as the world's 5th largest coal exporter (UPME 2006). In light of its strong dependence on extractive industries, why has Colombia championed low-carbon development at international climate talks if it theoretically implies high abatement costs?

One reason is that those costs are not as high as was first expected. The country has a relatively clean energy matrix, with about 70% of electricity coming from hydroelectric sources.⁷ The electricity sector is not its main source of emissions, but changes in land use and agriculture. Like other Latin American countries, Colombia can call for ambitious climate-mitigation measures without necessarily having to implement a massive transformation of the electricity sector at home.

Furthermore, export-based emissions are often unaccounted for in the country's inventory of emissions, since they are mostly caused by the burning of fossil fuels abroad. Colombia uses very little coal to generate electricity; 92% of its

7 Some question the "clean" nature of hydroelectric energy. Dams may be a significant source of methane emissions and can cause social conflicts by displacing local populations.

production is exported. Consequently, its climate-mitigation initiatives do not contemplate the diversification of its export base or take those emissions into account.

Nevertheless, economic growth and its accompanying increase of greenhouse gas emissions have affected abatement costs. While in the 1990s it was politically viable to side with other developing countries and emphasize the traditional responsibility of developed countries, the growth of its economy, which has made it one of the world's top 40 emitters (Interview #4), is forcing Colombia to face up to its moral obligation to act.

The actions outlined in the drafts and final submissions of Colombia's climate change plans to the UNFCCC in 2015 were based on the calculation that each action would not cost more than \$30 per each CO₂ ton reduced. Since not all of those actions are equally cost-efficient, the government has given a priority to specific areas to ensure that it complies with its pledges to reduce emissions while limiting any negative impacts on growth, such as changes in land use (mostly from deforestation), agriculture, and energy efficiency, which can reduce emissions in the most cost-efficient way (Interview #11 and #12).

Those policies also challenge some of the studies of the drivers of a country's climate actions. While abatement costs are a consideration in foreign policy, they do not define it. This contradicts Lachapelle and Paterson (2013), who argue that countries with a high domestic dependence on fossil fuels will have a costlier transition to alternative energies. However, despite Colombia's dependence on extractive industries (especially the export of oil and coal), its climate mitigation proposals are ambitious.

c. International reputation

To understand a State's foreign policy, it is important to examine the ways in which a nation's self-image may influence what its governments believe to be in its own interest (Fennimore 1996 in Barkdull and Harris 2002). In recent years, President Santos has sought to raise the international standing of Colombia, especially as a leader of sustainable development. In addition to negotiating a peace agreement with the FARC guerrilla, his administration has applied for membership in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with the idea that joining the ranks of the developed countries and following their "best financial practices," will improve its public policies (*El Espectador* 2011) and, along the way, cleanse the negative image of Colombia as a failed state, plagued by violence and organized crime, and thus encourage foreign investment.

In 2014, the OECD published an environmental performance review of Colombia which found that, despite its strong environmental legislation, its environmental institutions have been weakened at a time when its mining, energy

and agricultural sectors are rapidly expanding (OECD 2014). It recommended certain changes in its environmental system to ensure “a coherent and consistent environmental policy framework in keeping with good international practices.” Although it acknowledged the country’s efforts to comply with the OECD’s Green Growth Declaration, such as a high-level commission to coordinate climate change policy, a low-carbon strategy, a program to address emissions from deforestation and a national adaptation plan, it concluded that such policies do not “add up to a coherent policy framework for green growth” and that there is no consistency between economic and environmental goals.

While Colombia’s constructive position at the UNFCCC was not directly related to its bid to join the OECD, according to the negotiators we interviewed, President Santos’ approach to “green growth” has focused on international cooperation on the environment, backed by Colombia’s image as a middle-income economy that not only has the right to ask for financial support but also wants to play an important role in international forums (Interview #5). An example of this has been the country’s commitment to foster South-South cooperation, as evidenced in its climate plans and the President’s attendance at meetings of the United Nations, the launch of the New Climate Economy Report and the COP21 in Paris. Colombia’s contribution of 6 million USD to the Green Climate Fund is another indication of its wish to improve its international standing. While insignificant compared to the funding from other developed countries (more than 100 million USD in some cases), it signals a shift in its foreign policy, resumed by a statement of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “after years of being a country that receives international aid, Colombia is now being consolidated as a country that offers cooperation” (Cancillería 2015). In these ways, Colombia is building an image of a country that takes responsibility for its increasing emissions and wants to be an active international player, but also points out that its capabilities are limited. Some of the civil society actors I interviewed believe that the government’s rhetoric is only a way to leverage international aid and it thus, exploits the notion that Colombia is an exceptionally green country, with high biodiversity, a wealth of natural resources, and a strong commitment to climate mitigation (Interview #13), an idea tacitly endorsed by some of its negotiators (Interview #5, #10) and even implicit in certain statements of the Ministry of Environment (Ministry of Environment 2015).

d. International climate politics

The politics of the UNFCCC negotiations have inevitably shaped Colombia’s position on climate change. While it has developed a domestic position, its foreign one is evolving in accordance with the dynamics of the negotiations. Although it

is a member of the G77 + China bloc, Colombia has sought to build alliances with like-minded countries. Colombia's decision to join other Latin American countries and create the AILAC is another example of the above situation. According to several negotiators we interviewed, Colombia's support of the AILAC was a geopolitical move to increase those countries' visibility and distance itself from the stance of Brazil and members of the ALBA (Interview #6).

The founding members of the AILAC already agreed on a number of issues, such as the need for: a legally-binding agreement, market-based mechanisms, a long-term goal for mitigation, the attainment of parity between adaptation and mitigation, and the contribution of developing countries as well to broader mitigation efforts, in accordance with their capacities (Interview #13). In this way, the AILAC helped to strengthen Colombia's position on a number of specific issues.

DeSombre (2005) argues that the United States is an example of a country which is willing to support international environmental commitments because it has an institutional structure to ensure their enforcement on a domestic level.

In the case of Colombia, I find that, in many respects, its institutional structure is a response to the country's embeddedness in the international climate change regime. One of its biggest challenges in winning support for climate policies has been to convince different Ministries that such issues cut across narrow departmental agendas. Nevertheless, its participation in the climate Convention is evidence of a top-down approach that has given a new thrust to domestic discussions of such issues.

e. Interest-Group Politics

Genovese (2014) argues that it is crucial to understand the impact of lobbies on international policymaking since "clashing preferences across domestic sectorial activities" are often the reason for inaction on climate change. Genovese distinguishes between interest groups which promote or oppose international environmental agreements in accordance with their own economic interests. Insofar as dealing with climate change was long regarded as the exclusive concern of the Ministry of Environment or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, actors other than interest groups did not actively lobby against initiatives in that field.

While some interest groups criticized Colombia's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, such groups have not had a strong influence on the government's position. However, since the SISCLIMA's mandate requires an active consultation with different interest groups and economic sectors, that situation has changed. In that context, some economic sectors opposed certain aspects of the climate plans the government drafted in 2015, especially with regard to the mitigation

target (adaptation tends to be an easier sell). Nevertheless, the consultations which occurred throughout 2014 and 2015 helped to ease frictions. Furthermore, the fact that the government set a target of a 20% reduction by 2030 on an industry-wide basis, as opposed to quantitative goals for each economic sector, implied a business-as-usual approach which was acceptable to its critics (Interview #11). However, since the plan only rhetorically addressed the country's contribution, opposition may mount when the time comes to actually implement it (Interview #2). Some lobbying by the cement and oil industries is expected since they see the mitigation target as a step back in the country's economic development and harmful to their own interests (Interview #12).

Some well-organized economic pressure groups, like the National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI), the National Ranchers Federation, and the National Oil Association have criticized the mitigation target, both directly to the Ministry of Environment and through the media (Betancur Alarcon 2015). The ANDI and other trade associations also openly discussed their opposition at the National Environmental Council, the most important mechanism for consultations under Law 99, which established the Ministry of Environment (Personal communication with José Manuel Sandoval 2016). Some have argued that Colombia should only focus on adaptation. The ANDI has claimed that Colombia already has a clean economy, which will make any mitigation action extremely costly. Thus, Colombia's target of 20% should be 7% at the most depending on the provision of adequate technical cooperation and financial support (ANDI 2015).

Whether they are for or against climate-mitigation action, the lobbying of Colombian interest groups is very different from those in developed countries like the United States (Interview #11). They are smaller, have less money and most sectors of the economy are characterized by an inertia and lack of ambition which limits their influence on such policies. Business-as-usual takes priority and there are no strong incentives for industry to enhance its efficiency and competitiveness even if current forms of production are inefficient (Betancur Alarcon 2015).

f. The Bureaucratic Politics Model

Following Allison's theory, Colombia's foreign position on climate change can be seen as the result of a bargaining process between different actors in its government, like the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Finance, the National Planning Department, and the National Unit for Energy Planning (UPME). Vieira (2013) notes a similar situation in Brazil, where the bargaining between interest groups inside and outside of the government and bureaucratic infighting have led to inconsistent environmental policies.

In Colombia, past and present negotiators and other government officials believe that individual negotiators may play a critical role in influencing the nation's position. Its negotiators have traditionally been hard-working and well-prepared, partly because of their individual expertise and partly through an institutional ethos, which is especially noticeable in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Interview #2, #4). Nevertheless, the turn-over of negotiators has caused inconsistencies in government policy (Personal communication with Isabel Cavalier, May 2015).

Similarly, the influence of certain negotiators may lead to visible changes when they join the delegation or technical team, like Thomas Black, who was largely responsible for a shift to market-based mechanisms, and Paula Caballero, whose knowledge of climate change adaptation strengthened the country's decision to give it a priority and also enhanced its standing in the geo-political negotiating game.

As with foreign policy in general, decisions about climate change mitigation are in the hands of an elite, that is, a group of highly educated technocrats who assemble the relevant information, consult actors in the private and public sector, and ultimately formulate the country's position. They balance several considerations against each other: the capabilities of the governmental agencies responsible for meeting commitments, enhancing the international image of Colombia, internal geopolitics at the UN and the conflicting interests of carbon-intensive industries (e.g. the cement industry) and pro- climate action sectors (e.g. civil society organizations).

Conclusion

Despite Colombia's active role at international environmental negotiations, studies of the country's foreign climate policy have been limited.⁸ This article is meant to be a contribution to that field in the form of an analysis of the domestic and international factors which drive the country's foreign position on such issues. It finds that that position is closely linked to the country's institutional structure, ecological vulnerability, and emission abatement costs, wish to enhance its global prestige and seek benefits from international cooperation, strategic aims at the United Nations climate negotiations, and the limited influence of domestic pressure groups.

Like other developing countries, Colombia is an example of the multi-directional relationship found in Putnam's two-level theory. As a case study,

⁸ Rodríguez (1994), (2005) and (2012) and Caballero (1999) are some exceptions.

it presents a revealing puzzle: a middle-income country which is highly dependent on the export of fossil fuels, yet acts as a constructive leader at international environmental forums and thus challenges the belief that an extractive economy excludes a pro-active role in international negotiations. Colombia also illustrates the usefulness of opening the “black box” of domestic politics to study the context in which different pressure groups act and the interplay between international and domestic stances and actions. To sum up, Colombia help us to understand how middle-income countries may promote economic growth and at the same time decarbonize their models of development.

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