

Background: Protective environmental policies have taken a backburner on political agendas. Environmental policies are often portrayed as regulatory, costly, restrictive, and detrimental to jobs and the economy. Implementing environmental policies involves a lot of long term planning whereas politics often revolve around short-term results and gains. Dire environmental concerns such as global warming, natural resource depletion, and lack of clean water are becoming more pressing and thus need to be placed higher on the political agenda. Environmental politics is an issue that is increasing in scope and importance, but is environmental protection being implemented through domestic policies? The United States created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970 under Nixon to head environmental policy in the U.S. The European Union (EU) developed the European Commissioner for the Environment in 1990. Yet, the EU has implemented more stringent environmental policies than the U.S., becoming a leader in international environmental politics, playing a key role in advancing the policies of the Kyoto Protocol (1997), whereas the U.S. hasn't even ratified the Kyoto Protocol. The EU Climate Change package of 2008 established targets in which 20% of all energy has to come from renewable energy resources by 2020¹. The U.S. doesn't even have a renewable energy policy. However, public opinion polls show a general indifference to economic issues in both the U.S. and the E.U. According to a Pew Research Poll in 2007 asking the public about their most important political issue, the environment only scored 1 or 2% in the U.S. and 4% in the E.U.³

Project Description: The main question analyzed and debated in terms of the environment in politics concerns the cost of implementing protective environmental policies. My research question will take this broad question of analyzing the costs of environmental policies into a comparative analysis between the E.U. and the U.S., to look at the differences between what environmental policies, specifically in regards to energy (ie. fossil fuels, renewable energy, etc.),

have been implemented in the E.U. as compared to those in the United States. My research will look at why the E.U. and the U.S. have seemingly diverged on policies in addressing environmental issues. Why has the E.U. been able to implement more protective environmental policies whereas the U.S. has not? Is this a result of the U.S. following a market based approach in which environmental regulations are too costly?⁴ Or is it simply that public opinion and differing political environments have made the E.U. more favorable to implementing environmental regulations and the U.S. less favorable to these types of policies? I have chosen to use the E.U. and the U.S. as states of comparison as they are both Western, industrialized nations with similar political systems and histories of economic development². Ultimately, I want to look at why the E.U. has put pro-environment policies on a higher political platform than the United States. What was the driving force behind this? And was it primarily economic?

Qualifications: My interest in environmental politics was sparked by my studies in political science and conservation and resource studies. I have taken "Environmental Health" and "International Environmental Politics", which have introduced me to a variety of environmental concerns, the science behind many of these problems, and how these concerns are being addressed. Additionally, classes in political science such as PS 161, on "Public Opinion and Voting", have exposed me to research concerning the political environment in the United States and how the public forms opinion. Comparative politics courses such as PS 2 and PS 149E have exposed me to different countries' political environments and how they are shaped and compared. Ultimately, I want to combine the comparative nature of the differing political environments of the U.S. and the E.U. to look at how the "cost of implementing environmental policies" allows for certain countries to legislate protective environmental regulations and subsidies, while others cannot afford the economic or political cost.

Works Cited:

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4. Wallstrom, Margot. "'EU and US Approaches to Environment Policy'." European Institute. Washington D.C., 24 March 2002. Speech.