

Projektskizze zu ‘Die Umsetzung des Pariser Klimaabkommens im kanadischen Föderalismus‘

Context of this project

The project on the implementation of the Paris Climate Accord in the Canadian federal system is part of my PhD dissertation, the aim of which is to understand why certain political systems are more capable of meeting their international environmental commitments than others. I am especially interested in multi-level systems, which are understood as political entities in which competences are distributed across different levels of government (Marks and Hooghe 1996). Such regimes face particular structural challenges to meet their international obligations since the central government usually cannot achieve the objectives it agreed to without the action of the federated or regional entities (Gordon and Macdonald 2014, 155; Macdonald 2014; Wälti 2004, 602). The overall research question of my PhD project is as follows: How do multi-level structures affect the accomplishment of international commitments?

Background: Canada, the EU and the Paris Agreement

One focus of my PhD dissertation is the Paris Agreement, which 195 parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) adopted at their annual meeting in France in December 2015. The key element of the agreement is the international objective to relevantly reduce the emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) by 2030 in order to keep global warming below two degrees in comparison to pre-industrial levels and to seek to limit the increase of the global temperature to a maximum of 1.5 degrees. In this context, the European Union (EU) has pledged to reduce its GHG emissions by 40% in comparison to 1990 levels, and Canada seeks to decrease its emissions by 30% below 2005 levels. As yet, the EU has been more on track to meet the Paris climate goals than Canada. The EU and Canada are two (quasi-)federal systems¹ which face similar challenges with regard to the implementation of political measures to accomplish their climate commitments. In both systems, the field of environmental policy and the question of climate change mitigation are part of the area of shared competences, i.e. the two levels of government (federal and provincial, EU and national) have to act to effectively reach the respective climate target. Further, both Canada and the EU are informed by internal heterogeneity. Canadian provinces and EU member states have diverging policy preferences, which are partly due to different energy structures and unevenly distributed reserves of fossil fuels. While the EU and its member states have already adopted relevant measures that point to an overall climate strategy, the Canadian government and the Canadian provinces have so far not been able to overcome internal disagreements and to decide on a joint programme to achieve their climate targets. I aim to unpack the processes that help explain these diverging outcomes.

Existing literature, research question and theoretical framework

Existing literature has particularly dealt with policy preferences and party politics (for instance, Jensen and Spoon 2011; Neumayer 2004), public opinion (for instance, Mbaye 2001) and interest groups (for instance, Börzel 2000) as well as the number of veto-players (for instance, Madden 2014) and corporatist structures (for instance, Crepaz 1995; Scruggs 1999) in order to explain different levels of international compliance and environmental performance. However, this research branch has so far neglected the effects of multi-level structures, i.e. federalism and decentral governance (Madden 2014, 585). For its part, comparative federalism

¹ For the debate on the (quasi-) federal nature of the EU, see for instance Fossum and Jachtenfuchs 2018 and Kelemen 2003; Moravcsik 2001. In the following, the EU-level and the federal level in Canada are understood as the federal level of the respective system. Consequently, the EU member states and the Canadian provinces are considered as the sub-federal level.

theory has pointed to the distribution of competences between levels of government and cross-level intergovernmental relations in order to explain why certain (quasi-) federal systems perform better in meeting their climate commitments (Gordon and Macdonald 2014; Winfield and Macdonald 2012; Wälti 2004).

A relevant aspect on which Canada and the EU differ and which remains under-researched and under-theorised, concerns the intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms that are (or are not) used before and during the international negotiations and the way parties are represented in the UNFCCC context: The EU is represented by both its member states and the EU institutions, which negotiate on the basis of a common negotiating position. The Canadian government, on the other hand, does not coordinate its negotiating position with the provinces although the intra-Canadian division of competences ascribes a relevant role to the provinces in the area climate action (Paquin 2010). Existing small N-comparisons and exploratory or descriptive case studies within the comparative federalism literature (for example, Macdonald 2014; Gordon and Macdonald 2014; Paquin 2010) refer to the potential effects of involving and cooperating with the sub-federal level before and during the international climate negotiations on the implementation process, but we know little about the linking causal mechanism. Against this backdrop, this project asks how the (non-) involvement of the sub-federal level in the international climate negotiations affects the accomplishment of the climate commitments.

The theoretical argument I wish to test is that intergovernmental cooperation before and during the international negotiations creates a sense of joint ownership as well as shared responsibility and accountability of both the federal and the sub-federal levels, which explains the adoption of a comprehensive cross-level strategy to jointly fulfil the climate commitment (HT 1). The absence of intergovernmental cross-level cooperation during the international climate talks leads to a lack of commitment of the sub-federal level and consequently to the failure to develop an effective programme to implement the Paris Agreement (HT 2).

Hypothesis	Cause	Mechanism	Outcome	Case study
HT 1: cooperation approach	Intergovernmental cooperation and joint representation at the international climate negotiations	Joint sense of ownership across the levels of government	Joint cross-level climate strategy	European Union
HT 2: top-down approach	Unilateral action of the federal government during the international climate negotiations	Lack of commitment of sub-federal level of government	No joint cross-level climate strategy	Canada

Methodological approach and workplan

Canada and the EU were identified as two convenient cases to study on the basis of *Mill's method of difference*, which follows the logic of comparing two highly similar cases, which only differ in one relevant aspect and in which two diverging outcomes are produced (George and Bennett 2005, 153–60; Lijphart 1971, 687–88). I will conduct two process-tracing analyses to examine the two causal mechanisms that explain how the different institutional set-ups of the EU and Canada lead to different policy outcomes. More specifically, I apply theory-guided process-tracing (Beach 2017; George and Bennett 2005, 206; Trampusch and Palier 2016, 439) to test the explanatory power of the theorised causal mechanism.

By the end of 2020, I will have finalised the theoretical and methodological framework of my investigation. In winter and spring 2021, I will focus on the case of the EU, including research trips to various EU member states and Brussels, before I study the Canadian case, which I plan to do from July to December 2021. An essential part of my empirical analysis will consist of field research in Canada – besides the analysis of official documents and statements. More concretely, I plan to conduct semi-structured expert interviews of the relevant political institutions on both the federal and the provincial level (see *Arbeits- und Zeitplan*). On the provincial level, I will focus on two provinces that have proven themselves cooperative and ambitious in terms of Canadian climate policy (British Columbia and Québec) and two provinces that have rather obstructed the adoption of a pan-Canadian strategy to implement the Paris Agreement (Alberta and Ontario). During my field research, I will be based at the research centres of Prof Oliver Schmidtke (University of Victoria) and Prof Frédéric Mérand (Université de Montréal), who agreed to receive me and discuss my research project with me.