

# NGO Influence in International Environmental Negotiations: A Framework for Analysis

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## 1. Point of Departure

The dramatic increase in the number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) over the past century has been well-documented as has the fact that these organizations increasingly participate in global environmental politics. Academic interest in the role of NGOs in global environmental politics has also risen dramatically over the past decade, with virtually every study of international environmental issues mentioning NGOs as important actors. A growing body of evidence indicates that NGOs influence government decisions to develop domestic policies to protect natural resources and to negotiate international treaties, as well as how individuals perceive environmental problems.

Despite mounting evidence that NGOs do make a difference in global environmental politics, the questions of how and under what conditions NGOs matter generally remain unanswered. It is difficult to draw general lessons about the role of NGOs in global environmental politics because the current literature suffers from three weaknesses. First, there is a tendency to treat all studies related to NGOs in the environmental issue area as a single body of research. Second, there is a surprising lack of specification about what is meant by "influence" and how to identify NGO influence in any given arena. Third, most studies stop short of elaborating the causal mechanisms linking NGOs to international outcomes in the environmental issue area. Progress in understanding how and under what conditions NGOs matter can be achieved by more carefully recognizing the distinct political arenas in which NGOs operate, by defining what we mean by NGO "influence" and by elaborating the causal mechanisms by which NGOs influence international environmental negotiations.

In this article, we further theoretical development on the role of NGOs in global environmental politics by proposing an analytical framework for assessing NGO influence in one sphere of activity—the negotiation of international

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environmental agreements. We elaborate the weaknesses in the current literature and propose ways of overcoming them. We argue that NGOs influence international environmental negotiations when they intentionally transmit information to negotiators that alters both the negotiating process and outcome from what would have occurred otherwise. This definition provides a basis for gathering and analyzing evidence of NGO influence in a more systematic manner. Finally, we specify our analytical framework, which relies on triangulation. We suggest researchers use multiple data types and sources as well as methodologies to analyze the role of NGOs. This framework can be used to increase confidence in findings of NGO influence in global environmental negotiations and allows for conclusions to be drawn about NGO influence across cases, permitting much needed comparison (see Corell and Betsill 2001, this issue). Ultimately, it will enable scholars to demonstrate more convincingly how and under what conditions NGOs matter in global environmental politics.

Before turning to our discussion, however, we feel compelled to clarify what we mean by “NGOs.” Authors often struggle to find accurate terms that reflect the type of organizations they are studying. Some authors specifically examine international NGOs (INGOs), others analyze environmental NGOs (ENGOs), and some argue that there are science-based interest groups they call epistemic communities. Others examine groups representing business and industry interests. Another group of scholars prefers to discuss either transnational or advocacy networks. Yet other researchers explore grassroots organizations (GROs) and community based organizations (CBOs). This variety of terms illustrates that there is a whole range of different NGOs—from the local grassroots organization, via the nationally based NGO with international connections, to interest groups that span national borders and sometimes also issue areas. For the purposes of this paper we use the term “NGOs” to refer to all these types of organizations, as long as they are involved in international environmental negotiations. We recognize, however, that there may be important differences between them that affect whether and how they exert influence. The framework we develop in this paper to analyze NGO influence in international environmental negotiations may help illuminate these differences.

## 2. The State of the Art on NGO Influence

A growing number of scholars place NGOs at the center of their analyses of global environmental politics.<sup>1</sup> This body of research clearly documents the increasing number of NGOs participating in international environmental issues

1. Arts 1998; Auer 1998; Betsill 2000; Biliouri 1999; Björkbohm 1999; Bramble and Porter 1992; Carr and Mpande 1996; Chartier and Deleage 1998; Clark 1995; Clark, Friedman, and Hochstetler 1998; Clark 1992; Close 1998; Corell 1999a; Corell 1999b; Edwards and Hulme 1996; Gordenker and Weiss 1996a; Gordenker and Weiss 1996b; Humphreys 1996; Jamison 1996; Jasanoff 1997; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Kempel 1999; Kolk 1996; Lindborg 1992; Lipschutz 1992; Najam 1998; Newell 2000; Princen and Finger 1994; Raustiala 1997; Ringius 1997; Runyan 1999; Stairs and Taylor 1992; Wapner 1995; Willetts 1996; Williams and Ford 1999; and Young 1999.

as well as the types of activities and strategies employed by NGOs. Collectively, these studies indicate that NGOs have indeed had an effect on the way the international community addresses environmental problems. We build on this literature to differentiate the political arenas within which NGOs operate, concretize the meaning of NGO influence and elaborate the causal mechanisms by which NGOs influence global environmental policy.

### 2.1. *Recognizing Different Political Arenas*

NGOs participate in global environmental politics in a number of ways: they try to raise public awareness of environmental issues; they lobby state decision-makers hoping to affect domestic and foreign policies related to the environment; they coordinate boycotts in efforts to alter corporate practices harmful to nature; they participate in international environmental negotiations; and they help monitor and implement international agreements. It is important to recognize that these activities are carried out by a wide range of NGOs in different political arenas that may involve unique goals, strategies, and political dynamics.

In a thoughtful review, Zürn divides current research on transnational networks in global environmental politics into three broad areas of inquiry. First, many studies examine the relationship between the appearing networks and the emergence of a world civil society. For example, Wapner's work on transnational environmental activist groups and the spread of an "ecological sensibility" contends that environmental NGOs shape understandings about how individuals and corporations ought to behave vis-à-vis the environment.<sup>2</sup> The second area of inquiry is the role of transnational networks in creating structures of international governance. Princen, Finger and Manno, for instance, argue that INGOs link local demands with global negotiations as well as the world of scientists with the world of politics.<sup>3</sup> Zürn notes a consensus in the literature that INGOs and epistemic communities have significant influence on international governance by shaping the agenda, by playing a role in the negotiation process, and by improving implementation of international agreements. Zürn's third and final area of inquiry is the importance of transnational networks for the legitimacy of decisions in international institutions. It includes studies on how the networks can provide science with a platform in negotiations and/or represent societal interests, balancing the interests of economic groups.<sup>4</sup>

We argue that it is important not to collapse conclusions in the literature about these organizations and their different spheres of activity. For instance, while NGOs may be central in the development of a global civil society, it is entirely possible that they are less successful in shaping new international institutions to address environmental issues. Students of NGOs need to employ a multifaceted view of the role of NGOs.

2. Wapner 1995. See also Clark, Friedman, and Hochstetler 1998.

3. Princen, Finger, and Manno 1994.

4. See Princen and Finger 1994; Stairs and Taylor 1992; and Susskind 1994.

At the same time, however, there is great demand for general conclusions across cases. It would be useful to be able to consider whether NGOs are generally more influential in particular arenas and if so, why. This article develops a framework for analysis of NGO influence in the negotiation of international environmental agreements; most of the following discussion thus draws on the literature addressing NGOs in this domain. Our approach provides an instrument for researchers to reach comparable evidence across cases of environmental negotiations, while taking into account the need to be specific about which sphere of NGO activity we are examining.

International environmental negotiations are a particularly interesting arena in which to consider NGO influence since treaty making is the domain of states. As UN members, only states have formal decision-making power during international negotiations. They establish rules for who may participate and the nature of that participation (e.g. through formal interventions or by directly engaging in floor debate), and ultimately it is states that vote on whether to adopt a particular text. In contrast, NGOs participate as observers and have no formal voting authority. This makes it difficult for NGOs to influence the negotiating process. Thus findings of NGO influence in international environmental negotiations present an interesting empirical puzzle.

## 2.2. Defining NGO Influence

In considering whether NGOs make a difference at the international level scholars seek answers to numerous questions. Do NGOs facilitate the evolution of a global civil society concerned with protecting the natural world? Do NGOs place issues on the international political agenda? Do they shape the outcome of international environmental negotiations? In each case, the objective is to determine whether NGOs influence global environmental politics. Given their focus on NGO influence, it is surprising that few scholars define what they mean by “influence”—the dependent variable of the studies they are undertaking. It is simply a discussion that is left out in most works.<sup>5</sup>

Progress in our understanding of the conditions of NGO influence in international environmental negotiations depends on a more careful consideration of what we mean by NGO influence and how influence might be identified. While we recognize that defining influence can be a complicated matter, it is highly important because it forces analysts to think carefully about the types of evidence needed to indicate NGO influence. Without a clear understanding of what is meant by influence, scholars often appear to be presenting evidence on an *ad hoc* basis. Lack of consistency in the types of evidence used to indicate NGO influence in international environmental negotiations makes it difficult to compare the role of NGOs across cases.

5. Two notable and commendable exceptions are Arts 1998; and Newell 2000.

For instance, in a special issue of *International Negotiation* focused on the role of NGOs, Björkbom relied on access to negotiations as evidence of NGO influence in international negotiations on transboundary air pollution, while Kempel examined whether NGOs enabled negotiators to move forward in addressing the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes, and Short asked if NGO text was included in a convention to ban the use of land mines.<sup>6</sup> The use of different types of evidence of influence render difficult the determination of whether NGOs were more or less influential in one case than another. In addition, it runs the risk of over-determination as scholars look for any possible sign that NGOs made a difference in a given political process while ignoring evidence suggesting that NGOs had little effect.

Another problem associated with the failure to define influence is that the evidence presented may not be an appropriate proxy for NGO influence. If NGOs truly influence international environmental negotiations, then it should be possible to observe the effects of that influence. In most studies, scholars rely on evidence regarding NGO *activities* (such as lobbying, submitting information or draft decisions to negotiators on a particular position), their *access* to negotiations (such as the number of NGOs attending negotiations and the rules of participation) and/or NGO *resources* (such as knowledge, financial and other assets, number of supporters and their particular role in negotiations). Collectively, evidence regarding NGO activities, access to the negotiations and resources can be useful in identifying instances of NGOs influence in global environmental politics. Unfortunately, many researchers rely solely on one type of evidence related to NGO participation in international environmental negotiations and thus encounter several pitfalls. Moreover, these types of evidence primarily tell us *how* NGOs engage in international environmental negotiations but do not clearly give us information on the subsequent *effects*.

Clearly, to influence international environmental negotiations, NGOs must engage in some activity to ensure their views are heard. However, it is important to remember that NGO activity does not automatically translate into influence. Paterson documents the high-level of NGO activity during the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (Climate Convention) negotiations and contends that "it is hard to conceive that their very high profile, their persistent lobbying (in large numbers), and their links to the media both internationally and in their own countries were without effect."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Wright determines whether NGO influence occurred in international negotiations on dolphin protection "inferentially by documenting the activities that [environmental] NGOs undertook to accomplish their goals."<sup>8</sup> It is entirely possible that NGOs are extremely active during a negotiation process but that the actors do

6. Björkbom 1999; Kempel 1999; and Short 1999.

7. Paterson 1996, 110.

8. Wright 2000, 83.

not alter their behavior in response to those activities. In the case of the Climate Convention, environmental NGOs themselves acknowledge that they were ultimately unsuccessful in shaping the outcome of the negotiations.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, relying on access to negotiations as evidence of influence can be misleading. Many authors correctly note that NGOs are often denied access to negotiations and/or that they are only allowed to participate as observers (e.g. they are not permitted to voice their positions during the negotiating process). In his review of international negotiations on transboundary air pollution, Björkbom argues, "NGO pressure in the negotiating room has therefore had but a marginal influence on the results of the negotiations. This is partly due to the fact that NGOs could only act as observers."<sup>10</sup> Raustiala contends that states seek to minimize NGO influence in international environmental negotiations by holding talks and making key decisions during "informal-informals" from which NGOs can be excluded.<sup>11</sup>

In reality, the relationship between NGO access and influence in international environmental negotiations is more nuanced than suggested in much of the literature. The increasing frequency of closed meetings means that NGOs, to promote their positions, must use more indirect strategies to keep abreast of negotiations they can no longer observe. Common strategies include developing and using informal relationships with state delegates, lurking in the corridors, talking to state delegates on cellular telephones, and even searching trash cans and copy machines in hopes of retrieving documents being worked on behind closed doors.

In addition to activity and access, some authors use NGO resources as evidence of influence. Princen argues that NGO influence is

achieved by building expertise in areas diplomats tend to ignore and by revealing information economic interests tend to withhold . . . it is influence gained from speaking when others will not speak, from espousing something more than narrow self-interest, from sacrificing personal gain from broader goals, from giving voice to those who otherwise do not have it, from rejecting pessimism and looking for signs of hope. Put differently, it is the influence gained by filling a niche that other international actors are ill-equipped to fill. Moreover, it is influence gained when other actors need what only environmental NGOs can offer.<sup>12</sup>

The NGO resources Princen is referring to are the knowledge and interests they represent, as well as the particular role NGOs have in international environmental negotiations. These resources *may* be translated into influence but they do not directly tell us whether negotiators alter their actions in response.

9. Rahman and Roncerel 1994.

10. Björkbom 1999, 406. See also Albin 1999; and Raustiala 1997.

11. Raustiala 1997.

12. Princen 1994, 41–42.

NGO activity, access to negotiations and resources are all part of the story about how NGOs influence global environmental negotiations. They clearly address the ways that NGOs participate and attempt to shape the negotiating process and outcome. However, to get a more accurate indication of NGO influence, researchers must also consider whether NGOs were successful in their efforts to shape the negotiations. Some scholars have begun recognizing the need to focus not only on the ways that NGOs participate in international environmental negotiations but also on the effects of that participation.<sup>13</sup> While such a focus complements evidence about NGO activities, access and resources and makes a more compelling case for actual NGO influence, examining the effects of NGOs on international environmental negotiations is not the norm.

Keck and Sikkink argue that to “assess the influence of advocacy networks [NGOs] we must look at *goal attainment* at several different levels.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, it is important to ask whether political outcomes reflect the objectives of NGOs. A comparison of NGO goals with outcomes provides more concrete evidence of NGO influence than a focus limited to activities, access and/or resources. Analyses demonstrating that NGO activities designed to promote a particular position can be correlated with an outcome (e.g. inclusion of specific text in the agreement) can make a plausible case for the possibility that NGOs had something to do with bringing about that outcome.

### 2.3. *Linking NGO Participation to Influence*

Gathering evidence of NGO influence in a more systematic and consistent fashion would enable researchers to examine more thoroughly the possibility that NGOs affect international environmental negotiations. However, findings of NGO influence may still be over-determined as researchers run the risk of confusing correlation with causation. If a particular proposal for discussion or wording in the agreement text corresponds to views of NGOs, does that necessarily mean that NGOs were responsible? It could be the case that other actors involved in the negotiations were promoting similar views. Plausibility claims can be strengthened by tracing the process by which NGO participation in international environmental negotiations shaped political outcomes. Process tracing is useful for identifying the causal mechanisms by which NGOs exert influence.<sup>15</sup>

The fundamental idea of process tracing is “to assess causality by recording each element of the causal chain.”<sup>16</sup> In the specific case of NGOs in international environmental negotiations, this requires building a logical chain of evi-

13. For example, see Arts 1998; and Newell 2000.

14. Keck and Sikkink 1998, 25 (authors' italics). See also Arts 1998; Biliouri 1999; and Williams and Ford 1999.

15. See Arts 1998, 77–83; and Zürn 1998, 646–647.

16. Zürn 1998, 640.

dence linking NGO transmission of information, actors' use/non-use of that information, and the effects/non-effects of that information. Researchers can draw on evidence related to what NGOs were doing (activities and resources), how they tried to transmit knowledge and information to negotiators (access), whether delegates responded to that information, and whether those responses were consistent with the NGO position (goal attainment). While this is not a dominant strategy in the current literature, we strongly support the increased study of NGO influence by way of process tracing.<sup>17</sup> Greater attention to this process would not only strengthen current arguments that NGOs influence global environmental politics, but would also advance our understanding of the conditions under which NGOs matter.

### 3. Identifying NGO Influence

Future progress in our understanding of how and under what conditions NGOs influence global environmental politics requires that we address these weaknesses in the current literature. Focusing on the arena of international environmental negotiations, we begin by explicitly defining NGO influence, differentiating between influence and power. We contend that the notion of NGO influence has two dimensions: (1) the intentional transmission of information by NGOs and (2) alterations in behavior in response to that information.<sup>18</sup> To assess NGO influence in international environmental negotiations, researchers must thus look for evidence related to what information and knowledge was transmitted by NGOs and whether negotiators responded by altering their behavior.<sup>19</sup>

#### 3.1. What is Influence?

Although influence is a basic concept in the political science literature, this term remains difficult to define. This is partly because influence is intimately linked to another crucial concept that has also proven hard to define—power. Explanations of influence may vary depending on how influence is perceived to relate to power and the context in which the influence is exercised.<sup>20</sup>

Many examinations of influence in international relations begin first with the concept of power. Scholars of international relations most often discuss power in terms of *state* power: state A has power if it can make state B do something that B would not choose to do.<sup>21</sup> For instance, Holsti defines power as the

17. For examples of process tracing, see Arts 1998; Close 1998; and Short 1999.

18. While states have military and political resources and the private sector has economic resources with which they can exert influence, the provision of knowledge and information is the key NGO resource for influence. We regard information as a set of data that have not been placed in a larger context. When information is placed within such a context, by relating it to previously gained knowledge, it becomes knowledge and can be used at a general level as the basis for assessments and action. Corell 1999a, 22.

19. Keck and Sikkink 1998, 25.

20. The discussion on influence in this and the following section draws on Corell 1999a, 101–106.

21. Dahl 1957.

“general capacity of a state to control the behavior” of other states.<sup>22</sup> According to Scruton, power is the “ability to achieve whatever effect is desired, whether or not in the face of opposition.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Nye defines power as the ability to achieve desired outcomes.<sup>24</sup> Typical indicators of state power often include gross national product, population, military capability or prestige.

Defining influence—and determining its relationship to power—has proven a challenging task. Holsti, for example, views influence as an aspect of power, or a means to an end, but does not define influence. Scruton states that influence is a *form* of power, but distinct from control, coercion, force and interference:

It involves affecting the conduct of another through giving reasons for action short of threats; such reasons may refer to his advantage, or to moral or benevolent considerations, but they must have weight for him, so as to affect his decision. The influenced agent, unlike the agent who is coerced, acts freely. He may choose to ignore those considerations which influence him, and he may himself exert control over the influencing power.<sup>25</sup>

But given his definition of power, Scruton clouds the difference between influence and power by including the possibility for the influenced agent to exert control over the influencing agent. It seems hard to discuss one without the other, but difficult to define them both so that they do not appear to be the same. Cox and Jacobson have attempted to avoid this problem by distinguishing more clearly between influence and power. They state that “influence means the modification of one actor’s behavior by that of another.”<sup>26</sup> While influence is a *relationship between actors* and emerges in the political process, power refers to *capability*—the aggregate of political resources available to an actor. Power may be converted into influence, but there may also be cases where it is not converted to its full extent or at all. Conversely, power (as traditionally defined) is not a precondition for exerting influence.

The question remains *how* capabilities are translated into influence. Holsti identifies six tactics that states can use to exercise influence: persuasion, the offer of rewards, the granting of rewards, the threat of punishment, the infliction of non-violent punishment, and the use of force.<sup>27</sup> But nonstate actors in a multi-lateral negotiation tend not to have power as measured by traditional state-centric definitions. The most relevant avenue for these nonstate actors is Holsti’s first influence tactic—persuasion.<sup>28</sup> While tactics such as the granting of rewards or the threat of punishment may be useful between states or between actors within states, they generally are not viable options during a UN negotiation on an environmental issue. The negotiations would break down, for example, if a

22. Holsti 1988, 141.

23. Scruton 1996, 432.

24. Nye 1990, 25–26.

25. Scruton 1996, 262.

26. Cox and Jacobson 1973, 3.

27. Holsti 1988.

28. See Korey 1999.

government would try to use force or threaten punishment in a meeting room; a nonstate actor attempting to use a similar influence tactic would lose their right to attend the meeting. Nonstate actors can only try to influence the talks by persuading or convincing government representatives, who have the formal power to make the decisions, to accept the nonstate actors' perspective.

Historically, discussions of power and influence in international relations have focused on states. There is, however, growing awareness that other actors (such as NGOs) possess capabilities that can be used to shape international outcomes. For example, Mathews argues, "(n)ational governments are not simply losing autonomy in a globalizing economy. They are sharing powers—including political, social and security roles at the core of sovereignty—with businesses, with international organizations, and with a multitude of citizens groups . . ." <sup>29</sup> In the realm of international environmental negotiations, NGOs are increasingly successful in using their specialized knowledge to modify the actions taken by state decision-makers by altering their conceptions of their interests. Such knowledge is a particularly valuable resource as international environmental issues are highly complex, and decision-makers often turn to NGOs for help in understanding the nature of the problems and the implications of various policy alternatives under consideration. This knowledge provides NGOs with legitimacy and access to negotiations and can be used as a source of leverage to achieve their desired goals.

Information thus becomes the key currency for NGOs in exerting influence during an international treaty negotiation. Therefore, in the context of international environmental negotiations, *influence can be said to have occurred "when one actor intentionally transmits information to another that alters the latter's actions from what would have occurred without that information."* <sup>30</sup> We suggest that this definition, used by Knoke in his examination of political networks, would prove useful for future studies of NGO influence in international environmental politics.

### 3.2. Evidence of NGO Influence

Knoke's definition of influence helps us identify the types of evidence that would most strongly indicate NGO influence in international environmental negotiations. There are two aspects to this notion of influence: (1) the intentional transmission of information and (2) alterations in behavior in response to that information. Given this definition of influence, researchers must look for evidence related to efforts by NGOs to transmit information during international environmental negotiations and evidence related to the behavior of other actors in the negotiations to assess whether they are consistent with the information transmitted by NGOs. The problem with much of the existing literature

29. Mathews 1997, 50.

30. Knoke 1990, 3.

on NGOs in international environmental negotiations is that researchers tend to rely too heavily on evidence about what NGOs did during the negotiations (e.g. activities, access, resources) and often neglect evidence about how other actors (e.g. states) behave.

Data regarding NGO activities, access to negotiations and resources can help address the first dimension of NGO influence by demonstrating whether and how NGOs transmitted information and by providing evidence about the specific types of information supplied by NGOs. As noted in section 2.2, a combination of these types of evidence must be used. Solely looking at one type of evidence will not suffice. Evidence on goal attainment speaks both to what information and knowledge was transmitted and whether negotiators responded by altering their behavior.<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that NGO goals may focus on both the *outcome* of the negotiations (e.g. the text of a treaty) as well as the *process* of the negotiations (e.g. the agenda).<sup>32</sup>

The most direct indication of NGO influence is indeed whether the final agreement reflects NGO goals. If NGOs influenced the negotiations, it is logical to expect congruence between ideas contained in the information submitted by NGOs during negotiations and the ideas embedded in an international agreement. An agreement may contain specific text drafted by NGOs or reflect a general principle or idea introduced by NGOs during the negotiations. For example, article 21, paragraph 1(d) of the *Convention to Combat Desertification* recommends the establishment of national desertification funds, a proposal that originated with the NGOs.<sup>33</sup> Another indication of NGO influence would be if state decision-makers establish new institutions to address issues raised by NGOs during the negotiations.

We argue, however, that researchers should not solely rely on indicators focused on the outcome of international environmental negotiations as a way to identify NGO influence. One problem is that it may be difficult to identify NGO goals (and thus to determine whether they achieved those goals). There is, for example, frequently a gap between what NGOs publicly demand and what they privately hope to achieve. Environmental NGOs are notorious for promoting extreme positions as a strategy for pushing state decision-makers in new directions or for distracting their attention. In addition, while information transmitted by NGOs can be reflected in the final agreement text, we may also observe its effects on the broader context in which the information is transmitted, such as in individual country statements, which issues are (or are not) on the agenda, and which terminology is being used to discuss the environmental issue at hand.

Ignoring the negotiation process would be to simplify and overlook instances of NGO influence. Specifically, information provided by NGOs may affect the debates leading to an agreement by placing items on the agenda or by

31. Keck and Sikkink 1998, 25.

32. See Arts 1998; and Betsill 2000.

33. Corell 1999a.

forcing decision-makers to address particular issues in greater depth than they may otherwise have done. Another procedural indicator of NGO influence is if delegates give serious consideration to an NGO proposal even if they do not ultimately include that proposal in the final agreement. NGOs can also be said to have been influential if evidence can be found suggesting they have shaped the jargon used by state decision-makers during the negotiations. In the *Kyoto Protocol* negotiations, for example, environmental NGOs are widely credited with coining the term “hot air” in reference to proposals that would enable a country whose greenhouse gas emissions were below its legally binding limits to trade the difference.<sup>34</sup> Establishing jargon is a way for NGOs to influence how negotiators and observers perceive various issues and proposals in a negotiation.

The particular conditions prevailing in the arena of international environmental negotiations give rise to some challenges in collecting evidence related to goal attainment. For example, as a result of failed efforts NGOs may revise their goals during the process; which of the goals should be considered as obtained? In addition, NGOs involved in an international environmental negotiation may not be coordinated enough in the beginning of the negotiation process to share common goals; can goals acquired over time be considered to be obtained and at what point can the diverse group of NGOs be considered to have developed shared goals? There are also numerous NGOs involved in an international environmental negotiation; whose goals should be examined, the individual organization’s or the goals of the collective?

While we recognize the complexities involved in applying this approach to NGOs in international environmental negotiations, a complementary approach that combines examination of NGO activity, access and resources with goal attainment provides a richer picture of NGO influence by looking both at the intentional transmission of information as well as its effects on other actors. In addition, a more systematic approach to gathering evidence of NGO influence serves as a basis for comparison across cases. As researchers gather these various types of evidence, it should be possible to make qualitative judgments about levels of NGO influence in different international environmental negotiations.

#### 4. Analyzing Evidence of NGO Influence

Gathering evidence of NGO influence in a more systematic fashion is clearly an important first step to enhancing our understanding of how and under what conditions NGOs matter in international environmental negotiations. The next challenge is how to analyze that evidence. Methodologically, how can we identify instances of NGO influence with some degree of confidence? Above, we have discussed the problem of over-determination in much of the NGO litera-

34. See Bettelli et al. 1997.

ture. Evidence indicating that issues raised during the negotiations or wording in the agreement text corresponds to views of NGOs suggests that NGOs may have been influential. We argue that researchers can strengthen claims of NGO influence through the use of process tracing and counterfactual analysis, both of which help scholars to elaborate the causal mechanisms between NGO participation and influence in international environmental negotiations.

#### 4.1. Process Tracing

As noted above, process tracing requires researchers to build a logical chain of evidence linking NGO participation in international environmental negotiations with the effects of that participation. The first step is to demonstrate that NGOs did engage in intentional transmission of information. Did they make an effort to provide negotiators with information about the nature of the problem, particular proposals, etc.? As Knoke notes, "influence is possible only when communication occurs."<sup>35</sup> We must thus also consider whether the negotiators actually received the information. If delegates are not aware of an NGO proposal and/or if they do not consider the proposal to be a viable option, then this suggests NGOs have not been particularly effective at communicating their position and that they have thus not been influential. Finally, it is important to examine whether changes in actor behavior (in terms of both the outcome and the process of negotiations) is consistent with the information provided by NGOs.

An excellent example of process tracing can be found in accounts of how Greenpeace convinced the Gerber Corporation to stop using genetically modified products in its baby food. A Greenpeace employee reportedly faxed a set of questions to the company including an inquiry about steps taken to ensure that genetically modified ingredients were not being used. The fax made its way to the Chief Executive Officer of Gerber's parent company who, after two weeks of internal debate, announced that it would drop suppliers using genetically modified crops.<sup>36</sup> Here we see evidence that Greenpeace intentionally transmitted information aimed at stopping Gerber's use of genetically modified ingredients in its baby food products. We also see that decision-makers responded to that activity (e.g. they received the fax and discussed it) and altered their behavior accordingly. Finally, we see that the outcome—Gerber's decision to stop using genetically modified ingredients—reflects the Greenpeace position. Because this account shows the way that decision-makers within the corporation were affected by Greenpeace's activity, we have greater confidence in the conclusion that Greenpeace influenced Gerber's change in position.

35. Knoke 1990, 3.

36. See Lucette Lagnado, "Gerber Baby Food, Grilled by Greenpeace, Plans Swift," *The Wall Street Journal*, 30 July 1999; and Runyan 1999.

#### 4.2. Counterfactual Analysis

Researchers should also consider whether the outcome of the negotiations might have been different in the absence of NGOs through the use of counterfactual analysis.<sup>37</sup> Counterfactual analysis is an “imaginative construct” that considers what *might* have happened if one examined variable were removed from the chain of events.<sup>38</sup> Counterfactual analysis is a useful way of ruling out alternative explanations. If NGOs had not tried to influence an international environmental negotiation, would the outcome and/or process have differed? If the negotiations would have been the same regardless of the efforts or presence of NGOs, then it is more likely that NGOs had little or no influence. Similarly, if an outcome would have been different if NGOs had not been involved, then the claim that NGOs influenced a particular outcome would appear to be supported.<sup>39</sup>

Returning to the Gerber example, researchers could ask whether Gerber executives would have decided to stop using genetically modified ingredients if Greenpeace had not gotten involved. These thought experiments can be based on the researcher’s knowledge of the case material although it is also useful to ask those involved in the decision-making process whether the outcome would have been different. If researchers find that Gerber executives were already leaning toward a policy change when Greenpeace began its campaign, then we must question the finding that Greenpeace influenced Gerber’s decision.

### 5. Framework for Analyzing NGO Influence in International Environmental Negotiations

Drawing on the discussion above, we present an analytical framework for assessing NGO influence in international environmental negotiations. Our framework consists of a clear definition of influence that can be used as a guide for gathering evidence of NGO influence in a systematic fashion and methodologies that will enable scholars to increase confidence in findings of NGO influence in international environmental negotiations (see Table 1). Zürn argues that “(a)lthough there is a lot of good evidence about the role of transnational networks in international governance, more rigid research strategies are needed to determine their influence more reliably and precisely.”<sup>40</sup> The approach we introduce here represents such a research strategy.

Our framework relies heavily on “triangulation”—the use of multiple data types, sources and methodologies to determine the role of NGOs in international environmental negotiations. “Triangulation is supposed to support a

37. Biersteker 1995; Fearon 1998; Miles and Huberman 1994; and Tetlock and Belkin 1996.

38. Biersteker 1995, 318.

39. As Jon Elster has noted, “To distinguish causation from correlation we may point out that the former warrants the statement that if the cause had not occurred, then the effect would not have occurred, whereas no such counterfactual is implied by the latter,” quoted in Biersteker 1995.

40. Zürn 1998, 646.

**Table 1**

Framework for Analyzing NGO Influence in International Environmental Negotiations. (Cells contain examples of questions researchers might ask.)

<b>Research Task: Gather Evidence of NGO Influence (2 dimensions)</b>		
Triangulation by:	<b>1) Intentional transmission of information</b>	<b>2) Behavior of other actors</b>
<b>Data Type</b>	<p><i>NGO participation</i></p> <p><i>Activities:</i> What did NGOs do to transmit information to decision makers?</p> <p><i>Access:</i> What opportunities did NGOs have to transmit information?</p> <p><i>Resources:</i> What sources of leverage did NGOs use to transmit information?</p>	<p><i>Goal attainment</i></p> <p><i>Outcome:</i> Does the final agreement contain text drafted by NGOs?</p> <p>Does the final agreement reflect NGO goals and principles?</p> <p><i>Process:</i> Did negotiators discuss issues proposed by NGOs (or cease to discuss issues opposed by NGOs)?</p> <p>Did NGOs coin terms that became part of the negotiating jargon?</p>
<b>Data Source</b>	<p><i>Primary texts</i> (e.g. draft decisions, country position statements, the final agreement, NGO lobbying materials)</p> <p><i>Secondary texts</i> (e.g. <i>ECO</i>, <i>Earth Negotiations Bulletin</i>, media reports, press releases)</p> <p><i>Interviews</i> (government delegates, observers and NGOs)</p> <p><i>Researcher observations</i> during the negotiations</p>	
<b>Research Task: Analyze Evidence of NGO Influence</b>		
<b>Methodology</b>	<p><i>Process Tracing</i></p> <p>What were the causal mechanisms linking NGO participation in international environmental negotiations with their influence?</p>	<p><i>Counterfactual Analysis</i></p> <p>What would have happened if NGOs had not participated in the negotiations?</p>

finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it."<sup>41</sup> Triangulation can also help correct for the likely introduction of researcher bias in the development of indicators for assessing NGO influence. By the time a researcher gets to the point of identifying a set of possible indicators of NGO influence in a particular case, that person has likely spent a great deal of time studying and/or participating in the negotiation process. There is a danger of only looking at instances where NGOs successfully exerted influence and ignoring unsuccessful cases.<sup>42</sup> Through the use of triangulation, researchers can develop qualitative confidence intervals about their conclusions on the level of NGO influence in international environmental negotiations.

To obtain a creditable assessment of NGO influence it is important to collect several types of data drawn from multiple data sources. As already suggested above, a combination of data on NGO activity, their access to negotiations and their resources should be complemented with data on NGO goal attainment. In addition, evidence related to goal attainment should focus on both the process and the outcome of the negotiations, in recognition of the fact that NGO influence may be observed at different points in the policy process. As researchers gather this evidence, it should be possible to develop a concrete set of indicators to assess NGO influence more precisely and serve as a basis for comparison across cases. We are not, however, propagating for a quantitative approach that would measure NGO influence. We argue that precise quantification of influence is futile and would only create a false impression of measurability for a phenomenon that is highly complex and intangible. Instead of "measuring" influence, we prefer a qualitative assessment of NGO influence in terms of high or low levels of influence, based on a combination of types of evidence used to indicate NGO influence.<sup>43</sup>

In addition, we call on researchers to gather data from a variety of sources, including primary and secondary textual documents and interviews with NGOs, state delegates and UN observers. "The aim is to pick triangulation sources that have different biases, different strengths, so that they can complement each other."<sup>44</sup> Primary documents include the final agreement text, drafts negotiated along the way toward the final version, the official reports of each negotiation session, country statements, and NGO lobbying materials. There are also useful secondary documents, such as *ECO*, a publication produced by NGOs to make their positions known, the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, which contains detailed daily and summary reports from the negotiations, as well as media reports and press releases. To control for potential bias, researchers should also interview NGOs and national delegates participating in the negotiations. A third important category to interview is observers of the negotiations, particularly those who have attended the negotiations in person. As a general rule, NGOs can be

41. Miles and Huberman 1994, 66.

42. Arts 1998.

43. For a similar approach, see Arts 1998, 74–85.

44. Miles and Huberman 1994, 267.

expected to overstate their influence on negotiations and delegates can be expected to understate NGO influence. Observers (e.g. UN agency staff) can therefore function as a control group. Such actors know who was involved and could see who was talking to whom. In general, they have little interest in overstating any actor group's influence. Researchers can also obtain evidence of NGO influence by participating in and/or observing international environmental negotiations.

Finally, findings of NGO influence can be strengthened by analyzing the data using at least two different methodologies: process tracing and counterfactual analysis. These methodologies explicitly link NGO participation in international environmental negotiations with the effects of that participation. In particular, process tracing can be used to clarify that observed correlations between NGO activities and negotiating outcomes are not spurious. In constructing a logical chain of evidence demonstrating that NGOs transmitted information during the negotiations, that negotiators received that information and changed their behaviors in response, scholars build a stronger foundation for their claims that NGOs influenced the negotiations. Counterfactual analysis complements process tracing and provides yet another test of whether NGOs or other actors were truly responsible for observed changes in actor behavior.

## **6. Conclusions**

It is becoming increasingly clear that NGOs shape international environmental negotiations in a number of ways. However, progress in our understanding of the role of NGOs in this political arena is hampered by a number of weaknesses in the existing literature. To overcome these weaknesses and further theoretical development on how and under what conditions NGOs matter in international environmental negotiations, we propose an analytical framework in which researchers use multiple data types and sources as well as methodologies. In the context of international environmental negotiations, information is the primary tool used by NGOs to exert influence. We contend that the notion of influence has two important dimensions—one related to what NGOs do to make information available and the other related to whether and how other actors change their behaviors accordingly. Scholars must thus collect evidence that addresses both dimensions in order to get a more accurate indication of NGO influence in any given set of negotiations. In addition, we note that NGO influence may be observed both in the outcome of the negotiations as well as in the negotiating process.

An analysis of these multiple dimensions provides a way of making qualitative assessments of NGO influence that can be compared across cases. This analytical framework allows for a more systematic examination of the role of NGOs in international environmental politics that will complement the existing body of research and make the findings more convincing. In addition to strengthening claims of NGO influence in international environmental negotia-

tions, this framework provides the basis for comparative analyses of the role of NGOs. By collecting evidence of NGO influence in a more systematic and consistent fashion and by using more rigorous methodologies to analyze that evidence, researchers should be able to develop qualitative assessments in terms of high or low levels of NGO influence in different negotiations. Research conducted in such a rigorous manner will produce results allowing for comparison across cases. Such a comparison will likely demonstrate variation in NGO influence in different negotiating contexts. The key question then becomes under what conditions NGOs are more or less likely to influence international environmental negotiations. The answers to that question will contribute to a better understanding of how NGOs matter in global environmental politics.

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