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“Responding to the global challenge: Climate change and agenda setting process of policies in Australia and Japan”

Key words

climate change policy, newspaper coverage, attention to climate change

Abstract

Policy response to climate change has been a challenge for Australia and Japan because in both countries there are strong economic interests that rely on fossil fuels. Australia, despite facing impacts from climate change in many sectors, was during Howard’s administration hesitant to address this issue, and only in recent years managed to establish carbon tax and emission trading. However, climate change has lost its importance due to the change in administration and lack of political support and interest. On the other hand, the Japanese government had early embraced the idea of climate change legislation, but only some elements of it were actually passed. Both countries were subjects to international criticism at the last international climate change summit COP19 in Warsaw. Australia was proclaimed by the NGOs to be the Fossil of the Year for stalling the negotiations process. Japan faced backlash from the international community for weakening its mitigation target, despite the Japanese delegation’s efforts to show its contribution through the JCM technology transfer scheme and the promise of a substantial climate change aid to developing countries.

My study applies agenda setting framework and examines how the issue of climate change was brought to both governments’ agenda and what were the political responses. I look at the problem recognition, which is expressed by framing of climate change in national debates. I compare attention to climate change and framing of this problem in newspapers of the biggest circulation in Australia and in Japan. Media attention shifts depending on domestic political events and on developments in international negotiations, which create a pressure on national governments. Events related to the mechanism and impacts of climate change such as prominent scientific reports and announcements, extreme weather events or information about negative social present or future influences of climate change are the third important stream of media coverage.

Another issue worth examining is the role of international attention to domestic developments in both countries. In order to examine understanding of climate change, I also focus on indicators, triggering events, feedback from public opinion and interest groups. The study compares what policy proposals were made in Japan and Australia, what their feedback was, and whether the politics was favorable for pushing climate change solutions. In conclusion, I explain the policy windows, which stand for a situation in which evidence for the existence of the problem, available policies and willingness to act converge. My purpose is to explain what triggered national interest in climate change in both countries, and also to check why there were opportunities and challenges to establish climate change legislation.

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OSTROWSKA Monika is a PhD candidate at the Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University, Japan. She received her Bachelor degree in Cultural Anthropology and a Master degree in International Public Policy at the Osaka University. Her PhD research focuses on the policymakers' attention to climate change in Japan and on the agenda setting process in the Japanese domestic and foreign climate change policy. Monika is interested also in multilateral governance, and she worked as an intern at the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand and attended the COP19 in Warsaw, Poland.