Agenda Setting and Issue Definition at the Micro Level: Giving Climate Change a Voice in the Peruvian Congress

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Agenda-setting and policy-formulation processes, including those involved in global issues such as climate change, have been a focus of continuous research during recent years. Most studies have taken a broad, longitudinal perspective, with limited emphasis on the individual level decision making that can better explain the broader dynamics tested in the past. This study presents an analysis at the micro level that uncovers specific instances of individual decision making within an information-processing framework. Additionally, little is known about how climate change is defined in developing nations that are highly vulnerable to its effects. This micro-level analysis focuses on national legislators and advisers in the Peruvian Congress. The article presents a detailed narrative of the formulation process of several climate change bills and the development of a special committee on climate change and biodiversity in the 2006–2011 legislative period in the Peruvian Congress. The study discusses the role of policy entrepreneurs, the influence of limited or inaccurate information, and the competition with other policy issues through an analysis of in-depth interviews with these legislative elites. The results show the significant influence of media reports and Internet use in a low-information environment.
las entrevistas a profundidad con estas élites legislativas. Los resultados muestran la influencia significativa de los informes de los medios de comunicación y el uso de Internet en un entorno de información limitado.

**Key words:** agenda setting, climate change, Congress, Peru

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**Introduction**

Climate change has become a highly discussed and studied area of policy analysis. Within this realm, agenda-setting theory has been applied to explain how the issue takes on and loses importance in government agendas (Pralle, 2009). This agenda setting has been mostly limited to the United States and European nations. Some notable exceptions include Shibuya’s (1996) study of agenda setting concerning climate change in Vanuatu and Kwansah-Aidoo’s (2001, 2003) work on the influence of the media on the public agenda in regards to environmental issues in Ghana. The global nature of the problem requires a broader examination of the mechanisms enabling or preventing the issue from reaching agenda status in other contexts.

Peru is a country that is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change (Brooks, Adger, Bentham, Agnew, & Eriksen, 2004; IPCC, 2007). The country is home to approximately 70% of all tropical glaciers in the world (Bennett & Glasser, 2009), which are the main source of water for its population. These glaciers have been disappearing at an alarming rate. Additionally, about two-thirds of the country is Amazon rainforest, and effects on the biodiversity of the forest have been widely documented (“El Cambio Climático No Tiene Fronteras,” 2008; Miles, Grainger, & Phillips, 2004). This article uses the case study of climate change in Peru to expand our understanding of agenda setting in a different social and political context. Additionally, it builds on previous work that proposes a micro-level perspective to issue definition and agenda setting. Wood and Vedlitz (2007) argue that most research in agenda setting and issue definition has used a macro perspective (e.g., Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 2003), but they suggest that a micro-level information-processing model focusing on individuals can better explain policy stability and punctuations among laypeople.

Although Wood and Vedlitz (2007) differentiate their model from those macro-level models, it is necessary to place this micro-level perspective within a broader framework of agenda setting. This article discusses the individual level model that deals with knowledge and information processing as an integral component of Kingdon’s (2003) model of multiple streams in a low-information environment. In this article, we focus on Congress as an arena of policymaking and discuss the issue trajectory of climate change during the legislative period 2006–2011, providing explanations for the interest of individual legislators (particularly policy entrepreneurs) on the issue and the failure to reach significant agenda status. The study places special attention on sources of information and the ways in which the process of policy design was conducted. In summary, this study focuses on the ways in which national legislators define and give a voice to climate change and eventually decide to act upon it.
Agenda Setting and Issue Definition: From the Macro to the Micro Perspective

The literature on agenda setting focuses on questions related to how governments, the public, and the media prioritize issues. Issues rise and fall from the agenda due to a variety of factors including competing issues, politics, public mood, focusing events, and others. To explain the dynamics of agenda setting and policy change, scholars have proposed a number of theories, mostly from a macro perspective, that look at long periods of time. One of the most influential models of agenda setting is the multiple streams model by Kingdon (2003). Kingdon proposed the garbage can metaphor and argued that issues have a better chance to attain formal agenda status when the problem, policy, and political streams conflate at the right point in time. This happens when a window of opportunity opens. Pralle (2009), when discussing Kingdon and other agenda setting models in the context of climate change, points out that, “For climate change to rise and stay high on agendas, the public and policymakers must be convinced not only that we should do something to combat climate change, but that we can” (p. 786).

Attaining and maintaining formal agenda status also depends on the competition with a wide diversity of issues. Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) present an arenas model that suggests that these issues compete for attention in institutional arenas with different carrying capacities. Similarly, and particularly useful for this study, Cobb, Ross, and Ross (1976) described an inside initiative model that describes the actions carried out by appointed officials within government to bring agenda status to issues of their interest. These issues are selected based on institutional, political, and cultural factors that affect their chances and the definition of the issue (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988).

These models operate at the macro level. How do processes at the micro level influence these dynamics? In their book Politics of Attention, Jones and Baumgartner (2005) describe how issues are prioritized at the individual and institutional decision-making levels. In their behavioral model of decision making, Jones and Baumgartner identify a recognition stage, a characterization stage, an alternative stage, and a choice stage. They propose a disproportionate information-processing theory within the punctuated equilibrium model. Its three components are the unavoidable juggling of multiple issues, how decision makers understand and interpret the issue of choice, and the choice of competing solutions. Previously, Kingdon (1989) had discussed the role that the flow of information that reaches legislators could play in their voting decisions; Webber (1986, 1987) had studied the use of information by legislators, suggesting that time constraints, primarily, and the political acceptability of political decisions are the two factors limiting the use of policy information. These constraints are augmented in the case of complex issues such as climate change. In this respect, Jones, Fischhoff, and Lach (1999) suggest that in the intersection between climate change science and policymaking, most research is not useful to policymakers “due primarily to the incompatibility of the research with existing policy–making processes and decision–making models and to its relative inaccessibility” (p. 596). In the context of U.S. politics, there is an abundance of high-quality information, which can minimize the use and effect of external sources such as the media. In a country such as Peru, where legislators have limited exposure to scientific
information about climate change, other sources of information are expected to play a more prominent role.

Within this broad framework, Wood and Vedlitz (2007) argue that individuals process information through a variety of cues or filters that include values, ideology, background, social forces, and the continuing intrusion of new signals from the information environment. Their study on global warming attempts to determine the role of information processing in issue definition and agenda setting at the individual level. Adding to this line of research, we argue that their focus on issue definition among laypeople needs to be expanded to the political agenda to determine how this type of micro-level analysis could better explain how policymakers conceptualize issues and how that affects the placement of issues on the formal agenda.

Climate Change and Environmental Policy in Peru

Charpentier and Hidalgo (1999) and Lanegra (2008) succinctly describe the short life of environmental regulations in Peru. The first main legislative norm was the Code of Environment and Natural Resources established in 1990, which the more comprehensive General Law of the Environment recently replaced in 2005. In 1991, the approval of the Law that Stimulates Private Investment had somewhat weakened the provisions of the original code, hence the need to update it. In the interim, the first national environmental government entity, the National Environmental Council, was created in 1994. The newly created Ministry of the Environment absorbed it in 2008. In 1997, the Framework for Environmental Management was created, which set the bases for the National System of Environmental Management of 2004.

The implementation of these policies in the last two decades, until the creation of the Ministry of the Environment in 2008, was uneven and had no clear definition of priorities (Povéda & Sánchez-Triana, 2007). The low prioritization of the environmental sector can be seen in the 24% decrease in public spending allocated to the environmental sector from 1999 to 2003 (0.14% of gross domestic product) (Abugattás, 2005). Since the creation of the ministry, investments and funding in the sector have increased. Povéda and Sánchez-Triana (2007) suggest that national environmental priorities have “...traditionally been driven more by the environmental agenda of the donor community, stand-alone initiatives, and large projects, than by practical considerations ... The results have been an agenda marked by conservation of biodiversity, forestry, and climate change, which has had considerable dividends” (p. 463).

Climate change first formally entered the national government’s agenda in 1993 after Congress endorsed the endorsement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Legislative Resolution 26185 ratified the UNFCCC on May 10, 1993, and it went into force on March 21, 1994. On November 19, 1993, the government created the National Committee of Climate Change. The committee did not produce much-needed work, entering in hiatus for a considerable period of time. The Kyoto protocol was ratified by unanimity via Supreme Decree 080-2002-RE on September 10, 2002, and went into force the following day.

On October 27, 2003, the executive government made official the National Strategy of Climate Change. Despite the unchallenged idea of the occurrence of
climate change, the number of efforts to systematically assess its effects has been limited. Aside from a few efforts by government agencies (see, e.g., “Cambio Climático en la Cuenca del Río Mantaro,” 2010), little else has been done. Dr. Ronald Woodman, president of the Geophysical Institute of Peru (IGP) described this situation, “We are trying to harvest without having sowed. With the exception of a specific study conducted by IGP for the Mantaro basin, and another one conducted by the National Service of Meteorology and Hydrology (SENAMHI) in Piura, we only have general studies” (Unger, 2008).

In 2009, the government reactivated the National Committee on Climate Change, this time adapting its functions to the framework of the newly created Ministry of the Environment. The new ministry was created in May 2008 within the requirements of the free trade agreement that was under negotiation with the United States, a political process that revealed conflicting discursive coalitions (Takahashi & Meisner, 2012). In March 2009, and more recently in August 2010, the committee was formally modified to incorporate most of the organizations and sectors involved in the issue. Finally, in December 2010, the Ministry of the Environment presented the Mitigation and Adaptation Action Plan against Climate Change.

The 1990s were transition years in Peru. The country had to deal with a terrorist threat, an unstable economy, and a government plagued by corruption scandals (see Conaghan, 2005). These events shaped the conditions for this recent and relatively weak environmental regulatory system, which is still developing in the midst of a current impressive economic growth. The government did not consider climate change a priority until the last few years, from the time of the creation of the Ministry of the Environment, when the issue started to receive relatively more attention. In May 2008, Peru hosted the Latin America, Caribbean and European Union Summit with the presence of several world leaders (including Angela Merkel and Hugo Chávez, among others) in which the two main topics of discussion were poverty and climate change (see Takahashi, 2011). On the other hand, the Peruvian Congress has witnessed limited activity on the issue. It is expected that Congress will have to approve any post-Kyoto agreement.

Methodology

This study uses two sources of data. The first source is in-depth interviews (n = 18) conducted with government elites. They include national legislators involved in environmental issues (nine interviews) and advisers, research employees, and consultants that have worked on specific climate change related proposals (nine interviews). Congress is made up of 120 legislators representing 24 regions with a highly fragmented political composition. The second source of data came from secondary texts, including climate change policy proposals and committee minutes and agendas.

Tansey (2007) argues that, “when sampling interviewees in a process tracing study, the ultimate goal is to reduce randomness as much as possible, and thus non-probability sampling approaches are the most appropriate” (p. 765). Following Tansey, the sample was selected based on the review of proposed bills, as well as participation in the Committee on Andean, Amazonian, and Afro-Peruvian Populations, Environment, and Ecology; and the Special Committee of Climate Change and Biodiversity. Elite interviewing has traditionally been a challenging
academic endeavor. Earlier suggestions by Dexter (1970) were followed, as well as recent discussions in political science literature, such as Peabody et al. (1990), Goldstein (2002), and Lilleker (2003), who provide basic guidelines and delineate some of the barriers. Finally, validity and reliability issues, as discussed by Berry (2002), were considered.

The interviews were conducted between June and August 2010. They took place in congressional offices and lasted from half an hour to an hour. The semi-structured interviews included biographical questions, open-ended questions about the interviewees’ role in Congress, their perception of environmental issues and climate change, and their decision to work on a climate change related bill and the process followed in its elaboration. The main focus of the interviews and the analysis presented is on the establishment of the Special Committee of Climate Change and Biodiversity and the presentation of six bills directly focusing on climate change. The bills were identified through a review of the legislative database and corroborated during the interviews. The decision to analyze these specific instances responded to the formal nature of their elaboration and to the availability of formal documentation that can be used to trace the processes. Focusing on these specific processes facilitated the data gathering and analysis while still providing reliable documentation.

An open-ended inductive coding procedure to identify emerging themes was followed. After a preliminary coding, a number of common themes were identified and refined. A second round of coding was conducted using the refined codebook following established procedures for thematic coding (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002; Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 2006).

A process tracing approach as proposed by George and Bennett (2005) was followed to identify those processes and mechanisms that led to the policy outcomes and behaviors described. Within the varieties of process tracing approaches suggested by George and Bennett, this study falls between the categories of detailed narrative and analytic explanation. The detailed narrative approach is “highly specific and makes no explicit use of theory or theory-related variables” (p. 210). On the other hand, the analytic explanation “converts a historical narrative into an analytical causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms” (p. 211). More specifically, the study followed Büthe’s (2002) proposition that modeling and historical processes need not be incompatible but are a needed marriage to provide more robust accounts of history. Büthe suggests that the use of narratives is the most appropriate conduit for this proposition. The next section provides a narrative of the policy processes at the individual level placed within Kingdon’s (2003) multiple streams model.

**Climate Change in the Problem Stream**

The government recognized climate change as a condition worth examining in the early 1990s, but it began to discuss and conceptualize it as a problem more recently. This recognition has taken place despite the relatively limited information about the problem at the local level. Government agencies have conducted some scientific efforts, for example, a pilot program called PROCLIM (Program for the Strengthening of National Capacities to Manage the Impact of Climate Change and Air Pollution). Additionally, the Geophysical Institute gathered the different research efforts in the Mantaro Basin, arguing that there have been limited efforts
in understanding the effects of climate change in the country (Cambio Climático en la Cuenca del Río Mantaro, 2010). Using Kingdon’s nomenclature, indicators at the local level have actually played a limited role in shifting the attention to the problem. Only some reports from the Andean Community (“Cosa Seria Este Clima: Panorama del Cambio Climático en la Comunidad Andina,” 2007) have discussed the economic effects of climate change, whereas some local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have been producing limited reports. The media have also frequently reported on the effects on the tropical glaciers (see Takahashi & Meisner, 2013). On the other hand, there is no feedback on present policies because climate change has not yet been fully addressed from a policy perspective. Despite the existence of a national strategy, little has been done to assess its effectiveness. In the early 1990s, Congress adhered to the UNFCCC, and the government created a committee on climate change. The question arises: what factors account for the increase in attention to the problem by these decision makers? Some scholars have discussed that the climate change epistemic community (which includes the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], the UNFCCC supporters, scientists, NGOs, business, and others) plays a key role in bringing attention to the issues across different international, national, and local arenas (Gough & Shackley, 2001; Hulme & Mahony, 2010). The next sections discuss these external factors in more detail, including the mass media and other internal forces.

Institutionalizing Climate Change and the Development of Policy Proposals

Congress did not consider climate change a priority in 2006. For most legislators, the first year becomes a political learning period, as described by one legislator, “I had to really quickly learn, because first of all I had no knowledge of the activities that were being developed, and also I had to take during the first period the vice presidency of the agrarian committee” (personal interview, 2010). After this first year, during which climate change gained attention worldwide partially due to the release of Al Gore’s (2006) An Inconvenient Truth, some legislators started to show interest in the issue.

In January 2007, Congressman Jorge León Flores, from the ruling party APRA (Peruvian Aprista Party) introduced a first climate change-related bill in Congress. The project presented initiatives to improve existing institutions, promote innovative technologies, improve infrastructure and environmental management practices, and educate the population, among others. In summary, the proposal attempted to promote solutions at many levels, which made it broad and ambitious. The proposal was sent to the Committee on Andean, Amazonian, and Afro-Peruvian Populations, Environment, and Ecology, which released a dictum on March 2009. The dictum was unfavorable to the proposal, stating that the “legislative proposal contains norms that regulate themes that are already appropriately regulated in our current national legislature.” This would be the first of various proposals aiming at legislating climate change-related issues.

Policy entrepreneurs are defined as those individuals or institutions that invest their resources in a given policy issue (Kingdon, 2003). Roberts and King (1991) define a typology of policy entrepreneurs based on their behavioral patterns,
identifying political entrepreneurs as those who hold elected leadership positions in government. Political entrepreneurs of environmental affairs in the Peruvian Congress have been few. A former committee secretary had this to say:

People like Beatriz Merino (then the ombudswoman), and Oswaldo Sandoval (former committee president) gave the committee (of environment) status and respect. There is no renovation. Fabiola Morales (legislator who served two terms), who appeared to be a leader in the area, was really a bluff, it was strategic. Now she deals with issues of agrarian debt, small industries. She has abandoned the issue since 2009 when she was involved in issues of municipal and regional areas of conservation. There is no leader. (personal interview, 2010)

In 2007, Congressman Isaac Mekler, then from the opposition party Unión por el Perú (Union for Peru), seemingly emerged as a climate change policy entrepreneur. During a personal interview, he mentioned that he recognized the severity of the issue after hearing reports of the vulnerability of the country, and the debate taking place in the United States, through international media reports. Moreover, he became familiar with the work of former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, especially his book and movie, An Inconvenient Truth. Mekler saw a window of opportunity that opened at the international level and used it to push the issue in Congress. This window also included the release of the Fourth IPCC report and the Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings in Bali, Poznan, and later in Copenhagen. Mekler discussed the issue with then president of Congress, Mercedes Cabanillas, who, after hearing his arguments, decided to support a proposal to create the Special Committee on Climate Change and Biodiversity. Motion #1432 was presented on April 19, 2007; Congress approved it on April 25, 2007, with no opposition. This event can be described as an instance of discourse institutionalization, as defined by Hajer (1995).

The committee was in charge of evaluating and proposing guidelines, as well as identifying and monitoring current efforts across government sectors. According to Mekler (the committee’s inaugural president), legislators who had limited knowledge of the issue made up the committee. During the first meeting, the committee members reached a consensus that raising the awareness of the executive branch would be one of its main roles. Committee members expected that the government would create a new high-level entity to deal with the problem in response to the inactivity of the national committee on climate change.

Despite the committee’s specialized focus, none of the climate change-related bills developed during the study period were discussed there, and coordination with the Committee of Andean, Amazonian, and Afro-Peruvian Populations, Environment, and Ecology was very limited at best, according to the interviewees who participated in the special committee. Similarly, the authors of the bills discussed here had limited or no coordination among them. Franklin Sanchez Ortiz (from the government party APRA) presented the only relatively successful climate change-related proposal in 2008. This bill focused on the payment for environmental services. Similar proposals were presented in 2003 and 2005 during the previous Congress, but they were annexed to the General Environment Law and the Law of Promotion of Private Investment in Reforestation and Agroforestry, respectively, but without sufficient detail. It might be said that it was not the right moment to present the idea because discussions of ecological services were
relatively novel in the country at that time. This proposal was developed parallel
to a similar proposal coming from the Ministry of the Environment. The proposal
from the executive entered Congress with direct support from the Prime Minis-
ter, which helped expedite its review. The Committee of Andean, Amazonian,
and Afro-Peruvian Populations, Environment, and Ecology approved the bill two
days later (July 10, 2008). Kingdon explains these types of behavior.

This promoting aspect of competition cuts across the legislative and executive
branches as well. As bureaucrats see an issue moving on the hill, for instance, they
will often take action first, in order to have some control over the events, rather
than simply responding to and implementing legislation that is not of their own
making. (2003, p. 165)

This competition could lead to stalemate or move issues faster on the agenda,
and the latter is what happened in this particular case. This bill also exemplifies
a policy spillover. Much of the structure and the content were adopted from
already implemented laws in other Latin American countries, particularly Costa
Rica, a world leader in ecosystems management and environmental services.
Several interviewees discussed the importance of reviewing and adopting exist-
ing legislation in neighboring countries. This approach is recognized as a double-
edged sword, as described by an adviser who developed a climate change bill:

I had to use my criteria. My criteria I think were linked to the information I use,
information from UNEP, and the IPCC, about general proposals on adaptation and
mitigation of climate change. Therefore I think they are coherent. What happens is
that you have to put it in an appropriate language for this context. I've seen
legislative proposals from APRA (then the government party) that are a vulgar
copy from UN documents. That means that the author did not even internalize the
information. He just said this is interesting, that's not. (personal interview, 2010)

Despite the initial support from the President of Congress and the commit-
ment from the members of the Special Committee on Climate Change and Bio-
diversity to push the issue forward, the effort failed, as members of the committee
described. The then President of Congress had agreed to participate as a member
of the committee but eventually defected and suggested a replacement. The
legislator that replaced her did not have an interest in the topic but agreed to
participate as a favor to her. He was unable to attend most of the meetings because
he had back-to-back meetings on other committees. As his adviser discussed
during the interview, “We didn’t know to which committee we were going and
we had to sacrifice something, and many times this (climate change committee)
was sacrificed” (personal communication). After two initial meetings, most of the
members of the committee started missing sessions. Of the six members, only
three were present at one time, limiting the ability to elaborate proposals or
recommendations. The members met five more times over the next two years,
always with limited participation, and the meetings had to be canceled on five
other occasions. The committee went into a hiatus stage between 2009 and 2010.
It is worth returning to the previous discussion about the qualities of a successful
policy entrepreneur, as defined by Kingdon (2003). Kingdon says the person has
to have some claim to the hearing; he has to have expertise, ability to speak to
others, or an authoritative decision-making position. The generalized belief
among interviewees is that Mekler was a figuretti5 that used the issue on his own
behalf without any real concern, a double discourse as another legislator suggested. Mekler blamed the nonattendance on the lack of commitment, knowledge, and interest of its members and Congress at large. Mekler recognized the fact that the committee never had a clear and defined mission or objective (personal communication).

Despite the problems within the special committee on climate change, an opposition party (Nationalist Party) has recently reactivated the committee. On October 7, 2010, the new members were selected; and more recently, on December 15, 2010, the committee discussed the participation of the Peruvian delegation on the COP16 meeting celebrated in Cancun, Mexico. There has been no relevant output since then.

In the meantime, Congressman Luis Flores has maintained interest in the issue and presented another proposal in 2008, bill 2507, a law proposal that elevates supreme decree 086-2003-PCM, which approved the national strategy on climate change, to law. An adviser with ample knowledge and academic background on environmental issues developed this proposal. She became involved in the project after sensing a positive social–political context. “There was an opinion trend about climate change at the international level; you could see it on TV, in the press, on the Internet, that it was a very worrisome thing and that each country should take their regulations, their norms” (personal interview, 2010). The proposal did not comply with some basic legislative requisites. For example, the dictum, which was also unfavorable, stated that no national strategy has a legal status and giving this one that status would create a legislative conundrum. The adviser recognized that one of the reasons for this proposal and for bill 2166 was to garner the attention of decision makers. “It doesn’t matter whether the bill was approved or not, what matters is that people talked about climate change” (personal interview, 2010). Moreover, she argued that the bills had been developed before the creation of the Ministry of the Environment, which helped to put more attention on the environment as an issue. This is an example of what Kingdon (2003) calls the softening up process. More specifically, this was a trial balloon to test the waters on the receptiveness to the issue (Kingdon, 2003).

Quite the opposite was happening with Congressman Sánchez Ortiz (APRA), who had been partially successful with the bill on ecological services. He started working on a new bill, 4011/2009–CR, a law proposal that establishes the obligation of implementing adaptation measures to climate change. This proposal emerged from the legislator’s previous work as a mayor in a town in northern Peru where he had the opportunity to participate in several environmental initiatives and where he witnessed the devastating effects of El Niño in 1998, which he directly linked to climate change. Additionally, he mentioned that he had personally witnessed the lack of a national strategy throughout the country (although there is one now) and a lack of regional strategies, especially in the coastal regions. This can partially explain the fact that this bill had the strongest focus on adaptation of all the bills analyzed.

In May 2010, Legislator Elizabeth León, from minority party Bloque Popular (Popular Bloc), then president of the Committee on Andean, Amazonian, and Afro-Peruvian Populations, Environment, and Ecology, presented the last climate change proposal of the study period, bill 4046, which focused on water head protection, and mitigation and adaptation to climate change. This proposal was
developed as a result of the controversial debates concerning a new water law, which originally proposed to regulate several large mining ventures operating near important sources of water. The bill was sent to the committee she presided over and the Committee of Energy and Mines. She retired the bill soon after in June 2010 when she realized the narrow chances of success.

**Defining Climate Change and the Competition Among Issues**

There is no awareness of the issue (environment) in Congress. A lot of the bosses in Congress do not have any idea of environmental issues; they don’t talk like they do in Europe where they say that this is the New Leftist movement, or the new communism. Well, in the U.S. they also talk like this. Here they say: oh yes that issue, they have always looked at it as the least important issue, always. Moreover, sometimes the parliamentary specialist will say: oh let’s go there because we don’t do anything, you do little work. I’ve heard them say that. (personal interview, 2010)

With the creation of the Ministry of the Environment, environmental issues have become more prominent on national public and policy agendas, but as evidenced by the quote above, they are still not as highly regarded as other policy issues. Within the wide variety of environmental issues, climate change appears to be typically placed in a different category. One legislator said that the environment is not an issue that will gain votes. On the contrary, she mentioned that she was told that it would bring problems because she would be accused of being a terrorist, associating environmental issues specifically with the apparent dichotomous relationship between economic development and conservation (personal communication). Climate change is being framed as a threat and an opportunity in the form of international payments for ecological services. Moreover, most interviewees share the idea that climate change is a problem that developed nations are responsible for and have to fix. This overall belief in Congress that climate change is happening is clearly reflected in the document that the Special Committee on Climate Change and Biodiversity drafted in 2007 (Moción de orden del día #1432, 2007).

Considering that climate change is the result of the excessive emissions of the so-called greenhouse gases and the greenhouse effect generated by humans, especially as a result of the most industrialized nations in the planet; that the experts have evidence that suggest that global warming will affect the global climate causing a sea level rise, the retreat of polar ice and glaciers and more extreme climatic phenomenon such as storms and intense flooding that will also reach Peru...

The Committee on Andean, Amazonian, and Afro-Peruvian Populations, Environment, and Ecology has mostly focused on participatory processes of natural resource extraction that affects minorities and indigenous groups. Legislators are aware of the reports from the Ombudsman office that state the prevalence of conflicts between industry and local populations in the last few years (250 in 2010, of which 70% were environmental) (Reporte de Conflictos Sociales, 2010). The interest of Congress and the government in socio-environmental conflicts was marked by the violent protests in the locality of Bagua between 2008 and 2009 regarding some decrees proposed by the government that dealt with the use
of natural resources that would affect indigenous populations living in the area (Laplante & Phenicie, 2009). The protests resulted in more than 30 deaths including civilians and police officers. This event garnered the attention of all levels of government and effectively materialized in a public consultation law that Congress and the new government approved in 2011.

This same legislator argued that her party was able to bring some complex issues such as interculturality, public participation, and water and natural resource management to the agenda of Congress. She said that if they were able to bring those issues to the agenda, adding climate change should be easier because it is less complex. She argued that the other issues had clashed with the mining industry, not recognizing that an issue like climate change could potentially provoke even more intense disputes.

Aside from these sporadic events, it is the committee presidents who have the prerogative of prioritizing issues they think are important. The then president of the Committee on Andean, Amazonian, and Afro-Peruvian Populations, Environment, and Ecology stated that her committee had about 19–20 legislative initiatives, but the group elaborated an initial plan where five basic themes were determined. These were the issues of consultation, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), environmental services, the new forestry law, and the protection of water heads. When bills are prioritized and a dictum is prepared, the president also prioritizes which dicta are sent first to the floor. The former president of the committee mentioned that she came with a preestablished agenda influenced by her previous knowledge, professional experience, and experience in nature, which led her to focus primarily on environmental issues.

**Capacity, Information, and Knowledge**

According to most of the interviewees, one of the reasons why environmental issues—including climate change—are not prioritized in the agenda and do not have appropriate policy solutions is that legislators and advisers lack specialization in these issues. This example from an adviser illustrates the point:

> Here, we are respectful of the specialties, okay? And I am being honest, as a lawyer I can translate any topic into legal form, but the sustenance, the orientation, the conception, and all that supports it has to have a scientific base. The political proposals are very different. The technical proposals of this nature that set guidelines, like government policies, have to be well structured, well-conceived and well financed... climate change like I was saying—and here comes my ignorance on the topic—if you don’t have a clear dominion, a clear vision of what it means, is definitively going to be confusing. Therefore, when I have discussed the bill with the legislator, believe me, I had to redo the project like three or four times, okay? Because I would bring a proposal to him, and he would say *this is not like this.* (personal interview, 2010)

Similarly, the president of the Committee of Energy and Mines discussed the conflicting nature of the role of knowledge and expertise in policymaking.

> A mining engineer or an electrical engineer could have a different perception. But I think that Congress is an eminently political forum. I think that to the extent that you, being a politician, having the technical support of people that know the issue, will easily handle the issues that are needed to be handled. (personal interview, 2010)
The consultant responsible for the waterhead project pointed out that there are very few engineers and individuals from the natural sciences in Congress serving as advisers. Similarly, a legislator mentioned that a group of legislators are having a meeting with the dean of the engineering school because more engineers are needed in Congress. She mentions that “Right now there are 11, and they need at least 20 or 30 because your political vocation and your ideology are not enough, you need technical support” (personal interview, 2010).

Legislators and their advisers cannot be experts in every issue they tackle. Experts, nonprofits, interests groups, and industry, among others, play an important role in feeding policy information to legislators. On the other hand, as Webber (1986, 1987) and Jones and Baumgartner (2005) note, legislators can only give limited attention to this information, but this information system would ideally work in a setting where reliable information is readily available. As discussed by most interviewees, this system does not operate in the case of climate change and other complex environmental issues (e.g., GMOs). The characteristics of the problem make it difficult to understand it, and the information presented by the consultants hired by the Special Committee on Climate Change and Biodiversity was too complex, as an adviser stated, “The presentations in some cases were very technical for the legislators. I think that it should have started with an introduction, and little by little increase the level” (personal interview, 2010). Despite the presence of a small research center in Congress where legislators and advisers can obtain information about areas of interest, staff members in this office explained that legislators underutilize this service and that environmental issues have rarely been researched. Additionally, the limited resources limit the ability of the research center to provide in-depth analysis of the issue.

How do legislators and advisers learn about climate change? The first and main source of information for most interviewees in regard to problem characterization and policy formulation of issues that are relatively unknown—such as climate change—is the Internet. Some individuals use it as an additional medium, searching specifically for information from the IPCC, the United Nations, or other formal sources. Others “Google” the search terms and then use their own criteria to decide what is relevant and what is not. One adviser illustrates the interplay between specialization and information gathering practices:

> My perception is that, in specialized issues, generally in Congress, we lack the specialists. First you would have to find a specialized consultant on the topic that helps you develop a project of these characteristics. Therefore, we usually leave this little task to the executive to push. We the advisers basically help ourselves with the Internet, we aid ourselves with some doctrine, some books, some texts, and some events that can leave you some material that might be of use. (personal interview, 2010)

This practice can become problematic if individuals encounter inaccurate or conflicting information. Hamilton (2011, p. 240) explains that, “Web sites devoted to discrediting climate change concerns provide ideal conduits for channeling contrarian arguments to an audience predisposed to believe and electronically spread them further.”
Discussion

This article presents an analysis at the micro (individual) level (Wood & Vedlitz, 2007) of the development of climate change as a policy issue in the Peruvian Congress. The results present evidence of how these individual policy decisions came to be within the model of agenda setting described by Kingdon (2003); similar dynamics of policy attention identified and analyzed in the United States are also present in the Peruvian case. More specifically, the article presents three main conclusions.

First, in terms of information flows, the limited access to reliable and accessible information negatively influences the likelihood of the issue receiving further attention, especially among those individuals with limited knowledge about the problem or with no formal education on the topic. This limited information drives individuals to rely on less precise sources such as traditional media and the Web. These dynamics are consistent with the behavioral model of decision making presented by Jones and Baumgartner (2005).

Second, in a highly politicized institution, various internal and external forces influence the placement of issues on the formal agenda. Most of the policy proposals had a limited chance for success, something most individuals interviewed recognized. Others argued that presenting bills is just another component of the political game. Legislators are evaluated based on their output, despite the outcomes. They need to present or cosponsor as many bills as possible, a fact that might affect the need or appropriateness of the proposals. Committee presidents have to negotiate the prioritization of issues within their own committees and have to compete with other committees for prioritization in Congress. Furthermore, political parties set their own priorities, and the president of Congress is influenced by other major factors. Alemán (2006) investigated the power of gatekeepers in legislatures across Latin America and argues that, “majority parties that are organized well enough to exert control over the scheduling of legislative proposals can monopolize the direction of policy change, even in the absence of codified gatekeeping rights” (p. 151). He adds that, “In Peru, urgent presidential bills may be referred directly to the floor by the partisan committee” (Alemán, 2006, p. 152). These priorities are set by focusing events such as the violent protests in Bagua and external factors such as the conditions of the free trade agreement with the United States. Despite some documented evidence of the effects of climate change in Peru, the issue competes with many others in the short term, which is consistent with Hilgartner and Bosk’s (1988) arenas model and based on Rochefort and Cobb’s (1993) anatomy of problem definition; the issue needs to complete several of the steps in the model, such as attaining a crisis status, defining a problem population, and identifying the nature of the solution. Regarding indicators, at the individual level, some indicators, such as the effects described in the IPCC reports, had an influence on some legislators, such as Congressman Mekler’s decision to lead the special committee on climate change.

Third, climate change is recognized as a problem, but not a problem that needs to be taken care of at this point in time, and especially in Congress. The interviewees recognize that a lack of expertise impedes major policy changes and that the executive branch, now represented by the Ministry of the Environment, should deal with it. This position is also shared by the parliamentary coordinator of the ministry, who argues that it is not necessary to legislate in terms of climate.
change because all the necessary judiciary instruments are currently in place, with the exception of the law of ecological payments that was under review during that time period (personal interview, 2010). It appears that climate change is perceived as a different type of environmental issue. According to the interviewees, in recent years, environmental issues have mostly referred to public participation in socio-environmental conflicts, mining issues, pollution, and others. Members of Congress divide their position regarding environmental issues along party lines, marked by those who advocate a free market economy and those who favor a stronger governmental control. A common theme discussed in the interviews is that legislators with a rural background have a different perception of environmental issues than those who have an urban background. This difference is not so evident with climate change, which most interviewees discuss as a general global threat, with no major details beyond the melting of glaciers and the opportunity to engage in the payment for ecological services (i.e., forest conservation). On the other hand, the issue is not discussed as a threat to the economic development of the country, which is largely based on natural resource extraction. When there is a perceived threat to economic development, as exemplified by the waterhead protection bill, such legislative actions are quickly dismissed as antidevelopmental. This reaction is quite different than the one in the United States, where a counter-movement has been active in challenging the science of climate change and in blocking legislative actions (McCright & Dunlap, 2003). There is no such counter-movement in Peru. Climate change has not become polarized along party lines or ideological positions, which has been thoroughly documented in the United States, where Democrats tend to favor climate change mitigation actions and legislation more prominently than Republicans, for example (Fisher, Leifeld, & Iwaki, 2013). Ideological and political polarization in Peru refers mostly to economic development versus participatory and social inclusion.

In conclusion, this article tests and demonstrates the applicability of Kingdon’s (2003) model to a different political context in a developing country, following a micro level of analysis, which has not been fully developed in previous efforts. Future efforts applying a similar micro-level strategy should be conducted in other contexts to better understand the larger trends and effects identified in longitudinal studies. In this respect, comparative perspectives could provide deeper insights into the possible generalizability of the processes discussed in this study.

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Notes

1Budgetary information can be found at Ministerio del ambiente (Minam) (n.d.), http://www.minam.gob.pe
In 2010, GDP grew 7.8%, according to CIA's World Factbook (2010).


This is Peruvian jargon that refers to someone seeking public attention.

References


Appendix 1

Summary of climate change policy proposals during the legislative period 2006–2011

Law proposal 2166/2007–CR
Law proposal that foments actions to attenuate climate change.
Initiative proposed in 2007 by Congressman Jorge Leon Flores Torres from political party APRA.

Law proposal 2507/2007–CR
Law proposal that elevates to law the supreme decree 086-2003-PCM, which approves the national strategy on climate change
Initiative proposed in 2007 by congressman Jorge Leon Flores Torres from political party APRA.

Law proposal 2750/2008–CR
Law proposal that regulates the reduction or capture of greenhouse gases emissions.
Initiative proposed in 2008 by congresswoman Luciana Leon from political party APRA.

Law proposal 4011/2009–CR
Law proposal that establishes the obligation of implementing adaptation measures to climate change.
Initiative proposed in 2009 by Congressman Franklin Sanchez from political party APRA.

Law proposal 4046/2009–CR
Law proposal that promotes the protection of basin headwaters, and adaptation and mitigation measures to climate change.
Initiative proposed in 2009 by Congresswoman Elizabeth Leon from political party Bloque Popular.

Law proposal 2386/2007–CR
Law proposal 3213/2008–PE
Law proposal that calls for a law of promotion and compensation of environmental services.

There were two similar simultaneous proposals focusing on environmental services, one coming from Congress (2007), and one from the executive branch (2008). Franklin Sanchez, from political party APRA, presented the proposal from Congress.