Implications for Climate Change Politics

So far, I have argued that the network of civil society actors became significantly larger, more diverse, and more divided in the buildup to the Copenhagen Summit. This chapter traces the implications of those developments for climate change politics more broadly. In previous chapters I explained how the growing diversity of groups supported a wider range of tactics than had been previously employed: this resulted in an unprecedented expansion in contention around the UNFCCC in 2009, as I will document here. Changes in civil society participation transformed the UNFCCC from an off-the-radar venue for expert advocacy to a high-profile target of activism. Earth Negotiations Bulletin described this development in 2011:

Climate change COPs have evolved into a carnival-like forum . . . with a dizzying array of events competing for attention and mindshare. From side events, displays of green technology, marches and protests, to real time commentary over the internet through Twitter, Facebook and thousands of blogs, civil society [meetings] are something that a transparent COP host has to manage.

(Earth Negotiations Bulletin 2011)

In this chapter, I argue that these changes in civil society tactics have caused the UNFCCC to become more restrictive in its
policing and to seek reform in its procedures for dealing with civil society groups more generally.

I noted in previous chapters how the involvement of a wider range of groups introduced a new way of framing climate change as an issue of climate justice. This approach contrasted with the traditional frame of scientific urgency previously employed by most civil society groups. In this chapter, I examine the success of this frame. I find that the media, states, and other civil society groups have adopted the language of climate justice. I also argue that the frame diffusion has inspired new cleavages in the interstate politics of climate change, as well as a potential, if fragile, convergence in civil society.

This chapter employs the technique of process tracing to demonstrate how changes in civil society activity can influence political outcomes (Betsill and Corell 2001; Zürn 1998). I focus on two changes – increased use of contentious tactics and deployment of the climate justice frame – and trace the implications for climate change politics more broadly. I draw on a range of sources – including media accounts, interviews, institutional documents, and speeches – to provide evidence of the political impact of civil society strategies. I specifically document how the use of climate justice framing and contentious activism changed language, policy, and institutions around global climate governance. While noting that my scope is limited by my focus on only two developments within civil society and within the limited time span of this study, I conclude by considering what this case can tell us about the future of global climate politics.

THE UNFCCC AS A TARGET OF CONTENTIOUS ACTIVISM

Previous chapters documented how and why a growing number of civil society groups decided to adopt contentious forms of collective action in advance of the Copenhagen Summit. This chapter draws on quantitative protest event analysis to show that the culmination of their individual decisions produced an unprecedented amount of contention. Not only did the Copenhagen
meeting feature the largest number of protest events on climate change ever recorded; these events also drew a massive number of participants and were much more likely to be transgressive in character than those at previous meetings.

Protest event analysis is a method for collecting systematic longitudinal data on contentious events through coding of news sources. For this project, I employed traditional protest event analysis of newspaper sources alongside coding of issue-specific daily newsletters. First, I conducted an extensive search of media sources in the LexisNexis database for each COP from 2005 to 2013, limiting my search to reports filed in the city in which the COP was held.\(^1\) Because of the high number of false positives returned with the general search terms, each of the news items was hand-coded to determine whether or not it contained a relevant contentious action related to the COP. These data complement those presented in Chapter 3 by examining the volume of UN climate protest over a longer time period. The results were used to assess the relative frequency of protest, as shown in Figure 6.1.

First, these data show us that the number of protest events in Copenhagen was truly unprecedented, with a record number of seventy-seven protest events around this meeting. Most UNFCCC meetings – including the 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2011 COPs – attracted approximately 10–25 protests each. More technical meetings – including those in 2006, 2012, and 2013 – experienced virtually no civil society protests. These data capture the frequency of protest events, however, not their size or significance. For example, while the 2013 COP in Warsaw was the site of a few dramatic protest events, including a civil society walkout on the negotiations and a high-profile hunger strike, the data show us that there were numerically fewer protest events around this conference than in previous years.

\(^1\) Specifically, I searched for the terms “(climate change or global warming) AND (UN or United Nations) AND (protest* or march* or demonstrat*).” While the addition of independent media sources would be ideal, this type of reporting is not systematically available for the entire time period of the study. More details of this research procedure are contained in the Methods Appendix.
Some scholars have critiqued protest analysis for being vulnerable to reporting bias, meaning that the amount of protest reported could well be a function of the amount of coverage of climate change overall (Koopmans and Rucht 2002). Reporting bias can be difficult to detect using media sources alone, because high-profile meetings attract both more coverage and more protest. To assess the extent of this bias, I coded a different kind of publication – Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) – which provides comprehensive daily coverage of the official UNFCCC negotiations. Since this publication has consistent coverage, it is likely to have more limited reporting bias. Analysis of this publication supports the results from my coding of newspaper sources: protests were uncommon at most COPs, and the correlation between the number of events reported for each COP from the ENB and the LexisNexis sources was 0.91. The combination of these converging sources and the evidence presented in previous chapters should make us more confident that these data reflect a genuine expansion in contention.

Second, the scale of these protest events in Copenhagen was simply much larger. Fisher (2004) estimates there were approximately 5,000 protesters at the UNFCCC meeting in 2000, but in
2009 there was a massive demonstration of 100,000 people, as well as many smaller protest events (Fisher 2010). A total of over 13,000 individuals registered with the United Nations to lobby their delegates and observe the negotiations, while 17 million people signed an online petition demanding urgent action. More than a half million activists in 140 countries participated in coordinated demonstrations on the Global Day of Climate Action. Although comparable data from earlier years are not available, research teams collecting individual-level data at this protest confirm that the majority of individual participants were aware of the transnational dimensions of the mobilization, making this a highly significant transnational protest event (Walgrave et al. 2012; see also Wahlstrom, Wennerhag, and Rootes 2013).

Finally, the character of these events shifted in Copenhagen. Before 2009, most of the (limited) protest that occurred around the UNFCCC was of a nonthreatening character: examples might include the nonviolent activist demonstration in Poznan in 2008 or the march of activists wearing polar bear costumes in Bali in 2007. These are the kind of media-friendly stunts that members of CAN typically sponsored around climate negotiations. But Copenhagen marked the emergence of a more confrontational and transgressive repertoire of climate change activism, which had previously been rare.

Theoretically, transgressive contention is a subset of contentious action that can be distinguished because it comes from new actors who disrupt established routines in their protest actions (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 7). There are two crucial differences between the transgressive protest at Copenhagen and earlier protest actions. First, contentious events at the UNFCCC have usually been mobilized in support of stronger climate policy from the UNFCCC (Fisher 2004). Second, these protests have typically been sponsored by the same ENGO activists who were organizing actions inside the UNFCCC, and function as a small complement to their lobbying work. In Copenhagen, transgressive actions often came from newly mobilized actors and tended to be highly confrontational in language and demands.
One example of transgressive activism is the Reclaim Power action discussed in Chapter 5. As I documented, many activists began to call for the use of summit protest tactics against the UNFCCC in the buildup to Copenhagen. The summit protest is a well-known component of the global justice movement’s repertoire. As Wood (2007) argues, the Seattle tactics associated with summit protests include four elements: affinity groups; black bloc; jail solidarity; and protest puppetry. Yet these elements had not been used previously in climate politics, and this explains why the emergence of these transgressive actions caused particular uncertainty and upheaval in the politics of the UNFCCC. I will go on to discuss the implications of this tactical shift.

Even though most COPs I examined featured little transgressive activism, it is worth noting that this type of protest did appear forcefully at the 2000 COP in The Hague. Protesters at this meeting also made aggressive attempts to disrupt the institutional functioning of the UNFCCC, including storming the building, throwing paint bombs at buildings, climbing rafters, and destroying electrical equipment. One protester threw a custard pie in the face of U.S. Chief Delegate Frank Loy to express anger over the lack of U.S. action on climate change. But as UNFCCC Security responded aggressively to these protests, many mainstream groups (in particular Greenpeace) made efforts to disassociate themselves from these actions. These tactics were largely disowned within the NGO community, and while contentious events took place at subsequent COPs, few had the same transgressive character until Copenhagen.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE: A MORE RESTRICTIVE UNFCCC

How do institutions respond to protest, especially protest that is transgressive in nature? Intuitively, we might expect that a great volume of protest would increase the chances that civil society groups would achieve their desired ends. Many activists hold this mental model. But studies of the global justice movement have also documented another outcome of transgressive protest:
increased restrictions and policing (della Porta 2007b; O’Neill 2004; Wood 2007). The UNFCCC seems to fit this pattern as well: it has long prided itself on its openness to civil society but, in the years since Copenhagen, has responded to growing contention by becoming more restrictive in terms of access and policing.

The closing off of political opportunities at the UNFCCC can be seen in three respects. First, security around the conference became stricter and more proactive in targeting potential threats as indications of contentious activism increased. According to my protest event analysis, from 2005 to 2008, virtually no events that attracted police intervention were reported. In 2009, seventeen events (22 percent) resulted in arrests. Security forces used tear gas, beatings with batons, and mass arrests to contain protesters at this meeting. The number of arrests was also unprecedented: newspaper accounts place it at somewhere around 3,000 protesters in total. Even as the overall level of protest has dramatically decreased, 20 percent of events in Cancun, 32 percent in Durban, and 33 percent in Doha resulted in arrests. Activists report that security officials have been much more proactive, aggressive, and restrictive in policing protest actions around subsequent COPs (Interview, Climate Action Network International 2011). Although this is not a systematic study of policing practices, these observations suggest that changes in the repertoire of contention stimulated changes in policing around the COPs.

Second, security concerns contributed to an unprecedented decision by the UNFCCC to severely restrict access to the venue for the final days of Copenhagen. An email from the UNFCCC Civil Society Liaison stated that for “safety and security reasons,” only ninety of the 13,000 civil society observers present would be permitted into the venue on the final Thursday and Friday when world leaders would be present. Civil society representatives, who had flown in from all over the world for the meeting, were outraged. Thus, most civil society groups had virtually no access to the UNFCCC venue during one of the most important conferences in its history.
These strict restrictions were clearly a response to the appearance of transgressive protest. The fact that the UNFCCC Security Team particularly targeted Friends of the Earth, completely revoking the accreditation of all 300 members of the group days before the rest of civil society was shut out, supports this interpretation. FOE leaders reported in interviews that they were told their group had been identified as a threat in a UNFCCC security report, but that the UN Security Team had declined to elaborate on the reasons why. Previous chapters have noted that FOE was an important bridge between the more contentious actors and the mainstream NGOs. Other civil society groups – including CAN – appealed to the Secretariat to have FOE reinstated, but to no avail.

Increased security restrictions were not limited to Copenhagen. Security procedures were even stricter in Cancun in 2010, despite the almost complete absence of heads of state. In Copenhagen, actions were permitted if cleared with the Secretariat. In Cancun, UN security imposed a two-day waiting period for any civil society action, effectively curtailing civil society’s ability to respond to events in the negotiations in a timely manner. UN security was active in removing individuals who took part in protest actions in Cancun. Activists noted that they did this by either noting participants’ names from their badges or reviewing footage of protests and matching faces with photos in the registration system. One prominent indigenous activist described his suspension from the UNFCCC in this way:

We took our delegation over to the U.N. forum and went through the security and swiped my – this card here. And all of a sudden, the whole computer started flashing red. I was suspended ... So we found out that because yesterday we were talking yesterday after a press conference ... after that, our youth went out, you know, demanding climate justice and to lift up all the issues that we’re addressing ... So, of course, the media was asking, you know, what is the indigenous position on this? So I spoke, as well ... And I didn’t know there was anything that we were doing wrong at all.

(Goldtooth 2010)

The targeting of individuals is a new phenomenon in the UNFCCC’s security arrangements. The UNFCCC had previously
preferred to rely on a group-sanctioning policy, counting on organizations to restrain their members. The extent to which this policy will be used on a permanent basis is still unknown; however, one can reason that suspending individuals will give the UNFCCC more leverage in removing individual protesters from the talks without having to justifying bans on entire organizations. On the other hand, if the group-sanctioning policy is weakened, organizations will have fewer incentives to rein in contentious individuals, potentially lowering the costs of individuals engaging in protest actions.

The Durban negotiations in 2012 were similarly marked by unclear rules about which actions were acceptable and which were not. Participants reported that while the South African government demonstrated commitment to open access and consultation, the UN Security Team acted particularly “by the book” and was strict in shutting down actions. As a result, the conference was marked by a number of Occupy-style actions that led to extensive removals of participants from the venue (Interview, Climate Action Network 2012). The severely limited space for protest in Dubai “was a major source of concern” for civil society representatives attending the 2012 COP; this began a process of reflection that contributed to a decision to walk out at the 2013 meeting in Warsaw (Interview, Oxfam International 2013).

Third, civil society groups have been put on guard by discussions within the UNFCCC itself regarding reform in participation. The Aarhus Convention Secretariat report on COP 15 noted that an “atmosphere of distrust” had grown between civil society and the institution and that there was a need to “rebuild the dialogue” (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 2010). The UNFCCC began a process within the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI) to look into ways to “enhance observer participation” as a result of this growing dissatisfaction. This has been an intricate process. The UNFCCC clearly favors conventional participation while eschewing protest, explaining that civil society participation “flourishes in an atmosphere of mutual trust which acknowledges respect for others and their opinions, and takes into account the nature of
intergovernmental sessions” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2010, 3). This attitude has led many civil society groups to fear that any eventual reform may stifle their right to dissent.

The UNFCCC’s reevaluation of civil society participation came amid increased state skepticism about its value. Civil society groups approached the SBI discussion by asking for increased access to meetings, interventions, and documents, but several proposals from states suggested creating separate venues for civil society participation that would preclude the need for NGOs to participate directly in the COPs. For example, one proposal in this body suggested establishing a pre-COP high-level NGO dialogue that would mandate venues for civil society participation that would be entirely separate from the COPs themselves. NGO delegates strongly objected to this, on the grounds that it would “tokenize” their participation under the guise of “enhanced participation” (CAN 2010). While these proposals are unlikely to take hold, civil society groups are increasingly on guard in this arena and concerned that their once abundant access may be much more strictly limited at future sessions.

A LARGER ROLE FOR JUSTICE IN THE POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The second big change in Copenhagen was that civil society groups developed a new way to talk about climate change. Scholars have already documented that civil society groups can change how environmental issues are discussed (Betsill and Corell 2001; Gulbrandsen and Andresen 2004). Drawing on original evidence, I find indications of this discursive impact in climate change politics and demonstrate that after its development and promotion by civil society actors, the climate justice lens was adopted widely in the media, by a number of state delegates, and by other civil society groups. I detail each of these outcomes in this section.

First, civil society groups often try to influence the media with their statements and actions. My analysis suggests that this
strategy worked for the climate justice movement: the media have increasingly employed climate justice language since the 2009 meeting. To get a sense of this trend in media coverage, I conducted a simple search of the LexisNexis database for newspaper articles that employed the term “climate justice” in a given year. Figure 6.2 plots the use of the term. For reference, I included a second trend line with general coverage of climate change COPs from 2005 to 2011.

As Figure 6.2 shows, the popularity of the phrase took off after 2008. According to these data, only five articles used the term in 2005, but the term appeared in 221 newspaper articles in 2009. Although the figures do drop off a bit in the immediate aftermath of Copenhagen, the term is still used in more than 200 articles in both 2012 and 2013. As the figure suggests, much of the decrease in the use of the term might be because the climate issue was generally less salient to the media after 2009. The recent increase in usage indicates that climate justice is becoming a popular lens despite stagnating media interest. I would speculate that reporters were likely attracted to the climate justice

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Footnote:

2 For the general climate coverage search, the specific search terms used were (climate change or global warming) AND (UN or United Nations) AND HEADLINE((climate change or global warming)) for the date range of each COP, within the LexisNexis database, drawing on newspaper sources.
frame for the same reason as activists: the simplicity of the frame helps pitch complicated stories in an emotionally resonant way. Moreover, the disruptive tactics often associated with the movement likely drew reporters (and coverage), further educating the media about this movement and its demands.

Second, civil society groups often try to influence state leaders directly, as climate justice activists did in 2009. Were they successful? My results suggest that activists had at least a short-term influence on the ways in which state leaders discussed climate politics. I established this influence by documenting that state leaders adopted the language of climate justice for the first time in Copenhagen. I coded floor speeches given by heads of states at the high-level segment of climate change conferences in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013 to capture this dynamic. These speeches are a good source of data because they are relatively uniform in length and give us a sense of the issues that world leaders choose to prioritize. Figure 6.3 presents these data.

This analysis shows that 2009 was the only year in which the specific term “climate justice” appeared in delegate speeches. The term did not appear at all in 2005 or 2007, but twelve state delegates employed it in 2009. This suggests

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3 The Methods Appendix describes this procedure further.
the direct influence of the movement at this conference, and the success of these outreach efforts.

What about the years after Copenhagen? The climate justice movement has not focused as much on direct outreach to states in the UNFCCC as it did during Copenhagen. But it is notable that even though the use of “climate justice” as a specific phrase has disappeared, states are paying more attention to broader equity and justice issues. Twenty-three states (about 15 percent of those speaking) employed these terms at the Copenhagen conference. At the most recent conference in Warsaw, this figure increased to forty states (about 32 percent of those speaking). Although it is harder to attribute these changes to direct influence, it is clear that as the broader context of these negotiations has changed, the prominence of the issues associated with climate justice has also increased.

Finally, civil society groups often vie with one another for influence. I find significant evidence that the development of the climate justice frame has influenced the ways in which mainstream environmental groups have begun to frame climate change. To capture this change in framing, I coded all issues of the Climate Action Network’s newsletter ECO from 2005 to 2013. This newsletter is published on each day of the negotiations and is an important channel of communication for CAN during the COPs. Drawing on the coding scheme described in the Methods Appendix, I coded each issue for the number of times a science-based or justice-equity framing was employed. Figure 6.4 represents these data.

These data show that CAN has moved away from its traditional scientific approach and has increasingly embraced an issue framing that focuses on equity and justice issues. Whereas this trend is evident from 2007 to 2009, it is particularly remarkable post-2009, when the use of scientific framing declines dramatically relative to the justice and equity approach. This offers quite plausible evidence that the discursive influence of the climate

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4 At the time of writing, not all of the speeches from COP 19 were available online. Those that were have been coded and are presented here.
justice movement has extended to other non-state actors. I also note that CAN’s strategic change is not a straightforward imitation of the framing strategy of the climate justice movement. CAN still tends to prefer the term “equity” to “justice,” suggesting a continued insider emphasis. I discuss the implications of this development later in this chapter.

So far, I have demonstrated that changes in the nature of civil society participation – specifically the increased use of contentious tactics and climate justice framing – influenced the language and policy of institutions, media, states, and other civil society groups. But what does this mean for cooperation on climate change? The next two sections explore the implications of these developments for alliances in interstate politics, as well as for the internal politics of civil society.

**NEW CLEAVAGES IN GLOBAL CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS**

The climate justice approach encompasses a broader set of priorities and a new attention to the process of political negotiations. At the time of Copenhagen, the introduction of the climate justice
perspective initiated a new cleavage into the global climate negotiations. The climate justice approach differed from the approach of mainstream environmental groups in three areas. First, the climate justice approach highlighted different priorities – those associated with justice in mitigation and adaptation commitments – than mainstream environmental groups. While environmental groups may have often shared these commitments, they tended to prioritize the development of an environmentally sound climate treaty as the most important outcome. Second, climate justice activists routinely stated that “no deal is better than a bad deal” and encouraged states to block deals that would not achieve just outcomes. This contrasts with traditional NGOs, which in Copenhagen were pushing to “Seal the Deal.” Third, the two sides of the network had different time horizons: reform-oriented NGOs pushed the scientific urgency of the climate issue, while climate justice groups were willing to allow the need to slow down in order to get the political process right. As a result, the climate justice groups often ended up pushing for different agendas within the talks, introducing new elements of contestation to the already turbulent negotiations.

The two sides of the network cultivated different state allies at the 2009 summit. A core part of the Climate Action Network’s strategy in Copenhagen was to build an international civil society network that would have strong domestic groups located all over the globe. CAN hoped that these domestic groups would put pressure on their delegations, in the context of the international negotiations, to achieve an ambitious agreement. Daily CAN meetings – like those of other major international environmental NGOs – consisted of campaigners putting together the puzzle pieces from all of the feedback from domestic groups to figure out how best to leverage their connections to influence the trajectory of the talks.

But climate justice groups pursued a different approach. A key part of their strategy for Copenhagen (and beyond) was to target key states that might be willing to block negotiations that would not achieve just outcomes. As a result, the scope of this advocacy did not need to be global: in the context of the UNFCCC’s
consensus negotiations, it would be enough to have a small handful of states that were willing to oppose any proposed agreement. As Young (1994, 109) argues, in situations in which consensus rules operate, “the availability of arrangements that all participants can accept as equitable is necessary for institutional bargaining to succeed.” Climate justice activists hoped to replicate the experience of the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization meeting, in which outsider activist organizations were credited with supporting the dissent of developing country delegations participating in the talks (Edelman 2009). As an early organizing document put it:

In Seattle, we not only managed to shut down the conference by being on the streets, we also exacerbated the multiple conflicts that existed “on the inside” between the negotiating governments . . . If we manage to do the same thing again . . . we would be able to keep open the political space to discuss potential “solutions” to climate change that go beyond the reigning, market-driven agenda. 

(Müller 2008)

Putting this strategy into action required getting the message across to key state delegates. This task was made easier because many state delegates from the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) countries of Latin America were already quite receptive to the message. Many of the ALBA delegations to the UNFCCC intentionally included a large number of social movement and indigenous participants who had existing social movement ties. The boundaries between these delegates and the climate justice movement were sometimes porous. Participants in the Reclaim Power demonstration described in Chapter 5 often explained their motivation as reflecting a desire to support critical states within the negotiations. As one participant from the Indigenous Environmental Network shouted upon leaving the conference center: “We are here to support our brothers. We are here to support Evo Morales; he is coming here today. We are here to give him direction and to support Bolivia” (Democracy Now 2009).

ALBA leaders seemed to be listening, and their delegations actively consulted and coordinated with climate justice activists in Copenhagen. One example of this coordination was Evo
Morales’ decision to spend a full day of his time in Copenhagen attending the Klimaforum, as opposed to the official UNFCCC conference. Morales offered to present the official declaration of the Klimaforum to the UNFCCC. Although this never happened (the UNFCCC Secretariat reportedly stated that the document was “lost”), it signaled the extent of overlap and collaboration between the climate justice movement and the Bolivian state. As Morales explained in a public speech in Copenhagen:

Politics is a science of serving the people. I live to serve the people. Participating in politics is part of assuring our dignity, our traditional way of life. It is my duty to take your message to the heads of state here. If I make a mistake, let me know so that I can rectify it.

(Morales 2009)

After contact with the climate justice movement, ALBA leaders increasingly began to employ climate justice rhetoric and to draw on the protest movements as a source of legitimacy for their political positioning. In contrast to their statements at earlier summits, they explicitly mentioned protests and climate justice slogans (e.g., “system change, not climate change”) and used them to support and justify their opposition to the UN process. This was particularly true in Hugo Chavez’s floor speech:

But there are lots of people outside too . . . there are a lot of protests in the Copenhagen streets. I would like to say hello to all those people out there [applause] . . . I was reading some signs out there is the street . . . one, for example, is “don’t change the climate, change the system.” Don’t change the climate, change the system. I take that; I take note of that. Let’s change the system, and then we will begin to change the climate and save the world [applause].

(Chavez 2009)

Other ALBA countries also adopted the rhetoric of the movement and criticized the UNFCCC for its harsh stance against civil society:

I would like to associate myself with the protests and the demonstrations . . . we note with concern the exclusion of non-governmental organizations from this hall, and the clear repressive measures being used against demonstrators . . . selfishness and the
interests of developed countries in preserving an unjust and inequitable world order are preventing us from undertaking the changes that are demanded by present and future generations.

(Hernández 2009)

This use of climate justice language by heads of state was new in Copenhagen and promoted a perception of inequality in the talks. And while ALBA leaders were certainly predisposed toward these views, contact with the climate justice movement likely encouraged this change in discourse.

Beyond discourse, contact with the climate justice movement may have also influenced decision making about the Copenhagen Accord. The main opposition to the Accord came from a group of states that had already been associated with the climate justice movement. In particular, Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua spoke early and strongly against the accord and the inequitable way in which they felt it was brokered (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2009b). These states, which had already been primed with climate justice discourse, were the ones mainly responsible for refusing to allow the Copenhagen Accord to become an official UNFCCC decision. The extensive overlap between the climate justice movement and the ALBA delegations makes it quite plausible that the activism encouraged some states to sustain their oppositional stance within the UNFCCC (McGregor 2010), even if it is impossible to definitively demonstrate.

At the very least, it is clear that these delegates were listening to contentious activists and using their actions as a way to legitimize their political positions. This is clear in the final statement put out by ALBA on the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit:

Today more than ever, before the lamentable maneuvering that has been practiced in Copenhagen for petty economic interests, we reiterate that, “Don’t change the climate, change the system!”... We recall that while the conference failed in an irreversible way, the voices of the youth who know that the future is theirs, grows stronger. They strongly denounce the maneuvers of the developed countries and they know that the struggle will continue. We join with them and their protests, and we salute and support them. The people must stay on their guard.

(ALBA 2009)
These states also evaluated their actions by the standards set by civil society groups after Copenhagen. As Morales put it:

I would say that Copenhagen is not a failure, it is a success for the people, and a failure for the developed governments. Because in December 2009, the developed countries tried to approve a document, and thanks to the struggle of you, the leaders of social movements of the world meeting in Copenhagen, along with presidents of some countries, we communicated the feeling of suffering of the peoples of the world.

(Morales 2010)

Beyond Copenhagen, this experience has inspired ALBA leaders to pursue climate leadership in other venues. Notably, Bolivia sponsored a World People’s Conference on Climate Change in 2010 that was meant to serve as a grassroots alternative to the top-down politics of the UNFCCC. The process and procedures of this meeting echo the politics of the World Social Forum, where the issue was also discussed subsequently. In many respects, the development of these new cleavages within the UNFCCC has emboldened some state leaders, but it has also been the impetus for the development of a broader and more critical social movement that is not exclusively aimed at the UN system. I consider the longer-term implications of this development in the Conclusion.

TOWARD A CONVERGENCE IN CIVIL SOCIETY?

The mobilization of the climate justice movement also has a large influence on other civil society groups working around the UNFCCC. This book has so far detailed the development of a significant cleavage between groups that was especially pronounced and consequential in 2009. But what happened in the years after this? The most recent evidence supports the idea of a limited convergence emerging among civil society groups, in three respects.

First, this chapter demonstrated that climate change organizations are increasingly framing their demands in terms of climate justice. Most environmental NGOs chose to mobilize using the
scientific urgency frame in 2009, dividing them from the emerging climate justice movement. But by 2013, civil society groups seemed united around the climate justice approach, as my coding demonstrates. Even WWF, an organization thought to be at the more moderate end of the spectrum of environmental groups, employed climate justice language at the 2013 meeting. Second, notable reforms have occurred within the biggest interorganizational coalition – the Climate Action Network – that respond to critiques of the climate justice movement. Specifically, CAN has invested in its Southern Capacity Program to support groups located in developing countries, hired a new director from the Middle East, changed the nature of its leadership structure, and formed an equity committee to consider issues associated with differentiation and sequencing. All of these changes are described as originating from “demands from the members” that these issues be tackled by the coalition (Interview, Climate Action Network International 2013). Third, climate justice groups and CAN members collaborated on a significant joint contentious action at the 2013 meeting in Warsaw. Specifically, groups agreed to walk out of the talks en masse to demonstrate frustration with the lack of progress. While the demonstration was not highly confrontational, it signaled important cooperation between climate justice groups and the big NGOs, including Oxfam, WWF, Friends of the Earth, and Greenpeace. While these groups were divided at the time of Copenhagen, they seem increasingly open to bridging their divides.

What explains this change? A lot of the change seems to come from social influence among groups. For example, members of Climate Justice Now describe intentionally reaching out to CAN members about political positioning. As one explained, groups’ receptivity to the climate justice approach post-Copenhagen was partially the result of the deterioration of the negotiations themselves:

The Doha text was so terrible: it locks in virtually no progress for seven years. And so some members – Friends of the Earth in particular – started to reach out to CAN and especially WWF and Oxfam. Suddenly they could agree that things were truly bad. So I think there was a lot of peer education that went on there about climate justice and what it means.

(Interview, CJN, 2013)
Another noted: “In Copenhagen CJN and CAN wanted nothing to do with one another. Now the dialogue is much more constructive” (Interview, Climate Justice Now, 2013).

Better coordination among groups is likely to bring about more effective actions. But one question often posed by activists is whether the broad diffusion of the climate justice frame might pose some risks. The success of the climate justice movement – and the increased prominence of its framing – represents an opportunity and a challenge for mainstream environmental NGOs. And, as one anonymous activist complained, this new framing hasn’t necessarily led to the development of new policy: “The climate can’t be fixed with capitalism ... And some big organizations claim to support climate justice, but also have trading foundations. It seems like the climate justice language is being hijacked and co-opted by big NGOs who want to fudge the differences in the climate justice movement.” From this perspective, much of the bite of the climate justice frame comes from its engagement with an anticapitalist and antisystemic perspective. If the language of climate justice is watered down, then the corresponding political changes may also be less than transformational, and may co-opt the movement in significant ways.

But many take a more optimistic view of the potential for convergence without co-optation. As another campaigner explained, when asked if she was concerned about the climate justice movement being co-opted:

I think some groups take on climate justice without really thinking about it or knowing what it means. But a lot have listened and gone through a process of changing ... it seems like it has really been on our terms, with them coming to us.

(Interview, CJN, 2013)

This book establishes that social influence is a real force among organizations. As I note in the Introduction, network structure influences the frames and tactics that organizations adopt, but the adoption of frames and tactics can also restructure networks in critical ways. Coalescing around a common frame
suggests the potential for future convergence in the network. And while this cohesion may be fragile at this point, its implications for the international climate movement could be highly significant.

CONCLUSION

The chapter shows that divisions in the climate network resulted in two big changes in civil society actors’ participation in the Copenhagen Summit. First, their repertoire of climate change activism became much more contentious and confrontational. Second, many groups began to adopt and promote a climate justice lens in the negotiations. These were clearly not the only changes that took place in Copenhagen; however, I suggest they are two particularly important developments that had an important influence on the future trajectory of the movement and the political process within the UNFCCC.

It is clear from my analysis that the climate justice movement has been successful to date in developing a new and powerful approach to framing the climate issue. This frame has spread to a variety of actors, suggesting that framing power is an effective tool wielded by this movement. The discursive influence of the movement is particularly notable when one examines how it influenced other non-state actors. And while this is beyond the scope of this study, I consider it probable that this discursive influence has translated into policy influence in the case of some non-state actors and some states in the UNFCCC process.

This chapter suggests important pathways by which the mobilization of civil society affects the development of global climate politics, but it is important not to overstate the scope of this influence. Clearly, civil society groups did not get what they ultimately wanted in Copenhagen: an ambitious and fair climate treaty. While groups had an observable influence on some states, it is difficult to imagine that this strategy could be replicated with other major actors. Influence is real, but it is not unlimited. More systematic analysis of movement impacts is urgently needed to extend our understanding of this important topic.
I conclude this chapter by noting that the literature on transnational advocacy networks has been much criticized for its tendency to focus on successful cases of civil society activism (Price 2003). This study traces the impact of the mobilization of civil society actors, but it does not concentrate exclusively on whether or not they were successful in achieving their aims (see Busby 2010). Paying attention to the broader consequences of mobilization – including outcomes such as increased restrictions and policing – draws our attention to results that may be unexpected and even undesirable. These outcomes are understudied and especially deserving of attention as we attempt to develop a better grasp on the results of activism.

My analysis has examined the short- to medium-term implications of the climate network’s mobilization. These outcomes are important, but I also note that NGOs can exert broader power than the outcomes I am able to examine here (Wapner 1995). The Conclusion considers the future of the international climate movement and its potential to achieve broader social change outside of the scope of this study.