The State Divide: Differences in Climate Legislation and Rhetoric Among States

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Introduction

It is important to contextualize the impact of climate change and to recognize studies that allow for contextualization. Waldinger's study (2022) of the economic and agricultural impact of climate change during a period of time called "The Little Ice Age", roughly spanning from the year 1400 to the year 1900, is useful in showing how climate change can affect lives on an individual level. The author provides data that shows a decrease in city size, which in several studies has been proven to be an indicator of economic hardship, was strongly correlated with a consistent change in temperature. The author determines that a change in climate negatively affected agricultural production during this period, which decreased economic prosperity, increased mortality, and increased the prices of imports within trade. The author mentions the current-day implications of this research and argues that climate change will continue to have an economic impact, and a more devastating impact on less developed nations that are overly dependent on agriculture, and who lack strong trade relationships. This research provides context into the broader impact of climate change and also proves that climate change has a significant impact on the economy. It is important to note that Waldinger mentions the importance of reliable empirical data on policy decisions, as skeptics, many of whom hold positions in public office, have dismissed the impact of climate change on the lives of individuals. This research provides data showing the significant impact of climate change, in a time where the human impact on the climate is far less than it is today, stressing the importance of legislative action.

Climate policies encourage energy efficiency, which has several benefits beyond the goal of emissions reductions, as discussed by Lovins (2012). Moving from fossil fuels to more efficient sources of energy has become important not only from an environmental perspective but also from an economic and foreign affairs aspect. Lovins states “The rising costs and risks of these fossil fuels are undercutting the security and prosperity they have enabled. Each day, the United States spends about $2 billion buying oil and loses another $4 billion indirectly to the macroeconomic costs of oil dependence, the microeconomic costs of oil price volatility, and the cost of keeping military forces ready for intervention in the Persian Gulf” (Lovins 134). The author concludes the study by declaring that the United States needs to act in pursuit of clean energy, or they will watch as “the global clean-energy revolution passes it by”, as several countries around the globe have put goals into place to achieve certain clean energy standards (Lovins 145). Beyond any belief a political leader has in regard to the severity of climate change, as discussed by Waldinger, the economic and foreign policy aspects of climate change are undeniable, and to avoid climate policy is to put one’s state or country at a disadvantage.

Climate change is among the most divisive political topics in the United States, with some denying its existence, while others view it as a potential end to humanity itself. Despite a consensus belief in the effects of human existence on the climate among the scientific community, prominent figures in American politics dismiss climate change as a hoax and fear-mongering. This paper discusses the legislation that states have put into place that prioritizes the environment and climate change and will look for the differences between the states that are aggressive in passing legislation and those

that are not. This study finds that Democratic-led states are far more likely to pass comprehensive climate legislation than Republican-led states, and leaders within Democratic states are far more understanding of the climate issue than Republican leaders when analyzing the rhetoric of these politicians.

Literature Review

Scholars have been interested in climate legislation at every level of government both within the United States and abroad, and many different theories of how to best address the climate problem have been discussed. Researchers are interested in the proper legislation, and how to implement this legislation at the different levels of government. Although these pieces do not provide specific comparative cases of climate legislation between states and the leaders of those states, the research is useful in discussing the issue of climate legislation in government.

Focusing on the relationship between states and the federal government in regard to climate legislation, Mckinstry, Dernbach and Peterson (2008) discuss the best ways in which states and the federal government can address climate legislation. Their research recognizes the aggression of several states in terms of their climate legislation, but also points out the need for uniformity between states and the federal government. They mention the need for the federal government to use state action as an example of the proper way to address climate change, with an example being the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets that many states have implemented. Greater uniformity through federal action will allow for greater overall reduction, as it would be far more expansive than the current system, in which only a certain number of states have emission targets. The targets are based on data collected at the state level,

and McKinstry, Dernbach and Peterson state that “the most basic thing Congress can do before adopting any legislation is to learn what works and what does not in these state laws” (McKinstry et al. 6). The laws states use to reduce emissions are briefly discussed, and I look to provide more detail in terms of these pieces of legislation.

Grossman’s research (2010) discusses the effects of emissions on climate change, the severity of climate change in the United States, and the laws in place at the state and federal levels that address climate change. Grossman mentions that at the time of the study, 23 states had statewide emissions targets, and that every state had some sort of measures in place to combat climate change. Grossman also discusses specific state-level examples of legislation within California that were implemented prior to the publishing of this article in 2010, such as the state’s Renewable Portfolio Standard, and “regulations for mandatory reporting of GHG emissions”, enacted by the California Air Resources Board (Grossman 246). The article also mentions the legal problems states may deal with in implementing legislation, an example being constitutional limitations that require that state law not “interfere” with federal statutory provisions, showing how even the most proactive states may be limited in their action and impact. Grossman concludes by acknowledging the progress the government has made on the federal, state and local level, and states that the government will need to continue to focus its efforts on the climate and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The research is limited to the year 2010, and while the state legislative examples within this study are still relevant, many states have either expanded upon, or even reduced the amount of climate legislation over time, and the ways in which states deal with the climate issue have changed since the publishing of this article.

Melli's research (2017) focuses on the legal rights the federal government and states have in passing environmental legislation, and discusses mechanisms that can be used by states to implement environmental legislation. Melli cites examples of state action, such as the passage of the Global Warming Solutions Act in 2008, signed by Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, as well as the work of former California governor Arnold Shwarzzenegar and former New York governor Nelson Rockefeller. Melli mentions Rockefeller's work as particularly impressive, with the Pure Waters Bond Act being an example of legislation that has continued to be influential. The research mentions the failure to implement a carbon tax within Washington State in 2016, and Melli explains some of the issues states have in regard to the implementation of climate legislation. In this case, the carbon tax went to a vote, and Melli believes that the political infighting of environmental groups, as well as the word "tax" are to blame for the failure of the bill. Even in a state at the forefront of the climate battle, state governments are limited in their ability to create laws, but as Melli mentions, there are several ways in which states can maneuver politically to implement legislation. An important aspect of Melli's research has to do with the influence of states on one another, and in the Washington State carbon tax case, Melli believes that an attempt to pass a comprehensive carbon tax within Oregon had an impact on Washington State's proposal. Melli concludes by stating "State governments are too capable and too talented at responding to climate change to let it remain subject to the inert political dangers it faces at the national level", a statement that is relevant to the themes within my research (Melli 181).

Trachtman (2019) discusses the importance of state-level climate legislation, due to Trachtman's belief that large-scale climate legislation at the federal level is essentially unattainable. Trachtman states that climate legislation at the state level can shape and influence climate politics on a much larger scale, and that it is important for states to implement the proper policies. Some of the policy recommendations mentioned within this article are mandates for renewable energy sources, and incentivizing the use of solar and wind energy. More aggressive legislation includes carbon pricing programs, which are seen in California, and will be discussed in my research. Trachtman concludes by acknowledging the limitations states have in making major changes in national emissions, but this does not reduce the importance of the states in the climate fight. I will expand on this sentiment by assessing the levels with which certain states are addressing the climate issue.

A theme of the research on the topic of states and climate legislation has to do with the importance of state action due to the relative inaction of the federal government. This is discussed by Szymanski and Stone, but this research is limited to the year 2008, when the article was published. They mention the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, which represents a model of legislation that has had an influence on other state's climate agendas. In order to reach the goals of this act, the state implemented emissions reduction targets. California added a goal of reducing state-wide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2020, put into place by the California Air Resources Board in 2008, and this policy is an early example of legislation that other states should follow. Limitations of states are mentioned, particularly because of the ability of Congress to "pre-empt state action", but seeing as this research is limited to

the year 2008, I will look to determine just how successful states have been in creating climate change legislation (Szymanski and Stone 137).

Methods

State Selection

The reason for the selection of Washington, California, Texas, and Florida has to do with the political makeup within the states, as well as the level of risk each of these states faces. Two states, Washington and California, are majority-led by the Democratic party, while Florida and Texas are majority-led by the Republican party. I chose states with majorities because it allows for an easier analysis of the political will to pass environmental legislation. States that are considered tossups may have the political will, but the political inability to implement policy, which makes it difficult to determine the severity with which the state views the climate issue. If a state has the ability to pass the legislation it desires in a state government that is made up of a Republican or Democratic majority, thn that state is far more able to pass the desired legislation, as compared to a state with turnover and political competition within the state government. It is not a matter of “if” these states can implement policy, but whether they are willing to.

All four of these states are considered to be at significant risk of experiencing the effects of climate change, which allows for easier comparison. A state at low risk may be willing to implement policy, but does not necessarily need to address the climate issue with the same intensity as one of these four states. The four states chosen have already experienced the effects of climate change, and will continue to, which is important to understand when looking at the policies, or lack of policies, these states put into place.

ACEEE

The ACEEE State Energy Efficiency Scorecard ranks states based on their approach to several different policy areas: utility programs, transportation, building energy codes, state initiatives, industrial energy efficiency, and appliance standards. This index also addresses the importance of equity in environmentalism, and states can do this through increasing the accessibility of green energy for low-income communities. By ranking all 50 states, as well as dating back to the year 2006, this scorecard allows for direct comparison among states, as well as in-state comparisons over a specific period, to address how effectively states have legislated energy efficiency. The ranking is based on a 1-50 scale, with the best states ranking closest to one, and the worst ranking closest to 50. The best states rank well because they have aggressively addressed energy efficiency, while also balancing environmental and economic benefits.

This scorecard is important to this research because it gives a broad overview of how states value energy efficiency, which is important in limiting the effect of human activity on the environment. It does not delve into specific legislation, but having an index that analyzes states through a singular formula allows for comparison and contextualization of states' willingness to legislate the energy sector. An example of the importance of a high score is represented in the fact that California, the highest-ranking state, efficiently reduces overall greenhouse gas emissions through legislation. Greenhouse gas emissions contribute to global warming, and California is effectively combatting this through legislation that promotes efficiency, as well as equity. Equity, in this case, has to do with the state's willingness to enable low-income communities to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases, such as by making zero-emissions vehicles accessible to these communities.

State Greenhouse Gas Emissions Targets

This variable focuses on the executive and statutory greenhouse gas emissions targets set by states, and some of these targets are a set percentage of reduction by a specific date. Within this variable, states can have a statutory target, an executive target, both executive and statutory targets, a recommended target, or no target (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). A statutory target is put into place through legislative action, while an executive target is put into place through an executive order by the governor. The most effective states in combatting greenhouse gas emissions will have set specific percentage reductions in emissions, with dates as well. This is because it represents a comprehensive plan to attack the issue, one that allows for progress toward neutrality. States achieve this by putting legislation into place that reduces emissions in both the short-term and the long-term. An example of legislation that has a short-term, relatively immediate impact on emissions is a cap-and-trade program, which uses market strategies to limit the amount of emissions an industry can have. An example of a long-term goal is the eventual phasing out of gas-powered vehicles, goals that certain states hope to achieve years from now.

This data is useful to this specific research because it allows for a comparison with the rhetoric of politicians within a specific state, to gauge the importance with which these politicians view greenhouse gas emissions. It also serves as insight into how important the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is to specific states. Also, I can compare a state's targets, or lack of targets, to the level of risk each of these states experiences due to the effects of climate change, using a climate change risk index that will be discussed later on.

State Electricity Portfolio Standards

Within this study, I want to focus on whether or not the states selected have implemented a renewable energy portfolio standard, a clean energy standard, or no energy standard at all. A renewable portfolio standard requires a certain percentage of a state's utility electricity to come from renewable sources of energy, and a clean energy standard requires a certain percentage of a state's utility electricity to come from zero-carbon or low-carbon emitting sources of energy (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). States at the forefront of addressing climate change will have a standard in place, that is legally enforced, in comparison to states that have clean energy goals which are not written into law, or no standard at all. Beyond the environmental benefits of renewable and clean energy standards, these standards have significant benefits toward energy security and efficiency.

This variable is useful to the research because the environmental benefits, although not secondary to the overall benefits are not always the main factor for the implementation of these standards. The innovative nature of these policies moves states toward being more energy efficient, a positive beyond the issue of climate change. The rhetoric of state leaders, whether dismissive or understanding of the severity of climate change, should not apply to legislation of this kind. Whether or not a state has the desire to address climate change, a state should understand the importance of being energy efficient, looking for new and better ways to power their states as energy prices continue to increase.

State Transportation Policies

This variable focuses on low carbon and alternative fuel standards within the transportation sector. A low-carbon standard is a requirement to shift toward low-carbon

transportation fuels but does not require a specific fuel type. This standard focuses primarily on limiting fuel types based on the emissions produced within the fuel's entire "lifespan", such as the production and use of the fuel, as well as the emission intensity, rather than the overall emissions produced by a certain fuel type. An alternative fuel standard requires that a percentage of gasoline or diesel sold must be sourced through an alternative fuel source, such as biofuels (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). Both of these standards are aggressive, and only seven states have implemented some form of these policies, and only two have implemented a low carbon fuel standard. This is a useful variable because so few states have implemented these policies, and one would expect the states with the most transportation emissions to address the issue with a version of either a low-carbon or alternative fuel standard.

This variable is important to the climate crisis because it addresses the transportation sector, which has continued to grow in emissions. It is also the highest emitting sector nationally, meaning that the importance of the state's implementation of transportation policies is not unique to the most at-risk states.

State Clean Vehicle Policies and Incentives

This variable addresses the policies and incentives regarding the implementation of clean energy and zero-emissions vehicles. Most states have implemented some form of a clean energy vehicle incentive, and each state within this study has a program in place, yet the extent of each of these programs varies significantly. These programs exist in the form of rebates and tax credits for those who purchase or lease clean energy vehicles or exist in the form of requiring manufacturers to obtain zero-emissions vehicle credits (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). This variable is useful

because it shows the different ways in which states may address vehicle emissions and encourage their state populations to move toward clean energy transportation. The aggression of these policies can be compared to the rhetoric of the politicians within these states as well.

These policies are important because they create an incentive for both industry and civilians, entities that contribute to emissions. These incentives make greenhouse gas emissions targets much more attainable because they create an economic reason for people to emit less, rather than relying purely on a message of limiting one's carbon footprint. The ideological aspect of driving a low or zero-emission vehicle would not be enough to shift large portions of the population toward clean energy, but making low and zero-emission vehicles more affordable would.

State Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Sector

This variable is a percentage breakdown of the greenhouse gas emissions within the commercial, electric, residential, industrial, transportation, and agricultural sectors, as of the year 2019 (Climate-XChange). This is useful in contextualizing the specific legislation states implement in relation to the sectors within the state that emit the most greenhouse gases. This variable can also provide national context, by comparing a particular state's emissions by sector to the national averages of emissions by sector. One would expect the best states to address sectors with a high percentage of emissions with specific legislation, both in the short and long term. For example, a state with high transportation emissions should have an extensive legislative plan to address this, such as the previously mentioned state greenhouse gas emissions targets within

transportation. This could be achieved, for example, by having a goal of producing exclusively zero-emissions vehicles by a certain year.

This variable is important because it will indicate which sectors require the most attention within a given state, such as the degree to which a state with high transportation emissions is willing to legislate that sector.

Climate Change Risk Index

The climate change risk index used in this study focuses on determining the level at which certain states will experience the effects of climate change. The effects include extreme heat, drought, wildfire, inland flooding, and coastal flooding, meaning that certain highly at-risk states will experience all of these effects, while others will experience some or none. It creates the number assigned to a state by looking at several different data points, including but not limited to the increase in mosquito season days, the increase in widespread summer drought, the percentage of people at elevated wildfire risk, etc. The index ranges from the lowest score, meaning the least at-risk, being 30 (Vermont), to the highest at-risk being 308 (Florida). The average score within this index is 174 (Gabriele). This index is useful because it can be compared to the degree to which states address climate change. A state at severe risk of experiencing the effects of climate change would be expected to address limiting the causes of climate change within the state. It can also be compared to the rhetoric of politicians within the states of this study, such as comparing the number given to the state by the index to the statements politicians make regarding the climate issue.

Rhetoric

The rhetorical aspect of this research is focused on how state leaders address the issue of climate change through their own words. This can come in the form of, but not limited to press releases, speeches, television interviews, or statements to news media. Rhetoric is useful for comparing state leaders, more specifically state leaders that come from different political parties, and to understand the degree to which leaders view the climate as a political issue. Rhetoric is also compared to the actions of these leaders. For example, a state leader who talks about the importance of addressing the climate issue should lead a state government that legislates with the environment in mind. One would also expect leaders who dismiss the climate issue to lack climate legislation within their state, as compared to other states.

This variable is important because it addresses the political aspect of climate change, a phenomenon that is occurring, despite the beliefs of some. It is also important to understand that several of the previously mentioned variables have benefits beyond climate impact, such as more efficient energy sources, and more reliable energy sources. Meaning, that the politicization of the climate issue has an impact beyond simply ignoring or addressing climate change, it impacts many other aspects of the daily lives of the citizens within these states.

Florida

Data

Florida is among the states at the most significant risk of the consequences of climate change. It is predicted to experience extreme heat, drought, wildfire inland flooding, and coastal flooding in the future, and according to the Climate Change Risk Index, holds the most risk of any state in terms of climate change effects, with a score of 308, far

from the state average of 174 (Gabriele). The state has a Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, and a state house and senate with a Republican supermajority, and in comparison to the Democratically run states within this study, has been non-aggressive in addressing climate issues with legislation. The American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy scores states based on “six policy areas: utility programs, transportation, building energy codes, state initiatives, industrial energy efficiency, and appliance standards” which gave Florida a score of 29 out of 50. Although Florida ranks higher than other Republican-run states, its unique climate challenges would require a much more aggressive stance on climate policy. The state does have an executive target addressing emissions reduction, yet has not released a new or updated state climate action plan since 2008 (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). The most aggressive states have implemented cap and trade programs, which are emissions caps set by the state to reduce emissions, and some are considering the idea of a carbon tax, but Florida has not implemented, let alone introduced any program of this sort (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). The state also lacks a renewable portfolio standard that requires a determined amount of electrical utilities within a state to come from a renewable source, leaving them in the minority of states with this sort of legislation (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). The state does authorize local governments to offer financial incentives for individuals to purchase electric vehicles (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). The transportation sector is the highest-emitting sector in the state, responsible for 39% of all statewide emissions (Climate-XChange).

Rhetoric

Ron DeSantis is an interesting study of the politics of climate change, and as a former Presidential candidate, we see how his rhetoric shifts from state governor to an individual running for the country's highest office. Focusing on his home state of Florida, DeSantis has acknowledged the state climate issues, stating "I will continue to fight every day for the Everglades and Florida's environment" (Dean et al.). This includes the governor's opposition to offshore drilling in his home state and further drilling exploration off the coast of Florida. He believes that states themselves should be able to decide the levels to which they address climate issues in legislation, which could be viewed as a broader conservative belief that is used with other political issues. He also has stated that "We've seen a concerted effort to ramp up the fear when it comes to things like global warming and climate change", somewhat of a contrast to the rhetoric already discussed (Dean et al.). DeSantis has also declared, as President, that he would "support Americans' right to drive the cars they want", and would also ramp up extraction of oil, gas, and other minerals (Dean et al.). DeSantis also opposes national greenhouse gas emissions targets.

California

Data

California is considered to be at significant risk of climate change effects. Along with Florida, Texas, and Washington, the state is expected to experience extreme heat, drought, wildfire, inland flooding, and coastal flooding, all as a result of climate change. The Climate Change Risk Index scored California with 237, well above the average but not as drastic as a state such as Florida (Gabriele). California is led by a Democratic governor, Gavin Newsom, and a state house and senate Democratic supermajority.

California is among the most aggressive states in addressing climate change through legislation and the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy gave California a state energy-efficiency score of 1, the best according to their methodology which has been previously described. California has implemented a cap and trade program but does not have a carbon tax program (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). The state has both executive and statutory greenhouse gas emissions targets, hoping to reduce emissions by 40% by the year 2030, and aiming to reach neutrality by the year 2045. California is also one of the few states to implement a clean energy standard within the electricity sector, which requires electric utilities to derive a certain amount of energy from renewable sources. It is also one of three states with a low-carbon fuel standard, which seeks to address the amount of carbon emissions by requiring the usage of transportation fuels that emit less carbon. The state has both a zero-emission vehicle standard, and financial incentives for electric vehicles. The transportation sector is the state's highest emitting sector, with 44% of all emissions belonging to transportation (Climate-XChange).

Rhetoric

Of the Governors within this study, Newsom is as engaged in addressing the climate crisis as any. Although not a presidential candidate, Newsome is a national figure and uses this notoriety to express his beliefs regarding climate change and the need to address climate and environmental issues through legislation. During a United Nations speech, Newsom stated "This climate crisis is a fossil fuel crisis. This climate crisis persists. It's not complicated. It's not complicated. It's the burning of oil. It's the burning of gas. It's the burning of coal. And we need to call that out" (Office of the Governor). In response to the potential for increased regulation to negatively affect the economy,

Newsom claims “we have proven again and again that through policy we can accelerate innovation” (Davenport). He has also discussed how California should be viewed in terms of the climate fight, stating “We need to exercise not just our formal authority, but we need to share our moral authority more abundantly” (Associated Press).

Texas

Data

Texas ranks as the state with the 7th highest climate change risk index, with a rating of 264. The state is predicted to experience extreme heat, drought, wildfire, inland flooding, and coastal flooding, as a result of climate change (Gabriele). Texas is led by republican governor Greg Abbott and has a state legislature with a Republican majority in both the House and the Senate. Of the states within this study, Texas is the least aggressive in terms of addressing climate change and environmental issues through legislation, despite the state’s high climate change risk factors. The state’s ACEEE ranking is 29, ahead of other Republican-led states, but still not as “energy efficient” as other states, according to the ACEEE ranking methodology. Texas has no greenhouse gas emissions targets and lacks any sort of cap-and-trade program, but has implemented a renewable portfolio standard (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). Texas, like a majority of states, lacks a low-carbon or alternative fuel standard. The state offers rebates for the purchase of alternative fuel vehicles, and financial assistance for low income communities to purchase alternative fuel vehicles. The industrial sector leads the state in terms of emissions, with 41% of all emissions coming from this sector (Climate-XChange).

Rhetoric

Greg Abbott, the Republican Governor of Texas, has been vocal in attacking the idea of climate change and climate legislation. Following a power crisis within the state of Texas in 2021, Abbott blamed climate policy saying it “thrust Texas into a situation where it was lacking power in a statewide basis” (Mena). Incentive policies in the transportation sector are among the most popular forms of climate legislation, but Abbott declared he would “…exclude renewables from any revived economic incentive program” (Linden). Texas does provide a rebate for the purchase or lease of alternative fuel vehicles. After California sued Exxon for damages in regard to fossil fuel use and production, Abbott wrote to the state supreme court of Texas in support of Exxon, stating "No Texan voted for any of these meddling California officials” (Hiller and Hampton).

Washington

Data

Washington ranks as the state with the 13th-highest climate change risk index, with a rating of 216 (Gabriele). According to the index, Washington will experience extreme heat, drought, wildfire, inland flooding, and coastal flooding, as a result of climate change. Washington is led by Democratic Governor Jay Inslee and has a state senate and house with democratic majorities. Washington is aggressive in terms of its pursuit of energy efficiency, according to ACEEE, and has the second highest ACEEE rating of the states in this study with a score of 11. Washington has statutory greenhouse gas emissions targets, with reduction targets set at 45% by 2030, 70% by 2040, and 95% by 2050 (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). The state is also one of the few that have implemented a cap and trade program and is one of the few states to implement an alternative fuel standard. The state also has a clean energy standard within the

electricity sector, and has electric vehicle financial incentives, which offer tax credits to companies that use electric vehicles. In terms of the state's emissions by sector, the transportation sector leads the state with 41% of the state's total emissions (Climate-XChange).

Rhetoric

Governor Jay Inslee views the climate issue in a serious light, and in an interview with Fast Company, he was asked about the severity of the issue and stated "The fact that we are on the precipice of disaster is obvious, and it's been quite obvious for some period of time. I actually believe that the thing we need now is a sense of optimism that we can build a clean-energy economy" (Peters). In the same interview he is asked about other politicians' attitudes toward the climate issue, and states "[It should be] the top priority for humanity because we are seeing such major changes in our lives that can increase fatalities" (Peters). In terms of his states' climate actions, he stated in an interview with the Washington Post "First off, I think our state has been incredibly dynamic in developing a clean energy future", and when discussing the impact his legislation has had on other legislative bodies at the state and federal level, Inslee said "There's nothing more gratifying [than] when you have other governors asking how we are getting these jobs done" (Dennis). As seen in the Fast Comapny article, he views the climate issue as severe, but pushes for optimism in fighting the issue, and echoes this sentiment in the Washington Post interview by stating "I think we need to focus on messages of confidence and optimism and a can-do spirit. And here's the reason I say that. Despair is just deadly" (Dennis). He also talks about the ability to pass legislation within his state, saying "The good news is we can go faster even than Congress has

gone. And fortunately, we have a federal system where states can go faster than the federal government" (Dennis).

Discussion

Beginning with the results from the ACEEE scoring, the Democratic-led states rank higher than the Republican-led states within this study, and considering that ACEEE uses multiple variables to create a score for each state, it is fair to say that California and Washington are more forward-thinking in terms of energy efficiency and climate-friendly legislation than are Florida and Texas. This trend will be seen throughout most, if not all of the variables discussed within this study. When we compare the rhetoric of the governors of republican states to the rhetoric of governors of democratic states, we see a contrast in how the two parties view energy efficiency. For example, where Governor Inslee takes pride in the idea of his state being "incredibly dynamic in developing a clean energy future" (Dennis). Governor Abbott blamed progressive energy legislation for exacerbating a power crisis within his state (Mena). This difference in attitude is represented in the difference between Texas and Washington in terms of their overall energy efficiency, as Washington ranks much higher than Texas, according to ACEEE.

Texas is the only state in this study that lacks greenhouse gas emissions targets, and while Florida does have executive greenhouse gas emissions targets, it is far less expansive and up to date when compared to the targets set in the states of Washington and California (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). Seeing as a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is the driving force behind the climate crisis, the degree to which states have legislated emissions targets indicates the severity to which these

states view the impact of climate change. Florida has an executive target, and although this target was set in 2008, it still sets targets to reduce emissions by 2025 and 2050, targets that are similar to even the most progressive states. Although DeSantis himself did not put this target in place, his rhetoric would indicate that he is not completely dismissive of the climate crisis, as some of those within his party are. That being said, DeSantis, while running for President, said he would oppose national greenhouse gas emissions targets (Dean et al.). This, along with some of the Governor's other rhetoric, would indicate that he understands the impact of climate change on his state, but does not take the issue as seriously on a national or global level. Contrast that to Governors Inslee and Newsom, whose states have implemented extensive emissions targets. California has targets set for 40% reductions by 2030, and complete neutrality by 2045 (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). These are aggressive targets, but the targets shed light on the severity to which the state's leaders view the climate crisis. Newsom stated that "This climate crisis is a fossil fuel crisis", and emissions targets aim to reduce the use of fossil fuels (Office of the Governor). Washington's emissions targets are not as aggressive as California's but still call for a 95% emissions reduction by 2050 (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). Texas lacks any target, and while emissions reduction targets focus on the climate crisis, much of how states reduce emissions improves overall energy efficiency, which as discussed earlier, is not a focus of Governor Abbott.

In terms of the electricity portfolio standards, Florida is the only state within this study to lack a standard altogether (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). While Texas does have a renewable portfolio standard, the standard was established in 1999,

far before Abbott's government took power. Both California and Washington have clean energy standards, and both standards have a goal of 100% clean energy within the electricity sector, both aiming for the year 2045. These standards are concerned with both limiting emissions and becoming more energy efficient, and these standards indicate that California and Washington are at the forefront of this type of legislation. Inslee has stated "I think our state has been incredibly dynamic in developing a clean energy future" which we can see through the state's clean energy standard (Dennis). This leads one to believe that Inslee, as well as Newsom, are forward-thinking in their legislation, with a focus on improving the future of their states. Again, like much of the legislation discussed within this study, electricity portfolio standards have benefits beyond the impact on the climate, and to lack an updated standard, as seen in Texas, or lack any standard at all, as seen in Florida, allows a state to fall behind in terms of its energy efficiency (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions).

The political divide in climate legislation between the Democratic states and the Republican states is also present when evaluating the state transportation policies. While only a few states have any sort of fuel standard, both Democrat-controlled states within this study have a fuel standard, while both Republican-controlled states lack a fuel standard (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). California's program functions similarly to the emissions reduction targets, as the low-carbon fuel standard requires a reduction of the intensity of fuel types over a certain period, while Washington's alternative fuel standard requires a certain percentage of fuel used to be certain types of clean fuel sources. Both states have transportation sectors with high emissions, and these fuel standards recognize and address that problem, with both an immediate

impact, and a focus on continuing to shift toward efficient fuel sources over time. This variable shows a continued trend of leaders within the two Democratically led states having a long-term view of the climate issue, and shows their willingness to create comprehensive legislation. The climate issue requires legislation that is not only aggressive enough to create a change in emissions but also needs to be reasonable in its implementation, and these fuel standards allow for a steady increase in requirements that are possible to adhere to. The rhetoric of Newsom and Inslee supports the idea of addressing the issue within their states, but also looking to address the issue on a broader scale. Abbott and DeSantis are in direct contrast to Inslee and Newsom, and the lack of a fuel standard within Texas and Florida is consistent with the lack of other climate legislation that we see in the progressive states. Abbott declared he would "…exclude renewables from any revived economic incentive program", which is even less extensive than a fuel standard similar to those in California and Washington (Linden). DeSantis declared he would ramp up the extraction of fossil fuels if he were elected President, which is essentially the opposite of encouraging the use of low-carbon and alternative fuel standards (Dean et al.).

Each state within this study has implemented some sort of clean energy vehicle policy or incentive. Washington and California have electric vehicle incentives, while Florida and Texas have clean energy vehicle incentives (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). The states vary in terms of the level of incentive, an example being Florida, which allows local governments to authorize incentives for clean energy vehicles. Although this is a clean energy vehicle policy, it is not nearly as expansive as the programs put in place by Washington and Texas. Washington offers a tax credit to

businesses that purchase electric vehicles, and to businesses that convert vehicles to run on electricity or hydrogen, but has far less expansive programs than California, which requires vehicle manufacturers to purchase zero-emission vehicle credits, as well as offers loans to businesses to install electric vehicle infrastructure, and offers rebates and incentives to both individuals and businesses who purchase zero emissions vehicles. Texas does have a rebate program for the purchase of alternative fuel vehicles, as well as a financial assistance program for low-income individuals to purchase alternative fuel vehicles. In each of these states, transportation makes up a significant portion of emissions, and incentivizing the use of clean energy vehicles, which each of these states have done to a varying degree, is a way for the population itself to have a positive impact on the environment. Making clean energy vehicles the better economic choice will encourage the use of the vehicles far more than any call to action would, and whether or not a certain amount of those driving these vehicles are doing so primarily for the environmental benefit is somewhat irrelevant. The impact is felt whether those driving the vehicles care about the environmental benefit or not.

When looking at the climate change risk index within each of these states, we can contextualize the importance of the legislation, or lack of legislation that has been previously discussed. All four of these states are well above the fifty-state climate change risk index number, meaning the implementation of climate legislation is especially necessary within these states (Gabriele). All four states are coastal, and all four are considered to be at high risk of extreme heat, drought, wildfire, inland flooding, and coastal flooding. Despite similar risks, Texas and Florida, when compared to Washington and California, have implemented far less legislation that would address the

effects of climate change. The rhetoric supports this difference, as the Democrat Governors take the issue far more seriously than the Republican Governors. As previously mentioned, the Republican Governors are essentially dismissive of the issue, with Governor DeSantis describing the climate issue as fearmongering. Inslee differs in his climate beliefs, stating "The fact that we are on the precipice of disaster is obvious, and it's been quite obvious for some period of time. I actually believe that the thing we need now is a sense of optimism that we can build a clean-energy economy" (Peters). While this rhetoric does stoke fear, we can deduce that this fear is justified, when looking at data such as the climate change risk index, which compiles a large number of variables to determine an amount of risk.

The emissions by sector also allow for a contextualization of the legislation that these states have passed. In terms of the transportation sector emissions within each state, California leads in percentage with 44%, followed by Washington at 41%, Florida at 39%, and Texas at 24% (Climate-XChange). We have seen that both California and Washington have implemented plenty of legislation addressing transportation emissions, which is important considering the amount of emissions from this sector within these states. While Texas lacks much of the legislation passed in the Democratic states, the state's transportation sector emits a much lower percentage of the state's total emissions, meaning legislation addressing these emissions may not be as important in Texas. It is unlikely that this relatively low percentage factors into the state's lack of transportation legislation because the state's highest emitting sector is the industrial sector at 41%, and there is also minimal legislation addressing emissions in general, such as emissions targets, and an up to date renewable energy portfolio

standard which would lower industrial emissions. While similar in percentage of transportation emissions, Florida differs greatly in the amount and depth of legislation within this sector. This difference in the recognition of a high-emitting sector and the proper address of the sector between the Republican and Democrat states is representative of the parties' general differences in climate change beliefs. A simple way to attack the issue within a given state would be to legislate the sectors that emit the most, which is seen with Washington and California, but lacking in Florida and Texas.

The beliefs of these governors are representative of the legislation passed within the states they govern. While the power of the Governor is limited, they are the leaders of their states and have considerable influence on the proposed and passed legislation. All four states have single-party majorities within the state government, which could limit a Republican governor's ability to pass climate legislation if they truly wanted to. Still, as we have seen through the rhetoric of DeSantis and Abbott, there is little desire to do so, and if there were a desire, these Governors could label this legislation as energy and economically efficient, without needing to mention or even care for the climate benefits. The main difference between the Republican Governors and the Democratic Governors could be a function of overall political philosophy, where those who lean left on the political spectrum are more progressive than those who lean toward the right on most issues. Newsom is forward-thinking on the issue, stating "we have proven again and again that through policy we can accelerate innovation", and while this was said in an interview regarding climate policy, it could apply to various political issues (Davenport). Inslee takes a similar approach, and when asked about his state's ability to pass climate

legislation, he stated “The good news is we can go faster even than Congress has gone. And fortunately, we have a federal system where states can go faster than the federal government” (Dennis). Again, while the focus of this statement was on climate policy, it could be applied to a broader political philosophy. While the Democrats view the issue, and many others with a sense of urgency, the Republicans are more dismissive and more willing to label an issue such as climate change as a political ploy. This is not to say that the Democrats within these studies are not politically motivated to act, but whether or not their desire to act is primarily motivated by political gain, they still pass the necessary legislation to combat climate change. An example of this politicization of the issue came when a legal battle between Exxon, a fossil fuel producer, was sued by the state of California for environmental damages. The suit made it to the Texas Supreme Court, which led to a response from Texas Governor Greg Abbott. Abbott stated “No Texan voted for any of these meddling California officials”, which gives insight into the beliefs of the Republican Governor (Hiller and Hampton). This sort of rhetoric is consistent with not only the party’s climate beliefs but overall political beliefs as well. While the Democrat-run states within this study are willing to influence and be influencedby legislation within other states, the Republican-run states desire seclusion. Not only does Abbott dismiss the climate issue, he uses it to fight a political battle against the opposing party. Again, both sides are motivated by politics to some degree, but this motivation leads to action on one side and inaction on the other.

Conclusion

Despite the scientific data supporting the severity of climate change, there is a political aspect to the issue that will continue to affect the ability of governments to properly address the issue. While state action is important, action on a much larger scale will be required as the human impact on the environment and climate continues to grow, but the politization of climate change will continue to be a massive hindrance to action on a federal level within the United States. As seen in this study, the political difference in terms of climate legislation is drastic, as California and Washington have been far more aggressive in implementing the legislation that they believe is necessary, while Texas and Florida, while not completely lacking legislation, are far more hesitant to do so. Based on this study, we can expect the democratically run states to continue to implement new legislation and adapt previous legislation, while the Republican led states will continue to fall behind.

There are limitations to this research study, mostly having to do with intent. We can look at the legislation, and even the words of state leaders, but it is difficult to understand the true intentions of these leaders. For instance, it is impossible to determine whether or not these leaders truly believe in the severity of climate change, even when looking at Inslee and Newsome. Their rhetoric would lead one to conclude that they understand the effects of climate change and the importance of addressing it through legislation, but we cannot be sure that this is not a self-serving political act. Even if it were an act, the legislation and rhetoric have a positive impact on reducing the causes of climate change, so intention is not as important with the left-leaning leaders within this study. It is more of an issue with Abbott and DeSantis, as there is a possibility that they believe in the issue more than they let on through rhetoric and legislation. In

Abbott's case, this seems highly unlikely, but certain aspects of the DeSantis rhetoric, such as his belief in the need to protect the environment within Florida, could be a sign of a right-leaning Governor who strays from his party members and constituents on this particular topic. This also seems unlikely, but true intent cannot be definitively proven. Another limitation discussed briefly in the findings has to do with overall political ideology. It is difficult to determine, for example, whether or not Texas, a state with republican supermajorities in the state house and senate, is unwilling to pass climate legislation because those in power do not believe in climate change. It could be that the lack of legislation has more to do with the idea that right-leaning governments are less likely to pass legislation in general, when compared to left-leaning governments. While this may be true of the Republican states, it is unlikely that the Democratic states would pass legislation strictly because progressive governments tend to be more open to passing legislation. They have a reasonable motive to pass climate legislation, and are willing to do so.

In future research, it would be interesting to see the potential voting implications of an aggressive climate change approach. For instance, one could poll voters within a state such as Texas, in order to determine whether or not a pro-climate change stance would change one's opinion of a political candidate to the point of impacting a vote. If a Texan agreed with Abbott on every issue, but he decided to be a climate change advocate, how would this affect his political support? This is an important consideration for understanding action or inaction in terms of the passing of climate legislation, and large voting penalties may be a deciding factor in a leader's willingness to address climate change. Looking into states that are at less risk, and that are not dominated by a

single political party would also add to the research because it would give insight into the importance with which political leaders view climate change. If the effects are not apparent or soon to be apparent within a state, what would motivate state leaders to act? Also, a comparative study between the United States and other nations would allow for a contextualization of the differences in belief in the severity of climate change. All of these considerations would expand on this research to provide a more expansive understanding of the relationship between climate change and the law.

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