



**PROGRAM ON GOVERNANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

**Bren School of Environmental Science & Management
University of California at Santa Barbara**

<http://www.gsdprogram.org>

**International Environmental Agreements
and the Problem of Earth System Governance**

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Outline

- What is the relevant universe of cases?
- How should we frame our analysis of international environmental regimes?
- What difference do these regimes make?
- How do environmental regimes change over time?



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The Universe of Cases

- International environmental agreements typically establish environmental institutions or regimes
 - But not all environmental regimes are based on formal agreements
- Scope of the universe
 - Formal arrangements vs. informal or customary practices
 - Rules on paper vs. rules in use
 - Global regimes (e.g. MEAs) vs. limited regimes
 - Public regimes vs. private regimes and mixed-actor regimes
- The idea of a tool kit
 - One size does NOT fit all



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Framing the analysis of regimes

- Two paradigms
 - The collective-action paradigm
 - The social-practice paradigm
- What difference does it make?
 - Nature of regimes – contractarian vs. agent/structure perspectives
 - Central themes – compliance vs. socialization
 - Methodology: theory building vs. empirical analysis



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Causal significance of regimes

- Two extremes
 - “our fate is largely determined by our institutions”
 - The “false promise of institutions”
- Methodological constraints
 - Small Ns, limited experiments, problems of counterfactual analysis
- Empirical research
 - Tendency to engage in case study research
 - A few larger N studies
- Emerging consensus
 - Complex causality and scope conditions
 - Variance among cases



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Institutional dynamics

- Paradox of institutional stickiness and major change
- Patterns of change
 - Progressive development
 - Punctuated equilibrium
 - Arrested development
 - Diversion
 - Collapse
- Which pattern prevails in specific cases?



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The Road Ahead

- State of play
 - We know a fair amount but we need to know a lot more
- Cutting-edge issues
 - Addressing the paradox of rising demand and declining confidence in mainstream mechanisms
 - Treating environmental regimes as complex and dynamic systems
 - Understanding complex causality
 - Accounting for institutional dynamics



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