

A Glimpse into the Storms, Food Insecurity, and Political Turmoil Resulting from the Warming of Planet Earth

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Environmental Sociology Portfolio

Puko, Timothy and Katy Stech Ferek. 2021. "World Leaders Vow to Cut Methane Emissions." *The Wallstreet Journal*, Published on November 2, 2021. Accessed on November 10, 2021
https://www.wsj.com/articles/epa-moves-to-limit-methane-emissions-from-oil-and-gas-production-11635829202?mod=Searchresults_pos17&page=1), [1419 words].

"World Leaders Vow to Cut Methane Emissions"

Summary:

This article discusses the events of the Glasgow climate summit and Biden's plans for stricter oil and gas regulations in the US. The global leaders at the summit pledged to cut down on methane emissions while the US vowed to tighten regulations on oil and natural-gas production to lower the risk of leaks of these dangerous gases. Methane is harmful for the environment because it traps roughly 85 times as much heat as carbon dioxide and is a direct contributor to climate change. According to the Global Methane Pledge, the US and the EU plan to cut methane emissions globally by 30% by 2030. They plan to encourage the use of new technology such as drones to monitor the participating countries.

Although there will be immense benefits for the climate of our planet, oil and gas companies will suffer. Following these new restrictions will cost the companies of the oil-and-gas industry \$1.5 billion by 2026. By 2032, the costs will fall to 1 billion, but the benefits will outweigh the costs in the long run. This is because limiting the harmful effects of methane and property damage due to the severe weather recently will benefit all members of society. Mr. Reghan says that "the cost of inaction is far more severe and pressing" than the costs these companies will face (Puko and Ferek, 2021).

Only about 30% of methane emissions come from the oil-and-gas industry, while the majority comes from agricultural livestock. Animals such as dairy-cattle and pigs account for about 1/3 of all methane emissions. The agency's rules do not affect the agricultural industry, so there are loopholes in the plan.

Application:

I found this article very interesting because it discussed current events of global leaders working to make a positive change. For so long, the US government has acted with a downstream approach by dealing with issues as they pop up. Now, with this Glasgow climate summit, Biden has pledged to take more of an upstream approach by requiring large firms to cut carbon emissions which will prevent some of the adverse effects of climate change. The article mentioned that the other 100 plus countries that were a part of the summit are looking to the United States for leadership. Because the US operates as a capitalist society, these solutions seem to comply with the Ecological Modernization Theory. According to my class notes, this theory is

“a neoliberal approach that says that capitalism is a founding institution and markets are a good thing” (Class Notes, “Micro-Level Theories Transition to Macro-Level”). Biden is taking this approach because although he is placing financial burdens on the large oil-and-gas companies, he is still allowing them to do business as usual. He respects the free market ideology, but he is incentivizing them to use a more cradle-to-cradle approach when doing business.

In this approach technology is also central. The article mentions how new technologies such as drones are helping monitor whether companies actually comply with the new rules. In Julian Simon’s Anti-Malthusian approach, he believes that population growth is positive because it leads to more people who produce more technology which leads to more solutions. These ideas are represented in the fact that new technologies have been developed to monitor companies and how they respond to the force to end global warming.

During class, we have spent a large amount of time discussing the different stakeholders in environmental issues. This article provides a good example of many different groups of stakeholders all having different motivations for taking action. The US government, as well as the many other governments participating in the climate summit, are working to appease the groups fighting for environmental reform without angering the large corporations. In the United States, the treadmill of production is very prevalent because we are a capitalist society. Biden wants to continue this treadmill of production by allowing the corporations to continue, but he wants to make environmental reforms as well. The other stakeholders are the large corporations that are facing the new rules. They are losing significant portions of their profits to make these reforms, and the leaders of these tend to search out opportunities to have less environmental regulations. The last important stakeholders are the environmental groups fighting to make a change, so the citizens of the US can live their lives without fear of the imminent climate change. The citizens are the stakeholders that have the power to vote for different government officials. All of the groups have different motivations, and they are willing to take different actions to achieve their goals.

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“Climate change is now the main driver of increasing wildfire weather, study finds”

Summary:

Researchers in California are now saying that climate change is the main cause of the increasing number of wildfires in the area. A recent study found that global warming was approximately 88% responsible for the atmospheric conditions causing these wildfires in the west. This is because the atmosphere is sucking up the moisture that the plants need which primes the landscape to burn. The authors then go on to discuss how the atmosphere has grown “thirsty” (Climate Change is Now the Driver of Wildfire Weather, study finds). With the continuing rising of global temperatures, there is a more severe risk of fire conditions in multiple areas of the Western part of the US.

In the past 7 years, the summers have grown hotter and more arid which is making the fire seasons more dangerous. They are looking at ways of introducing new technologies to put out the fires such as nocturnal helicopters and drones. This past summer, California has reported its hottest summer on record, its driest water year in nearly a century, and its second largest wildfire: the Dixie fire. While all of these events are alarming and surprising, the scientists are aware of how the climate responds to these increased amounts of greenhouse gasses. The article concludes with a quote from Deepti Singh, an environmental professor, when she says, “the fire risk in this region is going to be proportional to how much the Earth warms...And how much the Earth warms is dependent on how society decides to progress in terms of emissions” (Climate Change is Now the Driver of Wildfire Weather, study finds).

Application:

I found this article extremely interesting and relevant to our class because we have recently been talking about the effects of climate change on storms and disasters in the United States and around the world. This LA Times article provided a perfect example of how global warming and the increase of CO₂ in our atmosphere is causing natural disasters which displace many different people from their homes. There were a lot of different parallels between this article and the assigned class article, “As Floods Keep Coming: Cities Pay Residents to Move.” This article by Schwartz discusses how city officials are offering to buy the houses of people in flood prone areas such as Nashville. This relates to how the government is spending money on new technologies to prevent the spread of wildfires instead of preventing the wildfires in the first place. Both of the articles provide examples of how these different communities are adapting to the disasters forced upon them instead of fighting to make a difference.

In addition, both of these articles represent the leaders of the communities using an upstream approach by looking at ways to prevent the problems from becoming worse. In Nashville, they buy people’s homes from them, and in California they invent nocturnal helicopters and drones to help find and eliminate wildfires. The government spends money addressing the problem, and the community has no choice but to adapt to it. Instead of doing this,

they should use a more downstream approach by preventing the floods and wildfires in the first place by enforcing measures to end climate change.

One common quote that environmental sociologists ponder is the phrase, “there’s no such thing as a natural disaster” (Class Notes, “Natural Disasters”). After reading the LA Times article, it has become clear that the wildfires are directly linked to climate change because of the scientist’s recent studies. The article mainly focused on the mitigation of the disaster by trying to control the already existing problem. Our government takes this same approach to the disasters caused by floods and hurricanes.

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“Urban-Farming Camps Have Kids Asking, Where’s the Healthy Food?”

Summary:

This article discusses how children who attended summer camps in Harlem and the Bronx had the opportunity to grow crops and discuss the limited sources of nutritious food resources in their neighborhoods. Harlem growth is a youth development nonprofit organization that uses gardening and cooking as a tool to educate and empower the children in Harlem. The article goes on to discuss how 15 of these children walked through the neighborhood and mapped their local food landscape. Rafael Espinal Jr., a City Council member, mentions how “food justice is an issue that primarily has impacted communities of color” (Urban-Farming Camps Have Kids Asking, Where’s the Healthy Food?).

In the South Bronx, only 4% of residents meet the federal recommendation of 5 or more daily servings of fruits and vegetables. The article goes on to discuss how gentrification is affecting their community, and they are having to fight a battle to keep their land. The children express that they would like to eat healthy, but it is not always worth the travel to obtain that food. The people in charge try to get the campers to say positive things to the plants as they lay the seeds in the soil. One of the counselors described the situation as “they are living in a circumstance that they cannot control” (Urban-Farming Camps Have Kids Asking, Where’s the

Healthy Food?). Harlem is not a food desert or a food swamp because there are supermarkets in the area. Instead, it is a food apartheid because it is manmade. When the parents pick up their kids, they are able to get vegetables that they grew. This is often the only type of vegetable they get all week because they cannot afford the healthy foods at places like Whole Foods.

Application:

This article perfectly illustrates the issue of food security in the United States, especially in communities with people who are minorities. This news article made me think of Marin's article, "Chef Jonny Rhodes Built a Revered Houston Restaurant. His next mission: fighting 'food apartheid'", which goes into detail about the differences between food deserts and food apartheid. Marin describes how the issue affecting Houston is not a food desert because a desert implies an organic state of bareness. Instead, it is a food apartheid because it is the result of deliberate, systemic racism. This same concept is discussed in the news article because the lack of healthy foods in the area is not a simple coincidence.

This leads me to my next point of the environmental injustice represented by this food insecurity. The textbook defines environmental justice as the fight against "the fact that environmental problems are not distributed randomly or evenly but instead are disproportionately clustered in working-class, racially marginalized, and Native American communities" (Harrison, 2021). This type of discrimination is especially evident in the Harlem and Bronx communities that are primarily made up of minorities. These residents face food insecurity solely because of the neighborhood in which they live. Our society as a whole needs to evolve to demand better for these communities that are being disproportionately affected by food insecurity.

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Concluding Essay

Throughout this class, we have discussed the impact of the environment on society as well as the impact that society has on the environment. The different societal structures that we have drastically affect the environment around us. For example, our capitalistic society in the US leads to the Treadmill of Production which leads to great amounts of waste, but there are also great new technologies that are created out of the competitive spirit of capitalism. We have studied many different theories on how the structure of societies affects the environment, and I have found that society in the US has created many environmental problems. While the entire United States population contributes to these problems, they are disproportionately affecting the minority communities. Minority communities face food deserts and food apartheid, meaning that even though they try to obtain healthy food, it is often too expensive or too much of a hassle

to buy. In addition, our habits have caused deadly storms and disasters, such as the raging wildfires in California. Lastly, the main way to break out of these environmental disasters is to vote for people who are willing to make a difference. An example of this is Biden making environmental rules for large companies at the Glasgow climate summit. In this essay, I will dive into the environmental disasters affecting our planet, the food insecurity caused by environmental injustice, and the solution of political reform that will help get us back on the right track.

When looking at environmental issues, it is important to maintain an upstream approach. Although many people choose to believe that disasters such as flooding and fires happen of their own occurrence, they are actually the effect of the actions of human societies. According to my class notes, flooding is actually the result of “centuries of human-induced landscape changes” (Class Notes, “Storms and Natural Disasters”). The wildfires in California have similar characteristics to the floods because they are human induced as well. Fires do not simply start on their own, there has to be someone to cause them. Many people choose to practice cognitive dissonance because they admit that they are scared of climate change, but refuse to change their actions. When looking at the causes of these fires, it is important to note California’s large population. The way California’s large population chooses to deal with the fires demonstrates Julian Simon’s view about the effect of population growth on the environment. He believes that population growth leads to more people with more ideas for creative technological solutions to our problems. The vast amounts of people in California are using the water and polluting the area, but they are also developing technologies to mitigate the wildfire disasters. The article mentioned new technologies such as nocturnal helicopters and drones to manage the spread of these fires. This Anti-Malthusians view has a more positive approach because it states that more people can be good for the environment due to the fact that we are niche creators (Class Notes, “Population Growth”). The large population in California has most definitely contributed to the problem, but it is possible that they could also hold the key to fixing the problem we created.

The fires in California will only cease to exist when we move from practicing our current downstream approach of dealing with the damage to a more effective upstream approach of dealing with the causes. It is evident that California is making efforts to stop the fires with new technologies, but it would be better and less costly to use these technologies to prevent the problem in the first place. This upstream management system must come from the government. This first article in my portfolio discussed how different political leaders are making efforts to drastically reduce methane emissions of large corporations. If these same leaders choose to tackle the causes of these problems, they will save themselves a lot of money that they are currently having to use in disaster management. Another area in which there is much room for improvement is how these disasters are disproportionately affecting minority communities.

According to the textbook, since the 1980’s environmental sociologists have studied environmental racism due to the fact that race is the best predictor of where one can find hazardous waste sites in the US. Researchers created the term “environmental racism” after studying the “links between pollution and race via studies of the proximity of hazardous waste

sites to communities of color” (Pellow, 2021). This led environmental sociologists to begin fighting for environmental justice which is the “goal or vision in which no community is unfairly burdened with environmental harms and where social justice and ecological sustainability prevail” (Pellow, 2021). One example of people making steps to achieve this goal is represented in the news article “Urban-Farming Camps Have Kids Asking, Where’s the Healthy Food?”. This article describes a camp in the poor areas of New York that helps children garden and find access to healthier food options. The counselors use gardening and cooking as a tool to empower and educate these young children to have a better life. While the counselors are not changing laws, or going to protests everyday, they are still making a massive impact on their community. By educating the children on what kinds of foods they should be eating, they are mitigating the impact of the discrimination into which the children had been born. They helped the children realize they were in a food desert, and they helped them find solutions to the problem.

All citizens can choose to act in different ways to make a positive impact on improving the climate, but the best way we will make a lasting impact is through significant political reform. Having people in power who are dedicated to eradicating climate change through an upstream approach will be extremely beneficial to the future of our planet. The Glasgow climate summit provides a perfect example of the opportunities that political figures have to create regulations that could save our environment. Social movements also help make a change by inspiring political leaders to act. It is not a coincidence that the Glasgow climate summit occurred when average citizens started getting concerned about climate change. According to my class notes, Olson believes that it is completely normal to be involved in social change because “protestors are rational” (Class Notes, “Social Movements”). When people choose to combine their different experiences and come together to demand change, they are often very successful when joining forces. To make a difference, it is important to vote for political figures who are committed to environmental change as well as joining in social movements to push these people in power to make decisions.

Ultimately, it is essential for us to change our personal actions to be more environmentally friendly, as well as looking at the bigger picture by voting in the right people and joining causes. As a society, we all come together from different backgrounds that shape our experiences and affect how we make decisions. It has been extremely interesting to hear everyone’s different perspectives about environmental issues throughout our class discussions. The main takeaway from this class for me has been that our impact on the environment as humans is severe and is causing environmental disasters such as wildfires, flooding, and hurricanes. In addition, different groups of people, specifically minority communities, are disproportionately affected by these environmental disasters which hurt them physically, mentally, and financially. While this can be depressing to think about, there is a silver lining that it is not too late to change our actions for the better. Large events such as the Glasgow climate summit and different social movements may be able to make a positive environmental impact and limit the damage we have already caused. It is important to focus on the tools we have to

make a difference and utilize them effectively after realizing how much our actions affect all of nature, which we humans are in fact a part of.

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