

Book Review

Can Democracy Handle Climate Change?

By Daniel J. Fiorino

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Debating issues in environmental politics and those in environmental ethics are inseparably intertwined with each other especially in this urgent time of finding the best policy for dealing with global problems of environmental loss and climate change. It is widely believed that taking a good care of those countries with much poverty is an ethical requirement for international aids, and hopefully it yields a result of better environmental quality for the entire globe.

In the present book written by Daniel J. Fiorino, even though it is intended to be studied by readers in environmental policy, it can be considered a positive answer to the critical question in climate ethics whether democracy is a suitable political regime for fighting with global challenges of climate change. Among debates in climate ethics, there is a question whether long process of democratic election and democratic-driven governments would be promptly suitable solutions.¹ Moreover, it is likely that levels of democratic ideology that differ between countries can lead to failures of taking action in coping with the problems efficiently according to world policies of climate change.² Fiorino disagrees with all of the things, and he assures us that "...there is no reason to conclude that any particular version of democracy is incapable of handling climate change," (p. 87).

¹ Stephen M. Gardiner and David A. Weisbach, *Debating Climate Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016) p. 25.

² Marianne Kneuer, "Who is Greener? Climate Action and Political Regimes: Trade-offs for National and International Actors," *Democratization* Volume 19 Issue 5 (2012), pp. 865-888.

Why environmental politics cannot be separable from democratic consideration when getting into the debates of what appropriate political regime it would be for making attempts to engage with international cooperative strategies dealing with global climatic changes? Fiorino starts with a study of discontentment in democracy especially in the aspect of its irrelevance when it comes to term with scientifically appropriate knowledge of climate change based on majority's consent. Moreover, Trump's political power stemming from democratic springboard in the United States is considered an obstruction of successful global cooperative effort of integration. Contrastively, authoritarian government in China is mentioned that it can make a better and faster move in environmental concerns (pp. 1-4).

However, can the environmental authoritarianism do it better? Fiorino explains that strategic policy is not enough to cope with this global issue because "it depends on the ability and willingness to act" (p. 31). Why democracies are eventually far better than any other political regimes? That is because the pluralistic conceptions of democratic ideology in different countries come with sectors that are to maintain the differences for each country's appropriateness in political administration (pp. 62-88). From this point, it can be interpreted from what Fiorino is trying to say, that if it turns out to be that just one ideology is instead accepted as normal line of global consideration, there will rather be more of potential risks of failure in coping with the climate change when that environmental authoritarian ideology turns out to be false. Fiorino has pointed out that for us to tackle with the climate change is like we are going to fight in the battlefield of an endless war (p. 36). What we should do is that we have to fight our best by using the ideological instrument that can best service our survivalism. It has been proved that democracies can stand the test of time in the long run because it opens itself to a variety of strategies. In other words, it is good for human prosperity and freedom of expression (pp. 34-35).

Democracy can handle the climate change problems because innovative technologies can be varied from private sector organizations; a number of options are therefore available to us (pp. 96-97). Contrastively, authoritarian populism as found in Venezuela can lead to failure in solving economic and political problems, let alone effective political administration of climate policy. This is because there are none of powerful institutional constraints that can orient its development policy (p. 109). Democracy will finally be the option that guarantees our sustainable quality of life (p. 117).

Could it be that democracy should receive its stand-alone role in coping with climate change? An empirical research in climate policy points out that there is some sort of conditional effect from a relationship between democratic strength of political system with lower corruption rates in a country and the rates of reduction of CO₂ emissions in that country.³ Democracy alone is not enough; it should go hand in hand with uncorrupt administrations.⁴ However, is this decisive line of argument to get against Fiorino's democracy thesis and its strength in tackling climate change? He would rather say no to the objection. Fiorino offers his argument to show that on practical grounds democracies are more advantageous with their necessary administrative qualities, not to show that only democratic regime is solely the answer (pp. 112-113).

There is only some point in this book that I consider not complete enough in giving us the answer. The point is that if it is true that the issue of how to cope with the problem of climate change is to be here with us for all time, and democracy is now the best option of political ideologies to deal with the issue, shouldn't it be inferred that democracy must always be accepted all through the course of human history either? If this is an indirect way of saying that democracy should exist for always, then we would have no more reason to prefer non-democratic regimes to democracies. However, should we say that this line of reasoning, democracy should exist for always because it is the most efficient strategy to cope with the perpetual problem of climate change, is acceptable? I think it is partially unacceptable because it is stemming from a confusion to conflate "efficient strategy" with "perpetual strategy." This is some point in Fiorino's proposal that I consider inadequate in strength of reasoning.

Nevertheless, Fiorino's book is small in size but powerful in quality. It is good for every sector to cope up with any kinds of administrative task, not just only those in specific realm of the public policy of climate change.

³ Marina Povitkina, "The Limits of Democracy in Tackling Climate Change," *Environmental Politics* Volume 27 Issue 3 (2018), p. 421.

⁴ Ibid., p. 427.

References

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