

STUDENT PAPER SERIES

33



**Winds of Change?** An Analysis  
of Regional Variations in Corporate  
Discourse on Climate Change

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Master's in International Relations

Academic year 2016-2017



INSTITUT  
BARCELONA  
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INTERNACIONALS

## **ABSTRACT**

Despite their centrality to the problem of anthropogenic climate change, the discourses of business actors are widely neglected in the study of this topic. Drawing on Maarten Hajer's social-constructivist framework of discourse analysis, this work aims to fill this gap. Its focus is on the EU and US as two of the world's largest and most developed economies. The analysis of documents published between 2002 and 2016 by umbrella business associations from each region, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, provides a comprehensive exploration of temporal and regional variations in discursive practices. The findings reveal a number of noteworthy cross-regional trends, such as the widespread prevalence of a 'win-win' discourse of Ecological Modernisation, and an outright rejection of administratively-focused Green Governmentality. This rejection, combined with a recent upsurge in nationalist sentiment across both regions, calls into question the willingness of business actors to support global, non-market-based climate policies. The analysis also illustrates the existence of far higher levels of scepticism towards climate science and policy in US corporate discourses than in those of their transatlantic counterparts.

## **KEYWORDS**

Climate Change, Corporate Discourse, Business Association, Social Constructivism, EU, US, Ecological Modernisation, Green Governmentality, Climate Scepticism

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My thanks and appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Oriol Costa Fernández, for his insightful guidance and encouragement throughout this project; to IBEI and Hertie School of Governance for enriching educational experiences which moulded this research; many thanks also to Janina Kempf for months of moral support; to Ronan Smith and Molly Brady-Martin for proofreading and their valuable feedback; last but not least, thanks to Morgan for his patience and advice.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

As the world faces the increasing threat of anthropogenic climate change and is today dominated by market economies, the importance of business actors in shaping our collective future cannot be overstated. The fact that just one hundred firms have been the source of more than 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988 (Griffin, 2017) makes the centrality of corporations to the problem of a changing climate abundantly clear. In recent years, the need for urgent action in order to tackle this issue has crystallised and the arena of climate politics has gained prominence worldwide. Discourse lies at the heart of the process of social construction which has led to development of climate change as a widely accepted reality based on shared meanings. It is crucial to explore the powerfully constitutive role played by language in framing this problem, and thereby shaping the actions which are deemed possible to tackle it. The climate discourses employed by highly significant corporate actors thus make for a particularly relevant, yet largely-neglected, area of research.

In the Western, industrially-developed world, two geographical regions - the EU and US - have been central to the development of climate politics over the past two decades. These regions share some key commonalities; both have similar liberal political values and comparable levels of economic development in economies of roughly the same size (Selin & VanDeveer, 2012). However, they have differed significantly in their approach to tackling climate change, with the EU taking a far more proactive stance than its transatlantic counterpart. This divergence, along with the economic power of both regions, makes them ideal subjects for an analysis of corporate discourses on climate. In an effort to map out the key developments in this area, this thesis answers the question: *how did corporate discourses on climate evolve in the EU and US between 2002 and 2016?* It seeks to explore discursive variations over time and between the two regions. The selected timeframe represents a formative period for climate politics in the two regions studied, as well as on a global level. By examining stances forwarded by umbrella business associations and using the most up-to-date available data, this analysis thus offers a unique insight into the constitutive role played by corporate linguistic acts in shaping the social reality of climate change.

This thesis employs a social-constructivist theoretical framework, drawing on the ideas of Hajer (1993, 1995) who expounds a discursive analytical approach to the study of environmental politics. Following an anti-essentialist ontology, it rejects the notion of one reality governed by immutable natural laws, instead assuming the existence of various, socially-constructed realities (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005). Moving away from pure positivism, such an approach does not attempt to provide causal explanations or predictions for future occurrences, but rather identifies changing discursive productions of climate politics and their effects in shaping this realm (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2016). Linguistic framing is central to this theory and a key concept forwarded by Hajer is that of 'story-

lines', or narratives which unify a vast array of discursive elements of any one topic. By reducing the complexity of a problem and overcoming fragmentation between similar but not fully cohesive narratives, story-lines constitute a powerful political device.

In order to analyse variations in corporate discourses on climate change, a three-pronged discursive analytical framework based on the work of Bäckstrand & Lövbrand (2006, 2016) is employed. This framework facilitates a qualitative analysis which involves the identification of dominant story-lines and the discourses to which they belong. A quantitative analysis is then carried out to uncover the frequency of occurrences of each discourse across time and region. This three-discourse study is additionally complimented by an analysis which traces the emergence of a sentiment of nationalism in corporate stances on climate.

Following this introductory section, the paper then presents a review of the dominant literature exploring corporate involvement in climate politics. The third chapter delves into the theoretical framework which shapes this thesis and lays out the three-pronged framework of climate discourses. Next, the process of case selection and data collection is explained, along with the qualitative and quantitative research methods used for the discourse analysis. The fifth chapter provides an in-depth examination and analysis of the main findings, and is followed, in chapter six, by a further discussion of how these link with dominant literature. Finally, the work closes with some concluding remarks.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW - CORPORATE ACTORS IN CLIMATE POLITICS**

Over the past two decades, as the complexities of effectively tackling climate change have crystallised, scholarly attention has shifted towards the role of non-state actors in the climate regime. Perhaps unsurprisingly, amongst these non-state actors, particular attention has been paid to the role of corporate actors, with scholars taking a broad range of approaches to the topic. Clapp and Meckling (2013) examine the variety of avenues of influence which business actors exert over the policy-making process for climate and the global environment. Levy and Newell (2002, 2005) tackle a similar subject but take a political economy approach, leveraging neo-Gramscian theory in their analysis of the role of business in international environmental governance. Other academics have delved into the political strategies of multinational firms in a variety of institutional contexts (Kolk & Pinkse, 2007) and studied how corporations leverage their representative NGOs at international negotiations (Vormedal, 2008).

At the European regional level, a significant body of work exists on the involvement of business actors in EU climate policy. Gullberg (2008) compares the lobbying activities of corporate associations with those of environmental groups. While Coen (2005) investigates the mechanisms

through which large firms influence the agenda-setting and policy formulation process in Brussels and member states. Others have examined industry influence on a particular policy-making process. Markussen & Svendsen's 2005 work, based on the 2003 directive for establishing a Greenhouse Gas emission allowance trading scheme, indicated that dominant corporate interest groups did indeed influence the final design of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS). Similarly, in their 2015 study, Fagan-Watson, Elliot and Watson, analysed two cases: the consultation on the Green Paper for the EU 2030 Framework for climate and energy policies and another on structural options to strengthen the EU ETS.

Across the Atlantic, there has been less explicit focus on industry influence upon US climate policy. Some scholars have studied the strategies employed by corporate actors to shape the political debate and rule-making on global warming (Layzer, 2007; Coglianese, 2007). However, for the most part, literature has tended to take a comparative approach to this topic, exploring similarities or differences between the US and EU. Levy and Newell's 2000 work seeks to explain the factors which shape the positions taken by companies on each side of the Atlantic on environmental issues in general. The authors assert that social-cultural, political-institutional and corporate-strategic factors reinforce one another to affect stances. An interesting finding from their research was an overall growing convergence between the positions taken by corporations in both regions. In a later analysis, Meckling (2008) narrows the focus purely to climate policy, comparing regulatory preferences of EU and US business associations, and similarly identifying a narrowing gap between them.

Various academics have taken a more discursive approach in their studies of climate change and its associated policies. There is, however, a dearth of work which explicitly examines the discursive positioning of corporate actors on the topic (see Rutherford, 2006 for an exception). The existing literature on general climate discourse ranges in its focus from the construction of anthropogenic climate change as a security threat (Detraz & Betsill, 2009; Hayes & Knox-Hayes, 2014), to an overview of the discourse of climate scepticism (Hoffmann, 2011) and evaluations of diverging discourses on the level of urgency with which climate change needs to be tackled (Risbey, 2008; Liverman, 2009). Numerous other scholars have analysed the media's role in the framing of climate issues and explored how the narratives promulgated by such actors come to influence both public opinion and climate policy (Boykoff, 2007; Boykoff, 2008; Grundmann & Krishnamurthy, 2010; Sonnett, 2010).

As outlined above, a vast array of literature exists on the influence and interests of corporate actors in the climate regime, at both an international and regional level. Nonetheless, there has been little attention paid to the discursive positioning employed by such actors in their attempts to frame this issue of vital importance. This work seeks to fill this gap. With a narrow focus and using a social



constructivist discursive approach, it aims to map out the dominant corporate discourses of two of the world's most significant powers, examining how they evolved throughout a formative period for climate policy. Moving away from the purely positivist approach taken by the majority of scholars writing on this topic, this work's critical analysis provides an insight into how businesses contribute to the social construction and shared meanings of the complex problem of climate change.

### **3. THEORY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 A Social-Constructivist Approach to Discourse Analysis**

This research draws on the theoretical framework of Maarten Hajer, employing a discursive approach to content analysis. In his seminal work (1995), Hajer outlines his social constructivist take on the study of environmental politics, challenging traditional realist perspectives which view interests and power as fixed and instead underscoring the constitutive power of ideas and language. Following a Foucauldian tradition<sup>1</sup> of discourse analysis, such an approach is concerned with the process of social construction through which problems and their solutions are defined, as well as how the institutionalisation of certain ideas creates standards of appropriate behaviour (Hajer, 1995). A discourse is taken to be a “specific ensembles of ideas, concepts and categorisation that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (Hajer, 1995: 45). Story-lines, narratives, frames and other linguistic elements found in discourses are seen to shape debates and form a pattern within these discourses. Discourse analysis is thus employed as “the method of finding and illuminating that pattern, its mechanisms and its political effects” (Hajer, 2009: 60).

Hajer contends that the discursive practices behind policy-making constitute an important social phenomenon, which is itself deserving of scholarly attention (1995). The creation of policies not only involves the development of a practical solution to a specific problem, but is in fact “the dominant way in which modern societies regulate latent social conflicts” and is necessarily prefaced by the redefinition of the given social phenomenon (ibid: 2). This is nowhere more so the case than in the realm of environmental politics, wherein the issues and problems at play often contain inherent latent social conflict. Following this logic, climate policies must therefore not be viewed as purely neutral mechanisms of regulation, but rather the manifestation of discursive struggles in which certain actors are empowered and certain conceptions of reality are favoured (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Discourse analysis provides an appropriate analytical tool as it bridges the linguistic elements and

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault's approach to discourse analysis emphasizes the importance of society's relationships of power, as expressed through linguistic practices. Through the production of knowledge, discourse is taken to be a mediator and tool of power (Foucault, 1972).

institutional dimensions of policy-making (ibid). Hajer's discursive framework is particularly useful for understanding the role which discourse plays in both change and permanence of political realities. Such an approach can be utilised to explain shifts in narratives or policies, while also offering insight into the power of the status quo.

A theoretical concept forwarded by Hajer which is particularly relevant for this work is that of discursive 'story-lines', or narratives through which an issue is debated. A story-line "is a generative sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena" (Hajer, 1995: 56). In unifying the vast array of discursive elements of any one topic (such as climate change), a story-line constitutes a political device which can overcome fragmentation and reduce the complexity of a problem. Actors often use such discursive devices to position themselves and to attribute concepts of 'blame' or 'responsibility' elsewhere, and the proliferation of a new story-line may re-order understandings, resulting in political change (ibid). It can be said that story-lines, and the discourses to which they belong, are central to the social construction of a given problem and to the establishment of a dominant social and moral order. For this reason, story-lines and discourses constitute the units for investigation in this analysis.

### **3.2 A Three-Pronged Framework of Climate Discourses**

The discursive analysis carried out in this thesis is informed by a three-pronged analytical framework of dominant climate discourses identified by Bäckstrand and Lövbrand in their 2006 work. The authors, drawing upon Hajer's approach to discourse analysis, highlight three main discourses found in debates on climate change and its associated policies. The first is that of 'Ecological Modernisation' (EcoMod) which holds at its core the idea that economic growth is inherently compatible with environmental protection and which therefore advances a liberal market order (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Supporters of this discourse expound a 'win-win' story-line, viewing climate change as a problem which should be tackled through technological innovation and the "greening of industrial production" (ibid: 53). EcoMod decouples environmental degradation from economic growth and emphasises the need for flexible and cost-effective market-based mechanisms for climate change mitigation. At the heart of this discourse lies the notion of a 'commodification of climate change', seen in the implementation of mechanisms such as carbon trading.

The second climate discourse recognised in Bäckstrand and Lövbrand's analysis is 'Green Governmentality' (GG). Unlike EcoMod, this discourse is informed by an administrative rather than an economic rationality (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Proponents of the GG viewpoint see climate change as a collective-action problem which necessitates a coordinated international policy approach. Such an approach tends to include features such as professionalised resource management, global

carbon target-setting and administrative monitoring (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2016). By framing climate change as an issue which requires tackling through a form of global managerialism, GG accords great significance to professional expert networks and the administrative state (ibid). The central themes found in this discourse thus centre around the idea of legally-binding targets, monitoring activities and global climate stewardship.

The third and final climate change discourse observed by the authors is that of Civic Environmentalism, which challenges many of the core tenets of the two discourses mentioned above. Civic Environmentalism can be described as a ‘bottom-up’ approach which centres on the concepts of democratic efficiency and climate justice, calling for more inclusive participation of those groups which are directly affected by climate change in the processes of policy-making (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). The more radical streams of this discourse include a deep scepticism of the power structures such as capitalism, patriarchy, sovereignty which are seen to shape contemporary climate governance (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2016).

Given that this study solely explores the narratives forwarded by corporate interest groups, it is assumed that civic environmentalism, as a radical, grassroots stance challenging the core tenets of the capitalist system, would not feature. For the purpose of this analysis, Bäckstrand & Lövbrand’s framework is instead enhanced with the addition of another discourse - that of climate science and policy scepticism (CS), as elaborated by Hoffmann (2011). Hoffmann contends that there exists a deep cultural clash over the reality of climate change and that academics’ neglect of the sceptic movement thwarts our ability to fully understand the landscape of debates on climate politics (2011). In taking a blinkered view which focuses only on those who accept the threat of climate change and call for mitigating action, we risk excluding more sceptical actors who also partake in the policy debate, and whose discourse remains extremely relevant to the framing of the problem and its solutions.

This third, CS discourse, includes three key story-lines. The first is a deep distrust of scientific findings on the issue of climate change and of the scientific process itself. Climate sceptics often cast doubt upon widely accepted peer-review practices, citing the public funding of science as indicative of a corrupt system in which journal editors only publish works which fall into line with their own viewpoint and that of the government (ibid). The second CS story-line labels climate policies as premature or unrealistic. This includes systematic calls to delay action and criticisms of measures as being unfeasible or damaging. Such a stance can be seen as a legitimate way to reject climate action without questioning the science behind it. Finally, the third story-line is one which expresses explicit support for the continued use of fossil fuels. While the second and third CS story-lines diverge slightly from a traditional conception of climate scepticism, this work takes a broader perspective

which also encompasses scepticism of climate policies, because such a sentiment is viewed as another means of expressing a reluctance to act on climate change.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

Having presented the theoretical and analytical framework which guide this work, attention now turns to the methodology used to carry out the analysis. This chapter details the case selection process, along with a discussion of how the data was collected, and closes by offering an insight into both the qualitative and quantitative research methods employed.

### **4.1 Case Selection and Data Collection**

This thesis takes the discourses of the US Chamber of Commerce (USCC) and BusinessEurope (BizEur) as a proxy for corporate stances in the US and EU respectively. Large, umbrella business associations act as a mouthpiece for firms of all sizes and from a wide range of industries, so can thus be assumed to represent the dominant corporate discourses on climate. Data which was voluntarily reported by companies and collated by the Carbon Disclosure Project reveals that 61% of all companies, and 77% of the largest 500 companies in the world, use trade associations to lobby on climate policy (Fagan-Watson et al., 2015). It should be noted that corporations are not one homogenous group, but vary in terms of the positions they take on the issue of climate change, and consequently also in the discourse they employ when engaging with such an issue. As a result, the groups taken as a proxy in this work do not provide a perfect reflection of the views of all corporations in any region, a fact which impacts upon the validity of the research. However, given the infeasibility of collating the vast range of corporate discourses on the topic, using data from large, well-established and dominant business associations offers the most accurate available data for analysis.

The reasons justifying the selection of USCC and BizEur as the specific associations chosen are manifold. Firstly, they each constitute the largest and most general business associations in their respective region, encompassing many sectors.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, both groups have been vocal on the issue of climate over the past twenty years. They regularly publish position papers, public letters and speeches on the topic which provide ideal material for a discursive content analysis of this type. Finally, they are both very well-established organisations, having existed for many decades - USCC was founded in 1912 and BusinessEurope in its earliest form came into existence in 1949. Their long-standing history results in both associations having built up strong networks of influence in their respective policy-making institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> USCC is the largest business organization in the world, representing more than 3 million businesses, while BizEur represents the interests of 39 national business and industry associations.

As mentioned, in order to map out corporate discourses on climate change in each region, documents published by USCC and BizEur are analysed. In total, the analysis examines 18 USCC documents and 22 BizEur documents published between 2002 and 2016.<sup>3</sup> This quantity of primary documents was designed to ensure a similar sample size from each interest group, and an even spread across the timeframe. The motivations for focusing on this specific timeframe are twofold. Firstly, the realm of climate politics in the Western world underwent significant developments during this 15-year period, as the topic gained traction and became a mainstream area of political concern. Secondly, from the more practical perspective of data availability, the chosen business associations provide an online record of their publications from 2002 onwards.

The analysed documents include position papers, public letters, speeches, and press releases and their selection was informed by numerous additional criteria<sup>4</sup>. First and foremost, the centrality of the topic of climate change or climate policy in the document was taken into account. The analysis includes documents which posit corporate positions on both internal (within the EU or US) and external climate policy, as the two are often deeply interrelated and may inform one another. Secondly, the quality of the documents was factored into the selection. Texts which predominantly report facts and figures were excluded, as were those which were too short to allow for meaningful analysis on the frequency of discourses. Documents which solely deal with one specific policy or law were also generally avoided, as those with a more general focus on climate were favoured. One limitation to the collection of data is that the available documents from certain years within the timeframe did not meet the requirements outlined above and therefore data is lacking for some years (2007, 2011).

## **4.2 Research Methods**

This work combines qualitative and quantitative research methods in a discursive content analysis. A qualitative analysis of the primary documents is undertaken to uncover their central discourses and delve into the dominant story-lines upon which these discourses are built. Guided by the analytical framework outlined in the previous chapter, a manual coding of the documents is undertaken. A number of story-lines found in each of the three discourses outlined in the theoretical framework - Ecological Modernisation (EcoMod), Green Governmentality (GG) and Climate Science and Policy Scepticism (CS) – provide the coding structure for this part of the analysis. Further details on the break-down of this coding process can be found in appendix B. It should be noted that while a clear procedure is followed for coding, the fact that it is carried out manually necessarily means that the analysis entails some level of subjectivity which could impact upon the reliability of the work.

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<sup>3</sup> Documents were retrieved from the respective organisations' websites. US Chamber of Commerce: <https://www.uschamber.com/environment> and BusinessEurope: <https://www.businesseurope.eu/publications>

<sup>4</sup> See appendix A for a full list of primary documents analysed.

Alongside the qualitative content analysis, a quantitative analysis is also undertaken in order to ascertain the frequency of each discourse and its constituent story-lines across the two regions and over time. Based on the assumption that the relative number of occurrences of any particular story-line correlates with the significance of that narrative for the actor concerned, the frequency of each story-line per document is analysed (Hermann, 2008). The quantitative analysis begins with an examination of the documents in which the number of sentences which contain an argument in each text is counted. An ‘argumentative sentence’ is here taken to mean one which includes a normative statement or judgement. This may involve presenting a clear stance on an issue, providing a suggestion, calling for specific action or presenting a warning about future occurrences. Sentences which lay out hard facts and figures or are purely descriptive are excluded. Once the number of argumentative sentences per document is determined, the occurrences of story-lines per document are then counted. Finally, their frequency is calculated as a percentage of the argumentative sentences and these findings are interpreted accordingly.

While it is difficult to verify concretely the assumption that the frequency of occurrence of a story-line correlates with the level of significance of that story-line for a given actor, it is highly reasonable given the approach taken to observe story-lines. Rather than using a word-counting technology which would ignore the context in which a term or phrase is used, the manual judgemental method of classification captures a more nuanced picture of the linguistic practices of the relevant corporate actor.

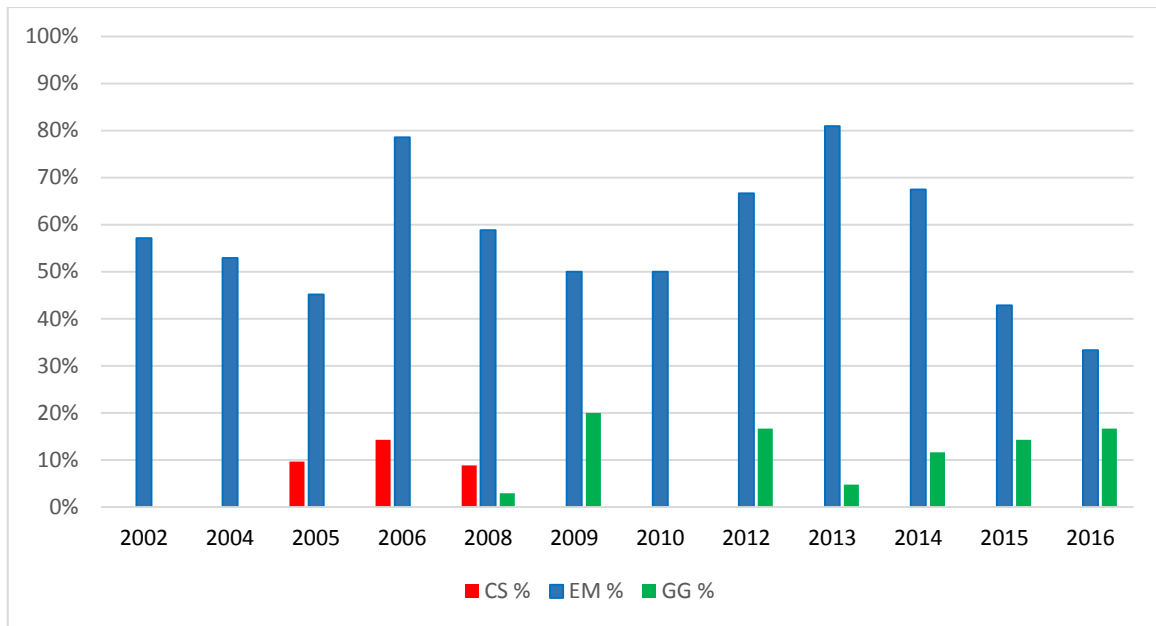
## **5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

This chapter opens with an examination of the high-level trends in variations of the three discourses found in the primary analysis of the texts. It then takes a closer look at some of the most noteworthy findings, offering a breakdown of the two most dominant discourses into their constituent story-lines and examining the language used therein. Finally, it provides an insight into the occurrences of a nationalist sentiment in EU and US corporate stances on climate change.

### **5.1 Main Trends in Discourse Variation Over Time and Region**

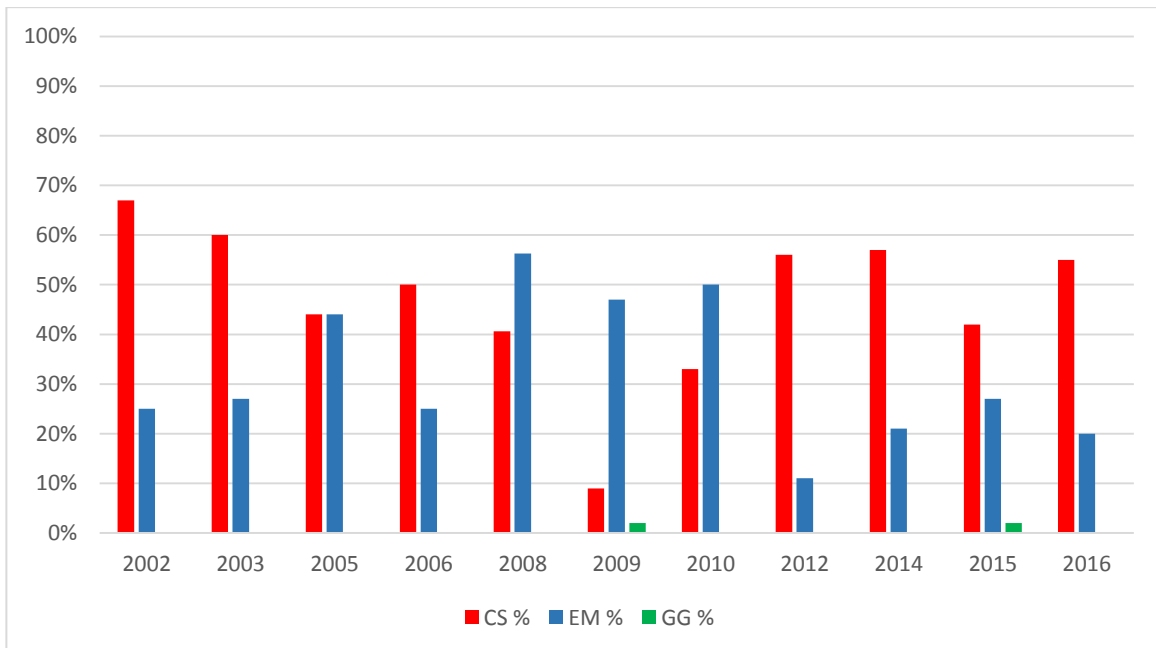
The analysis of variations in frequency of each of the three main discourses across time and between the two regions reveals numerous interesting observations. Firstly, a striking takeaway from a comparison of Figure 1 and 2 is the almost total absence of a discourse of GG across both regions. In the EU, the GG discourse did gain a low level of traction in recent years, however, its significance is dwarfed by the dominance of the EcoMod discourse. Across the Atlantic, the discourse of GG has been almost completely neglected by USCC, with only negligible occurrences of it found during two of the years studied (2010 and 2015).

Figure 5.1: Frequency of occurrence of 3 main discourses: EU (as % of argumentative sentences)<sup>5</sup>



Source: Author's own analysis of primary documents published by BizEur

Figure 5.2: Frequency of occurrence of 3 main discourses: US (as % of argumentative sentences)



Source: Author's own analysis of primary documents published by USCC

<sup>5</sup> In some years, the total adds up to under 100% because a small percentage of argumentative sentences did not pertain to these three discourses i.e. they were disparate individual arguments or else pertained to nationalism (see section 5.2).

A second standout observation from this high-level analysis is the prevalence of an EcoMod discourse, as the overall most dominant of the three discourses. In Europe, it has not been significantly challenged by any other discourse and has remained at a consistently high percentage of all argumentative sentence throughout the selected timeframe. In the US, however, EcoMod does not hold quite the same dominance, with the CS discourse featuring heavily alongside it. This dovetails nicely to a third and final noteworthy observation garnered from the analysis depicted in Figure 1 and 2 – a large disparity in levels of CS between the two regions examined. While some minor sentiments of CS were recorded in the earlier years in Europe, this discourse petered out completely almost a decade ago. Interestingly, in the US, very different results are observed as corporate discourses seem to have been quite consistently based on narratives of CS.

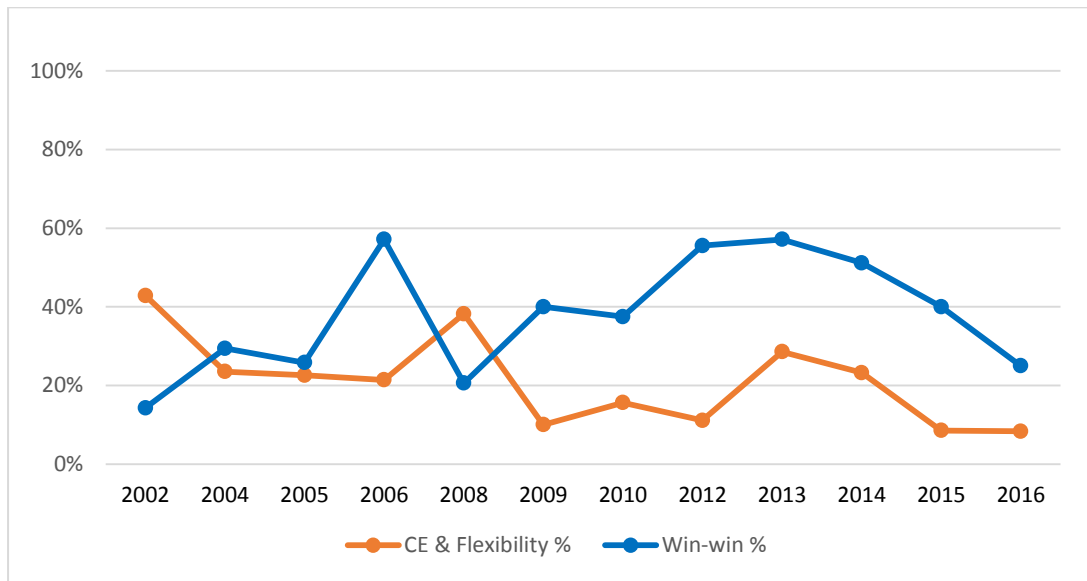
The three key observations highlighted above raise some intriguing questions and each warrants a deeper examination. In the following sections, they will be delved into. Starting with a breakdown of EcoMod into its constituent story-lines and an examination of their variations across time in the EU and US. Next, given the dominance of the CS discourse in the US, the frequency of its main story-lines found in USCC documents are examined. Finally the widespread rejection of GG is discussed.

### ***5.1.a Ecological Modernisation: The Dominance of a ‘Win-Win’ Story-Line***

Ecological Modernisation (EcoMod) is found to be the most dominant of the three discourses over aggregated time and regional variations. The salience of this discourse calls for a further examination which entails a breakdown of it into two main story-lines and an analysis of the variations of these story-lines across time and geography. The results of this analysis are found in Figure 3 and 4. The first story-line articulated within the EcoMod discourse is one which emphasises the importance of the cost-effectiveness and flexibility (CE-flex) of market-based climate mechanisms which are informed by an economic rationality. A second, ‘win-win’ story-line is also found within the EcoMod discourse. This ‘win-win’ narrative highlights the synergies between climate protection and economic growth, framing technological advancement as the key solution to the problem of climate change. This second story-line can also be thought of as a ‘no regrets’ perspective. That is, it frames certain climate actions as being low-risk and attractive strategies because they generate net social or economic benefits irrespective of whether or not climate change occurs (Heltberg et al., 2009).

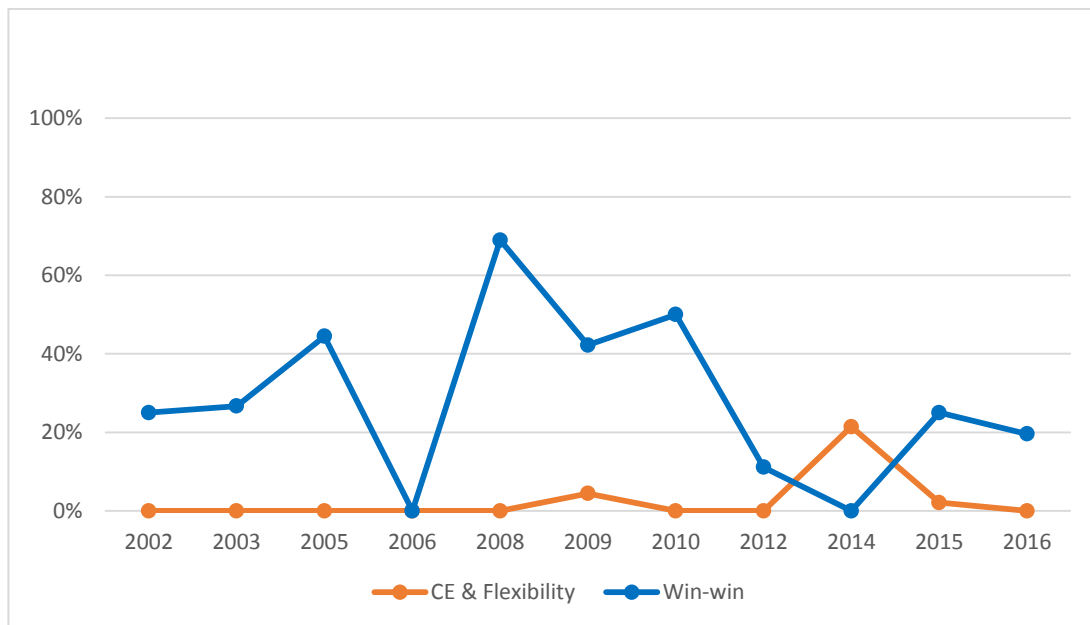


Figure 5.3: Breakdown of EcoMod Occurrences by Story-Line: EU (as % of total argumentative sentences)



Source: Author's own analysis of primary documents published by BizEur

Figure 5.2: Breakdown of EcoMod Occurrences by Story-Lines: US (as % of total argumentative sentences)<sup>6</sup>



Source: Author's own analysis of primary documents published by USCC

As the results shown in Figure 4 illustrate, in the US, the 'win-win' story-line has been far more dominant than that of cost-effectiveness and flexibility, throughout the period studied. In fact, in only a negligible number of instances did USCC refer to a need for measures to be low-cost or flexible. One possible explanation for this may be the dominance of the CS discourse in the US. If corporate

<sup>6</sup> As certain documents are rather short in length (e.g. that analysed for USCC in 2006), the available data affects the validity of results making it harder to draw meaningful conclusions.

actors are focused on highlighting the uncertainty of the science behind climate change and labelling suggested actions as premature, a discussion of the characteristics of potential mechanisms would be neither necessary nor logical. Indeed, if they were to engage in a debate about the most suitable way to design measures, USCC would be legitimising the need to take action against climate change. Interestingly, the almost complete absence of a CE-flex story-line and the dominance of the win-win one demonstrates that American corporate actors seem unwilling to defend climate policies without justifying them in economic terms. They rely on a narrative which promotes green growth and underscores how technological advancements can create jobs and boost the economy, framing the mission of tackling climate change as a secondary concern.

In the EU, the ‘win-win’ story-line is also more prevalent than that of cost-effectiveness and flexibility. However, the discrepancy between the two is not nearly as pronounced as in the US. This indicates that EU industry actors are more willing to engage in discussion regarding the details of designing climate policy. As almost no traces of a CS discourse were found in BizEur documents, this supports the idea that the existence of a CS discourse in the US may be connected to the dominance of the win-win story-line within the EcoMod discourse.

Taking a closer look at the language used in both EcoMod story-lines reveals some interesting trends. In their articulations of the CE-flex story-line, BizEur focus on the need for low-cost and market-based solutions which do not constrict corporate activities: “When including climate change into other policy areas, one has to ensure this is done in the most *cost-effective*, predictable way without imposing *unnecessary administrative burden* on companies. Market-based approaches should be preferred” (BizEur, 2013: 2). At times, more emphatic language is employed, with BizEur declaring that “[e]verything must be done to let the market forces play their role” (2010: 7). This rhetoric underscores the vehemence with which European corporate actors insist on the need to prioritise market-based climate mechanisms.

In their articulations of the second, win-win story-line the two groups emphasise the need to take both environmental and economic requirements into account. Using the same terms they refer to the aim of “*striking a balance*” between maintaining a strong economy and tackling climate change (USCC 2015: 4; BizEur, 2004: 2). In their claim that “reducing emissions...can be *reconciled* with economic development” BizEur again demonstrate a similar sentiment (2010: 3). Technology is a central element of the ‘win-win’ story-line and is framed as the silver bullet which will enable such a reconciliation. USCC posit that “[n]ew energy technologies can help fuel the economic growth needed to lift people out of poverty and make us responsible environmental stewards” and label technology as “the *best way* to address climate change challenges” (USCC, 2008: 1). Through the

framing of technology as a panacea, it is even argued that it can enable “us to use traditional energy more cleanly and reduce its carbon impact” (ibid).

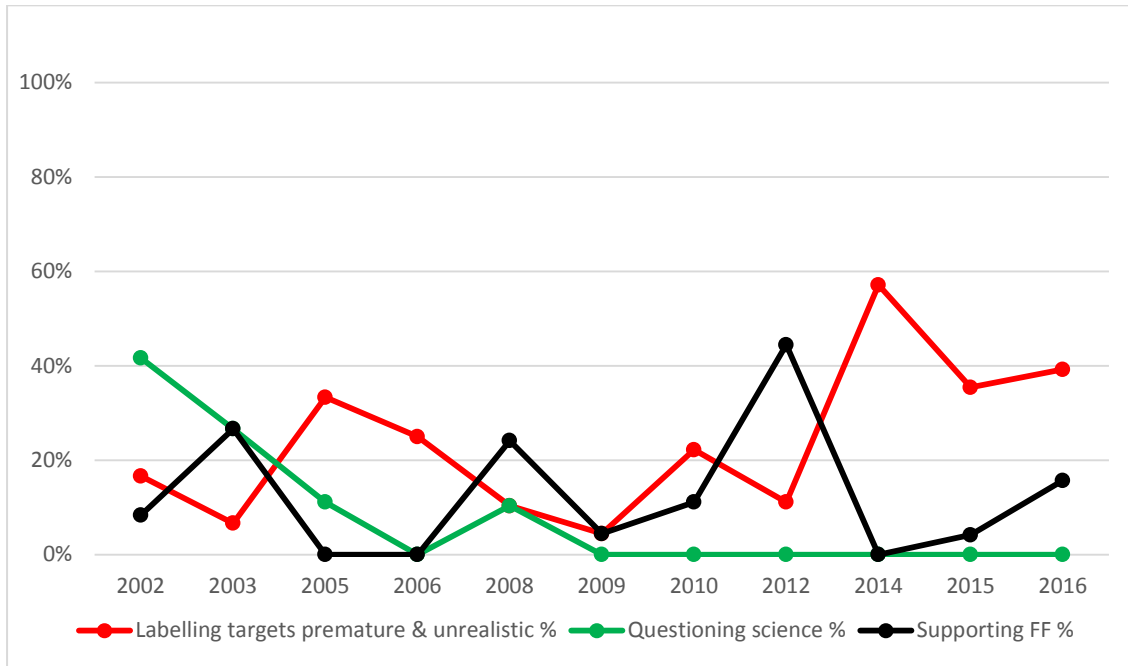
Overall, an in-depth analysis of the EcoMod discourse reveals that the ‘win-win’ story-line within it has been more dominant than that of the cost-effectiveness and flexibility, especially in the US. It is also shown that technology is frequently presented as the ultimate solution to climate change.

### ***5.1.b The Continued Prevalence of Climate Science and Policy Scepticism in the US***

As seen from a comparison of Figure 1 and 2, there is a notable variation in the frequency of occurrence of the CS discourse between the two regions studied. In Europe, some minor sentiments of CS were found in the timeframe between 2004 and 2008, however, no instances were recorded since. Across the Atlantic, on the other hand, CS constitutes an extremely dominant corporate discourse, with the frequency of its occurrences remaining relatively stable throughout the time period studied. In order to better understand the continued prevalence of the discourse of CS, a further analysis which examines the frequency of its constituent story-lines is carried out. Due to the extremely low levels of the CS discourse recorded in the EU, the following section of analysis focuses solely on the US.

The results of this analysis, as depicted in Figure 5, demonstrate that initially in the US, a ‘questioning science’ story-line was the most dominant of the three, however, from 2009 onwards a notable shift can be perceived. After this point, instances of a narrative casting doubt on the scientific certainty of climate change disappear from documents published by USCC. This decline coincides with a rise in the frequency of the story-line which challenges the feasibility of measures and suggests that action is premature. This suggests that there may be a substitution effect between the two; as the explicit questioning of science becomes less acceptable, US corporate reluctance to support climate action is instead manifested in the contention that measures should be delayed. The third story-line which promotes the continued use of fossil fuels is forwarded sporadically throughout the timeframe. This finding is particularly noteworthy as it shows that in recent years, while US corporate actors no longer openly question the scientific evidence for climate change, they nonetheless continue to support the use of hydrocarbon fuels which are the root cause of the problem.

Figure 5.3: *Breakdown of Climate Scepticism Discourse by Story-Lines: US (as % of total argumentative sentences)*



Source: Author's own analysis of primary documents published by USCC

A qualitative examination of the language used to express the CS discourse in the US offers interesting observations. The earliest USCC document analysed (from 2002) contains an outright dismissal of the existence of climate change. It draws a comparison between those who raise such concerns and ‘Chicken Little’, a character from a children’s fable about a young chick that believes the sky is falling after an acorn hits her head. The Chamber claims that “when it comes to global warming, environmentalists have adopted a Chicken Little approach” (USCC, 2002: 1). They describe a climate sceptic view as “common sense” for which the Bush administration “needs to stop apologizing” because “it can’t change the weather” (ibid: 1). Warnings of environmental havoc are dismissed as “catchy headlines” to which the government should pay no heed (ibid).

In later years, as instances of questioning science subsided, USCC instead began to assert that climate policies should not be rushed, they “urged lawmakers to ‘go slow’ in proposing legislation” (USCC, 2008: 1). Alongside the labelling of measures as premature, more explicit demands for the continued use of fossil fuels were also made, with the group contending as late as 2016 that “coal must remain a vital part of our diverse energy mix” (USCC, 2016: 1). They framed Obama’s efforts to curb emissions as an attack specifically on coal, claiming that “the president’s climate change agenda—a centerpiece of his legacy—hinges on coal’s demise” (ibid: 2).

Overall, an in-depth analysis of the breakdown of the CS discourse in the US shows that an initial preponderance of a ‘questioning science’ story-line gave way to one which labels climate action as premature, while support for fossil fuels fluctuated throughout the time period studied.

### ***5.1.c A Corporate Rejection of Green Governmentality***

As mentioned in section 5.1, the GG discourse has been largely neglected in corporate considerations of climate change across both regions. While it is almost completely absent from documents published by USCC, a small number of instances of the GG discourse are recorded in BizEur texts in more recent years. However, GG never accounts for more than 20% of argumentative sentences in any one year. Delving deeper into the breakdown of these GG instances in European documents, it is found that in the majority of cases, the featured story-line highlighted the importance of monitoring and reporting (~70% of GG occurrences in BizEur texts), with much less emphasis placed on the creation of legally-binding, strict mechanisms or standardisation measures.

This may not be the most surprising of findings, as the significant power which GG accords to the administrative state is somewhat incongruous with the free-market economy system in which Western businesses operate. Indeed, a high-level examination of empirical evidence also seems to reflect the decline of a GG perspective in the realm of climate politics during the past couple of years. The notions of global managerialism and stringent target-setting which lie at the heart of the GG discourse seem to be fading fast, reflected in the recent proliferation of local or private climate initiatives and market-based commodification mechanisms. Instead of a GG-type target-setting and monitoring approach, increasing numbers of governments at both the national and subnational level are introducing measures such as carbon pricing<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, in the corporate world, the commodification of carbon is becoming dominant, with a rapidly growing number of firms integrating internal carbon pricing models into their business plans (CDP, 2017).

It is important to note that corporate discourses in both regions are quite similar in their rejection of a GG and the global managerialism upon which it is based. This outright dismissal raises the interesting idea that such a trend may be linked to a broader phenomenon of a deepening divide between sentiments of globalism and nationalism. Inspired by this finding, an analysis of instances of a nationalism narrative in the documents was undertaken. The results of this analysis are outlined and discussed in the following section.

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<sup>7</sup> The 2017 World Bank Group’s State and Trends of Carbon Pricing report states that over 40 national and 25 subnational governments are now pricing carbon, covering about 15% of global emissions (CDP, 2017).

## 5.2 An Increasing Sentiment of Nationalism

In recent years, a globalism-nationalism<sup>8</sup> cleavage has become far more pronounced in Western politics, and society more generally (Grande & Kriesi, 2015). This split can be broadly defined as one which divides those who favour the domestic over the international, from those who support an increase in global connectedness. While such a cleavage has existed in various forms for decades, the recent acceleration of globalization, accompanied by the economic crash of 2008 and mass migration, has deepened this divide and brought it to the fore. Today such opposing viewpoints can be said to centre “more explicitly on differing conceptions of community” (Bornschieer, 2010: 419-420). While some actors conceptualise themselves as part of an international community and therefore promote solidarity which transcends nations, others are growing more vocal in their rejection of globalisation. Numerous scholars have identified the rise in popularity of extreme nationalist parties across the Western world as a clear manifestation of the deepening of such a cleavage (Grande & Kriesi, 2015; Dennison & Pardijs, 2016).

In this research, a narrative of nationalism<sup>9</sup> is taken as one which expresses a reluctance to take action against climate change for the ‘greater good’ of the international community, and instead favours approaches which are designed to ensure the prioritisation of one’s own nation or region’s interests (generally framed as being based upon an economic rationality). President Trump’s famous utterance that he was elected “to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris” which was made during a speech announcing the withdrawal of the US from the UNFCCC Paris Agreement, offers a clear example of such nationalist sentiment (Trump, 2017).

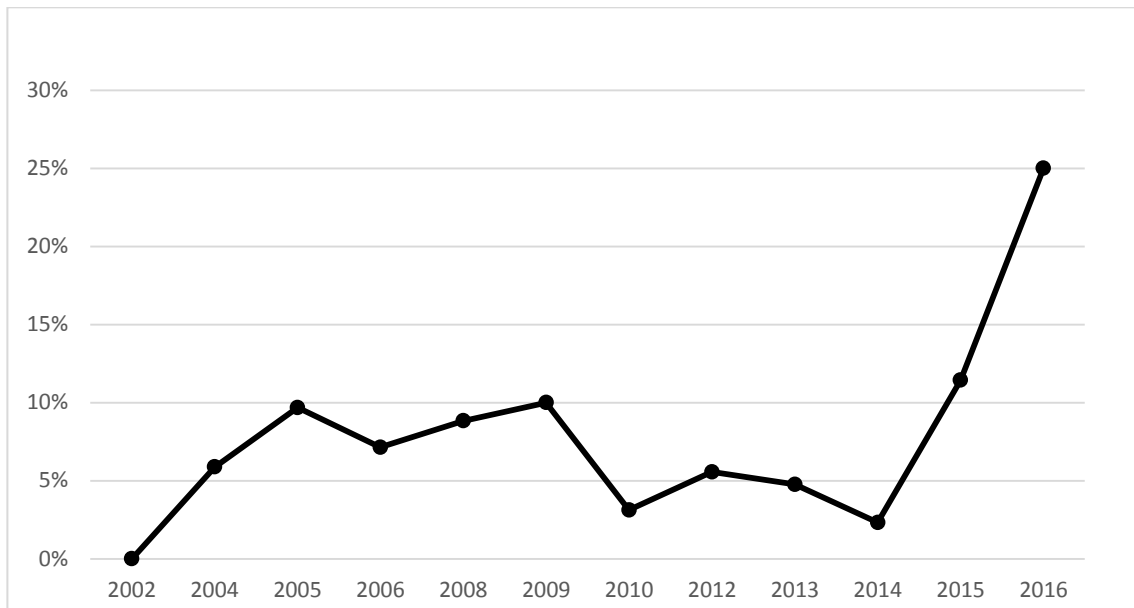
Figures 6 and 7 depict the results of the analysis of nationalist sentiment and illustrate that a significant spike in the number of instances of a nationalist narrative occurred in both regions in recent years. In the US, after 2010 the rate of occurrence of a nationalism narrative rises dramatically, while in EU the notable increase comes a few years later.

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<sup>8</sup> For the sake of simplicity, in this work the term nationalism is used when referencing both the US and the EU, despite the fact that the EU is of course not one unified nation.

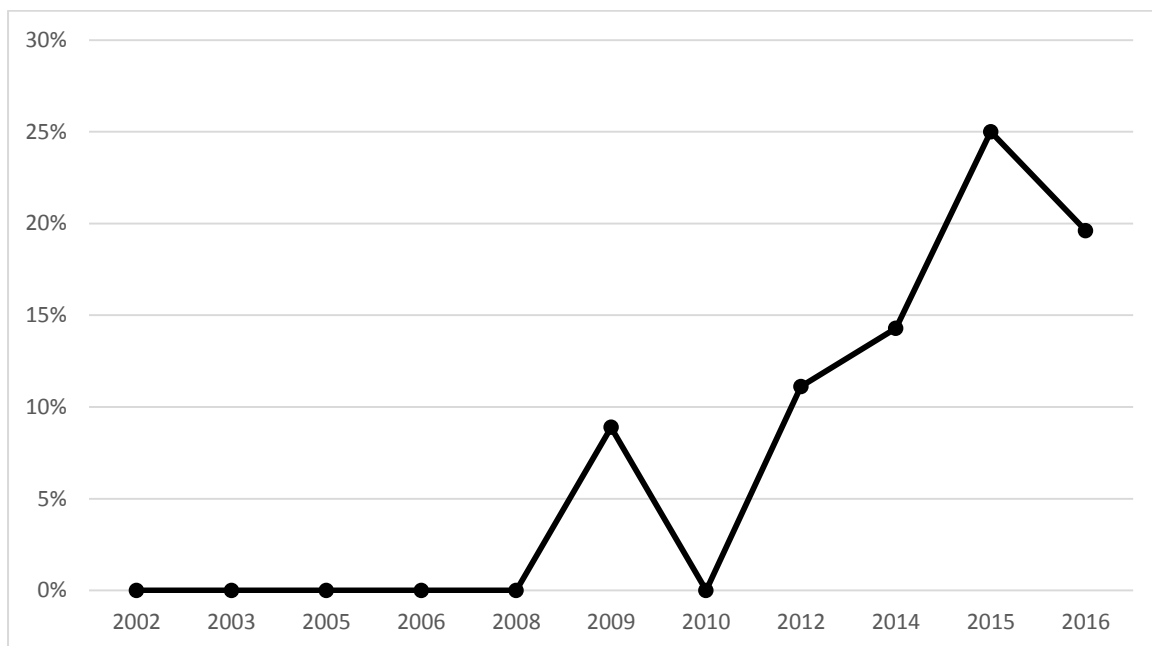
<sup>9</sup> When conceptualising the relationship between the three climate discourses expounded above and this divide between a stance of globalism and nationalism, it is important to note that they are independent of one another. That is, sentiments of nationalism could be found in any of the three aforementioned discourses.

Figure 5.4: *Frequency of Occurrence of Nationalism Story-line: EU (as % of argumentative sentences)*



Source: Author's own analysis of primary documents published by BizEur

Figure 5.5: *Frequency of Occurrence of Nationalism Story-line: US (as % of argumentative sentences)*



Source: Author's own analysis of primary documents published by USCC

In the analysed documents, such a sentiment of nationalism is articulated in a variety of ways. Firstly, an objection to a 'going it alone' approach in which other nations do not take similar climate change mitigating steps is clearly expressed in documents from both regions. Such an approach is framed as being both ineffective and unfair. BizEur contends that a "continued European 'going it alone' policy will be detrimental both in environmental terms and in economic terms" (BizEur, 2004: 1). While,

across the Atlantic, it is asserted that “[t]he U.S. has a great deal to lose, but very little to gain, from acting alone” (USCC, 2009: 2).

Criticisms of the lopsided nature of international climate measures and calls for stronger emissions-reducing commitments from developing countries are also expounded by both EU and US corporate actors. BizEur claim that “advanced developing countries should commit to setting their emission policies in a way that reflects their actual capabilities” (2015: 4). This aspect of the ‘nationalism’ narrative is particularly interesting as it fundamentally challenges the notion of historical responsibility and accountability which is incorporated into the international climate change regime. As the basis of the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibility’ (CBDR), the idea of historical responsibility means that developed countries should be held accountable for their cumulative greenhouse gas emissions, which have caused destructive climate change on a global scale (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). In the US, USCC go beyond a mere rejection of the principle of CBDR and highlight that “developing countries will account for the vast majority of future GHG emissions globally” and contend that their future emissions levels should be taken into account in a new international agreement (USCC, 2015: 7). Here, by changing the outlook from a historical one to one which focuses on probable future emissions, this narrative shifts responsibility for the problem away from industrialised nations.

## **6. FURTHER DISCUSSION**

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to seek a causal explanation for the findings outlined in the previous chapter, it is worthwhile to carry out a brief examination of whether they conform with the main strands of literature on the factors influencing corporate positioning.

Such literature can be roughly grouped into that which focuses on political institutional factors and that which highlights the importance of socio-cultural context. This chapter delves into how existing literature can be linked with the various observations made in chapter 5 and paves the way for potential future research in this area.

Regarding regional variance, this paper’s analysis reveals one major noteworthy divergence in corporate discourses on climate change between the EU and US. A discourse of climate science and policy scepticism is extremely prevalent in USCC texts, but barely features in the documents of their transatlantic counterparts. Certain scholars view the institutional context in which business operates as a central factor in the shaping of corporate positions on political issues (Wilson, 2003; Hacker & Pierson, 2002). In this case, the differing institutionalised national capitalist styles of the two territories (American Liberalism and European corporatism) may go some way in explaining their highly variant levels of the CS discourse (Wilson, 2003).



Another potential explanation for this discursive variation lies in the ‘socio-cultural differences’ between the regions. Social or culture context may shape corporate discourses in one of two ways. Firstly, it is contended that US corporate actors traditionally employ “defensive” tactics when endeavouring to shape policy (Thomas, 2002; Rosenthal, 2001). That is, they are aggressive in their attempts to put a stop the implementation of measures with which they disagree. In contrast, European industry associations have developed a culture which is far less confrontational and more consensus-orientated (Woll, 2006). The CS discourse which was prevalent in the US throughout the studied timeframe but largely absent in the EU, could indeed be described as a rather confrontational and aggressive stance. A second socio-cultural factor which may account for the dominance of the CS discourse on just one side of the Atlantic is the hegemony of a culture of neo-liberalism in the US. It has been argued that this neo-liberal culture goes beyond a mere political or economic ideology, instead constituting part of the fabric of everyday life for US citizens (Ventura, 2016). Such a deeply embedded neo-liberal culture in the US may thus offer an explanation for the high levels of CS in corporate discourses.

The large disparity in levels of CS between the two territories could also be the result of a kind of path dependency due to the significantly different approaches that the EU and US had taken to climate change in the years preceding and throughout the timeframe studied. By the late 1990s, the EU had moved into an unquestionable position of leadership in climate politics, reflected in their progressive actions at both the regional and international levels (Schreurs & Tiberhien, 2007; Paterson, 2009). The US, on the other hand, lagged far behind with George W. Bush’s 2001 rejection of the Kyoto Protocol, his administration’s open questioning of the climate science and vocal concerns regarding the economic costs of climate policy (Paterson, 2009). It would therefore not be surprising if the past actions and discourses of the national government influenced the discursive practices of US corporate actors accordingly. Although it is also important to allow for the possibility that it was corporate actors that may have been the primary influencers of government discourses.

The fact that three significant commonalities were found between the EU and US industry discourses, however, challenges the institutional and cultural expectations of divergence expounded above. A corporate rejection of the GG discourse, steady levels of a discourse of EcoMod, mainly based upon a ‘win-win’ story-line and a recent spike in nationalist sentiment are shared trends seen across both regions. One possible explanation for such similarities lies in Levy and Newell’s (2000) contention that the process of globalisation results in socio-cultural or institutional differences between territories becoming far less pronounced. As the business world becomes increasingly connected on a global scale, variations in how firms from different territories frame an issue like climate change are reduced. The simultaneous increase in corporate transnationalism over the past two decades may also help to account for such converging positions on climate change.

In sum, this work's findings raise some intriguing questions regarding the construction of corporate discourses on climate across regions. Much of the dominant literature on the topic of corporate positioning in the EU and US is challenged by the various discursive commonalities found between the two territories. Such findings open up multiple interesting avenues for further research projects which call for more detailed and sustained investigation.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Despite their pivotal role in the both the creation of the problem of climate change and the implementation of potential solutions, the voices of business actors are largely neglected in discursive studies of climate politics. Through a social-constructivist lens, this work has sought to fill this gap by mapping out trends and variations in corporate discourses on climate change in the EU and US. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, its findings demonstrate that the discursive landscape studied has indeed undergone significant transformation between 2002 and 2016. It is clearly shown that businesses eschew a Global Governmentality perspective, favouring one of Ecological Modernisation in Europe and Climate Science and Policy Scepticism in the US, and that corporate positioning seems to have become more local and less global. Such patterns of discourse play a central role in setting the frames of reference for the ongoing debates within climate politics and suggest that corporations may be increasingly unlikely to support global climate agreements

By way of regional variance, it is found that the discourse used by industry actors in the US has been dominated to a far greater extent by expressions of scepticism towards climate science and policy than that of their European counterparts. Interestingly, a breakdown of the CS discourse in the US reveals a substitution effect, whereby an initial questioning of science was replaced in more recent years with a frame which labels measures as premature and unrealistic. Aside from the disparity in levels of CS between regions, however, the results of the analysis demonstrate that the two territories share numerous discursive commonalities. Their joint rejection of a discourse of GG may be a manifestation of a more general tendency for market-driven actors to reject high-levels of state intervention. This idea is further supported by the dominance of a discourse of EcoMod, which focuses on a 'win-win' narrative of green growth and support for market-based mechanism, in both regions.

While the deviating levels of CS discourse in the EU and US lend support to the notion that local institutional or socio-cultural factors can influence corporate discourse, the numerous discursive commonalities between regions challenge this assumption and instead conform with the idea that increasing globalisation has eroded any such differences. Rapid globalisation may also account for the noteworthy recent spike in nationalist sentiment within corporate discourses on climate, constituting

part of a broader phenomenon of a deepening cleavage between solidarity with the global and domestic levels. Further research could examine the implications of this work's findings, by taking a more explanatory approach to exploring the potential relationship between the institutional, political or socio-cultural context in which corporate actors operate and their formulation of climate discourse.

Due to the length and scope of this thesis it is important to note that it is constrained by a number of limitations. Firstly, as the work takes the discourses proffered by dominant umbrella business associations as a proxy for the aggregate stances of firms in each region, it does not capture the diversity of corporate positions taken on the topic of climate change. Further, in-depth research could provide a more nuanced approach by delving into the climate discourses proffered by business actors from various sectors or different regions. Such research could also widen the analysis to include corporate actors from emerging economies such as China and Brazil, whose importance in the realm of climate politics is growing steadily. Secondly, the relatively small number of suitable texts available for the analysis could impact upon the validity of the findings. Future studies of a larger scale could use a wider range of data sources, thus making the research more exhaustive. Another limitation lies in the method used to ascertain the frequency, and thereby significance, of story-lines. This method entails a certain level of subjectivity and could thus influence the reliability of the analysis. However, in this case it offers the most feasible and accurate means of capturing levels of pertinence of each discourse.

In these environmentally and politically tumultuous times, corporations and their discursive practices are of paramount importance to the construction of the social reality of climate change and its associated policies. The 2016 election of President Trump, a vocal climate sceptic, has offered a powerful legitimising force to those who question the veracity of human-induced changes to our climate. This, along with increasing trends of nationalism detected in corporate discourses on climate and their rejection of Green Governmentality, indicates that business actors may be increasingly unlikely to support global climate agreements. Whether these trends stall climate action at this crucial juncture for the planet, or simply result in more local, market-based solutions remains to be seen.

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## APPENDIX A – Full List of Primary Documents

### BusinessEurope Documents

<b>Year Published</b>	<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Document Title</b>
2002	Letter	Proposal for a directive establishing an EU emissions trading framework
2004	Letter	Preparation of the Spring European Council - Climate Change
2004	Press release	European Climate Policy: UNICE Oppose Approaches which Fragment the European Market and Reduce Flexibility
2005	Letter	Letter by Philippe de Buck, UNICE Secretary General, to Commissioner Stavros Dimas concerning the Commission Communication "Winning the battle against global climate change".
2005	Position paper	Climate protection- European business recommendations for EU and international policies
2005	Press release	UNICE urges EU Ministers to follow global approach for climate change.
2006	Letter	Letter by Philippe de Buck, UNICE Secretary General, to Mr José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, on the future EU climate change strategy
2008	Position paper	Energy and climate issues- key messages ahead of the European Council on 15-16 October 2008
2008	Position paper	Combating climate change - Four key principles for a successful international agreement
2009	Position paper	What European business wants to see in an international agreement on climate change
2010	Position paper	European business recommendations on EU policies for climate and energy.
2012	Position paper	BusinessEurope's expectations for the 2012 international climate conference in Doha
2013	Position paper	BusinessEurope's response to the Consultation on the 2015 International Climate Change Agreement
2014	Position paper	BusinessEurope reaction to the EU climate and energy package
2014	Position paper	International climate negotiations in view of COP20 in Lima - BusinessEurope expectations

2015	Position paper	On the road to Paris - A global deal is our business
2016	Letter	BusinessEurope views on the impact of the Paris agreement on the 2030 framework for climate and energy policies
2016	Press release	Global climate agreement: Marrakech COP22 must bring more clarity

### US Chamber of Commerce Documents

<b>Year Published</b>	<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Document Title</b>
2002	Op Ed	Chicken Little Lives by William L. Kovacs
2002	Letter	Energy Policy Act of 2002*
2003	Press release	Chamber Urges Lawmakers to Reject Unsound Science
2003	Press release	Chamber Applauds White House Initiative on Climate Change
2005	Press release	Chamber Says Technology is Answer to Climate Challenges
2006	Press release	Chamber Raises Concerns with Senate Climate Change White Paper
2008	Press release	Lieberman-Warner-Boxer Bill a Misguided Plan to Curbing Carbon Emissions
2008	Press release	U.S. Chamber President Calls for Comprehensive Approach to Energy and Climate Change
2008	Press release	U.S. Chamber Highlights Role of Technology in Tackling Climate Change
2008	Speech	Managing a Changing Climate: Challenges & Opportunities for the Buckeye State
2009	Letter	Letter to the Senate on Climate Principles
2009	Press release	U.S. Chamber Calls House Climate Change Bill Wrong Approach to Slowing Emissions
2009	Press release	U.S. Chamber's Energy Institute Calls for Global, Pro-Growth Approach at International Climate Talks
2009	Press release	U.S. Chamber's Donohue Comments on Climate Change
2010	Issue brief	Core Principle's on Climate Change
2010	Position Paper	U.S. Chamber's Energy Institute Calls on Administration and Congress to Abandon Harmful Energy Tax Proposals
2012	Press release	U.S. Chamber's Energy Institute CEO Urges Policymakers to Pursue Unconventional Oil Sources

2014	Op Ed	4 More Potent Arguments Against EPA's Carbon Rule
2015	Position Paper	USCC statement to US Senate on Climate Negotiations
2015	Op Ed	Global Climate Proposal Deserves Serious Scrutiny
2016	Op Ed	Coal Remains Crucial to Diverse U.S. Energy Mix
2016	Position Paper	USCC statement to US Senate on Paris Climate Change Agreement

## **APPENDIX B – Breakdown of Coding Structure**

### **Green Governmentality (GG)**

Monitoring & reporting

Legally-binding targets

Global target-setting

### **Ecological Modernisation (EcoMod)**

Cost-Effectiveness

Flexibility

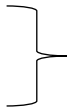
Market-based mechanism



CE & Flex story-line

Green Growth

Technological advancement/technology



'Win-Win' story-line

### **Climate Science & Policy Scepticism (CS)**

Questioning science

Labelling measures premature or unrealistic

Support use of fossil fuels