Earth System Governance 25 (2025) 100267

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Earth System Governance

journal homepage: www.sciencedirect.com/journal/earth-system-governance

Exporting norm interpretations from the Global South: Explaining India's reasons for contesting and reshaping international climate norms

Chris Höhne [a,b,*]

[a] Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Döppersberg 19, 42103, Wuppertal, Germany
[b] Freie Universität Berlin, Otto-Suhr Institut für Politikwissenschaft, Ihnestr. 22/26, 14195, Berlin, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Global South
Norm interpretations
Contestation
Counter-proposer
Export
Reshaper
Climate change
REDD+
NAMAs
India

ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship highlights Global South countries not only as norm-takers or localizers but also as norm-makers. Contributing to this shift, I conceptualize why these countries contest and lobby for alternative norm interpretations in international negotiations. Applying this lens to climate politics, I use triangulated data (incl. expert interviews) to identify domestic factors that explain the Indian government's behavior. By exporting domestic norm interpretations that merged with other norm interpretations from Global North and South countries, the Indian delegation successfully reshaped two international climate norms at the 2007 Bali Conference that target developing countries' mitigation efforts and climate action in forests. This increased the resonance of these two norms with the Indian government's domestic norms, political economy beliefs, international funding desire and collective identity needs. This research provides insights into the complex dynamics of international norm negotiations between proposers and counter-proposers in the context of the rise of the Global South.

1. Introduction

International institutions contain norms – i.e. standards of appropriate behavior by a community of actors (Finnemore, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996) – which require interpretation by affected actors when engaging with them (Krook and True, 2010). This can lead to various forms of localization and translation in domestic implementation (Acharya, 2004; Berger, 2017). In international negotiations, internationally agreed meanings of norms can also change based on reinterpretations in subsequent negotiations by different parties of the international institution. Scholarship on international norms points to the applicatory or proactive contestation dynamics around the meaning of these international norms, which can help to further specify and operationalize them (Wiener, 2018; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020), but is more concerned with who has access to these processes and what the implications are for norm robustness. We still lack in-depth knowledge of the domestic reasons for state governments to contest norm interpretations proposed by other states and to lobby for an alternative norm interpretation in international negotiations.

The rise of the Global South in world politics in recent decades adds another layer to the negotiations over internationally agreed norm interpretations, contributing to reinterpretations of international norms by both Global North and South countries. In particular, the perspectives, motivations and agency of Global South countries in global norm-shaping processes require further research. Previous approaches to the agency of Global South countries have argued that these states can act as socializers (Xiaoyu, 2012), as subsidiary norm setters at the regional level (Acharya, 2011) or as feedback providers to the international level based on implementation experiences (Acharya, 2013; Zimmermann, 2019). Here, I turn to a different setting, in which a Global South country successfully reshaped internationally agreed norm interpretations in international negotiations prior to its implementation. This raises the research question: Why do (Global South) countries contest the proposed reinterpretations of other (Global North and South) countries and why do they lobby for the export of their own particular norm interpretation?

Based on two case studies of the Indian government's successful efforts to reshape internationally agreed norm interpretations in international climate negotiations from 2005 to 2007, I show why India contested norm interpretations proposed by other states from the Global

This article is part of a special issue entitled: Global South published in Earth System Governance.

* Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Döppersberg 19, 42103 Wuppertal, Germany.
E-mail addresses: chris.hoehne@wupperinst.org, chris.hoehne@fu-berlin.de.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esg.2025.100267
Received 31 July 2024; Received in revised form 30 May 2025; Accepted 2 June 2025
Available online 16 June 2025
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North and South and lobbied for the export of its own norm interpretations to the international level. In the context of the rise of the Global South in terms of economic power and emissions (Fuhr, 2021), India is a particularly interesting case country because it is a large emerging economy that is among the top emitters in absolute terms, but has relatively low per-capita emissions, while being characterized by significant differences in per-capita emissions among different segments of society due to the high level of economic inequality. Moreover, in international negotiations, India had been a notorious naysayer to own domestically funded mitigation efforts until 2008, while having sufficient capacities and aspirations to lead the Global South, making India likely to provide its own norm interpretations in international negotiations. Moreover, India is one of the emerging economies that have influenced international climate negotiations since 1992 (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012; Sengupta, 2019).

I apply a scientific realist *case study* approach, which is defined as the investigation of a particular social context in order to generate context-dependent and holistic empirical explanations based on abductive explanatory factors (Easton, 2010; Jackson, 2011: 200; Bhaskar, 2008; Sayer, 2000). Cases are not selected to generalize for the universe of cases, but because they are expected to illuminate the workings of explanatory factors that may themselves be generalizable. Thus, the theoretical findings of a particular case study will be informative for studying similar cases, such as the efforts of other emerging economies in international negotiations, while potentially requiring adaptation to their case-specific contexts (Höhne, 2022). My analysis is based on a *qualitative content analysis* of secondary and primary documents (e.g., media articles, government documents) as well as transcripts of 18 semi-structured expert interviews, which I analyzed based on the abductive categories of the analytical framework presented in the following section. During two research stays in India, I interviewed government officials (incl. negotiators), NGO representatives, donors, advocates and researchers, who were involved in or close to the processes under study. Triangulating the interview data with coded primary and secondary sources allowed me to evaluate divergent claims about the processes under study.

The Indian case studies allow for an analysis of the domestic explanatory factors that were present in the context of norm contestation processes and Indian counter-proposals in international climate negotiations, while this study does not systematically examine the international bargaining strategies of delegates from India and other states or the international conditions for norm export. Scholars have provided empirical analyses of the Indian government's foreign climate politics regarding certain aspects, such as traditional negotiation positions or the negotiation strategies around the 2009 Copenhagen COP, among others (e.g., Atteridge, 2013; Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012; Jayaram, 2021; Stevenson, 2012; Rajamani, 2009), without explaining the reasons for India's efforts to contest other states' norm interpretations and export its own norm interpretations to the international climate negotiations from 2005 to 2007 in a norm-theoretically guided manner. I show that India's international counter-proposing efforts can be explained by a combination of several domestic explanatory factors, including the Indian government's independence-oriented social identity and its attempt to maximize India's economic growth rates, attract increasing international funding, and follow the cultural path-dependencies of India's policy positions. The resulting internationally agreed norm interpretation in Bali in 2007, which represents an important milestone on the way to the 2015 Paris Agreement, included elements proposed by both the initial proposers and India as a counter-proposer, pointing to compromise solutions in internationally agreed norm interpretations in the context of contestation by rising powers.

The article is organized in three sections. First, I outline my understanding of norms, point to the identified research gap in the International Relations' literature on norms, and present my conceptual framework. Drawing on insights from norm scholarship, particularly the strands on translation, contestation, socialization and localization, I develop the conceptual categories to be applied in the empirical section. Second, I contextualize the international climate norms, the particular negotiation period, and India's initial position, and detail the case study approach. I then apply the conceptual categories from the theory section to the two empirical cases in two steps: First, I trace the norm interpretations of the proposing states and the Indian government as contender and counter-proposer in the international negotiations, and show how the subsequent internationally agreed norm interpretation includes elements suggested by both the proposer and India as counter-proposer. I then explain India's negotiation position on the basis of the four domestic explanatory variables identified. I conclude with a summary of the findings, implications for scholarship on norms and the rise of the Global South, and suggestions for future research.

2. Why to contest and export norm interpretations in international negotiations

2.1. Norms and norm hierarchies

International norms are defined as collective expectations of appropriate behavior by a community of actors (Finnemore, 1996a: 22; Katzenstein, 1996: 5). Here I focus on norms that are inscribed in adopted international legal documents, such as international treaties of international regimes, which are typically organized in a hierarchical manner. Adapting Wiener's (2018) norm typology, which distinguishes between fundamental norms, organizing principles and standardized regulations, I also point to multiple layers of norms in a norm hierarchy (Fig. 1): Unlike Wiener, I point out that a norm hierarchy also consists of a *macro-norm* that defines *what* should be achieved, which is located below Wiener's fundamental norms. Fundamental norms can also be described as meta-norms, which exist beyond the regime, and have a high moral reach (e.g., sovereignty or democracy). *Meso-norms* (Wiener terms them organizing principles) specify *how* the macro-norm is to be realized, and are therefore subordinate to macro norms. In addition, I add more specific *micro-norms* to the norm hierarchy, because they *further specify how* the meso-norm should be achieved for a particular group of subjects or regarding a particular object. Micro-norms are located between meso-norms and Wiener's more specific standardized procedures and regulations that are part of the regime (e.g., reporting rules) (Wiener, 2018).

Norms have a prescriptive quality, but they do not trigger "blind habit […] but argumentation" (Kratochwil, 1989: 97). International norms are therefore subject to actor's interpretations of their meaning (Krook and True, 2010), which is based on their background, "against which understanding becomes possible and actions meaningful" (Berger, 2017: 25). This moves beyond the earlier norm literature, which demonstrated that norms matter based on their diffusion (Finnemore, 1996; Risse et al., 1999). Following the contestation and translation turn in norm scholarship (Wiener, 2018; Berger, 2017), I also emphasize the role of actor's particular interpretations of international norms, which can vary widely (see Höhne, 2022; Höhne et al., 2023; Höhne et al., 2024). In this paper, I conceptualize the reasons why a state actor (as a contender) contests a particular norm interpretation suggested by a different state (the proposer) and why this contender is motivated to export an own norm interpretation into the new international norm interpretation as a counter-proposer.

2.2. State of the art

The approach proposed in this paper moves beyond the previous norm literature, since the domestic reasons for efforts to export norm interpretation in order to reshape the international meaning of norms in international negotiations have not been at the center of previous conceptualizations. Initially, early norm scholars have explained the diffusion of fixed norms from the international level to the domestic level of a target state without taking into account a prior reshaping of

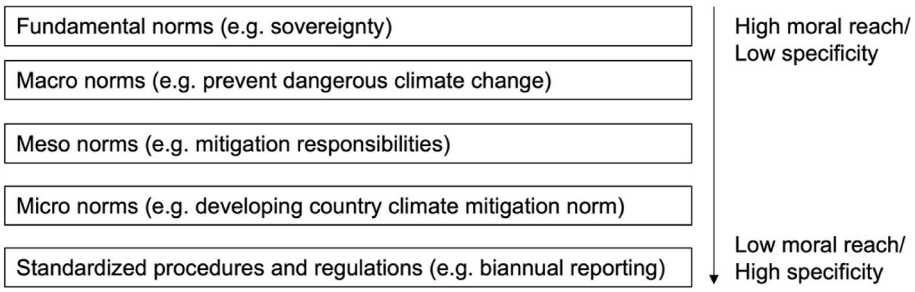

Fig. 1. Norm Hierarchy
Note: Adapted and expanded from Wiener (2018: 58–62). See next section for examples.

international norms by domestic actors of the target state at the international level (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Risse and Ropp, 1999). Instead, in their framework, international norm change occurs through norm entrepreneurs' persuasion of target states and subsequent norm cascading to other states (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Only recently have researchers begun to acknowledge potential discursive feedbacks to the global level following the domestic implementation of a norm (Acharya, 2013; Prantl and Nakano, 2011; Zimmermann, 2019), but without analyzing the prior consensual reshaping of the international norm in international negotiations. Scholars who have studied the international reshaping of norms focus on processes of applicatory or proactive contestation and their effects (Wiener, 2018; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020), or on the dynamics of norm change due to violations of unspecific norms (Sandholtz, 2008). However, they do not conceptualize the agent-specific reasons for contestation and the export of norm interpretations by concerned agents to the international level. Moreover, conceptual approaches that put a focus on the agency of Global South countries in global norm-shaping processes are still rare.

Moving beyond earlier research that conceptualized Global South countries as norm-takers in international socialization processes (e.g., Risse et al., 1999), or as localizers of international norms in domestic adjustment processes (Acharya, 2004), Acharya (2011) shifted the focus to the role of Global South countries as norm-makers. He introduced a conceptual approach called 'norm subsidiarity', which theorizes how a group of weaker actors create subsidiary norms that challenge and replace the existing norms of major powers at the regional level. Others have shown how these Global South actors reframed their alternative norms to better fit in the international context (Bettiza and Dionigi, 2015). However, these approaches conceptualized the establishment of alternative norms and did not theorize the domestic reasons for contesting and lobbying for alternative norm interpretations by Global South countries in negotiations on existing international norms. Xiaoyu (2012) has already rightfully pointed to the agency of Global South countries to socialize other states as well. Some scholars have described the attempts of developing countries as norm shapers at the international level without explaining the rationale behind these efforts based on domestic explanatory factors (Jinnah, 2017). Overall, conceptual and theory-led empirical work on these aspects is scarce and would benefit from conceptualizing the domestic reasons for contesting and lobbying for the export of alternative norm interpretations from the Global South in ongoing negotiations on internationally agreed norm interpretations.

2.3. Contesting and exporting norm interpretations

International regimes revolve around regular international meetings in which the parties to the regime negotiate not only new issues, but also new international interpretations and operationalizations of already agreed upon international norms from the founding treaty. This allows regime parties to further specify vague regime norms or to respond to new developments, which is intended to help achieve the objective of the regime. In international negotiations, new internationally agreed norm interpretations are adopted as new collective normative expectations of the community of actors (Höhne, 2022). The international reshaping of internationally agreed norm interpretations takes place in international negotiations, in which different state actors with different norm interpretations try to export their meanings to the international level. I distinguish between the state that initially proposed a change in the international norm interpretation, which I call the 'proposer', and the state that responds to this proposal by contestation and lobbying for an alternative norm interpretation, which I call the 'contender' and 'counter-proposer'. In settings of international regime negotiations where the principle of consensus decision-making applies, I assume the power differentials between the negotiators to be tempered (see also Snidal et al., 2024: 397). This may be particularly the case if the Global South government under scrutiny is an emerging economy.[1] It is most likely that the negotiation outcome, i.e. the internationally agreed norm interpretation, will then contain a mixture of different elements of norm interpretations suggested by both the proposer and the counter-proposer in a new form. The proposer thus becomes the 'shaper' of the final outcome and the counter-proposer the 'reshaper', as both sides have successfully contributed to the outcome (Table 1).

The focus of this framework is not to explain the bargaining dynamics and strategies of all parties involved, but to shed light on the reasons of the contender to contest the norm interpretations by the proposer and, as a counter-proposer, to lobby for alternative norm interpretations in cases where the new internationally agreed norm interpretation contains elements from both the proposer and the counter-proposer. I distinguish between four domestic factors that I have identified through an abductive process (i.e., an iterative process of reading the theoretical literature on norms and global-domestic governance dynamics as well as analyzing the empirical data): cultural path dependencies of existing policies, political economy goals and beliefs, the desire for international funding, and the collective social identity of the contender.[2] These domestic factors explain why the national government under study becomes a contender, contesting the proposer's norm interpretations and, as a counter-proposer, lobbies internationally

Table 1
Role of actors.

	Negotiation process	Successful negotiation outcome
Initiative	Proposer	Shaper
Reaction	Contender & counter-proposer	Reshaper

[1] Emerging economies have been found to be able to use their economic weight in international negotiations or their ability to form effective negotiation coalitions (Hopewell, 2015).

[2] For parsimonious reasons, I refrain from discussing other potential domestic explanatory factors that were not important in the cases under investigation, such as aspects related to societal influences, the domestic leadership aim for domestic prestige, or the domestic political-administrative system.

for its own alternative norm interpretations.

First, *cultural path dependence* is based on the idea that representatives of the national government under scrutiny are heavily socialized by their national government into pre-existing substantive negotiation positions and policy beliefs. Government's negotiation positions thus represent a particular policy culture for a particular policy area, including shared beliefs, norms, and traditions (Stephenson et al., 2021). Although they are rarely static, they are nonetheless sticky and usually require long periods of time to change. The foreign proposer's norm interpretations thus need to be perceived as being in line with pre-existing prescriptions of domestic norms embedded in the domestic discourse, political outputs (e.g., laws, policies, programs), and in organizational ethos of the contender (Checkel, 1999). In the absence of such cultural resonance, this will motivate the national government to become a contender and counter-proposer, lobbying internationally for its own alternative norm interpretation based on its pre-existing policy positions and domestic political norms and values.

Second, the national government under study has particular *goals and beliefs about the material needs of its political economy*. This may be based on particular understandings of how to increase economic and social development, which, in their view, may require maximizing economic growth. Consequently, any potential threat to the achievement of this goal may be a reason to contest it. Moreover, national governments compete for foreign investors and may therefore feel pressure to unilaterally create favorable market conditions to attract these investments (Börzel and Risse, 2012; Busch et al., 2005). These ideas and perceived needs are sticky and may change only slowly over time. Any proposed norm interpretation by a foreign actor must therefore resonate with the perceived material needs of the national government in order to be accepted (Stevenson, 2012: 56). In the absence of such material resonance, the likelihood is high that the national government will become a contender and counter-proposer, lobbying internationally for its own alternative norm interpretation based on the perceived material needs of its political economy.

Third, the national government under study is characterized by a particular *collective social identity*, such as a desire for international social recognition (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse et al., 2013; Höhne, 2018). This requires that domestic actors "care about their international image" (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 208) and have a desire "to be members of [the …] international community 'in good standing'" (Börzel and Risse, 2012). However, the collective identity of the national government may, in contrast, be characterized by a desire for international independence from foreign intrusion, influence or surveillance. This may be caused due to historical experiences with foreign powers, or it may be a cultural feature of the society (Acharya, 2011; Narlikar and Narlikar, 2014). If the social identity is more independence-oriented, then the chances for an acceptance of the norm interpretation of the proposers by the national government will be low if they are perceived to intrude into domestic matters. Instead, the national government will become a contender and counter-proposer, lobbying in favor of the government's own alternative norm interpretation that ensures the continuous independence from foreign influence.

Fourth, most countries of the Global South are characterized by challenges in terms of available public resources and are recognized by international regimes as having specific needs for which Global North countries should provide financial assistance. It is therefore to be expected that the national government from the Global South would like *to increase the available international* funding to which it can have access. An increase in international funding (e.g., grants, compensation) can impact the cost-benefit calculation of domestic decision-makers with regard to the norm interpretation suggested by a foreign proposer (Schimmelfennig et al., 2006; Risse et al., 1999; Risse and Ropp, 2013). If a norm interpretation proposed by a foreign government is not linked to an increase in the available international funding for the national government under scrutiny, it will become a contender and counter-proposer, lobbying for its own alternative norm interpretation that provides a strong link to increasing the available amount of international funding.

To sum up, in evolving international negotiations, the internationally agreed interpretation of international norms may change due to negotiations between proposer(s) and counter-proposer(s). New internationally agreed norm interpretations may include pre-emphasized elements from both the proposer(s) and the counter-proposer(s), who have become shaper(s) and reshaper(s) of the negotiation outcome. Four domestic factors explain the contender's motivations to contest, and, as a counter-proposer, to lobby for the incorporation of alternative norm interpretations (Fig. 2). In the following section, I introduce the setting of the two empirical cases and apply this approach to the two cases, in which the Indian government contributed to the reshaping of two UNFCCC micro-norms in the international climate negotiations.

3. UNFCCC's norm hierarchy

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of 1992 is the founding treaty of the climate regime. This Convention established several vague international norms that specify *how* the objective of the regime – to prevent dangerous climate change (Art. 2) – is to be achieved by its parties, the nation-states (UNFCCC, 1992a). The parties are requested to engage in mitigation actions on the basis of their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (hereafter referred to as the 'mitigation responsibilities norm'), but also to engage in cost-effective measures, to take mitigation actions in all economic sectors, or to promote economic development, among other things (Bodansky, 1993; UNFCCC, 1992a; Art. 2, 3; Höhne, 2022; Höhne et al., 2023; Höhne et al., 2024).

Different normative expectations have been formulated for different groups of subjects with respect to specific norms. These *micro-norms* further specify the regime's vague norms and *clarify how* a particular group of subjects should contribute to the achievement of the regime's objective (Höhne, 2022). For example, developed countries are expected to take the lead in mitigating climate change (the *developed* country climate mitigation norm). In contrast, the Convention only calls on developing countries to take mitigation action in accordance with their mitigation responsibilities and development priorities (Art. 3.1, 4.1) (the *developing* country climate mitigation norm).

The idea was that the loose framework convention with its vague norms would be further operationalized and specified in subsequent annual negotiations of the Conference of the Parties (COP). As an operationalization of the *developed* country climate mitigation norm, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol introduced quantitative emission reduction obligations for developed countries (Art. 3.1). Developed countries were allowed to finance Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects in developing countries to meet their own targets under the first commitment period, which ended in 2012. These types of voluntary, compensated mitigation projects were acceptable to developing countries because they did not have to change their domestic sectoral policies and did not have to pay for them. In the UNFCCC negotiations on a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, which began in Montreal in 2005, the parties then began to negotiate a further specification of the mitigation responsibilities norm and its micro-norms of developed and developing countries' mitigation efforts.

Micro-norms can also specify *how* a *particular object* should be approached (Höhne, 2022). The Convention requires all parties to "promote and cooperate in the conservation and enhancement, as appropriate, of sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol, including biomass, forests and oceans" (UNFCCC, 1992a: Article 4.1(d)). This micro-norm can be seen as a specification of the meso-norms on mitigation responsibilities, mitigation actions in all sectors, and, by mentioning cooperation, cost-effectiveness. In the following years, however, this carbon forestry norm did not play a special role in developing countries. Since the Kyoto Protocol's CDM did not result in many forestry projects, Brazilian

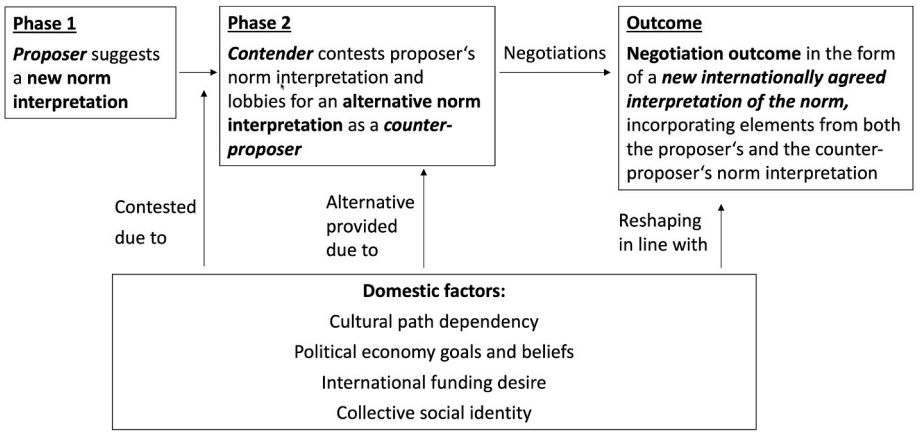

Fig. 2. Domestic explanatory factors for contestation and counter-proposing in cases of international reshaping of internationally agreed norm interpretations.

scientists proposed a new instrument in 2003 that would compensate for reducing deforestation in developing countries through carbon trading with private companies or developed countries (Pistorius, 2012; Santilli et al., 2005).

4. Exporting India's interpretations of climate norms to the UNFCCC

The Indian case studies focus on a particularly important period. During the period of negotiations on a successor to the Kyoto Protocol that begun in 2005 and that included important interim steps in Bali in 2007, the Indian government contested interpretations of two micro-norms – the developing country climate mitigation norm and the carbon forestry norm – proposed by industrialized and developing countries, respectively. In both cases, the Indian government lobbied for its own alternative norm interpretations, on the former in a more defensive manner and on the latter in a more offensive way, and contributed to the successful reshaping of the internationally agreed norm interpretations in the Bali Action Plan, which included elements from India's suggested alternatives and laid the ground for the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Subsection 4.1 first describes the actions by the proposer (the US) and the counter-proposer (the Indian government), and how they both shaped the new internationally agreed interpretation of the developing country mitigation norm that is at the center of the new governance mechanism of 'Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions' (NAMAs). This is followed by an explanation of India's reasons to contest the proposer's norm interpretation and to lobby for the export of its own norm interpretations to the international level based on four explanatory factors. Subsection 4.2 turns to the carbon forestry norm and how the elements from both the proposer (the Coalition for Rainforest Nations) and the counter-proposer (the Indian government) were included in the new internationally agreed norm interpretation, which is the normative backbone of the new governance mechanism 'Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks' (REDD+). The Indian government's reasons to contest the proposer's norm interpretation and to lobby for the export of its norm interpretation to the international level are explained based on three explanatory factors.

4.1. From contestation of non-compensated mitigation efforts to reshaping the developing country climate mitigation norm (2005–2007)

Under the Kyoto Protocol, only developed countries had binding emission reduction commitments through 2012. At the COP in Montreal in 2005, negotiations began on post-2012 commitments (Wittneben et al., 2006), with developed countries pointing to developing countries' rising GHG emissions, which had no obligations under the Protocol. The developed countries proposed a new interpretation of the developing country climate mitigation norm that would require developing countries to take on absolute emission reduction commitments under the Protocol's second commitment period. However, the proposers' norm interpretation was rejected by developing countries. As a counter-proposer the Indian government instead lobbied for an interpretation of the norm that was based on full international financial compensation for mitigation projects in developing countries (such as in the form of the CDM).

Following this setback, the US and the Canadian COP presidency subsequently initiated the 'Convention Dialogue' (Wittneben et al., 2006: 92), an additional interim negotiation forum "for discussions on long-term cooperative action to address climate change" (UNFCCC, 2005a: 1), and mitigation actions by parties not covered by the Kyoto Protocol (UNFCCC, 2006b: 4). Developed countries had achieved some success in putting the discussion of possible voluntary mitigation actions by developing countries on the agenda. However, India and other developing countries had ensured that those discussions would be linked to international funding, which represented only a small shift away from India's previous norm interpretation of internationally compensated mitigation actions (Kulovesi et al., 2007; Sengupta, 2019; Wittneben et al., 2006).

In the run-up to the 2007 Bali COP, which marked the end of the Convention Dialogue, developed countries' expectations of India and other major emitters to take on uncompensated mitigation commitments had further increased. The US, especially, argued in favor of a norm interpretation that was based on parity between major emitters of the Global North and South (Dubash and Joseph, 2016; Rajamani, 2009; GI-25042018; GI-01032018, GI-19042018). However, Indian negotiators continued to contest any demands that would require India to pursue its own domestically funded mitigation actions (DI-24042018). As a counter-proposer, Indian representatives instead lobbied for linking voluntary mitigation actions to international funding (GI-19042018; GI-25042018; Chakravarty and Ramana, 2012). In 2007, the Convention Dialogue ended with the establishment of a second negotiation track alongside the Kyoto Protocol's track in order to negotiate an international 'agreed outcome' by the 2009 COP. This 'agreed outcome' was meant to address "[e]nhanced national/international action on mitigation of climate change, including, inter alia, consideration of […] [n]ationally appropriate mitigation actions [NAMAs] by developing country Parties in the context of sustainable development, supported and enabled by technology, financing and capacity-building, in a measurable, reportable and verifiable manner" (UNFCCC, 2008: 3).

This new internationally agreed norm interpretation featured elements of developed countries' norm interpretations, since India and other emerging economies accepted domestic mitigation actions for the

first time. While Indian negotiators were initially reluctant to agree to the inclusion of 'mitigation actions by developing country Parties', the wording 'nationally appropriate' made it acceptable to India (Ghosh, 2012: 166). Moreover, India was instrumental in ensuring a continued differentiation between developed and developing countries' mitigation efforts (Sengupta, 2019). The Indian delegation contributed to the reshaping of the new internationally agreed norm interpretation by ensuring that nationally appropriate mitigation actions are not only supported, but also enabled through technology, financing and capacity building (GI-19042018; GI-25042018; Chakravarty and Ramana, 2012). In doing so, India along with other Global South countries, exported its interpretation of the developing country climate mitigation norm, which requires international funding for mitigation actions, and does not accept domestically funded actions or even (quantitative) mitigation commitments (Müller, 2008; GI-19042018).

The new internationally agreed framing in the form of internationally supported and enabled voluntary mitigation actions represented only a small shift from India's pre-existing norm interpretation. This time, however, international funding was no longer linked to the mitigation commitments of developed countries through carbon markets and was only enabling, not compensatory (Spence et al., 2008; UNFCCC, 2008: 3). Four explanatory factors help to explain the Indian government's motivation to act as a contender and as a counter-proposer: cultural path dependencies of traditional negotiation positions, political economy goals and beliefs that aspired to maximize economic growth, a desire for international funding as a prerequisite for domestic action, and an independence-oriented collective social identity.

4.1.1. *Cultural path dependency: traditional negotiation position*

The *cultural path dependency* in India's negotiation position shaped the international efforts of the Indian government. The proposers' norm interpretation in the form of uncompensated mitigation efforts by developing countries, did not *culturally resonate* with the traditional Indian understanding of the climate crisis. The Indian government viewed the problem of climate change as historically caused by developed countries (Isaksen and Stokke, 2014), and called for equity among member-states based on historical per-capita GHG emissions (Atteridge, 2013; Raghunandan, 2019; Sengupta, 2019), as developed countries had, in their view, already overused their fair share of the atmosphere, requiring them to implement absolute emission reduction commitments (Dubash et al., 2018; GI-19042018; Ghosh, 2012; Vihma, 2011). Due to this negotiation position, the Indian government did not foresee any future climate mitigation actions in its 2006 Environment Policy (MoEF, 2006). Sectoral efforts such as on energy efficiency, renewable energy or afforestation were already being undertaken domestically, but for sectoral non-climate reasons (Dubash et al., 2018). Similarly, Greenpeace India's campaign attacking the Indian government for hiding behind the low emissions of poor Indians, while 150 million high-income Indians were emitting above the 2 °C limit (Ananthapadmanabhan et al., 2007), was not successful due to the path dependency of India's cultural understanding of the climate crisis (Dubash, 2013; Stevenson, 2012: 152).

India accepted only those norm interpretations that culturally resonated with its own perspectives: India was already engaged in CDM projects, which it perceived as a form of compensated mitigation. By lobbying for the export of India's norm interpretation of compensated or at least internationally enabled mitigation actions (Dubash, 2013; Sengupta, 2019), it contributed to the reshaping of the internationally agreed norm interpretation towards internationally supported and enabled mitigation actions and ensured a greater cultural resonance with India's pre-existing norm interpretation (GI-19042018; GI-25042018; Chakravarty and Ramana, 2012). This financial enabling support was to come from developed countries, which the Indian government believed needed to continue to take the lead on mitigation (Sengupta, 2019; GI-19042018). Cultural path dependencies thus contributed to the Indian government's contestation efforts of the Indian government, and facilitated its engagement as a counter-proposer.

4.1.2. *Political economy goals and beliefs: maximizing economic growth*

The Indian government's chosen political-economic pathway of *maximizing economic growth* did not *materially resonate* with the proposers' norm interpretations that demanded uncompensated mitigation efforts from developing countries. The Indian government held political-economic beliefs that required India's emissions to continue to grow in order to industrialize the economy, to achieve high economic growth and to catch up with the Global North through coal-based development (Sengupta, 2019; GI-19042018; Stevenson, 2011). For example, one Indian negotiator emphasized that the Indian government would not accept "a treaty which puts a ceiling on our per capita emissions and so on energy units […] as it would manifest a distinction between poor and rich countries" (GI-19042018). The Indian government perceived any limitation on its GHG emissions as a reduction of its carbon space, and thus as a constraint on its economic development (Ghosh, 2012; Dubash, 2013; Isaksen and Stokke, 2014; Sengupta, 2019; GI-28022018). Indian diplomats thus considered climate negotiations as a bargain over future economic development prospects, in which the Global North had already exceeded its fair share of carbon space (Stevenson, 2011). Hence, the Indian government's central negotiation goal was to secure sufficient "carbon space" (Sengupta, 2019: 132) for its coal-dependent high economic growth path (Isaksen and Stokke, 2014; Stevenson, 2011), leading to the contestation of proposer's norm interpretations.

In the 2007 Bali negotiations, the Indian delegation was reluctant to agree to the inclusion of 'mitigation actions' as part of a post-Kyoto agreement, but the expression of 'nationally appropriate' saved it, as, in their view, this meant that India could prepare a plan "without external dictat [e]" (Ghosh, 2012: 166) that would not jeopardize its economic policy plans. Because the Indian delegation wanted to ensure India's future economic growth, it had consistently demanded that mitigation actions be "adequately compensated, and the necessary technology is provided at low cost" (Ghosh, 2012: 165), for which Indian negotiators lobbied as counter-proposers. Compensated mitigation actions, such as in the form of the CDM, leading to incoming foreign investments and the transfer of low-carbon technologies for energy efficiency and renewable energy were acceptable because of their contribution to economic development (Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2012; Never, 2012; Sengupta, 2019). During the Bali negotiations, Indian negotiators ensured that mitigation actions would receive international enabling funding. This was preferred by Indian negotiators because 'enabling' made it clear that the support had to come as a precondition for any mitigation action, thus, not diverting domestic resources from economic development goals (GI-19042018; GI-25042018; Chakravarty and Ramana, 2012).

The Indian government's political economy goals and beliefs prevented the acceptance of the proposers' norm interpretation. Instead, it facilitated India's efforts in counter-proposing alternative norm interpretation. By exporting the Indian government's norm interpretation, Indian negotiators ensured a greater material resonance with the new internationally agreed norm interpretation.

4.1.3. *Desire for international funding: foreign funding as a prerequisite for action*

India's negotiation behavior must also be seen in the context of its goal of *attracting more potential international* funding. Indian representatives contested proposer's norm interpretations that demanded domestically funded mitigation efforts, since the Indian government did not want to use scarce public resources for mitigation actions (Ghosh, 2012). Instead, Indian representatives counter-proposed voluntary, internationally compensated mitigation actions, such as CDM projects. The Indian government was already eager to receive foreign funding under the CDM, of which India was one of the largest recipients. (Dubash, 2013; Sengupta, 2019). Indian negotiators also actively demanded that developed countries increase their use of CDM projects to meet their absolute post-2012 emission reduction targets, in order to increase the amount of international funding flowing to India through

additional CDM projects (Sengupta, 2019; Stevenson, 2011; MoEA, 2007).

During the 2005–2007 negotiations, the Indian government advocated for international enabling funding for mitigation efforts in order to receive foreign funding as a prerequisite for climate action (Never, 2012). In the view of Indian representatives, this funding had to be new and additional to already existing development assistance (Ghosh, 2012). Indian representatives contested the proposer's norm interpretations since it did not foresee additional international (compensatory) funding and lobbied for their alternative norm interpretation that strongly linked any mitigation efforts to enabling international funding, which was incorporated in the new internationally agreed norm interpretation at the Bali COP.

4.1.4. Collective-social identity: independence-oriented identity

The Indian government's collective social identity was characterized by the goal of being independent from foreign influence. Indian representatives were known for their naysayer image in international negotiations (Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2012; Narlikar, 2017). Indian representatives did not seek international social recognition and therefore were not receptive to pressure from developed countries (Raghunandan, 2019; Vihma, 2011). Looking at Indian negotiation behavior through the lens of the Mahabharata (an important collection of ancient Hindu stories), scholars argue that Indian negotiators are culturally less oriented to accept compromise, negotiate from a moral high ground, and perceive negotiations as a zero-sum game. They argue that Indian negotiators are not easily socialized by external actors and prefer to balance great powers through coalition building (Narlikar and Narlikar, 2014). Indeed, Indian climate negotiators perceived themselves as defenders of Convention norms (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012), as balancers against developed countries (Wittneben et al., 2006), argued from a moral high ground (Stevenson, 2011), and perceived climate negotiations as a zero-sum game over the available carbon space, which they did not compromise on (Sengupta, 2019), leading to Indian negotiators contestation efforts.

Autonomy and independence, moreover, are deeply ingrained in the identity of Indians representatives, who have always sought to block any link between international negotiations and domestic action (Atteridge, 2013; Mohan, 2017). Indian negotiators were initially reluctant to agree to the inclusion of 'mitigation actions by developing country Parties' in the Bali Action Plan, but the wording 'nationally appropriate' saved it and gave India all the wiggle room it wanted (Ghosh, 2012: 166).

However, according to the Mahabharata, Indian negotiators are occasionally open to accepting voluntary actions in international negotiations (Narlikar and Narlikar, 2014: 216), which could be observed when Indian negotiations approved the shift from compensated to internationally supported and enabled mitigation actions as part of the Bali Action Plan. Thus, the independence-oriented social identity mostly hampered the acceptance of the proposer's norm interpretations and facilitated the Indian government's lobbying for their alternative norm interpretation based on voluntary international enabling mitigation actions.

4.1.5. Sum-up

During this period, the Indian government rejected the proposers' norm interpretation in the form of mandatory non-compensated mitigation commitments (e.g., from the US). This can be explained by the Indian government's cultural path dependencies in following its traditional climate policy principles, its goal of maximizing India's economic growth and its hope for international funding as a precondition for voluntary mitigation efforts, as well as its independence-oriented collective social identity, all of which led to India's contestation efforts. Based on those domestic reasons, the Indian government, as a counter-proposer, instead lobbied for their alternative norm interpretation based on compensated or at least internationally enabled voluntary mitigation actions. Eventually the internationally agreed international norm interpretation was acceptable to the Indian government since it included essential elements of its pre-existing norm interpretation, such as the voluntary nature and the supported and enabled international financing of mitigation actions, which was close to India's previous norm interpretation. The Indian delegates had successfully contributed to the reshaping of the internationally agreed norm interpretation that was adopted in the Bali Action Plan (Fig. 3).

4.2. From contestation of compensated reductions to the reshaping of the carbon forestry norm (2005–2007)

At the 2005 COP in Montreal, Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica, representing the Coalition for Rainforest Nations, pointed out that the carbon forestry norm – the normative expectation to promote and cooperate in the conservation and enhancement of GHG sinks in forests – had not yet been fully realized. They criticized the Kyoto Protocol for failing to provide incentives to reduce deforestation, only allowing for the crediting of afforestation and reforestation (UNFCCC, 2005b: 3, 8), which had also been unsuccessful. Instead, they proposed a new international instrument that would provide financial payments as a compensation for reducing emissions from deforestation (RED), with accounting to be done based on a deforestation baseline (Lederer, 2012; Pistorius, 2012). At the UNFCCC conference in 2006, Bolivia, the Congo Basin countries and Indonesia began to call for expanding the scope of the instrument – and thus of the interpretation of the carbon forestry norm – to include the reduction of degradation (REDD) (UNFCCC, 2006a: 19–21, 72, 88–89).

Indian negotiators were not persuaded by the norm interpretation suggested by the proposers. In their view, the "[p]roposed concept of 'Compensated Reduction' favours the countries with high deforestation rates" (UNFCCC, 2007b: 61), while India, according to its own official data and definition of forest and tree cover, presented itself to the international community as a country that had stabilized and increased its forest cover (UNFCCC, 2007b: 60). At the same time, this proposal inspired Indian negotiators to view forestry actions from a carbon value perspective (GI-1-13032018). Representatives of the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) believed that financial support should only be provided to countries that stabilize and increase their forest cover (GI-151202016). MOEF mandated India's negotiators to engage as a counter-proposer on the carbon forestry norm in order to "upload our [Indian] forest conservation to the global level" (GI-1-13032018). At the UNFCCC workshops in 2006 and 2007, Indian negotiators proposed the concept of 'compensated conservation' – based on forest conservation, sustainable forest management and afforestation – as an alternative approach. Under this approach, only countries that maintain (i.e., conserve) and increase carbon stocks (i.e., increase or improve forest cover) would receive financial benefits, (Kishwan, 2007).

Despite India's efforts, only ten developing countries initially supported this alternative norm interpretation, as these countries had already stabilized their forest cover according to official data, such as China (GI-1-13032018). As compensation for the reduction of deforestation and degradation became increasingly accepted in the UNFCCC negotiations (Sanz, 2007), Indian negotiators began to advocate for equal recognition of each ton of carbon saved from reduction and conservation (incl. afforestation) in order to gain support for the inclusion of conservation and afforestation in the new international instrument (Kohli and Menon, 2011; GI-1-13032018; UNFCCC, 2007a: 3).

At the 2007 Bali COP, Indian negotiators had to lobby intensively for the inclusion of conservation and afforestation, as other large emerging economies such as Brazil favored an exclusive compensated deforestation approach (GI-05122016). Nevertheless, at the Bali COP, Indian negotiators were successful in contributing to the reshaping of the carbon forestry norm, as the new instrument included "[p]olicy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and

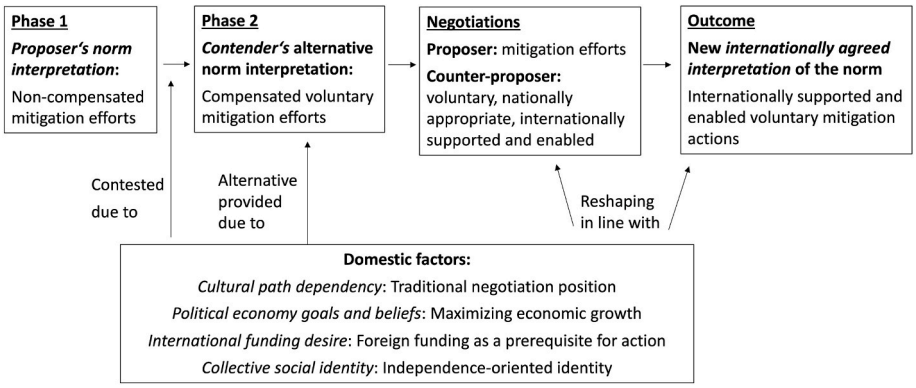

Fig. 3. Results for the developing country mitigation norm.

enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries" (REDD+) (UNFCCC, 2008: 3; GI-1-13032018).

The Indian government had turned from a contender of compensated reduction to a counter-proposer of compensated conservation to a reshaper of the carbon forestry norm, since the new internationally agreed norm interpretation included the pre-existing norm interpretations of the proposers and the counter-proposer: compensated reduction and compensated conservation in the form of a *comprehensive compensated carbon forestry approach*. Three explanatory factors help to explain the Indian government's motivations: cultural path dependencies of preexisting domestic policies, political economy goals and beliefs based on maximizing economic growth (and livelihoods), and the desire to increase and attract international climate finance for domestic forestry programs.

4.2.1. *Cultural path dependency: preexisting domestic policies*

Cultural path dependencies, based on India's decades-old domestic forest policy approach, contributed to the Indian government's international efforts. Compensated reduction as the proposer's norm interpretation did not resonate culturally with the Indian government's existing forestry perspective, since it did not perceive itself as a deforesting country (Lahiri, 2015; Ramesh, 2015: 391). In response to civil society pressure, the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 had already complicated large-scale deforestation (Bhushan and Saxena, 2016, RI-12122016, NI-14122016; Das, 2020; GOI, 1980). Subsequently, the National Forest Policy of 1988 also had a more conservation-oriented policy focus, along with other objectives such as providing livelihoods and timber (GOI, 1988: Article 1, 2). The dominant cultural perception of the Indian government was that India had been practicing sustainable forest management for decades (GI-2-13032018), even though natural forests were still declining due to deforestation from development projects and mining, and degradation from fuel wood collection (Kohli and Menon, 2011).

The Indian government's counter-proposal, based on the compensated conservation approach, was built on decades of experience with afforestation. Afforestation programs have been underway since the 1980s as part of social forestry programs. From 1980 to 2005, the reported cumulative afforested area was 34 million ha (Ravindranath et al., 2008; Das, 2020). The Forest Policy of 1952 already mentioned the target of increasing the forest and tree cover to one-third of the land area (GOI, 1952; Sudha and Ravindranath, 2004, DI-GI-02122016), which became an unquestioned cultural norm and has guided India's domestic forest policy ever since (AI-10022018). Uploading the conservation and afforestation approach to the international level allowed the Indian government to increase the cultural resonance of the international carbon forestry norm with India's forest policy (GI-1-13032018). For example, the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007–2012) had already set the additional afforestation target at 16 million ha (Planning Commission, 2008: 194), irrespective of an international agreement on the carbon forestry norm. The Indian government's cultural path dependency thus contributed to the Indian government's motivation to engage as a counter-proposer in order to reshape the carbon forestry norm by incorporating India's pre-existing norm interpretations (i.e., conservation and afforestation).

4.2.2. *Political economy goals and beliefs: maximizing economic growth (and livelihoods)*

The proposers' norm interpretation of compensated reduction did not materially resonate with the Indian government's political economy goals and beliefs, which were based on maximizing economic growth, since the Indian government was not interested in reducing India's deforestation rates for political economy reasons. Deforestation was not as large as in Indonesia or Brazil (Lele and Krishnaswamy, 2019), as the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 reduced deforestation from 5 million ha between 1950 and 1980 to 1 million ha between 1980 and 2007 (Bhushan and Saxena, 2016; Lahiri, 2015; Ramesh, 2015: 391). However, reports mention that mining, agriculture and infrastructure development still resulted in deforestation of up to 109,000 ha in 2006 (Kohli and Menon, 2011), while Indian negotiators downplayed deforestation to only 30,000 ha per year (UNFCCC, 2007b: 60). These deforestation activities were seen as essential to India's continued economic development path, leading the MOEF to approve 99 percent of all the proposals for environmental clearances (Ramesh, 2015: 79).

Since the 1970s, the Indian government has supported tree crops planting by farmers to increase wood supply and promote local economic activities (Ravindranath et al., 1997). India's annual increase in afforested area had been among the highest in the world, with annual plantings of up to 1.78 million ha from the 1980s–1990s (Singh et al., 2013). Despite the plantation of 34 million ha from 1980 to 2005, India's forest cover increased only from 64.08 million ha in 1987 to 67.83 million ha in 2003 (Ravindranath et al., 2008; UNFCCC, 2007b: 60), indicating continuous deforestation and short life span of seedlings. The result is the loss of native forests, which are replaced by monoculture plantations for local economic activities (Fleischman, 2014; Ravindranath and Murthy, 2010).

Compensation for reduced degradation also clashed with the political economy of 300 million forest-dependent people (NI-14022018), who relied on forests for fuelwood collection or grazing (RI-16122016, AI-10022018, Lele and Krishnaswamy, 2019; Saxena et al., 2018). Observers noted that more than 40 percent of India's forests are degraded (Aggarwal et al., 2009) – at a time when Indian negotiators hailed India's stabilizing and increasing forest cover (based on a definition of forest that only requires ten percent of the land to be covered by trees) (Kishwan, 2007; UNFCCC, 2007b: 60). India's own response to livelihood problems and forest degradation had traditionally been to promote large-scale, bureaucratically controlled community-based afforestation, rather than granting forest rights to local communities under the Forest Rights Act of 2006 (Das, 2020).

A compensated conservation and afforestation approach was therefore much more in line with India's political economy of maximizing economic growth and of promoting afforestation programs for local economic activities and livelihoods for local communities (UNFCCC, 2007a: 4; GI-1-13032018). The Indian government engaged as a counter-proposer in order to reshape the carbon forestry norm to resonate with these political economy goals and beliefs.

4.2.3. *Desire for international funding: foreign funding for domestic programs*

The Indian government's international efforts were strongly motivated by its goal of attracting more potential international funding. Recognizing that India would not receive the same high financial benefits from RED as high-density, large-scale deforestation countries such as Indonesia or Brazil (GI-1-13032018, NI-27022018), and in light of initial funding commitments from developed countries to deforesting countries (GI-09022018), they contested the approach of compensated reduction, complaining that "[all the] money goes to Brazil" (GI-05122016). Instead, the Indian government prompted its representatives to engage as a counter-proposer on the carbon forestry norm. As one Indian negotiator put it: "We are losing [funding opportunities] despite we are conserving forests. [… We] could also extract resources. REDD is putting us at disadvantage. [… That's why] we demanded compensated conservation" (GI-05122016). MOEF representatives expected that compensated conservation would provide sufficient, additional and credible financial benefits to the ministry for India's afforestation activities (Kohli and Menon, 2011; GI-05122016; UNFCCC, 2007b: 61). India did not benefit from the eligibility of afforestation under the CDM as hardly any forest projects had been financed in the global CDM market (Singh et al., 2013). With only 1.5 percent of the total government budget, the MOEF had a very small budget and perceived REDD+ "as an opportunity to get money" (GI-15122016) for its own long-standing afforestation programs such as the 'Greening India Programme' (GI-25042018; GI-1-13032018, Kohli and Menon, 2011; GI-05122016; NI-05122016, AI-10022018, GI-15122016).

Due to the Indian government's aim to increase international funding, their negotiators contested the financially unattractive approach of compensated reduction and lobbied for compensated conservation as a counter-proposer.

4.2.4. *Sum-up*

The Indian government contested the proposed norm interpretation of compensated reduction, and, as a counter-proposer, lobbied for an alternative norm interpretation based on compensated conservation (incl. afforestation). This can be explained by the Indian government's cultural path dependency on domestic forest policies based on afforestation, their political economy goals and beliefs that attempted to maximize economic growth and local livelihoods, and its desire to attract increasing amounts of international funding for India's long-standing domestic forest programs. Over the course of the negotiations, in order to facilitate international agreement, the Indian government shifted towards advocating for a comprehensive carbon forestry approach that included compensated reduction and conservation, thereby contributing to the reshaping of the carbon forestry norm (Fig. 4).

5. Discussion and conclusion

How can we explain that (Global South) countries contest new proposed interpretations of international norms by other (Global North and South) countries and lobby for the export of their own alternative norm interpretations, in cases in which it contributes to the reshaping of the internationally agreed norm interpretation? To answer this question, I introduce a new conceptual framework that distinguishes between the norm interpretations suggested by the proposer(s) on the one hand and the counter-proposer on the other. I theoretically introduce domestic factors that explain the behavior of the counter-proposer. The results are new internationally agreed norm interpretations that include elements of pre-existing norm interpretations by the proposers and the counter-proposer.

Based on the case studies of the Indian government's reshaping of two micro-norms – the developing country climate mitigation norm and the carbon forestry norm – from 2005 to 2007, I demonstrate the merits of this conceptual approach. Reacting to the proposals by the US and the Coalition for Rainforest Nations, respectively, the Indian government engaged in contestation and counter-proposal efforts based on its own alternative norm interpretations. In the case of the developing country mitigation norm, the Indian government took an active but more defensive stance to prevent new internationally agreed norm interpretations from which it potentially had something to lose. In contrast, in the case of the carbon forestry norm, it chose an offensive stance by lobbying for additional features of the internationally agreed norm interpretation from which it potentially had something to gain. The Indian government's counter-proposal was instrumental in shifting the internationally agreed norm interpretations from a narrow carbon forestry norm interpretation (compensated reduction as proposed by the Coalition for Rainforest Nations) to a comprehensive carbon forestry norm interpretation (including conservation and afforestation alongside compensated reduction). This included the Indian government's proposed interpretation of the norm (compensated conservation) into the new REDD + instrument. The Indian government also contributed to the reshaping of the internationally agreed interpretation of the developing country climate mitigation norm, which shifted from a focus on uncompensated mitigation efforts (as proposed by the US) to an operationalization that emphasized international enabling support for voluntary domestic mitigation efforts by developing countries. This incorporated elements of the Indian government's pre-existing interpretation of the norm (compensated voluntary mitigation efforts) into the new NAMA concept. In both cases, this is explained in terms of the cultural path dependencies of Indian foreign and domestic policies, the

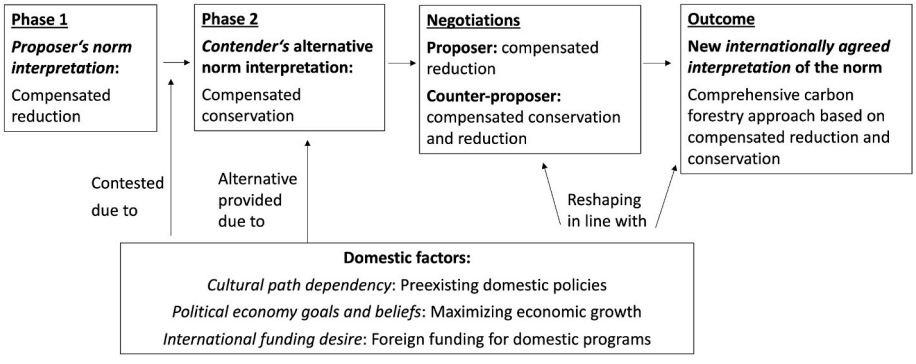

Fig. 4. Results for the carbon forestry norm.

political economy goals and beliefs of the Indian government rooted in maximizing economic growth, and its desire to receive international funding to compensate or co-finance domestic actions. In the case of the developing country mitigation norm, the independence-oriented social identity of the Indian government additionally played a part in the Indian negotiation behavior, since the pure adoption of the proposer's norm interpretation would have had direct implications on India's autonomy in terms of economic policy-making. This domestic factor was not important in the case of the carbon forestry norm, since the adoption of the proposers' norm interpretation would only have resulted in a missed chance for India to access potential international funding.

What are the implications of this research for our understanding of the politics of international norms and the agency of the Global South? This framework and the case studies shift the theoretical focus from the existing scholarly interest in the domestic implementation of international norms (Risse et al., 1999; Acharya, 2004; e.g., Höhne, 2018) and the forms and norm robustness effects of international contestation dynamics (Wiener, 2018; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020) to a different aspect: the domestic reasons for the contestation and counter-proposal efforts by state governments in international negotiations. This new perspective supports the previous arguments in the literature and adds additional elements and dimensions. A comprehensive understanding of the complex processes of international (and domestic) norm engagement processes requires taking into account the different interpretations of these norms by different interacting actors (Höhne, 2022), which is in line with scholarship on norm contestation and translation (Berger, 2017; Wiener, 2018). The proposed framework adds a conceptualization of the resulting international norm interpretations, characterized by elements proposed by different parties (the proposer and the counter-proposer). It also underscores the arguments provided on norm change and contestation, which point to the vagueness of international norms, leading to further norm specification in applicatory contestation processes (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020). I complement this perspective by pointing to the role of new (international) developments (e.g., scheduled negotiations for a new international agreement, the rise of the Global South), which can also lead to norm specification.

Moreover, this framework adds domestic reasons for international contestation and counter-proposal efforts to the existing literature. Thus, it builds on existing knowledge about domestic factors for norm change, but reconceptualizes and complements them to account for contestation and efforts to export norm interpretations. The identified domestic explanatory factors will also be important as starting points for explaining other cases, even across Global South and North boundaries, and seem to be valid for both defensive and offensive negotiation stances. National government representatives can thus be expected to contest international norm interpretations and lobby for alternative norm interpretations in order to increase the resonance with their own domestic norms, political economy goals and beliefs, funding requirements, and collective social identity characteristics. This points to the intermingling nature of cultural and material factors driving state behavior in international negotiations.

The framework highlights the agency of the Global South, particularly in the international (re)negotiation of the internationally shared meanings of norms. Global South countries have the agency to contest proposed norm interpretations and to reshape international interpretations of norms by exporting their alternative understandings. This underscores arguments made by others about the agency of Global South countries to respond to normative features institutionalized or advanced by Global North countries through their own norm-setting behavior (Acharya, 2011), as well as the ability of Global South countries to socialize others into (parts of) their own normative understandings (Xiaoyu, 2012). Moreover, it complements existing scholarship by emphasizing the agency of the Global South to contest and reshape international norm interpretations in international negotiations. This moves beyond arguments that highlight Global South countries' role as subsidiary norm setters (Acharya, 2011) or as providers of feedback from domestic implementation (Acharya, 2013; Zimmermann, 2019), as it relies on an even more extensive power of the Global South to reshape the meaning of international norms as such. While the concept of norm subsidiarity is based on the defensive assumption that the goal of Global South countries is to prevent abuse and interference by outside forces, which can also be seen in the case of the developing country mitigation norm, the other case presented, the carbon forestry norm, instead points to an offensive motivation to reshape international norm understandings so that Global South countries can benefit more from its implementation. More generally, emerging economies have been instrumental in the UNFCCC negotiations from the very beginning (Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012: 466), and are particularly capable of reshaping international norms due to their economic power (structural leadership), bureaucratic capacity and influence among other Global South countries (entrepreneurial leadership), and ideas and knowledge (cognitive leadership) (for the different dimensions of leadership, see Liefferink and Wurzel, 2017). In the context of the further rise of the Global South, this implies that Global South countries will increasingly insist that Global South preferences are incorporated into negotiation outcomes, pointing to increasing compromises that include elements from pre-existing norm interpretations from the North and the South.

The Global South, however, is not a homogenous group of countries, as we have seen in the context of the negotiations on the carbon forestry norm, with different proposals on compensated reduction or conservation. Varying norm interpretations among different developing countries can be traced back to different domestic contexts see also (Höhne et al., 2023; Höhne et al., 2024). It is therefore important to consider the domestic explanatory factors that drive the contestation and the counter-proposal efforts by Global South countries in international negotiations, and the conceptual framework proposed in this paper goes beyond existing scholarship by providing such a theoretical tool. Given the increasing differentiation among Global South countries due to different paces of economic development, the consensus within the G77/China negotiation group has already decreased and is likely to continue to decrease, requiring increasing compromises among Global South countries in international negotiations. Proposed norm interpretations that are appealing to many countries due to the resonance with their existing domestic sectoral norms and policies, their political economy goals and beliefs, and their desire for more international funding may be particularly successful in winning support in international negotiations.

The conceptual framework presented and the two case studies indicate the domestic reasons for contestation and counter-proposals in international negotiations in the context of new internationally agreed norm interpretations. Yet, the framework does not conceptualize mechanisms of international norm change (such as shaming) or the domestic explanatory factors of proposers of new norm interpretation. It is also parsimonious with respect to several theoretical aspects of international negotiations, such as the role of power differentials between states (assuming parity between great powers and emerging economies), or with respect to states' international bargaining strategies (e.g., Putnam, 1988) (assuming the tactic of searching for compromises as reflected in the internationally agreed norm interpretation that includes elements from both the proposer and the counter-proposer). While the presented approach emphasizes some regime features such as the consensus principle or the norm hierarchy, and new international developments such as the start of scheduled negotiations or the rise of the Global South, it does not cover systematically the international conditions for norm export (incl. when an international norm is ripe for reinterpretation). Applying the proposed framework to other cases may also require the integration of additional domestic explanatory factors, which were not important for analyzing the Indian cases, such as societal influences, the aim of domestic leaders for domestic prestige or aspects related to the domestic political-administrative system. All the

unexamined aspects deserve further theoretical and empirical research.

Empirically, other questions also arise. While the Indian government contributed to the reshaping of the two norms, and thus of the NAMA and REDD+ governance mechanisms - it has not become a strong recipient of NAMA or REDD + funding. Internationally and domestically, the negotiations and India's own norm interpretation quickly evolved further, leading India to adopt a national climate action plan with domestically financed actions in 2008 and to communicate a GHG emission intensity target in 2009 (Höhne, 2022). Questions thus arise as to the extent to which the international agency of Global South countries is still circumscribed by the Global North (e.g., the Global North not providing funding for afforestation or not accepting voluntary mitigation actions enabled by international funding), and why Global South countries evolve further in their own norm interpretations within a short period of time. These aspects also require further research.

Given the empirical and conceptual insights and implications mentioned above, applying the framework presented here to other cases in the area of climate change or to other policy fields such as the environment or trade will not only help to analyze the contestation and lobbying for alternative norm interpretations in global politics but will also provide new insights into the complex dynamics between proposers, contenders, shapers and reshapers in international norm negotiations in the context of the rise of the Global South.

Declaration of competing interest

"I have nothing to declare".

Acknowledgements

I particularly thank Markus Lederer for valuable discussions and comments over the whole duration of the broader project. I am also grateful to Navroz Dubash and the Center for Policy Research (CPR) as well as to Shyamasree Dasgupta and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mandi for hosting me during my research stays in India, and to all interviewees for sharing their insights. Furthermore, I would also like to express my gratitude to Marjanneke Vijge for recommending experts in India. For valuable comments on the broader project, I particularly thank Alejandro Esguerra, Harald Fuhr, Thomas Hickmann, Mathis Lohaus, Thomas Risse, and Jens Steffek, and members of the Energy-Climate-Environment research group at the Institute of Political Science, Technische Universität Darmstadt as well as the audiences of conferences of the International Studies Association, the German Political Science Association, and the Earth System Governance Research Network. Finally, I express my gratitude to the editors and the three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and helpful comments. Funding for field research was provided by the German Research Foundation (LE 2644/4-1) and by the TU9-IIT Network (funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research).

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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Dr. Chris Höhne is a Senior Researcher at the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, and a Senior Guest Researcher at the Otto-Suhr-Institute of Political Science, Freie Universität Berlin, where he previously held a position as a Post-Doc. He works on norms, global-domestic governance dynamics, the Global South, and climate politics. His research has appeared in *Global Environmental Politics*, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, *Public Administration and Development*, *Regulation & Governance*, *and Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen,* among others.