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Simplifying State Standing: The Role of Sovereign Interests in Future Climate Litigation

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Abstract: As Congress has yet to enact a comprehensive legislative framework to address climate change, environmental advocates have increasingly turned to the judiciary to push for the regulation of greenhouse gas emissions. Some lawsuits have been brought against the federal government, but others have been brought against private entities under common law causes of action. This Note focuses on the state standing and separation of powers dynamics at play in this area of litigation, and considers recent arguments that states suing as parens patriae against private polluters should be entitled to a relaxed standing regime. It concludes that complex common law claims involve discrete separation of powers concerns that give rise to a dangerously unpredictable array of prudential justiciability limitations, and therefore proposes that state litigants invoke their sovereign interests in regulating environmentally harmful activities as the basis for standing in future climate litigation. Such interests present the types of concrete and particularized injuries that satisfy separation of powers concerns, and asserting standing on this basis reinforces federalism values by ensuring that states remain important ancillary enforcers of national environmental policies.

INTRODUCTION

Federal courts appear to be in broad agreement that climate change is happening and that humans are the primary cause. Several have disagreed, however, as to whether the judiciary is the proper branch of government to resolve claims related to global warming. In

1 See Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. 497, 507–09, 521–26 (2007) (discussing international studies of climate change and reasoning that the EPA’s failure to regulate automobile emissions caused physical harm to the state); Connecticut v. Am. Elec. Power Co., 582 F.3d 309, 341–49 (2d Cir. 2009) (holding that allegations of harm caused by defendant power companies’ greenhouse gas emissions were sufficient to support standing to sue), cert. granted, 131 S. Ct. 815 (U.S. Dec. 6, 2010) (No. 10-174); Native Village of Kivalina v. ExxonMobil Corp., 663 F. Supp. 2d 863, 869 (N.D. Cal. 2009) (noting that global warming “is not itself an event so much as it is a sequence of events”), appeal docketed, No. 09-17490 (9th Cir. Mar. 10, 2010).

2 Compare Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 526 (holding that petitioners had standing to sue based on injuries related to climate change), and Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 332, 349 (holding that a climate change suit did not present nonjusticiable political questions and
its 2007 decision *Massachusetts v. EPA*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that a state petitioner had standing to sue the Environmental Protection Agency due to the agency’s refusal to regulate automobile greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act.³ Less than six months later, however, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California dismissed a state-led public nuisance action concerning automobile greenhouse gas emissions in its 2007 decision *California v. General Motors Corp.*⁴ Although the district court did not address standing, it reasoned that *Massachusetts v. EPA* demonstrates that claims relating to greenhouse gas emissions involve policy questions reserved to the political branches, and it therefore dismissed the nuisance action by invoking the political question doctrine.⁵

Despite the California court’s dismissal of the common law nuisance action, several scholars have argued that *Massachusetts v. EPA* entitles states to litigate complicated environmental suits in federal courts in their capacity as *parens patriae*,⁶ an English common law doctrine that allows states to litigate on behalf of their citizenry.⁷ This Note analyzes these arguments in light of the separation of powers principles the Supreme Court has often invoked when justifying restrictive justiciability thresholds and concludes that, insofar as Article III standing is concerned, states suing in their common law capacities should be entitled to a relaxed regime.⁸ The Note demonstrates, however, that particularly complicated common law actions give rise to separation of powers concerns embedded in the prudential justiciability doctrines, which may provide a basis for dismissal in addition to, or in lieu of, Article III

³ 549 U.S. at 526.
⁴ See 2007 WL 2726871, at *16 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 17, 2007) (dismissing a nuisance claim on political question grounds), and *Found. on Econ. Trends v. Watkins*, 794 F. Supp. 395, 401 (D.D.C. 1992) (“Notwithstanding the seriousness of the phenomenon, there is no ‘global warming’ exception to the standing requirements of Article III or the [Administrative Procedure Act].”.
⁵ See id. at *12–13, 16.
⁷ See Zdeb, supra note 6, at 1068–70.
⁸ See infra notes 153–169 and accompanying text.
standing.\(^9\) Thus, as an administrative law petition adjudicated within the confines of a statutory scheme, *Massachusetts v. EPA* offers relatively little help to states suing in their common law capacities and faced with prudential justiciability challenges, which counsel dismissal when a plaintiff alleges harms that are widely shared and unfamiliar to the legal landscape.\(^10\)

Ironically, *Massachusetts v. EPA* is precisely the type of case that would ordinarily give rise to a heightened justiciability threshold, as the Supreme Court’s restrictive standing jurisprudence has been justified almost entirely on the separation of powers concerns implicated by lawsuits brought against the federal government.\(^11\) The Court has never

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\(^10\) See *Gen. Motors Corp.*, 2007 WL 2726871, at *12; Gerrard, *supra* note 9, at 40 (“While the United States Supreme Court in *Massachusetts v. EPA* afforded broad standing to states to challenge administrative action, that is a far cry from entertaining what could well become the largest mass tort in the history of the world.”); *infra* notes 170–190 and accompanying text. As the court in *General Motors Corp.* stated:

> The underpinnings of the Supreme Court’s rationale in *Massachusetts* only reinforce this Court’s conclusion that Plaintiff’s current tort claim would require this Court to make the precise initial carbon dioxide policy determinations that should be made by the political branches, and to the extent that such determination falls under the [Clean Air Act], by the EPA.

offered a similar separation-of-powers justification for restrictive standing requirements in common law actions brought by states against private parties.\textsuperscript{12} By resurrecting the common law to combat global warming, however, climate tort litigants have uncovered a distinct separation of powers concern: the risk that the judiciary will undemocratically set policies that have consequences far beyond the actual adjudicated disputes.\textsuperscript{13} Unlike Article III standing, which focuses a court’s attention on the parties to the lawsuit, the prudential justiciability doctrines permit a court to account for broader implications of the issues raised in the lawsuit—particularly, whether the plaintiff’s claims raise issues of a “transcendentally legislative nature.”\textsuperscript{14}

In light of Massachusetts v. EPA’s limited applicability to parens patriae environmental lawsuits, this Note proposes that state attorneys general explore creative ways of establishing state regulatory and lawmaking interests as the basis for standing in environmental litigation.\textsuperscript{15} Rather than reading Massachusetts v. EPA as a parens patriae suit, state litigants should adopt a regulatory or sovereign interest interpretation of the case; this theory of standing suggests that where states can demonstrate injury to their ability to regulate environmentally harmful activities, they should be entitled to a relaxed justiciability regime when challenging federal agency action—or even inaction—that burdens state lawmaking interests.\textsuperscript{16} Unlike common law tort actions, such law-

\textsuperscript{12} See F. Andrew Hessick, Standing, Injury in Fact, and Private Rights, 93 CORNELL L. REV. 275, 289–90 (2008); Nagle, supra note 11, at 479–86; see also Lujan, 504 U.S. at 572, 577–78 (explaining that Congress established Article III courts to adjudicate cases involving individual rights that have been harmed by private action or unauthorized administrative action); Comer v. Murphy Oil USA, 585 F.3d 855, 863 n.3 (5th Cir. 2009) (noting that plaintiffs asserted “private, common-law claims of the sort that have been long recognized to give rise to standing . . . [and not] any public-law claims that might raise concerns the standing doctrine is designed to guard against” (citations omitted)), vacated, 607 F.3d 1049 (5th Cir. 2010) (en banc) (restoring the trial court’s dismissal of a nuisance action).

\textsuperscript{13} See, e.g., Kivalina, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 876; Hall, supra note 9, at 267–68.


\textsuperscript{15} See infra notes 191–235 and accompanying text.

suits fall short of directly punishing private polluters, but they can offer a more direct route into federal court to achieve what creative public nuisance actions ostensibly aim for: the effective regulation and mitigation of widespread environmental harms.\(^\text{17}\)

Part I of this Note provides an overview of the contemporary justiciability framework, with particular attention to the separation of powers rationales the Supreme Court has articulated as a justification for restrictive standing requirements.\(^\text{18}\) Part II then discusses the roles these justiciability doctrines played in the two most prominent global warming cases to date: Massachusetts v. EPA and Connecticut v. American Electric Co., a 2009 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit for that is currently under review by the Supreme Court following oral argument on April 19, 2011.\(^\text{19}\) Part II also discusses recent scholarship and lower federal court opinions restrictively interpreting Massachusetts v. EPA, and underscores the attention courts have paid to states’ regulatory interests as a basis for relaxing standing requirements.\(^\text{20}\) Part III then uses a separation of powers analysis to demonstrate why scholars are correct that states suing in their common law capacities should have as easy a time establishing Article III standing as Massachusetts did in Massachusetts v. EPA, but it proceeds to highlight an element that prior scholarship has largely missed—that the very nature of common law nuisance actions gives rise to justiciability concerns embedded in the prudential standing and political question doctrines.\(^\text{21}\) In light of the heavy burden states have faced at the threshold

\(^{17}\) See Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 330 (noting that federal common law can fill in gaps of federal regulatory frameworks); Robert H. Cutting & Lawrence B. Cahoon, The “Gift” That Keeps on Giving: Global Warming Meets the Common Law, 10 VT. J. ENVTL. L. 109, 114–15 (2008) (arguing that common law litigation serves as a default tool for public plaintiffs seeking to vindicate environmental harms when federal law provides an inadequate framework for recourse); Nikhil V. Gore & Jennifer E. Tarr, Case Comment, Connecticut v. American Electric Power Co., 34 HARV. ENVTL. L. REV. 577, 585 (2010) (arguing that states should be granted rights of action in the carbon tort context in part because “[w]here the federal government has chosen not to act, the power to speak in the common interest resolves to the states”); see also Dru Stevenson, Special Solicitude for State Standing: Massachusetts v. EPA, 112 PENN ST. L. REV. 1, 51, 65 (2007).

\(^{18}\) See infra notes 24–96 and accompanying text.

\(^{19}\) See infra notes 97–148 and accompanying text.

\(^{20}\) See infra notes 122–137 and accompanying text.

\(^{21}\) See infra notes 149–190 and accompanying text.
of climate tort actions, Part IV proposes that state attorneys general seek to establish standing by identifying ways in which state lawmaking and regulatory interests may have been injured by ineffective federal environmental regulation.\textsuperscript{22} Doing so would provide states with a relaxed justiciability threshold, and would more directly put the states into an ancillary role in ensuring that national policies and laws adequately counter the causes and effects of widespread pollution.\textsuperscript{23}

I. Historical Requirements of Justiciability

The common law public nuisance doctrine has been characterized as an “impenetrable jungle,”\textsuperscript{24} and federal courts have evaluated the justiciability of nuisance actions brought in the climate change context through two frameworks: (1) Article III standing, which seeks to ensure that the action has been brought by a proper party; and (2) the political question doctrine, which seeks to screen out cases that give rise to issues of a non-judicial nature.\textsuperscript{25} This Part provides an overview of both doctrines as well as the prudential standing doctrine.\textsuperscript{26} Section A introduces the constitutional requirements of standing to sue, which have largely been developed in the context of lawsuits brought by private citizens against the federal government.\textsuperscript{27} It also provides an overview of state standing doctrines, which often take into account the distinct interests states have in litigating to protect public interests.\textsuperscript{28} Section B then discusses the discretionary thresholds of prudential standing and the political question doctrine.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{22} See infra notes 191–235 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{23} See infra notes 191–235 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{26} See Elk Grove Unified Sch. Dist. v. Newdow, 542 U.S. 1, 11–12 (2004) (discussing the importance of prudential standing in ensuring judicial restraint when the judiciary is faced with issues of “great national significance”); infra notes 78–96 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{27} See infra notes 30–77 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{28} See infra notes 53–77 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{29} See infra notes 78–96 and accompanying text.
A. The “Irreducible Minimums” of Standing

As a prerequisite to federal court jurisdiction, Article III standing is meant to ensure that courts hear only “cases” and “controversies,” the constitutional bases for judicial power. The doctrine can be reduced to a simple question: Is the litigant entitled to have the court decide the merits of the dispute? Most federal courts, however, analyze standing under a far more complicated test first articulated in 1992 by the U.S. Supreme Court in Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife: plaintiffs may proceed with a claim if they can show (1) they have suffered an “injury-in-fact” that is (a) concrete and particularized, and (b) actual or imminent; (2) that the injury is “fairly traceable” to the challenged action of the defendant; and (3) that it is likely, as opposed to merely speculative, that the injury will be redressed by a favorable decision. Given the multifaceted approach to the injury-in-fact requirement alone, many suits alleging widely shared environmental harms have been dismissed for lack of standing. Additionally, the “fairly traceable” causation requirement renders complicated environmental lawsuits, such as climate tort claims, particularly vulnerable to dismissal. The level of scrutiny a court actually applies to a plaintiff under the standing test may vary, however, depending on the court’s view of the underlying separation of powers issues implicated by the suit.

32 See Lujan, 504 U.S. at 560–61. In Lujan, the Court held that environmental groups challenging a regulation promulgated under the Endangered Species Act (1) did not assert sufficiently imminent injury to have standing, and (2) claimed an injury that was not redressable. Id. at 562–71.
33 See, e.g., Summers v. Earth Island Inst., 129 S. Ct. 1142, 1148–53 (2009); Lujan 505 U.S. at 562–67, 571–78. A five-justice majority in Summers v. Earth Island Institute held that a group of environmental organizations suing the U.S. Forest Service did not have standing to challenge the agency’s decision to exempt a salvage sale of timber from certain procedural requirements. See 129 S. Ct. at 1147–51. The Court identified the petitioners’ failure to specify the dates they would revisit the affected forest as one of the reasons for the holding. See id. at 1150–51.
34 See Nagle, supra note 11, at 514–15; see also Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 345–47 (relying in part on Pub. Interest Research Grp. of N.J., Inc. v. Powell Duffryn Terminals, Inc., 913 F.2d 64 (3d Cir. 1990), a pre-Lujan Clean Water Act decision, for the proposition that mere contribution to an injury is sufficient for causation).
35 See Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. 497, 547–48 (2007) (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (noting the inherent flexibility of the modifiers “fairly” and “likely” in the Lujan standing test, and arguing “in considering how loosely or rigorously to define those adverbs, it is vital to keep in mind the purpose of the inquiry”); Lujan, 504 U.S. at 572, 577–78; Richard Murphy, Abandoning Standing: Trading a Rule of Access for a Rule of Deference, 60 ADMIN. L. REV. 943, 959–60 (2008); see also Elliott, supra note 11, at 466–68 (highlighting arguments
1. Article III Standing and the Separation of Powers

Although the Supreme Court has called Article III standing “perhaps the most important” justiciability doctrine courts use to screen out undeserving claimants, it was not formally articulated as a way to limit disputes to “cases” and “controversies” until the middle of the twentieth century. With the rise of statutory rights to judicial review and the liberalization of formal common law pleading standards, the Supreme Court began formulating standing requirements as a way to limit its jurisdiction. The test articulated in Lujan had been earlier developed within the context of actions brought by private citizens against the federal government, and was in part a reaction to Congress’s enactment of statutory provisions allowing individuals to seek judicial review of executive agency action. In these “public law” actions, the Court dismissed cases in which the plaintiff did not allege a violation of a personal right or traditional injury—such as a tort or property harm—but instead sought only to vindicate the public interest in assuring the proper enforcement and execution of federal laws.

The Supreme Court has primarily justified the restrictive standing framework on separation of powers principles. The attention the Court actually pays to separation of powers concerns, however, has varied depending on the justices’ underlying views of the particular issues at stake in a given case. In some cases, a majority of the justices has

that the standing doctrine hides what are essentially normative decisions about the proper scope of government action, and arguing that standing is built on several ideas of the separation of powers).


37 See Mank, supra note 6, at 1705 n.9 (identifying Stark v. Wickard, 321 U.S. 288 (1944), as the first Supreme Court case explicitly stating the Article III standing requirements); Murphy, supra note 35, at 968 & n.160.

38 See Anthony J. Bellia, Jr., Article III and the Cause of Action, 89 IOWA L. REV. 777, 792–93, 817–18 (2004); Hessick, supra note 12, at 290–92.


40 See Lujan, 504 U.S. at 577–78; Hessick, supra note 12, at 296.

41 See Summers, 129 S. Ct. at 1148–49; Lujan, 504 U.S. at 560, 577; Allen, 468 U.S. at 752 (maintaining that standing “is built on a single basic idea—the idea of separation of powers”); see also Elliott, supra note 11, at 467–75 (suggesting that by ensuring concrete adversity between parties, standing imperfectly serves at least one separation of powers function); Antonin Scalia, The Doctrine of Standing as an Essential Element of the Separation of Powers, 17 Suff. U. L. REV. 881, 891–97 (1983) (arguing that a liberalized approach to standing represents a threat to the separation of powers).

42 See Murphy, supra note 35, at 959–60.
been satisfied that the case involves “concrete adversity” between the parties, thereby diminishing the concern that the issues presented may involve more generalized grievances. In other cases, the Court has required more than concrete adversity, emphasizing that a plaintiff must be injured in a particularized way and that the relief sought must benefit the plaintiff more directly and tangibly than it would the public at large.

For some observers, an overly restrictive standing regime risks granting too much power to the political branches of the government, particularly in cases where only a court order can compel an agency, such as the EPA, to fulfill its statutory obligations. Some have even contended that, at best, the standing doctrine imperfectly serves separation of powers principles, and have suggested the Court adopt alternative mechanisms—such as an abstention doctrine—when evaluating the propriety of reviewing executive action. Other scholars, however, stress that the Court has always scrutinized whether a case has been brought by a proper plaintiff, particularly in actions where private parties seek to enforce public rights, and that the test outlined in *Lujan* is a reasonable means to ensure justiciability.

Despite its primary focus on the separation of powers as a justification for restrictive standing, the Supreme Court has never clearly distinguished private rights from public rights lawsuits for standing purposes. Given the Court’s broad holdings that standing is a constitutional requirement for jurisdiction, it appears that the *Lujan* test should apply to parties seeking to vindicate at least some types of common law.

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43 See FEC v. Akins, 524 U.S. 11, 23–25 (1998); Murphy, *supra* note 35, at 952–60 (reviewing a series of decisions in which the Court flipped back and forth on whether to bar claims that involved generalized grievances).

44 See *Lujan*, 504 U.S. at 573–74; Sunstein, *supra* note 39, at 226 (noting that a direct consequence of *Lujan* was that citizen-suit provisions, which are designed to allow private citizens to enforce public laws, are impermissible absent a showing of injury-in-fact).

45 See, e.g., Elliott, supra note 11, at 489–90.

46 Id. at 467–75; see also Murphy, *supra* note 35, at 969.

47 Elliott, *supra* note 11, at 515–16 (proposing a prudential abstention doctrine as an alternative); see Murphy, *supra* note 35, at 979–89 (suggesting the Court adopt a “rule of deference” in lieu of standing doctrine); see also Sunstein, *supra* note 39, at 168–79 (arguing that historical practice supports the propriety of standing if the plaintiff has been granted a cause of action under governing law, regardless of whether the action is a “citizen suit”).


private rights claims in federal court. Professor Erwin Chemerinsky has argued the contrary, concluding that “[i]njury to rights recognized at common law—property, contract, and torts—[is] sufficient for standing purposes.” Despite the historical adequacy of such injuries for standing purposes, federal courts have recently applied the *Lujan* standing framework to litigants bringing common law claims against private parties.

2. State Standing and Article III

Although federal courts have often applied the *Lujan* test to private litigants, it was unclear until the Supreme Court’s 2007 decision *Massachusetts v. EPA* whether the test applied to state litigants. In *Massachusetts v. EPA*, the Court required the lead state petitioner to satisfy the test, but also noted that states are not “normal litigants” for the purpose of standing and thus concluded that Massachusetts was entitled to “special solicitude” under the Article III standing framework. The Court premised this relaxed mode of standing in part on the states’ historical rights to litigate broader public interests in the federal courts.

Historically, states have often presented legal interests that are distinct from those of “normal” private litigants, and those interests have led federal courts to treat states differently than individuals for standing purposes. Prior to the twentieth century, states asserting governing

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50 See Massey, supra note 6, at 261 (noting that a private citizen who has suffered damage to land due to a defendant’s acts must prove the *Lujan* elements to maintain a federal court action); Thomas W. Merrill, *Global Warming as a Public Nuisance*, 30 COLUM. J. ENVTL. L. 293, 304–06 (2005) (concluding that states bringing common law nuisance actions in federal court should be required to satisfy standing requirements).


52 See Comer v. Murphy Oil USA, 585 F.3d 855, 863–67 (5th Cir. 2009) (citing Chemerinsky, supra note 51, at 69) (noting Chemerinsky’s assertion that common law injuries have historically been sufficient for standing, but nonetheless applying the *Lujan* framework to private party plaintiffs suing private entities in public nuisance action), vacated, 607 F.3d 1049 (5th Cir. 2010) (en banc) (restoring trial court’s dismissal of nuisance action); Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 341–49; *Kivalina*, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 877–82.

53 See Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 336–38; Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 307; cf. Merrill, supra note 50, at 299–305 (reviewing types of state-led suits that historically have not given rise to standing concerns, but concluding that *parens patriae* lawsuits brought in federal court should be subject to Article III and prudential standing limitations).


55 Id.

interests, as opposed to common law interests in contractual and property rights, were largely prohibited from litigating those interests in the federal courts. This prohibition included litigating generalized grievances on behalf of their citizens. At the turn of the century, however, the Supreme Court began to relax state standing requirements in public nuisance actions, reasoning that even though the state could assert no traditional common law interest, “it must surely be conceded that, if the health and comfort of the inhabitants of the State are threatened, the State is the proper party to represent and defend them.” By allowing states to vindicate generalized public harms in federal court, the Court retreated from its requirement that states resemble private party plaintiffs for standing purposes. Instead, the assertion of a state’s sovereignty interests—interests relating to the state’s governing and regulatory powers—became sufficient to invoke jurisdiction.

Today, courts recognize a category of state “sovereign interests” that generally give rise to a lenient standing threshold. This category includes a state’s ability to establish and enforce laws over individuals and entities within its jurisdiction and a state’s interest in preserving its law and regulatory jurisdiction from federal preemption. Similarly, where a state identifies a direct injury to its regulatory or economic interests under a federal administrative regime, a court will rarely perform a restrictive standing analysis, if it conducts a standing inquiry at all.

58 See id. at 431–32.
59 Missouri v. Illinois, 180 U.S. at 241; see Mank, supra note 6, at 1759–60.
60 See Woolhandler & Collins, supra note 57, at 449.
61 See id. at 456.
63 Snapp, 458 U.S. at 601; Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 311; see Woolhandler & Collins, supra note 57, at 410–11.
64 See, e.g., Alaska v. U.S. Dept. of Transp., 868 F.2d 441, 443–44 (D.C. Cir. 1989); Ohio ex rel. Celebrezze v. U.S. Dept. of Transp., 766 F.2d 228, 232–33 (6th Cir. 1985); Florida v. Weinberger, 492 F.2d 488, 492–94 (5th Cir. 1974); Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 311, 313–14 (noting that in several post-Lujan cases involving state sovereign interests, federal courts did not cite to Lujan or its three factors when deciding that the state had standing); see also Merrill, supra note 50, at 300–01 (noting that when a state vindicates its own laws in a criminal prosecution, federal courts do not require it to satisfy Lujan); Metzger, supra note 16, at 69 (arguing that recent case law suggests that states can sue in their sovereign capacities to challenge a federal agency’s policy on preemption, even before a specific preemption conflict has arisen); Nash, supra note 16, at 1055–56, 1072–74 (arguing that a state’s sovereign prerogatives are offended when it is preempted from lawmaking, and that states challenging federal regulatory power should be entitled to relaxed standing).
65 See, e.g., North Carolina v. EPA, 531 F.3d 896, 914–15 (D.C. Cir. 2008); West Virginia v. EPA, 362 F.3d 861, 868 (D.C. Cir. 2004); Davis v. EPA, 348 F.3d 772, 778 (9th Cir. 2003).
States may also assert “quasi-sovereign interests” when bringing lawsuits on behalf of their citizens, and in these *parens patriae* actions, they must satisfy a distinct standing test.66 Unlike sovereign interests, which can be relatively easy to identify, quasi-sovereign interests are inherently broad and abstract and thus risk being too vague to survive standing requirements.67 Therefore, in the 1982 decision *Alfred L. Snapp & Son, Inc. v. Puerto Rico ex rel. Barez*, the Supreme Court held that a state must demonstrate that its quasi-sovereign interest is distinct and independent of the interests of the purely private parties on whose behalf the state litigates.68 The Court has identified two principal categories of such interests: (1) the state’s interest in its citizens’ economic and physical welfare, and (2) the state’s interest in ensuring that its citizens enjoy the full benefits of participation in the federal system, to which the state has surrendered some of its sovereign prerogatives.69 These standing requirements are intended to distinguish *parens patriae* suits from cases in which the state has no independent interest at stake—an interest it presumably would have in a sovereign interest, or even a mere proprietary interest, lawsuit.70

Even where state plaintiffs can survive these standing requirements, however, states are generally barred from litigating as *parens patriae* against the federal government, which the Court has characterized

West Virginia v. EPA involved a dispute over the revision of a Clean Air Act state implementation plan, an instrument primarily created and administered by the state but subject to federal oversight and requirements. 362 F.3d at 865–67. Although it did not involve a traditional preemption dispute or the enforcement of a unique state law, at least one scholar has considered it to be a sovereign interests case. Wildermuth, *supra* note 16, at 313–14. Overall, the sovereign interests category appears to have some flexibility. See *id.* at 314; Woolhandler & Collins, *supra* note 57, at 410–11, 493; see also Metzger, *supra* note 16, at 69.


67 *Snapp*, 458 U.S. at 602.

68 *Id.* at 607; see Wildermuth, *supra* note 16, at 298–99. Observers have noted that a state’s “independent interest,” however potentially confusing and flexible a term, means an interest connected to the injury suffered by the state’s residents. See Wildermuth, *supra* note 16, at 298–99, 305, 317.

69 *Snapp*, 458 U.S. at 607–08. Additionally, the state must demonstrate that the defendant’s actions have injured a sufficiently substantial segment of the population. *Id.* at 607.


[S]tates that now litigate on the basis of *parens patriae* often have an independent basis for standing. . . . Where a state has an independent legally protected interest, there is arguably no harm in allowing a state to sue additionally as *parens patriae*. Such standing is analogous to that of private parties who have individually suffered harms suing as representatives of a class.

*Id.*
as holding a superior role in the protection of the general welfare.\textsuperscript{71} Ironically, however, the historical relaxation of state standing requirements may have been driven by the Supreme Court’s recognition of states’ interests in preserving their regulatory powers from federal intrusion.\textsuperscript{72} Today, observers have noted a steady increase in state challenges to federal administrative activity, particularly in contexts where the federal government has limited a state’s authority over matters affecting a state’s land and citizens.\textsuperscript{73} In cases where states have succeeded in overcoming standing hurdles, courts appear to have interpreted the states’ interests as sovereign, rejecting the federal government’s contentions that the states were suing as \textit{parens patriae}.\textsuperscript{74}

In light of the absence of any \textit{Lujan}-styled standing tests in many of these state lawsuits against the federal government, courts have generally not identified any separation of powers concerns similar to those at the heart of lawsuits brought by individuals seeking review of executive action.\textsuperscript{75} Of notable exception were the dissenting opinions in \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}, in which Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Scalia argued that allowing a state to sue the EPA in a politically and scientifically complex regulatory context impermissibly drew the Court into an area largely reserved for executive discretion.\textsuperscript{76} Scholars have recently ar-

\textsuperscript{71} See \textit{Snapp}, 458 U.S. at 610 n.16; \textit{Massachusetts v. Mellon}, 262 U.S. 447, 485–86 (1923). Even though some scholars have argued that the bar prohibits only state lawsuits against unconstitutional acts of the federal government, subsequent case law interpreting \textit{Massachusetts v. Mellon} have enforced the bar more broadly. See Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 308–09; see also \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}, 549 U.S. at 539 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting). But see Mank, supra note 6, at 1770 & n.386 (identifying federal court decisions that have allowed \textit{parens patriae} suits seeking to enforce rights provided to citizens under a federal statutory scheme).

\textsuperscript{72} See \textit{Woolhandler & Collins}, supra note 57, at 456. The Supreme Court itself has stated that an important factor in determining whether a state has an independent, quasi-sovereign interest sufficient for standing is whether the injury the state seeks to address is one that the state would address through its sovereign lawmaking powers. \textit{Snapp}, 458 U.S. at 607.

\textsuperscript{73} See, e.g., Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 287.

\textsuperscript{74} See \textit{West Virginia v. EPA}, 362 F.3d at 868 (rejecting EPA’s contention that West Virginia was suing as \textit{parens patriae} and holding that West Virginia had standing “as a state” due to injury caused by onerous federal regulatory requirements); \textit{Davis}, 348 F.3d at 778 (similarly rejecting EPA’s claim that a state lacked standing as \textit{parens patriae} and identifying the state’s independent pecuniary and regulatory interests in litigation).

\textsuperscript{75} See Merrill, supra note 50, at 299–301; Zdeb, supra note 6, at 1076–77 (arguing that the Court has held that traditional state standing tests are sufficient to ensure justiciability, even after it began widely applying the \textit{Lujan} test to private litigants).

\textsuperscript{76} See \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}, 549 U.S. at 536 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (“Relaxing Article III standing requirements because asserted injuries are pressed by a State, however, has no basis in our jurisprudence, and support for any such ‘special solicitude’ is conspicuously absent from the Court’s opinion.”); \textit{id}. at 550–53 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
gued, however, that when a state brings an action challenging the pre-
emptive or otherwise burdensome effect of federal regulatory action,
principles of federalism may justify a relaxed standing regime even
where separation of powers principles would otherwise give rise to a
heightened threshold.\footnote{See Massey, \textit{supra} note 6, at 262 (“The best argument for relaxing the meaning of the \textit{Lujan} elements when a state asserts a sovereign interest in federal court is that doing so is a necessarily implied aspect of the structural design of dual sovereignty.”); Metzger, \textit{supra} note 16, at 70–75 (noting that separation of powers principles may need to bend to accommodate federalism interests in ensuring the proper functioning of federal agencies, but that the Court has not yet articulated a justification along these lines); Nash, \textit{supra} note 16, at 1073–74; see also Melamed, \textit{supra} note 14, at 607.}

\section*{B. Additional Prudential Limitations on Jurisdiction}

Establishing Article III standing is only one threshold that a plain-
tiff must satisfy to survive a motion to dismiss; other prudential—that is,
discretionary—doctrines may come into play when the issues raised by
a lawsuit implicate separation of powers concerns.\footnote{See Flast v. Cohen, 392 U.S. 83, 100 (1968) (“[A] party may have standing in a par-
ticular case, but the federal court may nevertheless decline to pass on the merits of the case because, for example, it presents a political question.”).} The prudential standing doctrine and the political question doctrine may bar lawsuits that touch upon the generalized grievances of the broader population, particularly when the political branches have not yet addressed those grievances.\footnote{See \textit{Newdow}, 542 U.S. at 11–12 (discussing the importance of prudential standing in ensuring judicial restraint when the judiciary is faced with issues of “great national significance”); \textit{Kivalina}, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 871–77 (dismissing a common law action on political question grounds); \textit{Gen. Motors Corp.}, 2007 WL 2726871, at *12–13 (reasoning that policy questions concerning global warming emissions caps are reserved to the political branch-
es, which had not yet acted to address them); see also Murphy, \textit{supra} note 35, at 952–60 (analyzing the Court’s separation of powers “ping-pong” with regard to whether general-
ized grievances are justiciable).} Several federal district courts have relied on the political question doctrine in dismissing climate tort actions, even those brought by state plaintiffs, and the federal government has argued that states are barred from litigating such claims under the prudential standing doctrine.\footnote{See \textit{Kivalina}, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 871–77; \textit{Gen. Motors Corp.}, 2007 WL 2726871, at *16; Connecticut v. Am. Elec. Power Co., 406 F. Supp. 2d 265, 272 (S.D.N.Y. 2005), \textit{rev’d}, 582 F.3d 309 (2d Cir. 2009); Brief for the Tenn. Valley Auth., \textit{supra} note 9, at 13–24.}

Although it has been applied for different reasons in different con-
texts, the prudential standing doctrine generally focuses on whether it
would be appropriate for the court to render judgment for one particu-
lar party when the litigation could impact a larger class of affected indi-
viduals and potential plaintiffs. Because this standing doctrine is prudential, it may be overridden by Congress, and in the public law context, Congress has in many instances provided statutory authorization for private citizens to sue when issues involve more generalized harms and grievances. Thus, although the prudential standing bar against generalized grievances may complement an Article III standing inquiry, it appears most relevant to cases in which Congress has not already provided an express right of action, such as in the common law context.

Because the Court has stated that the contours of the prudential standing doctrine have not been “exhaustively defined,” the doctrine provides a malleable framework that could be used for dismissing novel claims for relief. Notably, in the 2004 decision

*Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow*, a five-justice majority of the Court identified the doctrine as a means to dismiss cases involving broad matters of public significance that would be better resolved by the political branches of the government. The Court therefore upheld a district court’s dismissal of an Establishment Clause challenge, based partially on the substantial family law issues implicated by the facts of the case. In a separate opinion written by Chief Justice Rehnquist, however, three justices accused the majority of creating a novel standing principle “loosely”

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81 See *Newdow*, 542 U.S. at 12; Valley Forge Christian Coll. v. Ams. United for Separation of Church & State, 454 U.S. 464, 474–75 (1982) (identifying three prudential standing limitations); *Warth*, 422 U.S. at 499–500; Murphy, supra note 35, at 989. As the Supreme Court has stated:

> Although we have not exhaustively defined the prudential dimensions of the standing doctrine, we have explained that prudential standing encompasses “the general prohibition on a litigant’s raising another person’s legal rights, the rule barring adjudication of generalized grievances more appropriately addressed in the representative branches, and the requirement that a plaintiff’s complaint fall within the zone of interests protected by the law invoked.”

82 See *Bennett v. Spear*, 520 U.S. 154, 162–63 (1997); *Warth*, 422 U.S. at 501 (“Congress may grant an express right of action to persons who otherwise would be barred by prudential standing rules.”); Murphy, supra note 35, at 952. Of course, for the plaintiff to satisfy Article III standing when suing under a statutory regime, the plaintiff himself must be particularly injured. See *Lujan*, 504 U.S. at 573–74; Sunstein, supra note 39, at 226, 235–36.

83 See *Bennett*, 520 U.S. at 162–63; *Warth*, 422 U.S. at 501 (noting that a plaintiff may assert Article III standing under a congressional right of action even where the alleged injury is shared by a large class of other possible litigants, and “may invoke the general public interest in support of [the plaintiff’s] claim”).

84 See *Newdow*, 542 U.S. at 11–12; cf. Brief for the Tenn. Valley Auth., supra note 9, at 13–25 (arguing that prudential standing doctrine constrains courts from hearing generalized grievances in common law global warming cases).

85 *Newdow*, 542 U.S. at 12.

86 See *id.* at 13–18.
based on a complex combination of state and federal law that inappropriately prevented the Court from reaching the merits of the dispute. 87

The political question doctrine is also designed to screen out disputes that would be better resolved by the political branches of the government, but it is more explicitly framed around the issues presented to the court, rather than the parties. 88 As one of the judiciary’s oldest justiciability doctrines focused on the interpretation of constitutional provisions, the political question doctrine expanded as a prudential tool of judicial restraint during the New Deal era, and courts have been willing to stretch it to encompass common law actions that involve widely shared harms. 89 Thus, a court applying the doctrine today has the discretion to apply a number of factors, first outlined by the Court in its 1962 decision Baker v. Carr, to determine whether the issues presented may cause the court to, among other things, make an initial policy decision otherwise reserved to the political branches. 90 The central separation of powers concern in this regard is that the judiciary would establish new federal policies despite a lack of accountability to the political branches or to the voting public. 91 A related but more functional analysis of the doctrine has prompted some scholars to argue that it properly allocates decisions to the branches of government that have superior expertise in particular areas, such as foreign policy. 92

Notably, the Supreme Court has stressed that that the political question doctrine must be applied on a case-by-case basis because even

87 See id. at 18–25 (Rehnquist, C.J., concurring in the judgment).
89 See Kivalina, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 871–77; Rachel E. Barkow, More Supreme Than Court? The Fall of the Political Question Doctrine and the Rise of Judicial Supremacy, 102 COLUM. L. REV. 237, 246–48, 258 (2002); see also Choper, supra note 88, at 1463, 1472–76 (“tentatively” suggesting that constitutional injuries that are widely shared may properly be treated as political questions).
90 Baker v. Carr, 369 U.S. 186, 217 (1962) (outlining six factors a court may consider to determine whether a case is justiciable, including whether the court would have to render an initial policy determination of a kind “clearly for nonjudicial discretion”); Kivalina, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 872–77 (applying a “distilled approach” of the Baker test and holding that two of the Baker factors were implicated by a global warming tort action).
91 See Baker, 369 U.S. at 210; Kivalina, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 876; Gen. Motors Corp., 2007 WL 2726871, at *16.
seemingly politically charged cases may in fact be appropriate for judicial review. Additionally, the doctrine is not supposed to turn on whether a case is large, complicated, or otherwise logistically difficult to manage, but instead on whether the claims could be resolved in a “principled, rational” way structured on judicial standards of review and reasoning. Despite these admonitions, however, several scholars have criticized the doctrine as overly discretionary and untethered from reliable legal standards. Observers have instead suggested that the “strangeness of the issue,” coupled with judicial “self-doubt,” is at the heart of courts’ application of the doctrine.

II. The Justiciability of State-Led Climate Lawsuits

In light of the federal government’s failure to adequately regulate greenhouse gas emissions, several states have crafted regulatory programs to mitigate and adapt to the anticipated effects of global warming. Several state attorneys general have also sought relief in federal court to combat interstate emissions. This Part discusses two of these state-led climate lawsuits: the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2007 decision Massachusetts v. EPA; and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit’s 2009 decision Connecticut v. American Electric Power Co., which the Su-

93 See Baker, 369 U.S. at 209, 217.
95 See Choper, supra note 88, at 1460 (discussing other scholars’ criticisms of the doctrine); Gore & Tarr, supra note 17, at 578 (noting the “messy state” of the doctrine); see also Barkow, supra note 89, at 260 (highlighting that the Court has emphasized “embroilment in politics” as a basis for dismissing lawsuits under the political question doctrine).
96 See Melamed, supra note 14, at 592 (quoting ALEXANDER M. BICKEL, THE LEAST DANGEROUS BRANCH 184 (1st ed. 1962)); see also John A. Ferejohn & Larry D. Kramer, Independent Judges, Dependent Judiciary: Institutionalizing Judicial Restraint, 77 N.Y.U. L. Rev. 962, 1013–14 (2002) (stating that political questions are those which the court should not consider because they are “too political . . . [they are] potentially controversial questions in areas where courts are more at sea than usual, more lacking in the sort of legal resources that enable them to insulate their decisions from easy political counterattack”).
The Supreme Court recently agreed to review. The two decisions illustrate the different separation of powers concerns that may be implicated by state-led lawsuits involving widely shared harms and controversial policy questions. Section A provides a brief overview of the Supreme Court decision, and also discusses different interpretations of the Court’s standing analysis and its applicability to common law actions like *American Electric*. Section B then provides a brief discussion of the Second Circuit’s decision in *American Electric* and the various hurdles the common law plaintiffs faced in establishing jurisdiction.

A. Massachusetts v. EPA: A Novel Approach to State Standing

The Supreme Court’s decision in *Massachusetts v. EPA* demonstrated an innovative approach to state standing by announcing a rule of “special solicitude” for the lead state petitioner in an action against the federal government. The Court also used the Article III standing test outlined in its 1992 decision *Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife* to analyze whether the state had standing to sue, a novelty in itself considering the historical relaxation of state standing requirements and the fact that several post-*Lujan* decisions had declined to apply the three-part test to state litigants. In response, several scholars have sought to clarify the types of state interests that formed the basis for the special standing rule; these scholars have reached various conclusions as to the rule’s future applicability to other state-led lawsuits, particularly *parens patriae* actions.

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99 See infra notes 103–148 and accompanying text.
100 See infra notes 103–148 and accompanying text.
101 See infra notes 103–137 and accompanying text.
102 See infra notes 138–148 and accompanying text.
103 See *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. at 518–20; id. at 536–37 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (criticizing the majority’s “novel standing rule”); Wildermuth, *supra* note 16, at 318 (noting “new twists” in Court’s standing analysis); see also Welti, *supra* note 16, at 1753 nn.6–7. The term “special solicitude” had been used in previous Supreme Court opinions with regard to litigants who demonstrated particularly pressing needs and claims, but it had never been used in connection with a relaxed state standing regime. Stevenson, *supra* note 17, at 20–26.
104 See 504 U.S. 555, 560–61 (1992); see supra notes 30–35 and accompanying text (discussing this standing test).
1. Special Solicitude and the Separation of Powers

The case began in 1999, when a group of private organizations filed a rulemaking petition with the EPA, asking it to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from new motor vehicles under section 202 of the Clean Air Act.\(^\text{107}\) Four years later, the EPA entered an order denying the petition, and the organizations, joined by twelve states, sought judicial review in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.\(^\text{108}\) Two of the three judges on the court of appeals agreed that the “EPA Administrator properly exercised his discretion” in denying the petition, but only one of them concluded that the petitioners had failed to demonstrate an injury-in-fact sufficient for standing.\(^\text{109}\)

Writing for a five-justice majority of the Supreme Court, Justice Stevens held that the lead state petitioner was entitled to special solicitude in the Court’s standing analysis, emphasizing the petitioner’s procedural rights to judicial review under the Clean Air Act and the state’s unique “stake in protecting its quasi-sovereign interests” in light of its inability to independently regulate harmful greenhouse gas emissions.\(^\text{110}\) Notably, the concept of special solicitude and its relation to quasi-sovereign interests was not briefed before the Court, and the decision does not make clear whether Massachusetts was even suing in its *parens patriae* capacity.\(^\text{111}\) Scholars have suggested that the term “quasi-sovereign” may have been used because the Court cited to a relatively obscure U.S. Supreme Court decision from 1907, *Georgia v. Tennessee Copper Co.*,\(^\text{112}\) for the proposition that states have historically been able to litigate broad environmental claims in the federal courts.\(^\text{113}\) After establishing this

\(^{107}\) See *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. at 510. Section 202(a)(1) of the Clean Air Act, as codified, provides in part, “The [EPA] Administrator shall by regulation prescribe . . . standards applicable to the emission of any air pollutant from any class or classes of new motor vehicles . . . which in his judgment cause, or contribute to, air pollution which may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public health or welfare.” 42 U.S.C. § 7521(a)(1) (2006).

\(^{108}\) See *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. at 504–14.


\(^{110}\) See *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. at 517–20 (citing to the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. § 7607(b)(1)). The Court also identified section 202(a)(1) of the Act, codified at 42 U.S.C. § 7521(a)(1), as a congressional mandate to the EPA to protect Massachusetts, and thus may have considered this provision among the state’s “rights under the Act.” See id. at 519–20.

\(^{111}\) See Stevenson, supra note 17, at 5; Welti, supra note 16, at 1762.

\(^{112}\) 206 U.S. 230 (1907).

\(^{113}\) See *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. at 519–20; Mank, supra note 6, at 1738–40 (suggesting that the majority probably relied on *Tennessee Copper* because it supported the proposition that states have broader rights to invoke federal jurisdiction when they assert quasi-sovereign interests); Murphy, supra note 35, at 963.
special status, however, the Court did not perform a *parens patriae* standing test but instead applied the *Lujan* framework to the state’s asserted loss of coastal property, an interest the Court had previously characterized as an ordinary proprietary, as opposed to sovereign or quasi-sovereign, interest.\(^\text{114}\) Holding that the petitioners did have standing to sue under this test,\(^\text{115}\) the majority concluded that the EPA had the authority to regulate automobile emissions of greenhouse gases and could only refuse to do so if it either determined that such emissions did not contribute to global warming or if it offered a reasonable explanation as to why it would not undertake such a determination.\(^\text{116}\)

Notably, the majority and the dissents split sharply over whether the decision violated underlying separation of powers principles.\(^\text{117}\) In a dissent joined by three justices, Chief Justice Roberts stressed that the primary purpose of the standing inquiry was to screen out cases that present generalized grievances better resolved by the political branches and noted that “[t]he very concept of global warming seems inconsistent with [the *Lujan*] particularization requirement.”\(^\text{118}\) Reasoning that the majority’s “special solicitude” rule simply amounted to a dilution of the *Lujan* standing requirements, the Chief Justice argued that the decision allowed the judiciary to become “a convenient forum for policy debates.”\(^\text{119}\) Justice Scalia joined the Chief Justice’s dissent but also offered a dissent on the merits, arguing that Congress had vested the EPA with broad discretion to regulate air pollutants.\(^\text{120}\) The majority, by contrast, disavowed the notion that any separation of powers principles counseled against resolving the petitioners’ claim; stating that the “gist of the question of standing” is whether the petitioners had a sufficiently

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\(^{115}\) *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. at 526.

\(^{116}\) See *id.* at 534–35. Three years later, the EPA finally did make such a determination, and has since begun the process of establishing a regulatory framework for greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act. See, e.g., Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for Greenhouse Gases Under Section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act; Final Rule, 74 Fed. Reg. 66,496 (Dec. 15, 2009) (to be codified at 40 C.F.R. pt. 1).

\(^{117}\) See *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. at 517, 522; *id.* at 536 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (“Relaxing Article III standing requirements because asserted injuries are pressed by a State, however, has no basis in our jurisprudence, and support for any such ‘special solicitude’ is conspicuously absent from the Court’s opinion.”); *id.* at 550–53 (Scalia, J., dissenting); *see also* Murphy, *supra* note 35, at 964 (discussing the majority and dissenting justices’ views of the separation of powers principles implicated by the decision).

\(^{118}\) See *id.* at 541 (Roberts, C.J., joined by Scalia, J., Thomas, J. & Alito, J., dissenting).

\(^{119}\) See *id.* at 547.

\(^{120}\) See *id.* at 560 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
personal stake in the litigation to ensure concrete adversity in the adjudication, the majority concluded that the Court could resolve the claim regardless of the fact that global warming could be construed as a generalized grievance.\textsuperscript{121}

2. Subsequent Interpretations of \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}

Several observers initially interpreted \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA} as a decision that could signal a more relaxed standing regime for environmental lawsuits, particularly those involving procedural rights.\textsuperscript{122} When in 2009, however, the Supreme Court held in \textit{Summers v. Earth Island Institute} that several environmental groups did not have standing to challenge certain U.S. Forest Service decisions, the scope of \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA} was bridled.\textsuperscript{123} Recent commentary suggests that the Court’s special solicitude standing rule is restricted to states challenging federal administrative actions.\textsuperscript{124} Several scholars, however, have concluded that the decision offers a relaxed standing regime for states suing in their common law \textit{parens patriae} capacities as well.\textsuperscript{125}

The more restrictive readings of \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA} generally suggest that the state had standing due to its inability to regulate green-


\textsuperscript{123} See \textit{129 S. Ct.} 1142, 1149–52 (2009). Notably, in a dissenting opinion, Justice Breyer argued that the Court should have held differently in light of the procedural rights analysis involved in \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}. \textit{Id.} at 1156 (Breyer, J., dissenting).

\textsuperscript{124} See Stevenson, \textit{supra} note 17, at 50–52, 73–74; Welti, \textit{supra} note 16, at 1775; \textit{see also} Nash, \textit{supra} note 16, at 1072–74 (arguing that a “null preemption” reading of \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA} standing analysis avoids confusing aspects of alternative explanations of the decision).

\textsuperscript{125} See, e.g., Mank, \textit{supra} note 6, at 1767–74; Massey, \textit{supra} note 6, at 277–80; Zdeb, \textit{supra} note 6, at 1075–77 (arguing that \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA} highlights that \textit{parens patriae} suits can serve as an adequate \textit{alternative} basis for state standing in climate change litigation); \textit{see also} Matthew R. Cody, Comment, \textit{Special Solicitude for States in the Standing Analysis: A New Type of Federalism}, 40 \textit{McGeorge L. Rev.} 149, 162 (2009) (arguing that \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA} signals a limited expansion of the \textit{parens patriae} doctrine, allowing special solicitude for states that possess a procedural right to challenge federal action).
house gas emissions and the fact that the EPA, counter to the state’s interests in addressing the problem, refused to regulate those emissions.\textsuperscript{126} In particular, one commentator has suggested that the Court adopted a “regulatory interest” theory of standing, positing that the state was injured by the government’s rulemaking decision and that this injury provided the basis for the relaxed \textit{Lujan} analysis of the loss of coastal property.\textsuperscript{127} This theory of standing was echoed in an amicus brief filed in support of Massachusetts by Arizona and four other states; these states contended that the EPA’s regulation potentially preempted all independent state regulation of carbon dioxide emissions, thereby giving rise to an injury cognizable under \textit{Lujan}.\textsuperscript{128} The amicus brief stressed that states retain at least some independent lawmaking powers under the cooperative federalism model of the Clean Air Act by highlighting, for example, that states can in some contexts adopt their own emission standards as long as the federal government has established a regulatory floor for those emissions.\textsuperscript{129} Thus, the federal government’s refusal to regulate carbon dioxide emissions impermissibly impeded the states’ residual abilities to enact state-specific standards.\textsuperscript{130}

Observers have also noted how, during oral argument, several justices appeared interested in a 2004 decision by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, \textit{West Virginia v. EPA}, for the proposition that a state may have “special standing” when federal action causes a direct injury to a state “as a state.”\textsuperscript{131} Notably, the state plaintiff’s stand-

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\textsuperscript{126} See Nash, supra note 16, at 1072–74; Stevenson, supra note 17, at 8, 32–36, 51; Welti, supra note 16, at 1765–67; see also Gen. Motors Corp., 2007 WL 2726871, at *11 (noting that “inherent in the Supreme Court’s reasoning” is the principle that a state, having surrendered its rights to independently regulate in certain circumstances, may challenge federal administrative decisions that it finds dissatisfying).

\textsuperscript{127} See Welti, supra note 16, at 1765–68.

\textsuperscript{128} See Brief of the States of Arizona et al. as Amici Curiae in Support of Petitioners at 13–15, \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}, 549 U.S. 497 (No. 05-1120).

\textsuperscript{129} See id., at 14–15, 18–20. Under section 209 of the Clean Air Act, as codified, California is the only state permitted to set emissions standards for motor vehicles. See 42 U.S.C. § 7543(a)–(b) (2006); Brief of Arizona et al., supra note 128, at 14–15. California may adopt its own standards if it applies for a waiver of preemption from the EPA and demonstrates that the state standards would be no less protective of public health than federal standards. See § 7543(b). Once those standards are adopted, other states can “piggyback” on California’s standards. See § 7507.

\textsuperscript{130} See Brief of Arizona et al., supra note 128, at 13, 20–25. The Supreme Court has held that even where a federal agency has decided \textit{not} to regulate certain activities, such as in \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}, the agency’s refusal to regulate can be treated as the equivalent of ruling that no such regulation, either state or federal, is appropriate, thereby preempting state regulatory power. See Ray v. Atl. Richfield Co., 435 U.S. 151, 178 (1978).

\textsuperscript{131} See West Virginia v. EPA, 362 F.3d 861, 868 (D.C. Cir. 2004); Mank, supra note 6, at 1738–40; Stevenson, supra note 17, at 30–35; Welti, supra note 16, at 1768–70.
ing in West Virginia v. EPA did not rest on its interests as parens patriae but rather on its economic and regulatory interests in the outcome of the federal agency’s decisions.\textsuperscript{132} 

Although the Supreme Court in Massachusetts v. EPA did not cite to the D.C. Circuit decision or explicitly reference the amicus brief, it identified the preemptive effect of federal law as a basis for special solicitude, noted that the state was asserting “its rights” under federal law, and justified its analysis in part on the state’s “well-founded desire to preserve its sovereign territory.”\textsuperscript{133} This language, which appears to distinguish the state’s interests from its derivative interests in its citizenry, has led some lower courts to dismiss parens patriae actions against the federal government in which the state did not assert a sufficiently distinct claim of injury based on its own interests.\textsuperscript{134} 

Nevertheless, some scholars have argued that Massachusetts v. EPA, by identifying “quasi-sovereign interests” and Georgia v. Tennessee Copper as the basis for special solicitude, still provides states suing as parens patriae a relaxed standing threshold.\textsuperscript{135} One scholar in particular has conceded that Massachusetts v. EPA is most directly on point for state suits that involve a procedural right given by Congress, but has nonetheless argued that the decision “implicitly approved parens patriae standing in the absence of a procedural right.”\textsuperscript{136} Despite their arguments in favor of expanded parens patriae standing, however, several of these commen-

\textsuperscript{132} See West Virginia v. EPA, 362 F.3d at 868.

\textsuperscript{133} See Massachusetts v. EPA, at 518–20, 520 n.17. Although the Court did not specify how states could be precluded from enforcing their own greenhouse gas regulations, two federal statutes potentially preempt state lawmaking in this respect: the Clean Air Act and the Energy Policy and Conservation Act (“EPCA”). See Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. § 7543(a) (prohibiting states from adopting or attempting to enforce standards related to the control of emissions from new motor vehicles); EPCA, 49 U.S.C. § 32919(a) (2006) (forbidding states from adopting or enforcing laws or regulations related to automobile fuel economy standards covered by federal law). After the Court decided Massachusetts v. EPA, however, two federal district courts held that, so long as EPA grants California the right to independently set greenhouse gas emissions limits under the waiver process of the Clean Air Act, neither the Clean Air Act nor the EPCA would preempt such state regulatory power. See Cent. Valley Chrysler-Jeep, Inc. v. Goldstene, 529 F. Supp. 2d 1151, 1189 (E.D. Cal. 2007); Green Mountain Chrysler Plymouth Dodge Jeep v. Crombie, 508 F. Supp. 2d 295, 350 (D. Vt. 2007).

\textsuperscript{134} See Citizens Against Ruining the Env’t v. EPA, 535 F.3d 670, 676 (7th Cir. 2008); Colorado ex. rel. Suthers v. Gonzalez, 558 F. Supp. 2d 1158, 1165 (D. Colo. 2007); see also Michigan v. EPA, 581 F.3d 524, 529 (7th Cir. 2008).

\textsuperscript{135} See Mank, supra note 6, at 1767–74; Massey, supra note 6, at 277–80; Zdeb, supra note 6, at 1073–78; see also Cody, supra note 125, at 162.

\textsuperscript{136} Massey, supra note 6, at 277.
tators have acknowledged that, as a *parens patriae* decision, *Massachusetts v. EPA* is unconventional—and even confusing.\(^{137}\)

**B. American Electric: Parens Patriae Standing and Global Warming**

The Second Circuit in *American Electric* similarly expressed confusion about the standing analysis in *Massachusetts v. EPA* and how it applies to *parens patriae* lawsuits.\(^{138}\) And unlike the state petitioner in *Massachusetts v. EPA*, the state plaintiffs in *American Electric* sought injunctive relief against six power generation companies, alleging that the utilities’ collective greenhouse gas emissions constituted a public nuisance under federal common law.\(^{139}\) Unlike the Supreme Court in *Massachusetts v. EPA*, the Second Circuit attempted to avoid ambiguity in its standing analysis by analyzing the states’ standing in two distinct capacities: *parens patriae* and proprietary.\(^{140}\) In so doing, the Second Circuit held that the states satisfied the *parens patriae* standing test articulated under the Supreme Court’s 1982 decision *Alfred L. Snapp & Son, Inc. v. Puerto Rico ex rel. Barez*,\(^{141}\) and also demonstrated a sufficient proprietary injury under the *Lujan* test.\(^{142}\) Furthermore, in evaluating the states’ standing under *Lujan*, the Second Circuit incorporated reasoning from *Massachusetts v. EPA* into each prong of its analysis, ultimately relying on strands of the Court’s decision based on the similarities between the physical harms the states suffered in both cases.\(^{143}\)

By bringing their claims under common law, however, the *American Electric* plaintiffs also faced several additional hurdles not encountered by the petitioners in *Massachusetts v. EPA*—in particular, whether the suit would force the court to render policy decisions more appropriate for the political branches, and whether their federal common law claims were displaced by the Clean Air Act or other federal legislation concerning greenhouse gas emissions.\(^{144}\) In reversing the judgment of

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\(^{137}\) See Mank, supra note 6, at 1746; Massey, supra note 6, at 268; Zdeb, supra note 6, at 1073.

\(^{138}\) See Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 338 (noting that the Court in *Massachusetts v. EPA* used “language that hearkened to a state’s quasi-sovereign interests” while applying the *Lujan* test to a proprietary injury, and asking, “Must a state asserting *parens patriae* standing satisfy both the *Snapp* and *Lujan* tests?”).

\(^{139}\) See id. at 316.

\(^{140}\) See id. at 338–49.

\(^{141}\) 458 U.S. 592 (1982); see supra notes 66–70 and accompanying text.

\(^{142}\) See Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 338–49.

\(^{143}\) See id. at 341–42, 344, 347–49.

\(^{144}\) See id. at 324, 369–88. The displacement question may become more relevant now that the EPA has begun establishing regulations for greenhouse gas emissions. See supra
the lower court, the Second Circuit held that the political question doctrine did not counsel dismissal, concluding that the judiciary possesses the institutional competence to resolve climate tort claims regardless of their novelty or complexity.\textsuperscript{145} Noting that the Supreme Court has rarely dismissed these cases as political questions, the Second Circuit reasoned that the common law claims did not involve policy questions that could only be determined by Congress or the Executive.\textsuperscript{146} Thus, the Second Circuit’s analysis differed substantially from the decisions of several lower courts that dismissed similar climate tort claims based on the political question doctrine.\textsuperscript{147} The Supreme Court granted certiorari the following year.\textsuperscript{148}

III. Pрудential Limitations and \textit{Parens Patriae} Lawsuits

As the Second Circuit’s 2009 decision in \textit{Connecticut v. American Electric Power Co.} illustrates, states may attempt to pursue their interests in combating widespread environmental harms under the common law rather than in administrative actions against the federal government.\textsuperscript{149} And, as noted above, several commentators have concluded that states suing in their \textit{parens patriae} capacities should be entitled to as relaxed a standing regime as Massachusetts received in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2007 decision \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}.\textsuperscript{150} Section A of this Part explores the

\textsuperscript{145} See 582 F.3d at 329.

\textsuperscript{146} Id. at 321, 330–31. Interestingly, the court also linked the political question doctrine to the displacement issue, reasoning that where Congress or the executive branch can displace common law standards with their own legislative or regulatory standards, “there is no need for the protections of the political question doctrine.” Id. at 332.

\textsuperscript{147} See id. at 324–30 (reversing lower court decision); Native Village of Kivalina v. ExxonMobil Corp., 663 F. Supp. 2d 863, 871–77 (N.D. Cal. 2009) (reasoning that a climate nuisance claim presented lack of judicially discoverable and manageable standards, and required the court to make an initial policy decision better reserved to the political branches), appeal docketed, No. 09-17490 (9th Cir. Mar. 10, 2010); \textit{Gen. Motors Corp.}, 2007 WL 2726871, at *12–13, 16.

\textsuperscript{148} 131 S. Ct. 813 (U.S. Dec. 6, 2010).


\textsuperscript{150} See \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}, 549 U.S. 497, 517–26 (2007); \textit{supra} notes 135–137 and accompanying text.
The Supreme Court has consistently identified separation of powers concerns as the basis for its restrictive standing regimes; therefore, a restrictive standing threshold for state litigants bringing common law actions would have to be justified on a theory of separation of powers. Most decisions involving Article III standing, however, have involved parties seeking to vindicate more generalized public rights by forcing the government to better enforce or comply with its own laws, particularly when it is unclear the party has suffered a distinct harm. As a statutory petition for judicial review of agency action, Massachusetts v. EPA fits into this public law framework of cases. In a common law suit brought against a private polluter, however, the relationship between the plaintiff, the defendant, and the role the court is asked to play in resolving the dispute changes. Rather than collaterally attacking government policy by asking the court to review an agency’s actions, the plaintiffs in a tort or property action seek relief from a harm directly caused by the defendants; the chains of causation and redress-

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151 See infra notes 153–169 and accompanying text.
152 See infra notes 170–190 and accompanying text.
153 See, e.g., Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife, 504 U.S. 555, 577 (1992); see supra notes 36–52 and accompanying text.
155 See Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 516–20 (discussing the statutory framework at issue in the case and the relation between the Article III standing inquiry and statutory rights to judicial review); Nagle, supra note 11, at 494 (characterizing Massachusetts v. EPA as "the quintessential public law case").
156 Compare Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 514, 516–18 (discussing petitioners’ request for judicial review of the agency decision), with Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 316–19 (reviewing plaintiffs’ claims of injuries caused by defendants’ emissions, and their request for injunctive relief).
ability are thus “shorter” than those alleged in Supreme Court cases like Massachusetts v. EPA and Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife.\textsuperscript{157}

As the judiciary is less likely to be asked to “oversee” the executive branch in common law suits, a moderate application of the Lujan factors in common law global warming lawsuits is sufficient to ensure that separation of powers values are protected.\textsuperscript{158} As illustrated by cases like Massachusetts v. EPA, Lujan, and the Court’s 1997 decision FEC v. Akins, the Court may apply the Article III standing test with varying degrees of intensity and scrutiny, depending on the majority’s sensitivity to the underlying separation of powers issues implicated by the suit.\textsuperscript{159} In both Massachusetts v. EPA and Akins, the majority identified the crux of the standing inquiry as whether the plaintiffs presented a sufficiently personal stake in the claim so as to ensure concrete adversity between the parties.\textsuperscript{160} This in turn diminished the concern that the adjudication would impact a larger group of people.\textsuperscript{161}

Furthermore, several Supreme Court justices have likened the concrete adversity model of standing to the more traditional threshold inquiry of whether a particular victim of a “widespread mass tort” has standing to sue.\textsuperscript{162} Even Justice Scalia, whom many consider to be the principal architect of the restrictive standing framework, has conceded that each plaintiff in a mass tort action will likely suffer a sufficiently particular injury, despite the widespread nature of that injury.\textsuperscript{163} Not surprisingly, the “widespread mass tort” analogy provides a strong foundation for a relaxed standing regime in state-led tort actions.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{157} Compare Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 510–14, 516–18, and Lujan, 504 U.S. at 559, 561–62, with Comer v. Murphy Oil USA, 585 F.3d 855, 865 n.5 (5th Cir. 2009) (noting a shorter chain of causation in a tort claim for relief compared to a public law challenge), vacated, 607 F.3d 1049 (5th Cir. 2010) (en banc) (restoring the trial court’s dismissal of a nuisance action).

\textsuperscript{158} Cf. Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 338–49.

\textsuperscript{159} See Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 520 (stating that Massachusetts was entitled to special solicitude in the Court’s standing analysis); FEC v. Akins, 524 U.S. 11, 23–25 (1998) (framing the issue of standing as whether the plaintiff’s claim is sufficiently concrete or too “abstract,” and then holding that a claim of informational injury was sufficiently concrete to support standing); Lujan, 504 U.S. at 573–74, 577 (stating that claims involving generalized public grievances are nonjusticiable); Murphy, supra note 35, at 959–60.


\textsuperscript{161} See Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 522; Akins, 524 U.S. at 24.

\textsuperscript{162} See Akins, 524 U.S. at 24–25.

\textsuperscript{163} See id. at 35 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (noting that in a mass tort situation, every victim suffers particular injuries); Murphy, supra note 35, at 975–76.

\textsuperscript{164} See Akins, 524 U.S. at 24–25; Am. Elec., 582. F.3d at 317–18 (listing different types of injuries suffered by states as result of climate change); see also Native Village of Kivalina v.
The theory of harm in a case like American Electric essentially maps onto this private law “mass tort action” framework and, as such, does not implicate the separation of powers concerns embedded in public law litigation. But even if one were to believe that a parens patriae suit presents the same problems as a public law action, the special nature of parens patriae litigation suggests that any lingering separation of powers concerns could be resolved by a moderate application of the Lujan factors, particularly when they are coupled with the standing test outlined in the Court’s 1982 decision Alfred L. Snapp & Son, Inc. v. Puerto Rico ex rel. Barez. As the Court has specifically recognized, the Snapp standing test already ensures that lawsuits like American Electric contain a concrete interest that is judicially cognizable. In fact, the Snapp test was the only threshold for states suing as parens patriae throughout the period during which the Court began applying the three-pronged Lujan test to private citizens and associations bringing public law actions. Nevertheless, assuming that the Lujan test will continue to play a part in complicated parens patriae lawsuits, a moderate application of the test would be sufficient to ensure concrete adversity.

B. Prudential Limitations on Parens Patriae Actions

Even though state parens patriae litigants should be able to establish Article III standing under the Court’s separation of powers rationale, they may still have to overcome prudential justiciability thresholds; indeed, recent case law suggests that defendants will continue to rely on these doctrines to obtain dismissals of common law environmental actions. Regardless of whether the judiciary is ill-suited to adjudicate

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165 See Nagle, supra note 11, at 511–13.
166 458 U.S. 592, 607–08 (1982) (outlining the standing test for parens patriae lawsuits); see Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 338–49; cf. Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 538 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (arguing that the state must satisfy both the Snapp and Lujan standing tests when suing as parens patriae).
167 Snapp, 458 U.S. at 602.
168 See Zdeb, supra note 6, at 1076–77.
169 See Merrill, supra note 50, at 304–05 (noting that the Lujan requirements were not developed in the state standing context, but should apply to parens patriae suits where a state sues outside of its own courts); Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 306–07; see also Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 338–49 (analyzing, though not requiring, state standing under both the Snapp and Lujan tests).
170 See Kivalina, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 871–77; California v. Gen. Motors Corp., No. 06-05755, 2007 WL 2726871, at *16 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 17, 2007); see also Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at
complex climate tort suits or not, these lawsuits operate outside the safeguards and limitations of a national statutory framework, and (as in cases like *American Electric*) may call on the judiciary’s equity powers to establish a cap on the greenhouse gas emissions of regulated entities.\(^{171}\) Additionally, the fact that the claims are non-statutory renders more problematic the fact that these cases involve “generalized grievances,” including the related problem that the injuries are caused by a large—and potentially global—combination of actors.\(^{172}\) Therefore, unlike the separation of powers concern embedded in public law litigation where the judiciary is asked to monitor executive action to ensure it satisfies congressional commands, common law actions give rise to a distinct separation of powers concern: that the judiciary will undemocratically create far-reaching law and policy.\(^{173}\)

Overall, the federal judiciary’s reluctance to entertain climate tort suits seems to have less to do with the Article III standing of the parties and more to do with the complex and unprecedented nature of the issues that arise in the cases.\(^{174}\) Most importantly, recent case law illustrates that the prudential standing and political question doctrines are still—even after hundreds of years—undefined at their outer boundaries, and invite courts to apply a fairly loose set of policy goals to dismiss

324–32 (evaluating defendants’ claims that a climate tort lawsuit violated the political question doctrine). Notably, a panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit took a particularly strong stance against the applicability of the political question doctrine to common law tort claims, even singling out the *General Motors* decision and district court decision in *American Electric* as “legally flawed.” *See Comer*, 585 F.3d at 873–76. It similarly refused to apply the prudential standing doctrine to the plaintiff’s nuisance claims. *Id.* at 866 n.7. This decision, however, was soon vacated by an en banc panel of the Fifth Circuit. *See* 607 F.3d at 1055 (restoring trial court’s dismissal of nuisance action). For a helpful treatment of justiciability concerns in *parens patriae* actions brought in the product litigation context, see Donald G. Gifford, *Impersonating the Legislature: State Attorneys General and Parens Patriae Product Litigation*, 49 B.C. L. Rev. 913, 947–50 (2008).

171 *See Am. Elec.*, 582 F.3d at 318.


173 *See, e.g.*, *Kivalina*, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 876 (noting that the doctrine is in part aimed at preventing a court from removing an important policy determination from the legislature); *Gen. Motors Corp.*, 2007 WL 2726871, at *16 (emphasizing that the judiciary is not accountable to any other branch or to the people).

174 *See Kivalina*, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 871–77 (relying primarily on the political question doctrine to dismiss a nuisance action); *Gen. Motors Corp.*, 2007 WL 2726871, at *6–8, 15–16; Gerrard, *supra* note 9, at 40; *see also* Massachusetts v. *EPA*, 549 U.S. at 541 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (arguing that climate change, by its very nature, is nonjusticiable).
claims that involve widespread injuries or complex chains of causation.175

Although not intended to dismiss claims merely because they are politically charged, the political question doctrine does make it easier for a court to decline jurisdiction when it is faced with an unfamiliar or complex issue of law.176 The six factors the Court originally articulated in its 1962 decision Baker v. Carr operate independently of one another to dismiss political questions; among these factors is the consideration of whether the issues presented may cause the court to make an initial policy decision otherwise reserved to the political branches—a fairly loose concept in itself.177 What the Baker factors really boil down to is that where the political branches have not yet enacted clear standards and policies by which to address a widespread problem, the judiciary should avoid resolving even portions of that problem.178 Whereas some observers have championed the common law of nuisance as a mechanism to fill the gaps left by legislative and regulatory inaction,179 the ongoing failure of the legislature to pass climate legislation—coupled with recent congressional attempts to prevent the EPA from regulating such emissions—suggests that defendants will continue to invoke the political question doctrine to dismiss climate tort lawsuits.180 Therefore, even in cases like American Electric, where states allege injuries similar to those found sufficient in Massachusetts v. EPA, plaintiffs will likely face

175 See Newdow, 542 U.S. at 11–12; id. at 18–25 (Rehnquist, C.J., concurring in the judgment); Kivalina, 663 F. Supp. 2d at 871–77 (applying a “distilled” version of the doctrine to common law tort claims); Choper, supra note 88, at 1460 (noting scholarly criticism of the Court’s political question doctrine as overly discretionary and not bound by rule of law); see also Cutting & Cahoon, supra note 17, at 141 (arguing that in terms of the lower courts’ dismissals of climate tort claims on political question grounds, “the justiciability issue is bogus . . . the courts probably just thought the cases were way too much work and that the legislative or executive action would eliminate need to decide the cases”).

176 See Barkow, supra note 89, at 260; Choper, supra note 88, at 1460; see also Ferejohn & Kramer, supra note 96, at 1013–14 (characterizing political questions as those which the court should not consider because they are “too political . . . [they are] potentially controversial questions in areas where courts are more at sea than usual, more lacking in the sort of legal resources that enable them to insulate their decisions from easy political counter-attack”).


178 See Baker, 369 U.S. at 217; Gen. Motors Corp., 2007 WL 2726871, at *14–16; Melamed, supra note 14, at 591–94.

179 See, e.g., Cutting & Cahoon, supra note 17, at 114–15, 139.

an array of political factors when bringing common law actions against private polluters.\textsuperscript{181}

Similarly, the prudential standing doctrine applies more flexibly to parties than Article III standing because it allows a court to shift its inquiry away from whether the plaintiff has been sufficiently injured to whether the plaintiff is the right party to bring the lawsuit—essentially, whether the suit should be litigated at all.\textsuperscript{182} One might argue that there is no better party to bring a complex environmental suit than a state, but if a court is motivated to dismiss a lawsuit based on the underlying nature of the issues presented—as in the Supreme Court’s 2004 decision \textit{Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow}—then it logically follows that no party could be entitled to litigate it.\textsuperscript{183} In other words, if the underlying separation of powers concern is that the court will render a decision with broad policy implications, then it makes no difference whether the plaintiff is a state or a private citizen.\textsuperscript{184}

This sort of analysis—framing the inquiry around the issues raised by the lawsuit rather than the injuries alleged by the parties themselves—is one that scholars criticize the Court for importing into the \textit{Lujan} standing test.\textsuperscript{185} But the prudential standing doctrine allows a court to engage in such an overlapping mode of analysis; even scholars who have criticized the disingenuousness and incoherence of the Article III standing doctrine have conceded that the prudential justiciability doctrines may provide a more legitimate and transparent means with which to dismiss complicated lawsuits involving widespread harms.\textsuperscript{186}

Underlying these significant drawbacks to state-led climate tort litigation is the reality that \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}, a statutory lawsuit that did not involve prudential justiciability thresholds, can be of no assistance to

\textsuperscript{181} See Am. Elec., 582 F.3d, at 321–32; \textit{Gen. Motors Corp.}, 2007 WL 2726871, at *6–16.

\textsuperscript{182} See \textit{Warth}, 422 U.S. at 499–500; Murphy, \textit{supra} note 35, at 989.

\textsuperscript{183} See \textit{Newdow}, 542 U.S. at 13–18.

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Cf. Massachusetts v. EPA}, 549 U.S. at 536, 547 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (arguing that doctrinal support for relaxed state standing is lacking, and that such a relaxed regime impermissibly allowed the Court to become a forum for public policy debates).

\textsuperscript{185} See, e.g., Elliott, \textit{supra} note 11, at 466–67 (discussing other scholars’ criticisms of standing doctrine, including that it “cloaks in technical doctrine what are actually normative decisions about the proper scope of government action,” and noting that even dissenting members of the Court have accused majorities of using standing as a “cover” for improper analysis). Indeed, in his dissent in \textit{Massachusetts v. EPA}, Chief Justice Roberts seemed to conflate the prudential justiciability doctrines with Article III standing when he argued that climate change, by its very nature, is nonjusticiable. \textit{See} 549 U.S. at 541, 547 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting); \textit{accord} Melamed, \textit{supra} note 14, at 586.

\textsuperscript{186} See Murphy, \textit{supra} note 35, at 989–90; \textit{see also} Elliott, \textit{supra} note 11, at 508–10, 515–16.
state litigants in common law actions. In fact, at least one court has cited to the case for the opposite effect by highlighting how the decision underscores the complex political nature of climate change litigation. The lack of statutory guidelines and standards makes climate tort lawsuits more likely to implicate these separation of powers concerns; in short, despite several scholars’ well-reasoned arguments to the contrary, Massachusetts v. EPA does very little to help states suing in their common law 

parens patriae capacities. Recognizing this should help motivate scholars—as well as state attorneys general who are concerned about global warming—to reevaluate how Massachusetts v. EPA can still help states combat climate change and other widespread environmental problems.

IV. SOVEREIGN INTERESTS AND SPECIAL SOLICITUDE

As Part III demonstrates, common law climate change lawsuits risk implicating particular separation of powers concerns, thereby rendering the preliminary stages of these lawsuits more complicated than statutory challenges like the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2007 decision Massachusetts v. EPA. This Part therefore proposes that scholars and future litigants shift their focus away from how Massachusetts v. EPA expanded parens patriae litigation to instead focus on how it provides a stronger basis for states asserting that the federal government has directly injured their lawmaking and regulatory capacities. Section A of this Part argues that Massachusetts v. EPA suggests a broader conception of sovereign interest lawsuits, as opposed to parens patriae actions, as the basis for special solicitude. Section B then provides an overview of the types of sovereign interest injuries that may be identified in future climate change litigation.

A. Massachusetts v. EPA as Sovereign Interests Precedent

Although several commentators have argued that Massachusetts v. EPA signals expanded parens patriae standing for states vindicating envi-

187 See supra notes 170–184 and accompanying text.
189 See Mank, supra note 6, at 1767–74; Massey, supra note 6, at 277–80; Zdeb, supra note 6, at 1076–77.
190 See infra notes 191–235 and accompanying text.
191 See supra notes 149–190 and accompanying text.
192 See infra notes 191–235 and accompanying text.
193 See infra notes 195–219 and accompanying text.
194 See infra notes 220–235 and accompanying text.
ronmental injuries, limiting the decision to *parens patriae* standing overlooks a simpler reading that could prove more useful to states developing future climate litigation strategies: *Massachusetts v. EPA* as a sovereign interests precedent. Although the decision itself is not a traditional sovereign interest case in which a state asserts a discrete legal right or regulatory power as its basis for standing, it does suggest a right to judicial review when the state’s lawmaking interests diverge from the federal government’s. Other scholars have identified similar rationales for the Court’s standing analysis, likening the decision to cases in which states assert direct injuries to their regulatory interests.

Both the language of the opinion and the procedural background of the case support this sovereign interest conception of *Massachusetts v. EPA*. In opening its discussion of the state’s standing, the Court characterized Massachusetts as a “sovereign state” and emphasized the state’s “well-founded desire to preserve its sovereign territory” in bringing the action against the EPA. After conceding that the state had surrendered certain sovereign rights to the federal government as a condition of federalism, the Court nonetheless insisted that the state was asserting its own rights under federal law when it distinguished the suit from actions where a state litigates to “protect her citizens,” as in traditional *parens patriae* lawsuits. Thus, the Court strove to identify a concrete harm to the state’s unique interests—its ability to exercise its rights to regulate and protect its territory—and coupled this interest with the state’s rights under the Clean Air Act to seek review of harmful agency action. This line of reasoning is strikingly similar to cases wherein the state’s interest was considered sovereign, including cases in

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195 See Mank, supra note 6, at 1767–74; Massey, supra note 6, at 277–80; Zdeb, supra note 6, at 1076–77; see also Cody, supra note 125, at 162.


198 See Nash, supra note 16, at 1073–74; Welti, supra note 16, at 1765–68; see also Mank, supra note 6, at 1729; Melamed, supra note 14, at 584, 607; cf. Massey, supra note 6, at 262 (“The best argument for relaxing the meaning of the *Lujan* elements when a state asserts a sovereign interest in federal court is that doing so is a necessarily implied aspect of the structural design of dual sovereignty.”).

199 See Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 516–21.

200 Id. at 518–19.

201 See id. at 519–20, 520 n.17; see also West Virginia v. EPA, 362 F.3d at 868 (concluding that state was suing “as a state” and not as *parens patriae*); Davis v. EPA, 348 F.3d 772, 778 (9th Cir. 2003) (distinguishing a state’s direct interests in litigation from *parens patriae* standing).

which the state retained only a residual lawmaking power under a federal regulatory program like the Clean Air Act.\textsuperscript{203} Additionally, the Court noted that another basis for special solicitude was the fact that the state’s lawmaking powers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions “might well be preempted,” and decisions involving preemption disputes have largely been categorized as sovereign interests cases.\textsuperscript{204}

The most confusing language in the Court’s opinion, therefore, is its use of the term “quasi-sovereign” when it appeared to identify a regulatory or sovereign right in the litigation as the basis for standing.\textsuperscript{205} The majority’s characterization of quasi-sovereign interests as a state’s own rights under federal law is inconsistent with how the Court has previously defined the concept—as fundamentally a derivative interest in the welfare of the state’s citizens.\textsuperscript{206} Additionally, Chief Justice Roberts correctly asserted in dissent that states suing in their par

Although future litigants and scholars could continue to grapple over whether Massachusetts v. EPA is a quasi-sovereign or a sovereign interests case, the Court’s use of the term “quasi-sovereign” does nothing to diminish the well-established leniency shown toward states that assert their own lawmaking and regulatory interests as a basis for standing.\textsuperscript{208} In fact, the main problem with the Court’s use of the term is not how it impacts future sovereign interests litigation, but how it affects parens patriae suits such as American Electric, in which a perplexed Second Circuit ultimately resorted to a traditional Snapp analysis of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{203} See West Virginia v. EPA, 362 F.3d at 865–68; Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 313–14; supra note 65 and accompanying text.
\item \textsuperscript{204} See Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 519; Alaska v. U.S. Dept. of Transp., 868 F.2d 441, 443–44 (D.C. Cir. 1989) (holding that states suffered injury to their sovereign power to enforce state law because administrative rules threatened to preempt state statutes); Florida v. Weinberger, 492 F.2d 488, 492–94 (5th Cir. 1974) (reasoning that a state had standing because a new federal law conflicted with state law and the state faced sanctions if forced to comply with federal standard).
\item \textsuperscript{206} See Snapp, 458 U.S. at 602; Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 298–99, 305, 317.
\item \textsuperscript{207} See Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 520 n.17; id. at 539 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting).
\item \textsuperscript{208} See, e.g., West Virginia v. EPA, 362 F.3d at 868; Davis, 348 F.3d at 778; Alaska v. Dept. of Transp., 868 F.2d at 443–44; Ohio ex rel. Celebrezze v. U.S. Dept. of Transp., 766 F.2d 228, 222–233 (6th Cir. 1985) (concluding that a state had standing to seek judicial review of federal regulation that claimed to expressly invalidate a state statute); Weinberger, 492 F.2d at 492–94; Merrill, supra note 50, at 299–301; Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 318–20.
\end{itemize}
states’ quasi-sovereign interests rather than granting the states a blanket “special solicitude.”209 As discussed in Part III, parens patriae suits like American Electric involve separation of powers concerns that can give rise to a more stringent justiciability threshold.210 Sovereign interests lawsuits, however, do not similarly invite a court to render initial policy decisions independent of a pre-established regulatory framework; they instead focus a court’s analysis on the concrete injuries to the state’s own interests.211 Sovereign interests suits, therefore, are particularized the way the Supreme Court requires public law litigation to be, and do not undermine separation of powers values.212 This places them comfortably within the realm of the “special solicitude” the Court articulated in Massachusetts v. EPA.213

Similarly, a sovereign interest approach that frames the standing inquiry in terms of federalism concerns and states’ rights would likely appeal even to advocates of more restrictive standing regimes.214 Supporters of heightened standing tests concede that where states challenge federal laws that directly impact state administrative machinery, standing requirements should be relaxed.215 “Special solicitude” standing in such actions would reflect the reality that in the modern administrative state, states challenging federal regulatory actions often are not concerned with the substance of the action itself but with how the action impacts the state’s ability to regulate.216

Overall, future state litigants will increase their chances of invoking a relaxed standing regime if they forgo further manipulation of the scope of quasi-sovereignty, thereby avoiding the additional restrictions on states suing as parens patriae, and instead allege an injury to state lawmaking or regulatory capabilities.217 Under this framework, a state could satisfy the Lujan test by asserting: (1) an injury-in-fact to the

209 See Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 338–49.
210 See supra notes 149–190 and accompanying text.
211 Compare West Virginia v. EPA, 362 F.3d at 868, and Davis, 348 F.3d at 778, with Gen. Motors Corp., 2007 WL 2726871, at *10–13, 16.
212 See Metzger, supra note 16, at 42.
214 See Woolhandler & Collins, supra note 57, at 508; see also Welti, supra note 16, at 1774–79.
215 See Woolhandler & Collins, supra note 57, at 508.
216 Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 321; see Metzger, supra note 16, at 66.
217 See Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 313–14 (noting that even where states asserting sovereign interests had to meet Lujan requirements, those requirements were easily met); see also Merrill, supra note 50, at 305 (suggesting that even though states suing in federal courts would have to satisfy Lujan, they “could satisfy these limitations . . . by showing that the State itself had suffered some injury in fact from the challenged action”).
state’s particular regulatory interests, (2) that the federal government’s actions caused the injury, and (3) that a favorable court decision would redress the injury.\textsuperscript{218} Specifically, as the following Section demonstrates, sovereign interests may be invoked in precisely the types of circumstances that cause states to seek vindication for injuries the federal government has refused to regulate adequately—such as in the climate change context.\textsuperscript{219}

B. Identifying Sovereign Interests in Future Litigation

As described above, a state could merit special solicitude at the threshold of a climate change lawsuit by asserting that it has suffered an injury to its interests in regulating and safeguarding its territory and citizenry, and that the federal government’s actions—or even inaction—is the cause of that injury.\textsuperscript{220} Such a regulatory dispute could arise where a state retains a concrete lawmaking or regulatory power under a federal administrative scheme, such as the Clean Air Act, and the federal government’s actions deprive the state from fully exercising its residual rights.\textsuperscript{221} Similarly, where a state alleges that federal regulation threatens to preempt the state’s independent regulatory efforts, federal courts would likely recognize that a sovereign interest is at stake and would therefore relax standing requirements.\textsuperscript{222}

The most direct route for incorporating sovereign interests into future environmental litigation would be to identify an injury to a specific statutory right or duty retained by the state that would give rise to a concrete governing interest.\textsuperscript{223} The Clean Air Act does grant states some residual lawmaking capabilities, and in other regulatory schemes where states might seek to challenge federal power, states often retain similar levels of independence.\textsuperscript{224} In particular, California has been

\textsuperscript{218} Indeed, this is essentially the test articulated by several amicus states in Massachusetts v. EPA. See Brief of Arizona et al., \textit{supra} note 128, at 14–15.

\textsuperscript{219} See infra notes 220–235 and accompanying text.


\textsuperscript{221} See Davis, 348 F.3d at 778 (state had a direct interest because it was a direct recipient of denial of waiver of a federal oxygen level requirement); Brief of Arizona et al., \textit{supra} note 128, at 18–19; Wildermuth, \textit{supra} note 16, at 318–20.

\textsuperscript{222} See Alaska v. Dept. of Transp., 868 F.2d at 443–44; Celebrezze, 766 F.2d at 232–33; Weinberger, 492 F.2d at 494; see also Metzger, \textit{supra} note 16, at 69; Nash, \textit{supra} note 16, at 1073–74.


\textsuperscript{224} See Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. § 7410(a)(1) (2006) (outlining state involvement in creating plans to meet national air standards); id. § 7543(a)–(b) (allowing eligible states to apply for waivers from EPA in order to set independent emissions standards); Brief of Arizona et al., \textit{supra} note 128, at 18 (clarifying that “not all state regulation in this area is fore-
granted significant regulatory authority under the Clean Air Act to establish emissions standards independent of the federal government, and observers have characterized California’s interests as “sovereign.”

But even where the state’s interest may be less explicit, recent case law indicates that federal courts will nonetheless consider the state’s interests under the statutory scheme to be substantial enough to merit a relaxed standing threshold. These cases suggest that where a federal agency’s actions are onerous, burdensome, or otherwise damaging to the state’s regulatory interests, special solicitude is warranted.

A state may even have a sovereign interest where the federal agency abstains from action and refuses to enforce its own regulations, thereby causing injury to the state’s interests in ensuring it receives the benefits of the federally administered regulatory scheme.

A more generally applicable source of regulatory interest standing is a state’s claim that federal law threatens to preempt the state’s independent efforts to regulate an environmental harm. Several federal appellate court decisions indicate that a state has a sovereign interest in preserving its lawmaking and regulatory powers, even where the federal government’s laws may ultimately preempt those powers. None

Moreover, the FCC’s refusal to exercise its declared authority does not deprive states of standing. The states point out that the District of Columbia Circuit will not find a lack of standing simply because an agency has refused to enforce its own regulations. For the same reasons, we also reject the FCC’s standing defense.

Texas Office, 183 F.3d at 449.
of these cases dilute the state’s interests to a “quasi-sovereign” status, despite the fact that the federal government’s power is often treated as superior under the Supremacy Clause of the Constitution.\textsuperscript{231} Thus, many federal courts would likely determine that states do retain a sovereign interest in their lawmaking and regulatory powers when the states are either subjected to claims of federal preemption or assert the claim themselves to establish that their independent regulatory efforts are allowed.\textsuperscript{232}

The precise contours of sovereign interest standing in the climate change context will evolve as the federal government develops a framework for regulating greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act or another statutory scheme; once the federal framework has matured, states likely will, if anything, be more able to identify concrete interests in litigation.\textsuperscript{233} Thus, sovereign interest lawsuits would in the long run achieve the same goal the climate tort lawsuits are ostensibly trying to achieve today: filling the gaps of federal environmental regulation.\textsuperscript{234} In that sense, these lawsuits would not signify a shift away from directly punishing the nation’s worst polluters, but would instead ensure that states continue to play a meaningful role as ancillary enforcers in administering a comprehensive federal scheme.\textsuperscript{235}

\textbf{Conclusion}

By examining separation of powers dynamics in both the common law and the statutory law contexts, this Note provides an analysis of justiciability that extends beyond recent climate change litigation to help

\textsuperscript{231} U.S. Const. art. VI, cl. 2; see Wildermuth, supra note 16, at 314.

\textsuperscript{232} See Alaska v. Dept. of Transp., 868 F.2d at 443–44; Weinberger, 492 F.2d at 494; cf. Nash, supra note 16, at 1076–77 (proposing that courts recognize a new cause of action under which a state could challenge a government’s refusal to regulate in an area where the state may be preempted from regulating, and arguing that the reviewing court should allow states to regulate if the applicable statute could not be read to provide the federal government with the power to regulate).

\textsuperscript{233} See North Carolina v. EPA, 531 F.3d at 914–15; West Virginia v. EPA, 362 F.3d at 865–66, 868. As mentioned above, the EPA is currently in the early stages of implementing greenhouse gas regulations under the Clean Air Act. See supra note 116.

\textsuperscript{234} See Am. Elec., 582 F.3d at 330 (noting that federal common law can fill in gaps of federal regulatory frameworks); Cutting & Cahoon, supra note 17, at 114–15; Gore & Tarr, supra note 17, at 585.

\textsuperscript{235} Cf. Carlson, supra note 97, at 1125–28 (describing how California has been the national leader in setting higher mobile source emissions standards under the Clean Air Act).
guide states in proactively litigating for better regulatory protection of their citizens and environments. Specifically, the Note argues that state attorneys general should focus on asserting injury to their states’ unique interests in regulation in order to establish Article III standing. By doing so, state litigants could shift federal courts’ attention from the complexity and widespread nature of the issues implicated by the lawsuits, to the merits of the state as the proper party to pursue such claims. Overall, by framing state-led lawsuits in terms of statutory law, federalism, and sovereignty, rather than in science and widespread environmental harm, state plaintiffs should have an easier time invoking a relaxed standing threshold, and should thus be able to dedicate more effort to the merits of their claims.

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