



# CLIMATE DIPLOMACY AFTER THE PARIS AGREEMENT: THE QUEST FOR GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND JUSTICE

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**Abstract:** The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015 under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), has been recognized as a landmark in global climate governance. Unlike previous arrangements such as the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris framework is characterized by a bottom-up approach through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), enhanced transparency mechanisms, and a long-term goal of limiting global warming to well below 2 °C, preferably 1.5 °C. This study aims to examine the evolution of climate diplomacy in the post-Paris era, focusing on the roles of state and non-state actors, the challenges of multilateral negotiations, and the implications for global governance. Relying on a literature-based conceptual analysis, the article identifies three key dynamics: the transformation of negotiation practices, the growing involvement of civil society and private sector actors, and the persistent North-South divide concerning equity and climate justice. The findings reveal that while the Paris Agreement has expanded the scope of inclusiveness in climate diplomacy, it also introduced complexities regarding compliance, financing, and the geopolitics of energy security. The article concludes that post-Paris climate diplomacy is increasingly embedded in broader security, economic, and justice discourses, requiring innovative governance models to achieve the net-zero targets of 2050. In addition, the Paris Agreement has been interpreted as an experiment in “polycentric governance,” where authority is distributed across multiple levels of decision-making from local governments to international organizations (Jordan et al., 2018). This polycentric nature allows for innovation, experimentation, and diffusion of best practices, yet it also raises challenges of coherence and accountability. Furthermore, the emphasis on climate finance and capacity-building for developing countries has elevated the discourse on equity to an unprecedented level in climate negotiations. By embedding climate diplomacy within global security and economic agendas, the Paris era signals a fundamental redefinition of multilateralism in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** Paris Agreement, climate diplomacy, global governance, multilateral negotiations, climate justice.

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## 1. Introduction

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century, reshaping the way states, institutions, and societies conceptualize security, development, and cooperation. The Paris Agreement of 2015 marked a historic turning point in climate diplomacy by introducing a universal, legally binding framework in which both developed and developing countries committed to undertake climate action through their respective Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, which imposed top-down obligations only on developed nations, the Paris regime embodies a

more inclusive and flexible architecture, emphasizing transparency, voluntary cooperation, and equity. The relevance of the Paris Agreement extends beyond environmental policy. It represents a reconfiguration of multilateral diplomacy, bringing together not only governments but also non-state actors such as international organizations, civil society networks, and private corporations. Consequently, climate diplomacy has become a multidimensional arena where environmental objectives intersect with geopolitical rivalries, economic interests, and normative debates over fairness and justice. This article addresses the central research question: How has climate diplomacy evolved in the aftermath of the Paris Agreement, and what are the implications for global governance?



To answer this, the study draws upon a systematic review of international relations theory, recent COP negotiations (notably Glasgow 2021, Sharm el-Sheikh 2022, and Dubai 2023), and the evolving role of both state and non-state actors. By situating the Paris Agreement within broader debates on multilateralism and global governance, the article aims to shed light on the opportunities and challenges of post-Paris climate diplomacy. At the same time, the Paris Agreement was not only a milestone in global environmental policy but was also signed during a period of crisis in multilateralism. Considering the United States' tendencies to withdraw from multilateral regimes, China's rising geopolitical influence, and the European Union's claims of normative leadership, the Paris Agreement carries a meaning that goes beyond environmental diplomacy (Falkner, 2016). Moreover, the direct linkage between the climate crisis and security policy has become increasingly visible, with NATO officially incorporating the concept of "climate security" into its documents and the United Nations Security Council actively debating climate-related issues (Scott & Smith, 2021). In this context, post-Paris climate diplomacy represents a new era in which environmental problems are directly associated with international peace, stability, and development.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Analyzing climate diplomacy in the post-Paris era requires drawing upon different perspectives within international relations theory. Realism maintains that states are the primary actors and shape their foreign policies based on national interests and power balances. From this standpoint, the Paris Agreement cannot be assessed independently of factors such as energy security, economic growth, and geopolitical competition. For instance, the U.S. withdrawal under the Trump administration in 2017 illustrated the fragility of international climate diplomacy and demonstrated that states tend to prioritize national interests over environmental commitments (Colgan, Green & Hale, 2021). Similarly, China's increasing investments in renewable energy to reinforce its global leadership ambitions, and the European Union's efforts to position itself as a normative power through the European Green Deal, can be interpreted from a realist perspective as new dimensions of states' pursuit of power and influence. By contrast, liberal institutionalism highlights the cooperative dimension of the Paris Agreement and its capacity to foster interdependence among states. According to this perspective, international institutions build trust and facilitate joint solutions to common problems. The Paris Agreement's flexible framework, which incorporates all states into the process, has secured broad participation, making it one of the most inclusive platforms for global environmental governance (Keohane & Victor, 2016). The system of NDCs, allowing states to contribute according to their capacities, along with transparency and monitoring mechanisms that enhance accountability, align closely with liberal institutionalist predictions of cooperation. Constructivist theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of norms, identities, and discourses in international relations. From this perspective, the Paris Agreement is not only a legal arrangement but also a process of generating new global norms and discourses. Concepts such as the "1.5 °C target" and "climate justice" represent a transformation in the value systems of the international community. The rise of youth movements such as Fridays for Future, led by Greta Thunberg, and the activism of civil society organizations, has intensified normative pressure in climate diplomacy (Rosen, 2020). In this sense, the Paris Agreement is

evaluated as a normative framework that contributes not only to governmental action but also to the identity formation of societies. Therefore, no single theoretical approach is sufficient to explain post-Paris climate diplomacy. Realism underscores power struggles and national interests, liberal institutionalism emphasizes institutions and cooperation, while constructivism highlights the transformative power of norms and discourse. Taken together, these three perspectives allow for a holistic understanding of the geopolitical, institutional, and normative dimensions of the post-Paris era. Beyond these, alternative approaches such as critical security studies and green theory also provide valuable insights. Critical perspectives argue that the existing climate regime reproduces global power asymmetries and exacerbates the structural dependencies of Global South countries (Okereke & Coventry, 2016). Green theory, meanwhile, centers the human-nature relationship and views climate diplomacy not merely as an interstate process but as a field of ethical and ecological transformation. In this respect, understanding the post-Paris era requires a multi-layered theoretical approach-one that considers realism, liberalism, and constructivism alongside critical and ecologically centered theories.

## 3. Innovations Introduced by the Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement introduced profound innovations in the international climate regime, marking a significant departure from its predecessor, the Kyoto Protocol. The most important innovation is the system of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, which imposed centralized and binding top-down limits, the Paris Agreement allowed states to set their own targets based on national circumstances. This flexibility increased participation and ensured global inclusiveness (Bodansky, 2016). Another innovation is the incorporation of the 1.5 °C target into international diplomacy. Scientific evidence demonstrates that limiting global warming to 1.5 °C rather than 2 °C would substantially reduce climate risks (IPCC, 2018). Through the Paris Agreement, this target became a normative anchor and secured a permanent place on the global agenda, particularly in response to the demands of small island developing states most affected by climate change. The Paris Agreement also placed significant emphasis on transparency, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms. The requirement for states to periodically review, report, and subject their NDCs to independent assessment represents a critical step toward international trust and accountability (Falkner, 2016). This mechanism not only records commitments but also allows the international community to exert pressure on states to fulfill them. Climate finance is another innovative aspect of the Paris Agreement. The pledge by developed countries to provide USD 100 billion annually to assist developing countries in mitigation and adaptation efforts has emerged as a tangible instrument of climate justice (Roberts & Weikmans, 2017). Such financial support is considered vital for enabling low-income countries to align their sustainable development goals with climate commitments. Finally, the Paris Agreement facilitated a transition from an exclusively intergovernmental process to a multi-actor framework. The growing role of private sector renewable energy investments, local governments' sustainability initiatives, and the normative pressure of civil society movements complemented and strengthened the diplomatic process in the post-Paris era (Hale, 2020). As a result, climate diplomacy evolved into a multi-level and multi-actor governance field beyond the realm of

states alone. These innovations transformed the Paris Agreement into a milestone in global climate diplomacy. Through its principles of flexibility, inclusiveness, transparency, and multi-actor engagement, the Agreement reshaped not only environmental policies but also the very structure of international relations. Another major innovation is the emphasis on technology transfer and capacity-building mechanisms. Ensuring access to technological support for developing countries in renewable energy transitions, climate adaptation, and disaster risk reduction strengthened the implementation dimension of the Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015). Moreover, the Paris Agreement placed climate change at the center of the development agenda, making it complementary to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Pauw et al., 2019). Its emphasis on “inclusive diplomacy,” by incorporating not only states but also cities, regions, and corporations, consolidated the multi-level governance approach.

#### 4. The Transformation Of Climate Diplomacy After Paris

In the aftermath of the Paris Agreement, climate diplomacy has undergone a comprehensive transformation, from the methods of multilateral negotiations to the diversity of actors involved. First, the style of negotiations has significantly changed. Whereas the Kyoto Protocol emphasized rigid, top-down, binding commitments, the Paris framework relies on flexibility, voluntarism, and nationally determined pledges. This shift has transformed climate diplomacy from a purely technical intergovernmental negotiation space into a more inclusive, flexible, and politically multidimensional arena (Falkner, 2016). A new diplomatic balance has also emerged among major powers such as the European Union, the United States, China, and India. The EU reinforced its global leadership claim through the European Green Deal (2019), integrating climate diplomacy into its foreign policy tools (Dupont & Oberthür, 2022). The U.S., by withdrawing from the Agreement in 2017 and rejoining in 2021, displayed volatility, but under the Biden administration sought to reclaim a leadership role (Keohane & Oppenheimer, 2016). China and India, while emphasizing development and energy security, have pursued a more cautious approach. Nevertheless, China’s announcement of its 2060 carbon neutrality target marked a significant turning point in global climate diplomacy (Lo, 2021). Post-Paris diplomacy has not been confined to states. The increasing influence of civil society, youth movements, and the private sector broadened the scope of participation. Movements such as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion exerted strong normative pressure from below (Rosen, 2020), while private sector investments in renewable energy and green finance reinforced climate policies, embedding them within the global economy (Hale, 2020). These transformations are clearly reflected in post-Paris COP summits:

COP26 (Glasgow, 2021): The Glasgow Climate Pact was adopted, including for the first time an explicit reference to phasing down unabated coal (UNFCCC, 2021). More than 130 countries announced net-zero targets for 2050 or later, making climate neutrality a shared global vision.

COP27 (Sharm el-Sheikh, 2022): Discussions of climate justice gained prominence, culminating in the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund, a historic achievement for vulnerable countries (Pickering et al., 2022).

COP28 (Dubai, 2023): The first Global Stocktake was conducted, revealing that progress under NDCs remains insufficient and that without rapid emissions reductions by 2030, the 1.5 °C target will be unattainable (IPCC, 2023). Commitments to triple renewable energy capacity and increase energy efficiency highlighted the integration of climate diplomacy with development and technology agendas.

These developments illustrate that post-Paris climate diplomacy is no longer confined to environmental policy but has become embedded in global security, economic, and justice discourses. While states continue to pursue energy security and geopolitical interests, civil society and non-state actors exert normative pressure that reshapes negotiations. Furthermore, the nature of diplomatic practices has shifted. Traditionally closed-door negotiations have become more transparent under public, media, and civil society scrutiny (Allan & Hadden, 2017). Digital diplomacy and social media have become critical tools; campaigns during COP meetings on platforms such as Twitter amplify public awareness and place pressure on decision-makers. This shift distinguishes climate diplomacy from traditional state-centered diplomacy, making it a more open, multi-dimensional, and participatory practice.

#### 5. Challenges Ahead

Despite the institutional and normative achievements of the Paris Agreement, the post-Paris period has revealed multiple implementation challenges. The foremost challenge is the insufficiency of NDCs. Although all parties are now committed to submitting climate targets, these pledges are insufficient to limit warming to 1.5 °C or even 2 °C. According to the IPCC (2023), with current commitments, global temperatures are expected to rise by 2.7 °C by 2100. This implementation gap is one of the Agreement’s greatest dilemmas (Rogelj et al., 2016). A second challenge lies in the persistent North–South divide and climate justice. While developed countries are historically responsible for the majority of emissions, vulnerable states in the Global South suffer the most severe consequences. Developing countries demand fair burden-sharing and financial support. The Loss and Damage Fund established at COP27 reflects these demands, but uncertainties about its operation, funding sources, and distribution mechanisms raise doubts about developed countries’ willingness to honor commitments (Roberts & Weikmans, 2017; Pickering et al., 2022). Energy security tensions have also become more pronounced. The European energy crisis following the Russia–Ukraine war forced many countries to revert temporarily to fossil fuel investments, exposing the contradictions between climate commitments and national energy policies. Falkner (2022) describes this as the fragility of climate diplomacy in the context of global security, warning that recurring energy crises could continually delay climate goals. Another problem is the imbalance between mitigation and adaptation. While developing countries demand more financing for adaptation, developed countries remain more focused on mitigation. This divergence creates conflicts of priority and hampers effective negotiations (Pauw et al., 2019). The lack of binding enforcement mechanisms further limits the Agreement’s effectiveness. Since NDCs are voluntary, there are no sanctions if parties fail to meet their commitments. Keohane and Oppenheimer (2016) argue that the Paris regime is a soft system based on political pressure, with its effectiveness depending largely on normative pressure and the strength of social movements. Moreover, climate diplomacy is increasingly intertwined with

geopolitical rivalries. China's continued fossil fuel investments under the Belt and Road Initiative, U.S. discourse on energy independence, and Russia's reliance on hydrocarbon exports illustrate the tension between climate goals and global power politics (Mathews, 2020). Finally, global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and regional wars have disrupted climate commitments, as many governments prioritized short-term economic recovery over climate action (Steffen et al., 2020). These crises underscore both the fragility of climate diplomacy and the necessity of building more resilient and sustainable commitments.

## 6. Conclusion and Evaluation

The Paris Agreement is widely regarded as a historic turning point in global climate diplomacy, bringing with it a multidimensional understanding of diplomacy that extends beyond environmental policies to encompass security, economic, and justice dimensions. This study has examined the theoretical, institutional, and practical aspects of climate diplomacy in the post-Paris era, highlighting both its transformative potential and its fundamental challenges. First, from a theoretical perspective, post-Paris climate diplomacy is too complex to be explained by a single school of thought. Realism emphasizes states' conflicting interests and energy security-driven policies (Colgan, Green & Hale, 2021), while liberal institutionalism underscores the Agreement's multilateral cooperation and institutional inclusiveness (Keohane & Victor, 2016). Constructivist perspectives highlight the normative transformation brought by concepts such as the 1.5 °C target, climate justice, and sustainability, as well as the growing influence of civil society (Rosen, 2020). Thus, the Paris Agreement can be seen as a field where multiple international relations theories intersect. Second, the innovations introduced by the Agreement—including NDCs, transparency mechanisms, climate finance, and multi-actor participation—have significantly broadened the scope of climate diplomacy. These innovations created a more inclusive and flexible framework for tackling climate change, yet simultaneously gave rise to debates over insufficiency, lack of binding enforcement, and financing gaps (Bodansky, 2016; Roberts & Weikmans, 2017). Third, the diplomatic transformation of the post-Paris era has been reflected in successive COP summits from COP26 to COP28. In Glasgow, a historic reference to phasing down fossil fuels entered official texts; in Sharm el-Sheikh, the Loss and Damage Fund represented a critical achievement for climate justice; and in Dubai, the Global Stocktake clearly revealed the inadequacy of parties' commitments to achieve the 1.5 °C target (UNFCCC, 2021; Pickering et al., 2022; IPCC, 2023). These developments demonstrate that the Paris Agreement is not merely a diplomatic document but an evolving and dynamic process. Nevertheless, the challenges of the post-Paris era cannot be overlooked. Insufficient NDCs, debates over climate justice, tensions between energy security and climate goals, and the absence of binding enforcement mechanisms continue to limit the effectiveness of climate diplomacy. Keohane and Oppenheimer (2016) describe the Paris Agreement as a "soft but inclusive regime," arguing that its effectiveness depends on political will, normative pressure, and the power of social movements. Indeed, the success of climate diplomacy in the post-Paris era rests not only on state negotiations but also on civil society advocacy, private sector green investments, and innovative solutions from local governments (Hale, 2020). In sum, post-Paris climate diplomacy has situated security, economy, and justice debates—traditionally at the core of international relations—within an

environmental framework. This has made climate diplomacy both more inclusive and more complex. Looking ahead, achieving net-zero targets by 2050 will require collective action by not only states but all actors. Otherwise, existing commitments will be insufficient to limit global warming to 1.5 °C. The success of climate diplomacy thus depends on strengthening international institutions and enhancing normative pressure. Ultimately, the Paris Agreement's most important contribution lies in redefining climate change not only as an environmental problem but as a central issue of global governance, international security, and social justice. In this respect, the Agreement continues to serve as a lasting reference point in international relations literature, not only in the field of environmental policy but also in debates on normative transformation, multi-actor cooperation, and global governance. Overall, post-Paris climate diplomacy represents a paradigm shift in international relations. However, the success of this process depends not only on states updating their commitments but also on strengthening accountability mechanisms in global climate governance (van Asselt, 2016). Moreover, the future of climate diplomacy is closely tied to increasing normative pressures and the growing societal demand for sustainability. Therefore, climate diplomacy can no longer be understood solely as an environmental matter, but rather as a diplomatic arena intertwined with global justice, human rights, and development policies. This multilayered structure makes the Paris Agreement one of the most important international documents of the 21st century.

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