

## Overcoming Obstacles in Global Climate Action from Copenhagen to Paris: Issue Framing as a Tool to Understand Opportunities for Policy Change

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WORKING PAPER

**KFG**  
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# Overcoming Obstacles in Global Climate Action from Copenhagen to Paris: Issue Framing as a Tool to Understand Opportunities for Policy Change

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Jean A. Garrison

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# OVERCOMING OBSTACLES IN GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION FROM COPENHAGEN TO PARIS

## ISSUE FRAMING AS A TOOL TO UNDERSTAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY CHANGE

**Jean A. Garrison**

### Abstract

The global climate change agreement completed on December 12, 2015 in Paris set a collective target to cap greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit the temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius with a goal to get as close as possible to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. These goals were to be accomplished through a “bottom up” mechanism for national policy approaches in which states made their own choices about how they would meet climate targets. This paper examines why and how an agreement was possible in 2015 when it had not been before. What was different in Paris, or leading up to Paris, so that the parties involved successfully came to an agreement when it was not possible in Copenhagen? This paper presents a problem definition and issue framing perspective to examine the shift in the discussion in Paris from the burdens of climate action to opportunities climate action offered for economic and development models. It provides a road map to understand the role of key stakeholders, including governments, the business community, civil society, and subnational actors in the making of the climate agreement.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The global climate change agreement completed on December 12, 2015 at COP 21 was more than twenty years in the making from the original Rio Conference in 1992 and the subsequent negotiation of the Kyoto Protocol in 1995. In Paris, the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed to what some have called a fundamentally new approach to climate action. However, the fundamentals of the Paris agreement were not that new. The same basic framework had been presented in Copenhagen five years before, but not with the same success. Why and how was this the case? What was different in Paris, or leading up to Paris, so that the parties involved successfully came to an agreement when it was not possible in Copenhagen? This paper presents a problem definition and issue framing perspective to help us understand how and why this change occurred so that an agreement could be signed in Paris. The clear message from Paris was the aspirational goal on the part of the international community to end global reliance on fossil fuels in the next several decades. In issue framing terms, Paris signaled a collective shift in the discussion from the burdens of climate action to opportunities climate action offered for economic and development models, e.g., optimism about a path forward to promote economic growth and poverty alleviation while creating jobs and prosperity. Fundamentally, nations and publics were no longer being asked to make radical lifestyle adjustments to support a climate agreement, instead they were being told about the opportunities afforded by the Paris agreement.

Procedurally, states made their own choices about how they would meet climate targets. The framework agreement included a new stocktaking mechanism for international review every five years where countries reported on their emission levels and mitigation actions. Using a “bottom up” mechanism for the national policy approaches, the collective target limited the temperature increase to two degrees Celsius with a goal to get as close to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels as possible. The parties agreed that they wanted to see greenhouse gases peak “as soon as possible,” and to achieve overall carbon neutrality in the global economy before 2100.

This paper begins with a general discussion of the importance of understanding how issues are framed and how climate action has been defined. This focus provides a lens through which to evaluate the obstacles to an agreement in Copenhagen versus changes in the Paris process. A closer look at the Paris process demonstrates how this shift in the problem definition and issue frame opened the door for other actors to play a significant and positive advocacy role in the Paris process. This is borne out by looking at the positions of national parties, civil society, business actors, and subnational actors – each of whom were key advocates in the framing of climate in the Paris agreement. This analysis relies upon sources such as “The Bottom Line” newsletter from the We Mean Business coalition,<sup>2</sup> which was put out daily during the Paris meeting, other public sources, and the author’s off-the-record interviews and discussions with participants in Paris and experts during and after the Paris meeting. This article provides both a descriptive and explanatory lens to explore how key actors reframed the climate agenda in Paris and contributed to how the agreement was formed.

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1 This paper has been prepared for the KFG “The Transformative Power of Europe” Working Paper Series.

2 “The Bottom Line” newsletter of the We Mean Business coalition for COP 21 in Paris (Issues 1-10, 30 November-10 December 2015) is available at <https://www.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/the-bottom-line/archive>; 16 June 2017.

## 2. How Do Frames Shape Political Processes and Choice Outcomes?

At a fundamental level, international negotiations on any issue are characterized by competing narratives, discourses, or frames. These frames set up how a problem is defined, what choice sets are considered, and what policy choices/outcomes are likely. In a multilateral, competitive, and collective negotiation setting, different frames compete for attention with the targeted audiences. Consensus is built as the discourse, or ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations, create a frame which produces a set of meanings and practices that give meaning to a physical or social reality for those involved (see Hajer 1995; Corneloup/Mol 2014). How one succeeds in creating a dominant frame in a multilateral negotiation process is a question of the salience of the message to the targeted audience – in this case the parties to the negotiation – and the capability of the leaders or coalition of stakeholders to push a particular agenda forward successfully.

In the environmental politics literature, scholars argue that actors seek support for their definition of reality, interests, ideas, or discourse by building coalitions around a discourse and mobilizing resources to achieve favorable outcomes (Corneloup/Mol 2014: 285-293). In this scenario, entrepreneurial (or idea-based) leaders are positioned to define the problem, set the agenda, and frame options that become the solution-set for collective problems when they have bargaining leverage. This leverage comes from structural power and/or the ability to inspire followers to join in the coalition-building process. Other factors such as intellectual leadership, which relates to expertise (in this case the science that shapes perspectives on climate change or innovative energy systems that provide new affordable, low carbon options) can be influential. Structural leadership, which relates to the position of powerful actors such as the United States or newly emerging economies, can support entrepreneurial leaders and the positions they advocate. Successful leadership can be linked to the power resources exhibited by a leader able to create incentives or change the cost-benefit structure associated with certain choices. In the climate arena, leaders have built support when they showed overall commitment to solving climate change problems or were perceived to work for the common good (Karlsson et. al. 2012: 50-52).

The assumptions underlying the environmental framing literature are based on prospect theory, the behavioral economic theory which posits that at the most fundamental level, in decisions involving risk, people make choices based on certain heuristics focusing on the potential value of losses and gains (see Kahneman/Tversky 1992). Taking this as their starting point, Newell, McDonald, Brewer, and Hayes (2014: 448) argue that positive frames emphasizing the efficient use of energy rather than energy curtailment are more effective. Similarly, Mauro Bertolotti and Patrizia Catellani (2014) argue in their study on public attitudes toward renewable energy that the highest public agreement with a policy message on renewable energy came when it was formulated in terms of the achievement of positive, growth-related outcomes and when the greenhouse gas emissions message was framed in terms of the avoidance of negative, safety-related outcomes (Bertolotti/Catellani 2014). These are examples of broad frames emphasizing opportunity rather than loss.

The most effective frames are presented in terms of specific attributes (options as losses, gains, etc.) and based on salient issues and experiences that link the problem to everyday life and one's local context. Studies show that the most effective instruments for framing uncertainties are when they relate vulnerability and adaptation in a way relevant to the specific community of actors – in this case the community of

nations and other stakeholders in the climate negotiation. Among publics, particular frames gain support when they are linked to other salient issues like economic growth, employment, public health, or human rights, how widespread the consequences are, and who is affected when, how and why (Veziagiannidou 2013). Similarly, Frans Berkhout et al. (2014) argue that threats to people's everyday lives ultimately are much more salient.

For many scholars, determining whether international negotiations proceed effectively depends on the qualities and level of expertise of international negotiators (Citron 1989; Grunert 1989) who set the agenda and who have the skills and position to move the process forward (e.g., the ability to influence outcomes). Scholars also argue that effectiveness is related to specificity of wording, clear stipulation of goals, timeliness of implementation strategies, targets, enforcement, and transformation of agreements within domestic legislative strategies (Seelarbokus 2010: 11).

In climate negotiations, we have seen how contextual factors can serve as obstacles to a successful policy framing process. Factors such as issue area characteristics, the North-South divide, and sovereignty concerns shape the formation of, and participation in, relevant environmental regimes (Young 1989; Bodansky 1994; Seelarbokus 2010: 12). From this perspective, the deadlock in Copenhagen resulted, in part, from a series of knowable obstacles such as poor administration of the conference itself, fragmented leadership, and a context in which long-term North-South disagreements were not near a point of resolution.

### **3. Obstacles to a Shared Policy Frame and Climate Action in Copenhagen**

In Copenhagen, lingering long-term disputes between developed and developing states over who would take responsibility for mitigation, how the burden would be shared, and the level and type of financing from developed states were major obstacles for an agreement. This divide had developed based on the structure of the frame to differentiate responsibility for climate action along North-South and developed-developing state lines. The Kyoto Protocol asked developed states (Annex I) to take on modest binding commitments to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels following UNFCCC principles of common, but differentiated responsibilities. Developing countries (Annex II) were not asked to make binding commitments, but instead to take voluntary actions to reduce emissions and to adapt to the changing climate with developed countries' assistance. Annex II states argued that when carbon is viewed historically as an issue of justice then the distribution of obligations that are economically costly become the responsibility of developed countries only. Developing countries also argued that they should get priority in using the remaining carbon space for their development. Kyoto put in place Annex I country commitments (resisted by the United States but supported by the European Union) to decrease emissions by at least 25-40 percent below 1990 levels by 2020 (Hochstetler/Milkoreit 2015: 211-216).

As leaders pushing the Annex II agenda and frame, China and India called for differentiated responsibilities, deep commitments on the part of developed countries while not for developing states, and persistently called for wealthy nations to commit one percent of their GDP to help the rest of the world reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. The European Union and United States were divided over using the Kyoto



Protocol as a basis for an agreement given its focus on specific targets. In particular, the US resisted efforts to give no responsibility to developing economies like China and India that were emerging as big emitters. It became clear at Copenhagen that developing states would not commit to limits before the United States. Despite newly elected President Barack Obama's enthusiastic embrace of climate change policy, his election was not enough to overcome uncertainties over the future of domestic legislation needed to support US climate action at the international level (see Carraro/Masseti 2012).

China and other emerging economies were in a position to complicate governance on climate change, particularly in the discussion of burden-sharing arrangements. The evolving positions of BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) countries after 2009 regarding responsibilities and capacities in climate action provide one example.<sup>3</sup> Through 2009, China and the G-77 collectively argued for broad principles like the right to development and to financial assistance from the Global North to aide this cause. However, as Hochstetler and Milkoreit (2015) show, from 2009-2013 BASIC countries wanted to be identified as developing states with fewer responsibilities and not emerging economies with the capacity to contribute. On one level, this example illustrates that there has been a persistent free-rider rationale in climate negotiations, e.g. a tendency to avoid obligations in burden-sharing agreements in the hope that others will take up the slack. Such discussions in climate change remain difficult because this definition of the problem presents a zero-sum task to distribute obligations to reduce emissions. In this burden-sharing frame, the North persistently called on the South to share the costs of providing global public climate goods. Further, the benefits are not salient to the actors involved; they are indivisible collective goods that cannot be seen or directly experienced (Hochstetler/Milkoreit 2015: 210f).

Leading states also did not take constructive leadership roles to attempt to overcome persistent differences. In their research, Karlsson et al. (2012: 49) surveyed participants in climate meetings and described the period leading up to Copenhagen and beyond as a time of fragmented leadership. According to their survey results, the European Union, United States, and China were most frequently mentioned by a plurality as states with the potential to play a leading role in climate change negotiations. But these potential leaders failed to overcome the underlying context of long-term disagreements that had created deep divides among parties in the negotiation process.

One obstacle to overcoming the developed-developing world framing divide in Copenhagen was the failure of the Danes to structure an effective process to address these differences. Danish efforts created procedural roadblocks which aggravated the situation. For example, Denmark's effort in the final two days of the conference to organize a smaller group of twenty-six countries to work on core issues exacerbated the problem by raising the specter of a closed process which many developing states mistrusted. It galvanized resistance by a small sub-set of developing countries who insisted that negotiations remain open to all parties. They felt Denmark's efforts circumvented the UN's multilateral and democratic process for climate negotiations. Ultimately, the objection by the small group of states led by Venezuela, Bolivia, and Sudan kept the Copenhagen Accord from being adopted. Instead, the conference took "note of" the Copenhagen

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3 There were differences across the emerging economies and their perceived capacities to help themselves. When the European Council encouraged emerging economies to contribute to the financing of adaptation and mitigation in line with their capabilities, Brazil and China said they could pay for their own domestic mitigation while India and South Africa argued they needed climate financing to adjust.

Accord, leaving no binding accord and a galvanized opposition (Bodansky 2010a: 230f; Bodansky 2010b). The US-China blame game that followed was one of the major stumbling blocks in climate negotiations for quite some time to follow.

As we have seen in the lead up to Copenhagen, there were different discourses, for instance on burden-sharing and historic responsibility, reinforced by differences among states on these positions. The problems in Copenhagen were exacerbated by differences among key developed states, a fragmented leadership, the North-South divide, and growing differences among emerging economies. These were circumstances where key players did not see a situation for collective action. There also was no entrepreneurial leader to create an agenda with mutually acceptable positions which could bring a coalition of partners together (Karlsson et al. 2012: 46f).

#### **4. From Competing Narratives to Shared Policy Frames in Paris**

What was different in Paris? How and why was an agreement possible in Paris when it had not been in Copenhagen? Paris became an important symbolic event that advocates aimed toward to provide a breakthrough in climate negotiations. Janos Pasztor, the UN Assistant Secretary-General on Climate Change, argues that the globe was in a much different and more favorable situation for an agreement leading up to Paris than it had been in the recent past. Moreover, he contends that from an environmental certainty perspective, the science was much more certain than before, and the impacts were now visible and measurable and new options made progress possible. Procedures also mattered. The fact that states made their commitments well before the Paris meeting provided a means to decrease uncertainty. As a starting point, before coming to Paris, 185 countries submitted national climate action plans (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, INDCs), covering 98 percent of territorial emissions, and 97 percent of the population reflected in both the countries' climate ambitions and national circumstances. The INDCs were national climate action plans which covered mitigation and adaptation through a "bottom up" nationally determined process. These INDCs submitted in advance minimized the risks of failure due to a lack of specific targets or lack of participation from a majority of countries. Further, the attitude of the private sector changed tremendously leading up to Paris, and along with civil society actors it actively sought a strong agreement (Pasztor 2015).

The Paris process itself demonstrated that some obstacles to collective action in Copenhagen had been removed in Paris. As COP 21 opened, French President François Hollande noted that the agreement which came out of Paris would have to be "universal, differentiated and binding" (Hollande 2015). Developed countries were being asked to take the lead and also to support developing countries in their efforts to adapt – e.g., the need to finance climate actions and to free up the 100 billion dollars pledged in Copenhagen. Developing states, however, also had committed to self-identified targets based on their individual INDCs (see, for example, We Mean Business 2015n).

Procedurally, the presence of 140 world leaders at the launch of the conference who each gave speeches framing the imperative to address the climate threat and hope for a common solution “injected political capital and direction” into the beginning of the meeting which set the tone and context for action. In their opening remarks in Paris, leaders noted the need to address dire climate challenges now. By their words and actions, political leaders signaled the meeting’s importance, and when government ministers returned for the second week to finalize the draft framework, their presence raised the stakes and kept the pressure on to reach an agreement (We Mean Business 2015b: 1). The common themes across their speeches incorporated both a threat frame, including the imperative for action now, and the opportunity that Paris provided to make immediate progress. For example, when US Secretary of State John Kerry returned to Paris, he reiterated that the globe had reached a critical moment:

*We’re seeing momentum for an agreement that has never before existed. But at the same time, we are seeing firsthand the impact of climate change. The projections many scientists have been making for decades are unfolding before our eyes – and, in some cases, they are occurring faster and with greater intensity than initially foretold. [...] [T]his Conference of the Parties, may be the best chance we have to correct the course of our planet. And we gather to chart a new path – a sustainable path – to prevent the worst, most devastating consequences of climate change from ever happening. [...] [U]nless the global community takes bold steps now to transition away from a high-carbon economy, we are facing unthinkable harm to our habitat, our infrastructure, our food production, our water supplies, and potentially to life itself. Make no mistake. If a global community cannot come together [...] we will be liable for a collective moral failure of historic consequence (Kerry 2015).*

By this definition of the problem, Paris provided both an opportunity and a symbolic platform to reframe the climate policy and action narrative from a negative burden-sharing focus in past COPs, which had led to deadlock, to a positive opportunity frame that made the time to act now in a coordinated manner to save the planet. Saving the planet, however, would be done in different stages with reachable nationally-based targets to move toward a lower carbon economy rather than aspirational “decarbonization” and “climate neutrality” that were not immediately salient to those involved. There were pragmatic opportunity frames that appealed to the immediate context of national economies, energy and development needs, and environmental imperatives.

#### *4.1 Moving Beyond the North-South Burden-Sharing Controversy to the “Inevitable, Irreversible, and Irresistible” Economic Opportunity Frame*

National leaders set a positive tone that allowed for a shift from the “burden sharing” narrative of past COPs, to one embracing “an opportunity narrative” which recognizes that “bold climate action makes good economic sense” (We Mean Business 2015a). The Paris agreement was an opportunity to create a green economy which would produce a clean and safer world (We Mean Business 2015f). US Secretary of State John Kerry acknowledged that while climate change was an extraordinary challenge, “it is also the greatest economic opportunity the world has ever known” (Kerry 2015). Accompanying the economic opportunity theme (supported by extensive climate commitments made by businesses, investors, sub-national

governments and cities discussed below), civil society was poised to organize the hearts and minds to act and religious leaders emphasized the moral imperative that comes with climate change (Polman 2015).

Shifting to a clean lower carbon economy by reducing the carbon footprint and promoting sustainability was portrayed as a win-win rational course of action for all. As we will see, a strong coalition of states (and other stakeholders) came to support this frame because it had something for everyone, e.g. it simultaneously helped developed states protect their standard of living while developing states could continue to pull people out of poverty. The strong support from the progressive business community such as the We Mean Business coalition was essential. It argued that the transition to the low carbon economy made good business sense, but also that it was “inevitable, irreversible, and irresistible.” An ambitious global climate agreement, thus, would give corporations, entrepreneurs, and investors a strong signal that an orderly transition was possible, which in turn spurs investment and innovation (We Mean Business 2015b). Kathy Calvin, President and Chief Executive Officer of the United Nations Foundation, argued there was a “race to the top” mentality as countries, businesses, and people committed to climate action because they recognized it was in their own interest to do so and beneficial to their bottom line. In the long-term view, she felt there was a future where ethical leadership and commercial leadership would be inseparable (We Mean Business 2015h).

Leading up to Paris, these themes provided the opportunity for emerging powers to focus on growth and poverty alleviation themes in domestic discussions rather than the previous zero-sum terms in climate action. As the environmental literature cited suggests, there was room for them to emphasize both the positives of climate action and the negatives from carbon pollution such as public health impacts – issues that were salient for China, India, and other developing states (We Mean Business 2015d). There was a sense of opportunity for innovation and the co-benefits of climate mitigation and addressing increasing energy needs. They could note that moving ahead with energy efficiency, renewables, or solar would be for competitive reasons, climate reasons, or both (see, for example, discussion in We Mean Business 2015d).

Key bilateral meetings prior to Paris made this shift possible. For instance, the joint announcement of new climate targets between President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping in November 2014 (a full year before the Paris meeting) set the groundwork to overcome one of Copenhagen’s major obstacles between the two largest carbon emitters. US Secretary of State John Kerry argued:

*[[]last year the United States and China – the world’s largest economies and emitters, accounting for roughly 40 percent of the world’s emissions – came together to announce our respective, ambitious post-2020 mitigation commitments. This was proof that the roadblocks that we’ve hit for decades can be removed from our path (Kerry 2015).*

Through their INDCs each country could pick their level of mitigation to fit national circumstances. In the joint statement following the meeting, the US said it intended to seek “an economy-wide target of reducing its emissions by 26 %-28 % below its 2005 level in 2025 and to make best efforts to reduce its emissions by 28 %” (The White House 2014). China intended “to achieve the peaking of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions around 2030 and to make best efforts to peak early and intends to increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 20 % by 2030” (The White House 2014). Both sides were committed to increasing their ambition over time (The White House 2014).

Other agreements in place prior to Paris, such as the EU-China Joint Statement on Climate Change released on June 29, 2015, also paved the way for positive cooperation. This built on previous commitments made by the major economies in the European Union, which had created an emissions trading system and pledged to reduce its emissions by 20 percent from 1990 levels by 2020 and by 30 percent as part of a global comprehensive agreement. There also were changes in China's and India's domestic circumstances. China's progress in renewables and energy efficiency since Copenhagen made this part of its domestic imperative. No longer did meeting its growth in energy demand mean that economic growth goals conflicted with limiting emissions. For example, while its energy dependence previously made reliance on dirty domestic coal attractive (and essential), the focus on innovation simultaneously spurred investment in renewable sources of energy, which helped China diversify its supplies as it reduced its emissions and created jobs. The co-benefits of solutions like this explain how and why China could move forward to address compatible energy and climate goals (Garrison 2009; Levi 2009).

India moved forward as well. Despite the more than 300 million people who still lacked access to electricity, India pledged to reduce emissions per unit of GDP by 20 to 25 percent from 2005 levels by 2020, and by 33 to 35 percent by 2030. In its INDC, India committed to having 40 percent of its installed electric power capacity come from non-fossil fuel sources. As Dr. Rana Kapoor, Founder and CEO of Yes Bank, emphasized, India's fast growth necessitated access to clean and affordable energy as well as higher carbon sources. Much like China a decade earlier, India faced a current shortage of energy supply with growing demand. For India, the challenge to a low-carbon transition was financing, especially in terms of access in the scale of finance needed to meet the demand for low carbon energy opportunities (We Mean Business 2015i). French President Hollande and Prime Minister Modi of India used Paris to launch the International Solar Alliance. Defining solar power as "the foundation of the new economy of the century," Modi vowed to support the alliance to bring clean and affordable energy to all through the active involvement of developed and developing countries alike (cited in We Mean Business 2015d).

There was a palpable sense in Paris that renewable energy and energy efficiency opportunities made the low carbon energy transition possible for all. There had been innovation in technology and cost savings and given the lower prices, it was possible for even the poorest to leapfrog over old technologies. Peter Agnefjäll, CEO of IKEA, noted that the record investment and lower prices had helped renewables go mainstream – e.g., the cost of solar had declined dramatically since 2008 reaching grid parity with fossil fuels in many countries and wind was the lowest cost option for new power in some countries (We Mean Business 2015o). The Paris meeting further sped up the sense that the low carbon economy meant an end to fossil fuels.

#### *4.2 The Business Coalition and Evolving Opportunity Frame – Cleaning up Carbon as an Energy Opportunity*

In Paris, the private sector injected a new and different kind of energy and leadership in the framing of climate possibilities. The low carbon economy (as opposed to complete decarbonization) was framed as a real possibility given the national plans submitted by governments (pledged to cut over 52 billion tons of carbon overall – the first such commitment), and this perspective received real support from the

progressive business community who believed a thriving, clean economy would be good for business. Unlike in Copenhagen, in Paris the private sector had direct access to the multilateral process through Workstream 2, created by the Durban Platform in 2011 as the mechanism to facilitate decarbonization of the economy ahead of the official start of the national commitments in 2020. This process provided a space for the private sector to support policies that increased investment. It also facilitated a collective business response to a set of policies presented at the negotiations (We Mean Business 2015o). As noted previously, Paris was a catalyst to accelerate the “inevitable” shift to a low-carbon economy and to serve as a ratchet-effect to solidify past progress and then move forward (We Mean Business 2015b).

There was a clear sense in Paris that the private sector was out ahead of many of the national parties and their positions. Emerging public-private partnerships provided a new platform to push for coordinated progress in Paris and beyond. In its inaugural newsletter at the Paris meeting, the We Mean Business coalition of progressive businesses argued that the ministers needed to focus on five-year ambition cycles, starting in 2020, in order to keep pace with private sector innovation and to beat the two degree Celsius target. They reminded the parties that climate finance needed to fulfill the Copenhagen pledge of mobilizing 100 billion US dollars per year and subsequently to unlock private financing including the trillions needed to implement the INDCs. Business and investors were already driving investment and innovation towards a clean economy and they sought signals from governments to see that it would go further (We Mean Business 2015a).

The We Mean Business coalition gave companies and investors a common platform on which to act and show leadership on climate change. Through the coalition, 501 businesses and investors that represented more than 7.1 trillion US dollars in revenue and 19.5 trillion US dollars assets made 812 commitments to lead on climate and build a clean economy (Branson 2015). For example, prior to Paris ten large companies had made commitments and set targets approved by the Science-Based Targets initiative including: Coca-Cola Enterprises, Dell, Enel, General Mills, Kellogg, NRG Energy, Procter & Gamble, Sony, and Thylys. In combination, they were committed to reducing their emissions by 871.2 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> over the lifetime of the targets (We Mean Business 2015o). Already private sector financing for climate projects had reached roughly 650 billion US dollars per year. Big banks such as Citigroup, Bank of America, and Goldman Sachs had committed more than 325 billion US dollars to finance efforts (We Mean Business 2015g). Even some forward-thinking oil and gas companies were using a shadow carbon price of 25-50 US dollars per ton to help shape investment decisions. At these prices, the most carbon-intensive projects become less attractive and investment in carbon reduction technologies made good business sense. As Statoil CEO Eldar Sætre said at an oil and gas event at the Paris talks, “[w]e need to embrace low-carbon solutions as a business opportunity rather than as a threat to our industry” (cited in Zhang 2015).

For a significant plurality of businesses, the writing was on the wall and companies were eager to take advantage of the opportunity this energy transition would bring. Climate risk was set to become part of the bottom line for investment decisions. The Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures was an initiative to help companies disclose their climate risk information. The point was to produce comparable statistics that help companies put in place a transition strategy and support companies with low risk (We Mean Business 2015j: 4). It was seen as a smart business decision to bolster the resilience of supply chains and workforces in light of climate change impacts. Such moves reduce risk exposure and serve as

an important economic driver for building resilience and preventing the worst impacts. For example, ING was one of the financial companies to move away from investment in coal. They were ending the financing of new coal-fired power plants and thermal coal mines worldwide and also of new clients whose business was dependent on coal. They called this an example of the market responding to growing concerns about stranded assets and fiscally irresponsible financing (We Mean Business 2015k).

The plan was for these actions to direct international finance flows to enable climate adaptation in the poorest and most vulnerable countries (We Mean Business 2015g). Bolstering resilience, especially in some of the most vulnerable nations of the world, meant that investors had a stronger incentive to partner with governments in this effort to unlock financial flows and technology transfers that were a prerequisite of a strong COP agreement. They were developing products and investment opportunities for adaptation purposes (We Mean Business 2015g). Multilateral development banks also played a role by providing capacity building and means to implement pledges for developing countries. Finance regulations and other incentives shifted investment dollars to the low carbon private sector (We Mean Business, 2015j).

Strong policy engagement from the private sector had the effect of reducing uncertainty for negotiators. The private sector's emissions-reduction commitments convinced policymakers that business would be a long-term steady partner in this change. It also placed new pressure on governments to commit to an ambitious agreement. In return, these businesses saw that a strong agreement would only increase the confidence of businesses and investors, which in turn would drive innovation, increase clean energy investments, expand research and development (R&D) into climate-neutral technologies, and spur an era of green economic growth and job creation. Business argued it needed a level playing field and regulatory certainty a Paris agreement and supporting national policies could bring (Branson 2015; Polman 2015; We Mean Business 2015j).

Global carbon pricing did not come with the Paris agreement as most businesses would have preferred. Instead, carbon pricing came via subnational and a handful of national policies. More than half of the INDCs made prior to COP 21 mentioned market mechanisms, such as a carbon price, as an important tool for reducing emissions. By the time of the Paris meeting, 40 countries and 23 regional or local jurisdictions had a carbon pricing mechanism – including the European Union, Mexico, India, and California. Governor Jerry Brown of California stressed how regulations and incentives in his state and at the regional level made an impact. California sources 25 percent of its electricity from renewable energy and has created a cap-and-trade system linked with Quebec and Ontario (We Mean Business, 2015l). Cities also have become leaders in carbon policy in order to make long-term growth and development plans more climate resilient and low carbon. This calls for better urban planning, public transport, etc. China's impending national cap-and-trade program involves two provinces and several cities. Its pledge spurred a new series of commitments (We Mean Business 2015p). Looking at the G20 countries, which together are responsible for 85 percent of global GDP, we see that many will have carbon pricing policies in place by 2018. So business was getting a global carbon pricing option although in an indirect way (We Mean Business 2015c).

### *4.3 Pushing the Ambition Envelope Further: Fostering an Open Process with Space for Civil Society and the Small Island States Agenda*

Civil society actors also played an important role in the Paris Agreement success to both expand the scope of the discussion and to create space for future advances. The unprecedented access of NGOs in Paris meant that they were well positioned to encourage governments to act boldly and to be a vocal accountability measure. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on NGOs to help keep governments accountable, so that they implemented the targets they had committed to and so that they would be ready to do more. The UN chief argued that the world was standing at a very critical moment: “I’m hopeful and I’m reasonably optimistic that we’ll be able to have for the first time in the history of the United Nations a universal and very ambitious climate change agreement which will make our lives healthier and more prosperous” (cited in UN News Service 2015).

NGO involvement and open procedural processes in Paris proved essential for the ambitious agenda, including small island state coalitions and their efforts to push for the 1.5 degree goal. This small states’ group dominated the meeting in a way much beyond their size. On one level, they served as a moral compass for the conference and a reminder that their survival hinged on the outcome of the Paris meeting. The movement, which began with fifteen states who met in the months before Paris as the High Ambition Coalition, saw their ranks swell to over 100 including the United States, European Union, and a variety of African, Pacific, and Caribbean states (Burkett 2015). This diverse group argued it was committed to a “truly ambitious” agreement. Through its efforts, terms such “1.5° C” and “loss and damage” emerged as discussion points to be formally recognized. Small island concerns showed up in the discussion of capacity building and simplified procedures to access financial resources.

Their progress was mixed. While their demands for funds for adaptation and an increase over time did not make a lot of progress, they made progress on climate mitigation funding. For example, as part of its commitment the US announced a new program to provide 800 million US dollars in grants-based aid for the world’s poorest to adapt to extreme weather. This would be in addition to the 3 billion US dollars over four years that the United States pledged toward the international community’s 100 billion US dollar annual flow described above. Small island states also tried to get a standalone section on loss and damage in the text. In the end, compensation and liability were not addressed in the text – in part because it was resisted by the United States (Reguly 2015).

These states had this opportunity to push the ambitious agenda because of the structure of the Paris process put in place by the French leadership. French Environment Minister and COP President Laurent Fabius was committed to full transparency and assured participants that the Paris COP would not be a repeat of Copenhagen where the EU, United States, and BASIC countries tried to force an agreement without consultation with the rest of the developing states (Rattani 2015). Thus, in direct response to criticism of Denmark’s lack of transparency, procedurally the French designed an open, disciplined, and transparent process which was complimented by participants, observers, and the media for its effectiveness.

The French presidency at COP 21 made sure there were no secret side deals in Paris, which had plagued Copenhagen’s legitimacy. Instead, the French organized a series of ministerial-led, open-ended consultations



known as the “Paris Committee” in which the French Foreign Minister took the lead and made the ministerial section of COP available to hear reports each evening from the consulting ministers. Ministers from eight countries, pairing developed and developing states as co-leaders, led four consultation processes. Gabon and Germany led the group to explore the means-of-implementation for finance, technology, and capacity building; Brazil and Singapore focused on differentiation and issues of mitigation, finance, and transparency; Norway and St. Lucia focused on ambition and subsequent review and long-term goals; and The Gambia and the United Kingdom looked at pre-2020 action. Their mandate was to bridge differences by facilitating discussion between the parties and different groupings (We Mean Business 2015m). This became an effective coalition-building mechanism in which those who disagreed felt their concerns were aired and discussed.

The “1.5°C to stay alive” refrain from NGOs and small island states gained much more attention in Paris than it had in Copenhagen because the open process allowed this agenda to be aired. Where NGOs were relegated to the Bella Center in Copenhagen far from the center of the action, in Paris their access to the negotiation process made them important supporters for small island states (Burkett 2015). As Ban Ki-Moon anticipated, their actions seemed to help keep states accountable. Alden Meyer, director of strategy and policy at the Union of Concerned Scientists in Washington, said that the small state coalitions came prepared with a unified message and they worked effectively with the environmental and scientific community to push their message. The case was bolstered by the release of the Structured Expert Report by the UNFCCC, which found that 1.5 degrees of warming would greatly reduce the risks over the two-degree goal (Reguly 2015). The literature on epistemic communities supports the notion that the involvement of stakeholders in the communities and scientific consensus tend to strengthen international commitments to relevant agreements (Krasner 1982; Haas 1989).

When the final text was published, small island states did not get their specific goals, but their needs had been widely recognized. They had come to Paris armed with scientific evidence and allies whose numbers expanded by the day. While this wording in the agreement represented progress, there was nothing formally binding to make this a measurable target. Yet, they had come farther than ever before to get what they needed in climate action. The agreement called for a peaking of emissions “as soon as possible,” rather than requiring complete decarbonization. This wording struck a balance and kept the door to future progress open. To its critics, the absence of the decarbonization mandate made the 1.5 degree goal almost entirely illusory (Reguly 2015).

## **5. Conclusion: The Journey Past Paris – American Withdrawal and Next Steps in Climate Action**

Decarbonizing the global economy and reaching the two degree and 1.5 degree temperature goals is the ultimate goal of the Paris agreement. Paris itself put countries on a path to potentially meet these goals. By design, this was done through a multifaceted strategy to 2050, including negotiation every five years to strengthen reduction commitments (beginning in 2020), to enact meaningful and coordinated carbon pricing, and to fulfill the Copenhagen finance pledge. Transparency and accountability were enshrined as

the means to make mitigation and finance commitments clear. The agreement embraced the broad opportunity frame and created a definable path to make forward progress. Within this broad structure, the INDCs set a baseline problem definition for what countries at the time could commit to, but states were asked to be ambitious in their future climate goals.

Paris represented a first step in a long-term commitment to make deep changes to how countries develop. The bottom-up approach brought countries to the table with individual commitments and meaningful reductions which set a positive baseline for negotiations in Paris. This structure allowed states the flexibility they needed to advance their national policies while overcoming differences that had stymied past agreements. Reviews every five years provided a structure to trust and verify each state's promises for climate action. Thus, states found a way to sign on to an agreement that took practical win-win steps in climate action, while providing a road map for an ambitious climate agenda that could make more progress over time for societies such as the small island states on the front lines for climate impacts.<sup>4</sup>

Paris signaled a collective shift in the discussion from the burdens of climate action to opportunities climate action offered to promote economic growth and to create jobs and prosperity. It seemed to permanently set the economic opportunity frame as "inevitable, irreversible, and irresistible." But it was none of these for President Barack Obama's successor, President Donald Trump. For President Trump, the climate accord represented an unfair burden on the American economy while it gave emitters such as China and India a pass. In issue framing terms, the US withdrawal from the Paris Accord reflected the embrace of the old framing of climate action as a burden rather than emphasis on collective opportunities. However, American withdrawal from the Paris Agreement has not changed the collective opportunity baseline.

On the international level, the collective response to the US withdrawal illustrates just how isolated the US administration is on this issue. The immediate reaffirmation of the accords by EU states as well as China and India show that the Paris agenda is alive and well. President Trump has made the United States irrelevant to the effort it led two years before and the important role it played in putting it together. Countries such as China and India are poised to fill the leadership vacuum. The rejection of Paris also was a rejection of the multilateral agenda and a fundamental shift in approach to American foreign policy. This is about nationalism over globalism, and the triumph of domestic symbolic politics. This action also shows the president's misunderstanding of the Paris model and ignorance to the mechanisms that allowed specifically for national responses to address climate action. The "bottom-up" mechanism for the national policy approaches allowed the United States a mechanism to respond. Thus, President Trump had already made the necessary changes in federal policy with the Environmental Protection Agency reversal of regulations and dismantling of policies set to support America's climate commitments, which made public repudiation of the treaty unnecessary.

Where does climate action go from here? Looking at this through the analytic lens of this paper, we can see precisely how the broad coalition of support for climate action provides a solid basis to move Paris

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<sup>4</sup> For the small island states, there is a frustrating lack of impetus for rapid change as the sea level rise threatens whole societies. But the aspirational 1.5 degree goal provided the impetus for climate advocates to continue encouraging states to do more and to oversight on a five-year basis to effectively see this happen.

goals forward without the United States as a signatory. In fact, climate action in the United States is set to continue. First, the US federal government leadership gap has been filled by subnational actors such as states and cities. California is the sixth leading economy in the world and has remained committed to the climate agenda. Further, mayors of cities within the United States and beyond remain committed to their climate action goals. Second, Trump's decision does not change the stance of the coalition of business groups supporting climate action. This coalition, including leading fossil fuel companies such as Exxon and Shell, see climate action as something to factor into their business plans. Similarly, utility companies will not change their trajectory to move away from coal and toward natural gas and renewables. They do this because customers expect it, investors expect sustainability, the technology has changed, and the economics support the shift to rely less on coal. These are the entities that will implement the policies that accomplish the goals of the Paris Accord.

The bottom line is that the broad coalition of actors promoting the Paris agenda remains in place. American withdrawal is a barrier, but key states remain committed to climate action and broad support from subnational actors, business, and civil society show the breadth of the transnational coalition agreeing on this action. Paris remains a baseline for future progress in climate action.

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