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The Impact of National Interests on Cooperation in Global Environmental Policy: A Critical Study of the Paris Agreement

Wpływ interesów narodowych na współpracę w globalnej polityce środowiskowej: krytyczne studium Porozumienia Paryskiego

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Abstract
This study examines the interplay between national interests, domestic politics, and international climate cooperation, focusing on the Paris Climate Agreement as a landmark in global environmental policy. The agreement marked a potential shift toward enhanced multilateral cooperation. However, a decade since its adoption, persistent compliance challenges have raised concerns about its effectiveness in reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. Employing an analytical-descriptive approach combined with a chronological analysis to evaluate states' compliance with the agreement's commitments. The analysis is grounded in a dual theoretical framework: institutional neoliberalism to assess the agreement's institutional achievements and realism to interpret how national interests and domestic pressures impede compliance. Findings indicate that domestic priorities significantly shape adherence, revealing a disparity between ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and their practical implementation.

Key words: national interest, climate cooperation, Paris Agreement, compliance, climate change

Streszczenie
Niniejsze badanie analizuje wzajemne oddziaływanie między interesami narodowymi, presjami politycznymi wewnętrznymi a współpracą międzynarodową w dziedzinie klimatu, koncentrując się na Porozumieniu Paryskim jako punkcie zwrotnym w globalnej polityce środowiskowej, które zapoczątkowało potencjalny zwrot w kierunku wzmocnionej współpracy wielostronnej. Jednak po dekadzie od jego przyjęcia utrzymujące się wyzwania związane z przestrzeganiem jego postanowień budzą obawy co do jego skuteczności w redukcji globalnych emisji gazów cieplarnianych. W badaniu zastosowano podejście analityczno-deskryptywne w połączeniu z analizą chronologiczną w celu oceny stopnia realizacji zobowiązań przez państwa, przy czym analiza opiera się na podwójnych podstawach teoretycznych: neoliberalizmie instytucjonalnym do oceny instytucjonalnych osiągnięć porozumienia oraz realizmie politycznym do wyjaśnienia, w jaki sposób interesy narodowe i presje polityczne wewnętrzne utrudniają jego wdrażanie. Wyniki wskazują, że priorytety krajowe w znacznym stopniu kształtują poziom przestrzegania zobowiązań, ujawniając rozbieżność między ambitnymi krajowymi wkładami (NDC) a ich praktyczną realizacją.

Słowa kluczowe: interes narodowy, współpraca klimatyczna, Porozumienie Paryskie, zgodność, zmiana klimatu

1. Introduction

Scientific evidence confirms that human activities, particularly the dependence on fossil fuels, serve as a key driver of climate change (IPCC, 2021). Rapid economic growth and unsustainable development have significantly depleted natural resources and degraded ecosystems, undermining the resilience of local communities. Despite the increasing and complex effects of climate change, achieving a comprehensive international agreement has remained a significant challenge. Before the Paris Agreement, countries faced significant challenges in negotiating a solution that addressed the diverse interests of developed and developing states. The complexity of balancing economic growth, national sovereignty, and environmental responsibility posed significant challenges to reaching a universal accord.

In the context of international efforts to address climate change and sustainable development issues, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, introducing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an integrated framework for addressing global social, economic, and environmental challenges. Among these, several goals are closely tied to global environmental policy, notably Goal 6, which promotes sustainable water use and sanitation; Goal 7, which aims to ensure access to affordable and clean energy for all; Goal 13, which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; Goal 14, which focuses on conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas, and marine resources; and Goal 15, which is dedicated to protecting, restoring, and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. Collectively, these goals emphasize the urgent need for coordinated international action to combat environmental degradation. Later that same year, in December 2015, the international community adopted the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), marking a significant step in operationalizing the environmental dimension of the SDGs through binding and voluntary national commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Paris Climate Agreement marked a significant turning point in international cooperation. It adopted a bottom-up approach where both developed and developing countries committed to establishing their emission reduction targets under the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) framework. However, when implementing the agreement's provisions, obstacles and issues arose that hindered the achievement of its objectives.

A decade after adopting the Paris Climate Agreement, global efforts have shown varying progress in achieving its goals, particularly in reducing emissions and fostering international cooperation. In this context, a complex relationship has emerged between national interests and global objectives, with national priorities influencing the enforcement of the agreement. While there is a strong global commitment to climate action, reconciling national requirements with global environmental objectives remains a persistent challenge. Based on this, the research question can be framed as follows: How does the tension between national interests and global objectives affect the trajectory of cooperation in global environmental policy?

The following sub-questions stem from the main research problem:

1. What is national interest, and how does it theoretically differ from collective interest?
2. How does the Paris Climate Conference contribute to enhancing global climate cooperation mechanisms?
3. To what extent do internal political factors influence national commitments to the Paris Agreement?

The research hypothesis is formulated as follows: The greater the tension between global environmental policies and national interests, the more it adversely affects the effectiveness of international efforts to address climate change.

This study aims to examine the influence of national interests on the dynamics of international cooperation in addressing climate change. By analyzing their pivotal role over the ten years following the adoption of the Paris Agreement, emphasizing the need for a deeper examination of the concept of national interests to better comprehend their impact on international climate cooperation during this period, and to mitigate its negative effects on international climate cooperation.

The analytical-descriptive method is a fundamental tool for understanding the impact of national interests on the pathways of international cooperation over a specific period. This method enables an in-depth analysis of the shifts and trends in national priorities and their reflection on collective commitments. Additionally, theoretical frameworks that explain national interests, such as realism and institutional neoliberalism, have been employed to explore the complex relationship between national interests and global collective goals, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of this issue.

This study consists of the following sections:

1. International climate Cooperation between national interest and global common interest: A theoretical approach
2. The Paris Agreement: Prospects of international climate cooperation
3. The influence of internal factors on international climate cooperation

2. International climate cooperation between national interest and global common interest: A theoretical approach

The debate on international climate cooperation is divided between two main perspectives: realism and liberalism. Realists argue that national interests hinder effective global cooperation, while liberals assume that cooperation can be fostered through international institutions and norms.

2.1. Realism and the limits of climate cooperation: prioritizing national interests over collective action

The concept of national interest holds an important place within the theoretical study of international relations, given that it effectively explains conflict situations. Regarding the challenges facing international cooperation in mitigating climate change, many theorists – especially realists – attribute the lack of cooperation to the prioritization of national interests over collective interests, a topic we will discuss in more detail.

2.1.1. National Interest as a core concept in international climate cooperation

Realists maintain that states are the main entities in global politics, operating in a world without a central authority. Given this anarchic environment, states act rationally to maximize their own interests.

Following World War II, realism emerged as the dominant perspective in the field of international relations. Prominent scholars such as Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, E. H. Carr, and Henry Kissinger contended that international politics operates under objective, universal laws grounded in the national interest, defined as power (Halliday, 1994). Realists assert that the primary dynamic on the global stage is the competition among states to secure their often conflicting national interests (Falode, 2009).

NeoRealists define interest as being synonymous with power, primarily equating it with material capabilities (Kenneth, 1979). States are perpetually competing for power, driven by their desire to survive and dominate other states. As a result, power is the paramount concern for states. International politics revolves around power, with every state striving to enhance its power (Morgenthau, 2006).

Realists highlight the role of human nature in shaping international politics, suggesting that human nature drives states to behave in particular ways and is fundamentally self-interested, leading to a propensity for conflict (Sutch & Elias, 2007). Unlike classical realism, neo-realism, as prominently represented by Kenneth Waltz in his book *Politics Among Nations* (1979), argues that human nature is not the sole factor driving conflict between states. Rather, the anarchic international environment primarily drives states into an unending pursuit of security.

The primary objective of foreign policy is the advancement of national interests. This objective is often viewed through the realist perspective, which interprets it as a continuous pursuit of power and a fundamental means of ensuring state survival. (Jackson & Georg, 2003). The survival of the state constitutes the most essential national interest, with other priorities, such as economic, environmental, or humanitarian considerations, taking secondary importance if the state's existence is at risk (Dunne et al., 2020). Consequently, according to realism, national interest is considered the primary driver of foreign policy. Any form of cooperation pursued by a state is perceived as being driven solely by self-interest rather than by ethical considerations or mutual benefits.

Assuming collective action is necessary to address a common problem, such as the threat of climate change, and the urgency of coordinated responses to protect the environment. In that case, the main driver behind states engaging in this behavior is ultimately their own self-interest; political scientist Kenneth Waltz has noted this in relation to how easily states can withdraw from collective agreements. *All have reason to hang back, hoping that others will bear the costs - something that nobody may have the incentive to do* (Kenneth, 1979).

This realist perspective has faced considerable criticism, particularly within the framework of climate change. The unwavering emphasis on national interest and state security has hindered international cooperation. As a result, this approach could make life on Earth unsustainable as the effects of climate change become more severe. Additionally, the concept of *national interest* has been widely criticized for its ambiguity. Even Hans Morgenthau, who found the concept analytically valuable, acknowledged its lack of a precise definition (Cornelia, 2016; Hans J & al, 1952).

However, the primary realist conclusion concerning climate politics is that the anarchic nature of the international system compels great powers to perceive climate change as a secondary concern. John Mearsheimer, for instance, explicitly avoids discussions on climate change to prioritize *first-order* security threats (Mearsheimer, 2001). Realism expects that external systemic forces are unlikely to drive states toward climate action, indicating that domestic politics primarily shape national climate policies. This is evident in the experiences of countries such as Costa Rica, South Korea, and the United Kingdom, where supportive domestic politics have facilitated the adoption of ambitious climate policies (Cameron & Alexander, 2017; Karlsson & Hee Yoon, 2015; Sung-Young et al., 2015).

The tension between national interests and global climate goals hinders progress toward the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainable development. Many states prioritize fossil fuels to meet their immediate energy and growth needs, especially in developing countries, due to financial and technological constraints. This reliance hinders progress on multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Continued reliance on fossil

fuels delays progress toward Goal 7 for Affordable and Clean Energy, intensifies the challenges of Goal 13 on Climate Action, and contributes to the degradation of ecosystems addressed by Goals 14 on Life Below Water and 15 on Life on Land (United Nations, 2015). Overcoming these challenges requires robust international cooperation to facilitate access to clean technologies and to empower less-resourced countries to pursue climate action without compromising their development priorities.

Green political theory strongly critiques the realist approach, which prioritizes national interest and views the state as the sole central actor, arguing that this perspective encourages isolationism and ignores cross-border environmental issues that require global cooperation. In contrast, green theory advocates for embracing Ecocentrism, prioritizing environmental concerns over Anthropocentrism. As for Hempel (L. Hempel), global environmental governance shows that the spatial scope of the state is insufficient to address the dimensions of environmental change. The state is, at the same time, too small to handle global environmental challenges and too large to address local environmental issues effectively. Therefore, governance practices shift towards regional and global levels on one hand and local levels on the other (Hempel, 1996).

Green theory theorists argue that the search for a state-centered solution is doomed to fail. Instead, they propose the idea of decentralization as a central axis in green politics, a concept that weakens the state's position as the central representative. However, not all proponents of green thought agree on favoring decentralization at the expense of central state authority. According to researcher Robyn Eckersley, the goal of decentralization can be achieved through inclusive practices, such as establishing virtuous and coordinated relationships between the state and society, adopting ecological and critical modernization policies, and promoting active environmental citizenship at the international level (Eckersley, 2004).

2.1.2. Relative gains and the pursuit of national interest: within the framework of international climate cooperation

Realist theory emphasizes the importance of relative gains, particularly within the framework of climate cooperation. Countries must secure greater gains than other states, negotiating favorable agreements prioritizing their national interests.

A second assumption in Realist theory is that great powers focus on maximizing their relative power. This makes inexpensive mitigation measures more practical. For instance, Sevasti-Eleni Vezirgiannidou's research into U.S. Congressional discussions surrounding the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 highlights how U.S. legislators prioritized gains relative to China, despite Kyoto's modest emission reduction targets expected to reduce U.S. growth by only 0.15 percent (Vezirgiannidou, n.d.). Realism suggests that a strong international response to climate change is unlikely if mitigation entails significant economic or political costs (Keohane & Victor, 2016).

In addition, states prioritize the distribution of relative gains resulting from cooperation. Given the dynamic nature of international relations, states cannot always trust their allies. Neo-realists argue that these factors make international cooperation challenging. States often avoid cooperation that benefits others more, especially in an anarchic international system where there is no overarching authority to ensure the legitimate rights of these countries (Martin & Terry, 2002). Thus, realism assumes that self-reliance is the key to achieving relative gains aligned with their self-interest, ignoring the interests of others. Therefore, it does not recognize the interdependence that liberalism assumes (Berkan, 2010). As a result, growing concerns about relative gains can lead states to act cautiously in their international efforts and prioritize conserving resources domestically for future contingencies rather than pursuing international cooperation. As climate change worsens, states may focus on building resilience within their borders, avoiding the complexities and uncertainties of international cooperation (Purdon, 2014).

Neorealists argue that states are more concerned with relative gains, or improving their position relative to other states, than with achieving absolute gains. This can lead to resistance to international cooperation, particularly in areas such as environmental governance, where collective action is necessary.

2.2. The power of institutions: Neoliberal Institutionalism and climate change cooperation

Neoliberal literature has been more engaged in theorizing climate cooperation than realist literature. It underscores the significance of establishing robust international institutions and promoting effective cooperative mechanisms among states to tackle global environmental challenges.

2.2.1. Neoliberal Institutionalism and the possibility of international cooperation

Global institutions play a crucial role in fostering cooperation among states, as emphasized by Neoliberal institutionalism. These institutions can facilitate collective action by providing forums for dialogue, setting rules and standards, and monitoring compliance.

Neoliberalism fundamentally holds an optimistic view of human nature. asserting that human intellect can be harnessed to achieve more beneficial collective outcomes through interaction and cooperation (Sterling et al., 2010). International cooperation occurs when states adjust their behavior to align with the actual or anticipated preferences of others, ensuring that one government's policies are perceived by its counterparts as facilitating their objectives. (Robert O, 1984). Neoliberal theory aligns with neorealism in recognizing the challenges of cooperation

among international system units due to its anarchic nature and the associated uncertainty. However, from a neoliberal perspective, institutionalism can overcome these obstacles.

Unlike realism, liberalism holds an optimistic perspective on foreign policy and national interests. Liberal scholars greatly trust human reason and are convinced that rational principles can be effectively applied to international relations. At the same time, they acknowledge that individuals can be self-interested and competitive. However, they also argue that people share many common interests, enabling collaborative and cooperative social actions both domestically and internationally, ultimately leading to greater benefits for everyone at home and abroad (Jackson & Georg, 2003).

Overcoming collective action challenges in an anarchic international system can be challenging. However, within the framework of Neoliberalism, the design and structure of international institutions are seen as crucial in shaping the extent to which collective objectives can be realized. Policymakers and other actors can design and adapt institutional frameworks to more effectively advance shared interests. Essentially, the challenge is how to design international institutions that can consolidate cooperation between international units by limiting the effects of the anarchic international environment, and this is the focus of neoliberal institutional analysis. (Sterling et al., 2010).

The political scientist Robert Keohane notes that cooperation is uncommon in global politics but can still occur among rational, self-interested actors. This is possible if they are concerned about maintaining their reputations or if an international institution exists that can facilitate cooperation between them (Robert O, 1984).

International institutions and prevailing approaches are seen as failing to provide fundamental solutions to the climate crisis. From the perspective of both critical theory and green theory, particularly its radical strand, *green capitalism* is viewed as a cosmetic tool of neoliberalism, masking the contradictions of the production system without addressing them. Practices such as recycling or purchasing *green* products create a false sense of contribution to saving the planet, ultimately hindering the radical thinking required and obstructing genuine collective action toward meaningful structural change to confront the environmental crisis (Biro, 2011). Green political theory, particularly in its radical form, challenges international climate institutions by linking the environmental crisis to systems of exploitation and extreme anthropocentrism within the modern global order. It advocates for a profound transformation of humanity's relationship with nature and rejects capitalist and consumerist structures. According to this perspective, genuine environmental protection demands sweeping structural change rather than surface-level reforms.

2.2.2. Institutions and their role in reducing obstacles to international climate cooperation

Neoliberal institutionalism highlights the obstacles to global environmental cooperation, such as differing national interests and economic priorities. It argues that strong international institutions can help bridge these gaps, enhance cooperation, and coordinate environmental policies on a global scale.

The fundamental assumption of neoliberal institutionalism is that international institutions influence policy outcomes in a manner that benefits all parties involved. They achieve this by discouraging non-compliance, providing stable platforms for regular interactions, and fostering trust among states (Robert O, 1984). Neoliberal institutionalism has provided an important vision for climate change policies. Strengthening the institutional framework for climate action would enhance the effectiveness of international efforts to address climate change (D. Victor & Keohane, 2010). For this reason, neoliberal research focuses on the types of institutions that can facilitate the desired cooperation. The inability to achieve effective cooperation may stem from institutional design flaws.

Furthermore, the virtues of cooperation are assumed to become evident once states join international institutions. As a result, states become more willing to cooperate despite having different national interests. Consequently, neoliberal institutionalism places greater importance on international political processes than domestic politics in determining whether a state will cooperate. It is assumed that it is in the best interest of states to cooperate in reducing emissions because they benefit from this cooperation (D. G. Victor, 2011).

From a neoliberal perspective, it is erroneous to assume that cooperation is automatic; rather, it relies on deliberate effort. While states may share common interests in controlling environmental pollution, this does not necessarily lead to easy or automatic cooperation that results in a solution. Cooperation may fail due to a lack of information about the true preferences of each state toward one another, and states may fear that others will exploit the cooperative arrangement by cheating or free-riding on their efforts without a reciprocal contribution (Sterling et al., 2010).

International institutions concerned with climate change play a central role in advancing the sustainable development agenda across its environmental, economic, and social dimensions. Through frameworks like the UNFCCC, they aim to balance emission reductions with economic growth and climate justice. The environmental dimension is evident in mitigation and adaptation efforts, the economic dimension in promoting renewable energy and low-carbon innovation, and the social dimension in protecting vulnerable groups and ensuring fair access to resources and technologies. The IPCC (2022) emphasizes that climate action is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (IPCC, 2022).

3. Paris Climate Conference: Opportunities to enhance global climate cooperation

Through this section, we will examine the impact of the institutional approach on advancing international cooperation efforts during the Paris Conference. This analysis will be structured around three key elements, which are outlined as follows:

3.1. The inclusiveness of the Paris Agreement

3.1.1. Participation

The Paris Agreement, a legally binding global accord on climate change, was ratified by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris on December 12, 2015. It officially came into force on November 4, 2016. (The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC, n.d.). For the first time, a universal agreement was achieved to tackle climate change. Its broad participation stemmed from a collective acknowledgment of the pressing need for climate action. Unlike previous summits, the Paris Conference employed a bottom-up framework and encouraged states to define their own climate targets based on their capacities and circumstances. Throughout the negotiations, the French strategy prioritized an inclusive approach to facilitate consensus on the broader objectives (Ourbak, 2017). A Norwegian negotiator supported this perspective, highlighting the importance of ensuring everyone, including historically less ambitious Parties, felt their voices were acknowledged in the process. Such inclusivity is vital for preserving the Agreement and preventing it from being abandoned in the future (V. H. Tørstad, 2020). Therefore, the Paris Agreement marked a pivotal moment in global climate cooperation, as it shifted the focus to encompass challenges faced by all states worldwide, moving beyond the traditional emphasis on the concerns of developed countries that had characterized previous conferences.

3.1.2. Efforts to address the issue of differentiation

From its inception, climate agreements have been plagued by the challenge of differentiation, rooted in embedded inequities within the international system and fundamental Proofs about climate justice and historical responsibilities. The Paris Agreement addresses these issues, allowing for a flexible and comprehensive approach. Although all Parties participate in mitigation efforts, the Agreement's precise language subtly differentiates between developed and developing countries (Vogler, 2018). The Agreement establishes a shared, long-term objective for all countries to limit global warming to *well below* 2°C, with an ideal target of 1.5°C (Paris Agreement, 2015). The Kyoto Protocol obligated only industrialized states to commit to emissions reductions, lacking a long-term goal. In contrast, the Paris Agreement recognizes climate change as a global issue and applies to all states indefinitely (Allan, 2019).

The Paris Agreement refrains from employing a rigid burden-sharing mechanism. Instead, it introduces flexible provisions designed to be broadly applicable, contrasting with the more structured frameworks outlined in earlier UNFCCC agreements. Notably, the Paris Agreement departs from the clear distinction between developed and developing countries established in the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. Climate agreements are more likely to achieve compliance when grounded in a universally accepted notion of distributive justice (V. Tørstad & Sælen, 2018). In addition, the agreement partially alleviates the division of responsibilities between developed and developing countries. While developed countries are still expected to take the lead in emission reductions, they are also required to support developing countries (Savaresi, 2016).

3.2. Ambitious global goals

The significance and ambition of the Paris Agreement can be assessed through three main elements: its global goals, the current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and the framework of commitments and expectations for future NDCs. These elements collectively highlight the Agreement's comprehensive approach to addressing climate change and its potential to drive progressive and ambitious climate action over time.

3.2.1. Basic global goals

For two decades, the objective of the climate convention remained vague, aiming broadly to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations and avoid dangerous human interference with the climate system, The Copenhagen Accord, endorsed at the 2010 Cancun COP, specified a 2°C threshold for *dangerous anthropogenic interference*, which was insufficient for the survival of small island states at risk of flooding. The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) advocated a 1.5°C threshold. Remarkably, this was partly achieved in Paris, where parties agreed to limit the global temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, aiming for 1.5°C (Art. 2.1) (Allan, 2019).

The Paris Agreement sets both individual and collective objectives. Each party submits a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) representing its particular target. Two primary shared objectives of the Paris Agreement are to limit the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 °C, strive to cap it at 1.5 °C, and achieve global carbon neutrality between 2050 and 2100 (Bang et al., 2016). This is the first agreement to establish a long-term

goal of limiting the rise in global average temperature to 1.5°C by 2100. Two primary mechanisms were implemented to accomplish these objectives: the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the pledge-and-review system.
The primary aims of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change are closely aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 13, which emphasizes the need for urgent measures to address climate change and its effects. The agreement promotes a shift toward low-carbon, climate-resilient development pathways.

3.2.2. The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

According to several reports, it has been emphasized that international efforts must be strengthened to enhance national contributions, not only for developed countries, as stated in the Kyoto Protocol, but also for developing countries with significantly high emission levels, such as China and India.
The insufficient national contributions to emission reductions led the Paris Conference to establish a crucial mechanism to boost ambition: Parties must regularly submit updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) every five years, as outlined in Articles 4.2 and 4.9 (Friedrich, 2017). This requirement is considered the Paris Agreement's fundamental legal commitment for the Parties, as noted by Brun (Brun, 2016). The most important thing about this mechanism is that it enables countries to embark on a path of ambition to achieve global environmental goals.
The Paris Agreement is designed to strengthen over time, mandating that countries update their domestic policy plans and establish stricter targets every five years, with firm language to ensure continuous policy progression (Art. 4.3). This *ratcheting mechanism*, which received strong backing from the European Union, Brazil, and other countries, was the result of extensive negotiations. By aiming for increasingly accelerated policy actions and the constant evolution of the global policy regime, these provisions could have tremendous importance (Falkner, 2016).

3.2.3. Pledge-and-Review System

The climate regime has shifted towards a *pledge and review* approach, where UNFCCC Parties independently declare their intended actions. This represents a significant change from the top-down method of the Kyoto Protocol (Daniel & Elliott, 2010). Keohane and Oppenheimer (2016) argue that the pledge-and-review system can only be effective with a high degree of transparency (Keohane & Oppenheimer, 2016).
Article 13 of the Paris Agreement establishes the Framework for ensuring transparency. Countries must submit regular reports on their emissions and disclose the necessary information to monitor progress in implementing and fulfilling their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Furthermore, these reports must undergo a multilateral review (Falkner, 2016). This mechanism enables the monitoring of progress in meeting Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and assesses how effectively these commitments pave the way for more ambitious future contributions. By ensuring transparency and regular reporting, the framework supports continuous improvement and accountability in international climate action.
Given the gap between the collective goals and the overall impact of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the effectiveness of the Paris Agreement will largely depend on the mechanisms designed to enhance ambition (Young, 2016). The concern is that these reviews could reveal implementation gaps, potentially triggering a downward cycle of diminishing confidence and reduced ambition. (Falkner, 2016).

3.2.4. Climate finance

Article 9 of the Agreement requires developed countries to provide financial assistance to developing countries, thereby facilitating both emissions reduction and climate adaptation efforts (The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC, n.d.). By 2020, developed countries had pledged to mobilize US$100 billion annually for climate finance; nevertheless, in 2017, they contributed only approximately half of the allocated financial commitment (Key World Energy Statistics, 2017).
Securing adequate financing for mitigation and adaptation represents a critical barrier to developing countries' compliance with the Paris Agreement, primarily due to the failure of developed countries to honor their financial commitments (V. H. Tørstad, 2020). However, the provisions on adaptation and finance are noteworthy aspects of the Paris Climate Agreement. They highlight an important element of international cooperation and solidarity, acknowledging the disproportionate vulnerability of developing countries to the impacts of climate change and the need for targeted support. By prioritizing assistance, the goal is to strengthen the resilience of these countries and enhance their capacity for adaptation.

4. The influence of internal factors on international climate cooperation

This section examines the extent to which domestic factors influence states' commitment to implementing the Paris Climate Agreement, organized around the following key elements.

4.1. Domestic political pressure and international climate cooperation

Domestic political factors play a significant role in determining the level of commitment to the Paris Agreement, as observed in the following section.

4.1.1. The rise of right-wing populism

The emergence of Right-Wing Populism poses a significant challenge to the implementation of the Paris Agreement, as modern Right-Wing Populist movements are generally antagonistic towards climate policies and international cooperation (Gemenis et al., 2012; Lockwood, 2018). The most notable instances occurred in 2016 during the Brexit referendum in the UK and the election of Donald Trump in the USA. In 2017, the Front National performed strongly in the French Presidential election, and Alternative für Deutschland made significant gains in the German general election. Usually, The Right-Wing Populist (RWP) parties frequently oppose climate change policies (Lockwood, 2018). Additionally, Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has been a vocal critic of the Agreement and has expedited the deforestation of the Amazon (Economist,2019). Thus, the rise of Right-Wing Populism has complicated global climate cooperation and created additional challenges in implementing climate agreements.

4.1.2. Political pressures of interest groups

Political decision-making on climate change is shaped by public opinion and the representation of interest groups (Rory et al., 2022). Introducing new legislation or modifying existing laws and regulations is often seen as a contest between business and environmental lobby groups. Generally, business lobby groups strive to restrict expensive environmental measures, whereas environmental lobby groups push for broader and more stringent measures (Tavoni & Winkler, 2021). Brulle analyzed lobbying expenditures from 2000 to 2016 in the U.S, finding that over US$2 billion was allocated to climate lobbying. This represented about 3.9% of total lobbying expenditures on average, peaking at around 9% in 2009 (Brulle, 2018).

Corporate lobbying on climate change is often seen as secretive and anti-regulatory, working against the public interest. Research confirms that such lobbying efforts by companies and their alliances can successfully weaken, delay, or obstruct the implementation and enforcement of climate policies. Climate lobbying can lead to significant negative economic consequences. For instance, the lobbying efforts that succeeded in blocking the Waxman-Markey Bill (formally known as the American Clean Energy and Security Act) from passing in the U.S. Senate in 2010 had far-reaching impacts. This bill aimed for a 17% reduction in U.S emissions by 2020, an 80% cut by 2050, and the establishment of a national cap-and-trade emissions trading scheme, among other measures. The global social cost of the bill's failure was US$467 billion (Rory et al., 2022). These groups work to modify or repeal climate laws and regulations, resulting in variations in commitments and execution among different states.

4.1.3. The impact of autocratization on international climate cooperation

There is a current rise in autocratization, with a total of 24 countries currently experiencing significant impacts from what is identified as the *third wave of autocratization.* This group includes populous states such as Brazil, India, and the United States, as well as several Eastern European countries, including Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Serbia (Lührmann et al., 2018). In major countries such as China, India, Indonesia, and Russia, weak accountability mechanisms between political leaders and the public create a significant challenge to the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement. Leaders may hesitate to enforce stringent climate targets, particularly when they conflict with economic growth. For instance, China's approval of five times more new coal mines in the first half of 2019 highlights this issue (David & Muyu, 2019). Weak oversight mechanisms in Autocratic regimes encourage political leaders to shirk international climate commitments to achieve political stability in their countries.

4.1.4. The impact of withdrawing from climate agreements

President Donald Trump declared the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in June 2017, fulfilling his *America First* campaign promise, asserting that global warming was a hoax created by China to undermine U.S industrial competitiveness. He argued that the agreement restricted the US while benefiting other countries and stated that the US would negotiate to reenter the agreement under terms that he deemed fair to the US (Zhang et al., 2017). In the U.S. 2018 Fiscal Year budget, the Department of State and USAID reduced financial support for global climate initiatives by US$10.9 billion, representing a 28.7% decrease, which assists in tracking and reducing emissions and enhancing renewable energy capacity in developing countries, was also cancelled (Zhang et al., 2017).

Analyses differ on the extent of the impact of the U S withdrawal on international cooperation. However, as the world's second-largest CO_2 emitter, the United States had promised that carbon reductions would contribute to more than one-fifth of the total emissions cuts outlined in the Paris Agreement by 2030 (Hartmann, 2017). The United States' withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement weakened its global commitments to reduce emissions and cut financial and technological support. Despite rejoining in February 2021, the U S continues to play a crucial role in influencing climate policies both within and outside the agreement.

4.2. Challenges of Implementing Carbon Neutrality

Achieving carbon neutrality is one of the core objectives of the Paris Agreement. Yet, it simultaneously represents one of the most significant challenges to implementing international climate cooperation, particularly among the world's largest emitters.

At its summit held on 10–11 December 2020, the European Council endorsed a legally binding target to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, as a critical milestone on the path toward achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. This target was adopted within the framework of implementing the Paris Agreement. As part of the European Green Deal, the Council called for this goal to be swiftly enshrined in the European Climate Law, aiming to promote sustainable economic growth and strengthen the EU's global competitiveness through green innovation (European Council, 2024).

Nevertheless, the European Union faces several challenges in its path toward achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. One major obstacle is the continued reliance on fossil fuels, particularly natural gas, which is widely used for heating. Additionally, economic and technological disparities among member states create significant differences in their ability to finance and implement climate policies. Social resistance also emerges, particularly when climate measures result in higher living costs or threaten jobs in traditional industries. Another key challenge lies in the global economic competition with countries that have less stringent environmental regulations, such as China, raising concerns about losing competitiveness.

Turning to the United States, the Biden Administration submitted the United States' long-term strategy to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in November 2021, officially committing to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. This target covers all greenhouse gas emissions (Climate Action Tracker, 2024). As the United States continues to accelerate its transition to a clean energy economy, President Biden announces a new climate target for the country: to reduce net economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 61% to 66% by 2035 compared to 2005 levels (the white house, 2024).

Despite these efforts, the United States will need to adopt additional policies to achieve its emissions reduction targets. By 2030, greenhouse gas emissions, excluding those from land use, land-use change, and forestry (LULUCF), are projected to range between 4.6 and 5.4 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent (Gt CO_2e). This corresponds to a 29% to 39% reduction from 2005 levels (excluding LULUCF), which remains insufficient to meet the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) target of a 45% to 50% reduction. (Climate Action Tracker, 2024). In addition, serious concerns are emerging about the possibility of former President Donald Trump withdrawing from the Paris Agreement once again. Such a potential withdrawal could undermine the climate momentum initiated by the Biden administration, particularly the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

As for China, it announced in 2020 its aim to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. Since that announcement, it has taken significant steps toward clean energy, pledging to double its renewable energy capacity by 2030— a goal it achieved six years ahead of schedule. In 2024, China led global investments in the energy transition, accounting for two-thirds of the $2.1 trillion spent worldwide on areas such as power grids and electric transportation, according to Bloomberg NEF. Despite its progress in the green transition, China remains heavily dependent on coal, the most polluting energy source. In 2024, alongside record investments in clean energy, the country approved 66.7 GW of new coal power capacity, the highest in a decade, to meet growing energy demand and maintain energy security, given coal's domestic availability (Shah, 2025). In 2024, China recorded a 3.4% reduction in carbon intensity, according to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, falling short of its target of 3.9%. This decline highlights the challenges the country faces in reaching its goal of carbon neutrality by 2060 (Stanway, 2025).

In the case of India, at COP26 in 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared India's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070. The following year, at COP27, India presented its first Long-term Strategy for Low Carbon Development (Climate Action Tracker, 2024). Despite India's remarkable progress in developing renewable energy sources, particularly in solar and wind power, its continued reliance on coal—which accounts for more than 70% of electricity generation, remains a significant obstacle to achieving the declared carbon neutrality target by 2070. These challenges are further compounded by the growing demand for energy and the insufficient funding allocated for expanding clean energy infrastructure. In this context, India's share of global greenhouse gas emissions rose from 6.7% in 2019 to 7.5% in 2022, with projections indicating a 46% increase in energy consumption by 2031. This raises serious doubts about the country's ability to fulfill its climate commitments within the specified timeline (Kay, 2024).

Finally, Russia, in its long-term climate strategy submitted to the UNFCCC in 2022, committed to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2060. The strategy includes a target to cut emissions by 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. It relies heavily on negative emissions from the land use, land-use change, and forestry (LULUCF) sector (Climate Action Tracker, 2024). Nevertheless, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has profoundly disrupted its energy transition trajectory and cast serious doubts on global progress toward carbon neutrality. Although Russia had taken initial steps toward decarbonization, it showed no substantial intent to abandon its hydrocarbon-based economic model. The new political, trade, and financial conditions triggered by Western sanctions and geopolitical

tensions have significantly weakened the momentum for environmental reform. Moreover, the shifting global energy landscape may jeopardize international climate cooperation if not properly managed (Kamila Godzinska, 2022).

4.3. Conflicting geopolitical interests and their influence on climate commitments

The period following the Paris Agreement was marked by the rise of geopolitical tensions, which impacted the ambitious objectives of the agreement and weakened the level of international cooperation, particularly among major powers.

Ahead of the Sharm El-Sheikh Climate Conference in November 2022, international climate cooperation encountered numerous challenges. The war in Ukraine and other geopolitical tensions complicated negotiations among rival powers. Additionally, global energy and food crises, coupled with rising debt in developing countries, rendered the cost of reducing carbon emissions less attractive. Trust in the Global South deteriorated, fueled by perceptions that the developed world was not fulfilling its commitments or dealing fairly with lower-income countries (Barrett & Dannenberg, 2016). As a result, geopolitical tensions complicated the preparations for COP 27 and deepened the divisions between Russia and the West. Moreover, the competition for influence intensified between the West and China, which reduced the willingness of both sides to cooperate (Engström, 2022).

Additionally, progress in implementing climate pledges has been challenging. In Glasgow, the plan to transform commitments into a *mitigation work program* within the UNFCCC process encountered resistance, with countries such as China viewing it as excessive interference in their domestic policies. During the June 2022 Bonn conference, disagreements arose between wealthy countries and the global south over financing climate-related damages. Consequently, a few new and more ambitious NDCs have been introduced (Engström, 2022). Thus, the inaction of wealthy states in fulfilling their financial commitments to the Global South deepens the crisis of mistrust and weakens international cooperation in addressing climate change.

Given that China and the United States collectively account for roughly 43% of CO_2 emissions (29% and 14%, respectively) and possess significant global innovation capacity, the participation of these two great powers is essential for any effective climate agreement (Jos et al., 2017). Realists expect that China and the United States will prioritize their comparative gains over rapid decarbonization if the two objectives conflict (OECD, 2017). The geopolitical conflict between China and the US is likely to hinder climate cooperation, particularly in the areas of green technology transfer and financial support. Their rivalry may hinder cooperation and trust, making it more challenging to achieve global climate goals.

Furthermore, the discovery of unconventional fossil fuel reserves, such as shale gas, is igniting new geopolitical and social tensions, significantly impacting international climate politics. While Earth's fossil fuel resources are finite, the currently proven reserves are still extensive and vast (Ciplet et al., 2015). Additionally, climate change is melting deep ice sheets, which is causing geopolitical conflicts over newly accessible oil reserves in regions such as Antarctica and the Arctic seabed. This newfound availability of fossil fuel resources worldwide is also triggering new social conflicts (Klein, 2014).

The erosion of trust between the Global North and South constitutes a significant impediment to achieving meaningful progress. This lack of trust hinders cooperation and undermines the credibility of commitments.

4.4. Non-compliance with mitigation measures

As the need for global climate cooperation intensifies, some states are falling short in fulfilling their national commitments. The gap continues to widen between ambitious climate pledges and executing them.

Climate change is fundamentally a challenge to cooperation and arguably one of the most difficult international cooperation issues ever (Barrett, 2003). This is clearly demonstrated by the substantial hurdles in meeting the commitments outlined in the Nationally Determined Contributions NDCs.

The Emissions Gap Report 2024 highlights that the current strategies of G20 members have significant shortcomings in achieving their net-zero targets, as indicated by their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). In states where emissions have already peaked, most NDCs suggest that major emission reductions will be delayed until future years. This results in higher cumulative emissions in the short term and necessitates rapid decarbonization in the coming decades (UNEP, 2024). Additionally, at COP26 in Glasgow, countries agreed to enhance their climate action commitments (NDCs) ahead of COP27. However, only a few have followed through, and disagreements have deepened over how much developed countries should compensate for climate-related damages in developing countries (Engström, 2022).

Despite the successful negotiations of the Paris Agreement, it is considered a weak and limited form of governance compared to the mechanisms established for protecting the stratospheric ozone layer. The agreement lacks enforcement mechanisms to hold non-compliant states accountable, as it adopted a *pledge and review* system instead of binding targets and strict timelines.

The Paris Agreement's compliance mechanism has faced criticism for its inability to effectively address the free-rider problem (Barrett & Dannenberg, 2016). Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, which achieved high compliance rates through its system of financial Sanctions, the Paris Agreement lacks a robust compliance mechanism to compel

Parties to fulfil their commitments. Instead of Sanctions, the Paris Agreement relies on alternative methods to incentivize participation and compliance (V. H. Tørstad, 2020).
Despite widespread participation in the Paris Conference, the key challenge lay in securing the commitment of signatory countries to their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and ensuring transparency and accountability in emission reduction reporting (Bodansky, 2016). However, the drawback of the NDC mechanism is that it emphasizes procedural commitments while neglecting the substantive content of the Parties' NDCs. The *Compliance Mechanism* was established to enhance implementation and reinforce compliance with the Paris Agreement (Article 15.1). However, it lacks effective incentives to deter and penalize non-compliance, making it essentially an expression of goodwill among the parties (Bang et al., 2016).
The Paris Agreement promotes participation but sacrifices ambition and compliance, lacking robust enforcement mechanisms to deter free-riding or penalize non-compliance. While procedural commitments are emphasized, substantive action and accountability remain weak, resulting in delays in achieving reductions in emissions.

4.5. Transparency barriers to climate adaptation efforts

Adaptation to climate change is a central issue in the Paris Agreement, given equal importance to mitigation; however, it still faces significant challenges regarding transparency and implementation.
The Paris Agreement leaves the specifics of adaptation information reporting quite open-ended, deferring contentious issues, such as the reporting of adaptation needs, to future negotiations (van Deursen & Gupta, 2024). Although the Paris Agreement elevates adaptation to the same level as mitigation, it remains less emphasized in transparency efforts. While countries can include adaptation in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), reporting is not mandatory. Key elements, such as adaptation needs, are often addressed in separate communications, reducing their prominence. This reflects the political challenges in adaptation transparency, even when framed as technical discussions. For developing countries, particularly the least developed ones, implementing transparency provisions poses further challenges. Despite advocating for better reporting on adaptation needs, these efforts were relegated to less-supported channels, with limited resources and prioritizing the technical review of adaptation reports (van Deursen & Gupta, 2024).
Although developed countries have pledged support for climate adaptation, they frequently fail to meet their financial commitments to developing countries. This gap erodes trust and hinders the effectiveness of climate initiatives.

5. Conclusions

The implementation of the Paris Agreement reveals a clear tendency among many states to prioritize their national interests over global environmental commitments. Domestic policies often favor immediate economic or social objectives, even at the expense of climate goals. As a result, progress in achieving Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) slows down, undermining trust among participating countries and hindering international cooperation. Consequently, maintaining the momentum of global efforts becomes increasingly complex, threatening the long-term effectiveness of the agreement.
National priorities pose a fundamental challenge to international cooperation within the framework of the Paris Agreement. Some countries hesitate to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels, fearing economic repercussions. This reluctance delays the implementation of climate commitments and postpones the achievement of shared goals. Moreover, the lack of effective coordination between national policies and global obligations exacerbates disparities among states, transforming climate cooperation into mere theoretical commitments rather than tangible progress. In addition, in light of recent developments and the current trajectory of carbon neutrality efforts, particularly among major emitters, there are growing concerns that net-zero targets will not be achieved within the pledged timelines.
The emphasis on narrow national interests directly undermines global efforts to combat climate change. Some states minimize their contributions to collective emission reduction initiatives, hindering the establishment of a sustainable cooperative framework based on solidarity. As a result, the gap between global environmental ambitions and the practical realities of implementation widens, thereby limiting the agreement's effectiveness. Ultimately, the success of international cooperation remains contingent on the willingness of states to transcend their immediate interests and uphold their shared responsibilities toward global climate action.
The results show that international institutions face significant challenges in effectively addressing climate change, with achievements remaining limited compared to the magnitude of the global environmental crisis. This further reinforces the green perspective, which advocates fundamentally restructuring humanity's relationship with nature through radical solutions beyond superficial institutional reforms. Additionally, this perspective calls for building institutions free from the dominance of capitalist frameworks to ensure sustainable and effective responses to the environmental crisis.

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