

Paris Climate Accord Agreement Position Paper

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Position Statement

The Paris Climate Accord Agreement (Paris Agreement) is a policy that aims to develop solutions to tackle climate change and its negative impacts. The climate crisis goes beyond borders and requires international cooperation and coordinated solutions. On December 12, 2015, the UN Climate Change Conference reached an agreement in Paris (*United Nations, 2024*). This agreement is what's known as the Paris Climate Accord Agreement commonly known as the "Paris Accord" or "Paris Agreement". Although this policy is necessary and beneficial, there are some changes that could be made to make the agreement more efficient and realistic. This paper aims to explain the structure, advantages and disadvantages of the Paris Agreement. The position is maintained that it was the correct decision for the United States to re-enter into the Paris Agreement.

Background

The idea of global warming is something that can be traced back to the 17th century a time when the idea of the Earth's changing climate was considered and even welcomed. By the 1930s a scientist by the name of Stewart Callender had noticed that many parts of the North Atlantic region had begun to warm and found it interesting that it occurred a couple of decades after the Industrial Revolution (*History, 2023*). However, it wasn't until the early 1980s that a sharp increase in global temperatures was noticed (*History, 2023*).

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The year 1988 was seen as a pivotal moment for climate change awareness, when climate-related issues started to receive more attention. James Hansen, a NASA scientist, was one of the first scientists to sound the alarm on the dangers of climate change. This new urgency helped lead to the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC was established in 1988 with the role of preparing assessments to analyze the state of climate change at any given time. These assessments cover things such as scientific information, technical information and socio-economic implications (IPCC, 2024). The IPCC is also responsible for reporting on the future risk of climate change and options that can help mitigate this risk (IPCC,2024). The IPCC is essential in making sure that information relayed to policymakers is accurate (Peterson,2024).

Since the IPCC had been so influential to policymakers, it played a role in the creation of the Kyoto Protocol. This was the first global agreement made with the intent to reduce greenhouse gases around the world (*History*,2023). The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997, and signed by President Bill Clinton, though shortly after this the United States withdrew from the protocol during George Bush's presidency (*History*,2023). The Kyoto Protocol was ratified by 192 countries, though the protocol was only legally binding for industrialized nations (Maamoun,2024). The legality was one of the main criticisms of the Kyoto Protocol, and some nations felt it was unfair that they had different expectations than their counterparts (Maamoun, 2024).

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The IPCC and Kyoto Protocol helped lay down the framework for the Paris Agreement. The Agreement came into effect in December of 2015 (*History*, 2016). As with previous policies, this was seen as another turning point in climate change mitigation. The Paris Agreement set a goal of preventing the average global temperature from rising more than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels (*History*,2016). The Paris Agreement planned to execute this by dramatically decreasing carbon emissions (*History*,2016). The Agreement consists of twenty-nine articles, each describing a way to tackle climate change (*LSE*,2020). The Paris Agreement uses a lot of terminology like *recognizing*, *emphasizing*, *affirming*, and *taking into full account* (*Paris Agreement*). These terms are put on the first page of the document to help lay out the values and steps that need to be taken. Nations need to *recognize* the issue, *take into account* all the specifics of the situation, and *emphasize* the fundamental priority which is mitigating climate change (*Paris Agreement*).

The Paris Agreement requires various groups to communicate and work together. As of now, there are about 175 nations that have signed onto the Agreement (*Sustainable Development Goals*, 2024). These nations' governments are significant players because they decide if and how policies from the Paris Climate Agreement are rolled out. The IPCC is very involved in the process and delivers the science that is used to justify this international treaty. Every five to seven years the IPCC will produce a report on the status of climate change. These reports have laid down the scientific foundation for the Paris Agreement and are helping to guide policies made all over the world (*The University of Edinburgh*,2024). Lastly, the United Nations is the

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most significant stakeholder since the treaty was founded and signed through this organization. The UN's goal is to get as many nations as possible to sign onto the Paris Agreement, and their role is to oversee cooperation toward a common goal.

Environmental Impact

The effectiveness of the Paris Agreement can be measured by analyzing the changes in the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The Paris Agreement aims to accomplish its goals by the year 2100 (Cornwall, 2020). Certain environmental policies and actions are needed to make this possible. The primary source of energy would have to shift from fossil fuels. The “extraction” of fossil fuels alone has negative environmental implications such as mining and fracking. Something such as coal mining can have implications like emitting sulfur dioxide, which contributes to toxic rain (*US Energy Information Administration, 2024*). Coal mining also contributes to mountaintop removal which can cause the mass burying and contamination of headwater streams, especially in the Appalachian region (*Appalachian Voices, 2024*). If countries switch to cleaner energy sources, this would eliminate the environmental impacts of extracting fossil fuels. Reduced mining would halt the resulting deforestation, and in return maintain forests that remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

The Paris Agreement will also have an impact on ocean and marine systems. Scientists predict an increased stress to these ecosystems and biodiversity if the temperature is not kept under 2 degrees Celsius below industrial levels (Sumaila, 2019). Increased global temperatures would

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have profound effects on the ocean. Such warming would increase the chance of ocean acidification, combined with detoxification (Sumaila, 2019). Those effects would impact the primary production and distribution of fish populations. Achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement has been predicted to benefit fisheries.

Paris Agreement Structure

The Paris Agreement has guidelines and procedures, but the overarching idea is that temperatures are to stay 2 degrees Celsius below pre-industrial levels. All member nations make pledges of action to lower their greenhouse gas emissions every five years. For example, the European Union pledged to at least 40% below 1990 levels (Tso, 2021). Although nations are required to submit these pledges, there is no legal formality involved. Each individual nation must develop its own goals and unique set of actions, and provide periodic updates and reports of what has been done to help meet those goals (Tso, 2021). If a country fails to meet these goals, they are required to meet with a committee of researchers to determine what went wrong and how to meet the set goals in the future. The main objective is not to punish nations that don't meet certain requirements but to encourage cooperation. The Paris Agreement is meant to meet the needs of nations where they are and help get them back to where they need to be. Developing nations may need funding and aid to meet their goals. Another aspect of the Paris Agreement is that wealthier countries like the United States are to provide technologies and financial assistance to developing nations (Tso, 2021).

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Advantages and Disadvantages

Although the Paris Agreement is a positive and necessary treaty, it is not perfect and it has advantages and disadvantages. One of the main advantages of the Accord is that it helps unify countries across the world to achieve a common environmental goal. Around two hundred countries have signed on to support climate change mitigation. If climate change policy is enacted it will mitigate the impacts. Climate change will still be there, but the effects will be much less severe. The Paris Agreement, and climate policy in general, has the potential to create clean energy jobs. Since the Paris Agreement, jobs within the solar industry have increased over ten times (Miller, 2020). Another advantage of the Paris Agreement is that it encourages cooperation among different nations so that countries are not tackling these issues on their own (Miller, 2020).

Although this is a good policy overall, there are some underlying problems. Many feel that this Agreement is not entirely fair and that not all nations are given the same responsibilities. For example, when China and India signed the agreement, they were not forced to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to the same level as the United States and other developed nations. Another issue is that it does not call for any major enforcement policy or solid deadlines (Kotlikoff, 2016). This can be problematic since many of the requests are voluntary and there are minimal repercussions for noncompliance. So, many nations may not feel motivated to take action against climate change because they would face no formal consequences. The Accord also

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promotes the idea that when it comes to fossil fuel companies, they should either lose it or use it (Kotlikoff, 2016). The consequence of this pushes the fossil fuel industry to accelerate the use of the remaining resources preventing the industry from sufficient transition time from fossil fuels to alternative clean energy sources. This only encourages the use of fossil fuels (Kotlikoff, 2016).

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Conclusion

The Climate being identified in a “crisis” was brought to the world’s attention in the 1980’s.

Three international efforts have attempted to address the problem beginning with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) established in 1988, followed by The Kyoto Protocol adopted in 1997, and lastly the 2015 Paris Climate Accord Agreement (Agreement).

The intent of the Agreement is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2100 to prevent atmospheric warming. The Agreement has its pros and cons: the pros are that countries work together and identify goals aimed at reducing contributing sources and the international sharing of technical information and financial resources; the cons are that some nations feel subjected to higher standards resulting in an economic disadvantage, and there are little to no tools to enforce compliance with the Agreement. The United States has both joined and left the Agreement. In 2017 President Trump removed the US from the Agreement stating that it was killing jobs and punishing American citizens while enriching foreign polluters (Friedman, 2021). President Biden returned the United States to the Agreement stating that rejoining this Agreement was one of his priorities (Mai, 2021).

In conclusion, the Climate Crisis is not going away. Each day we are reminded of the enormity of the problem. Nations must continue to work through the process of international cooperation through increased negotiations that include developing requirements unique to each country’s economy in such a way that minimizes conflicts between environmental protection and economic prosperity, allowing sufficient time for each nation’s infrastructure to transition to clean energy, and lastly implement financial penalties and rewards as a means to “enforce” the Agreement.

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Paris Climate Accord Agreement Position Paper

Ariana M. Sims, Dr. De Szalay (Instructor), Environmental Biology & Management, 20 Feb.2024

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Paris Climate Accord Agreement Position Paper

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