

This is a graded discussion: 2 points possible due 5 Feb at 18:30



Reading Reflection #10

[Jackson Herron](#)

4 Feb at 9:44

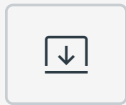
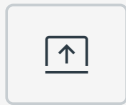
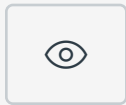
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Answer the following in 200-400 words.

1. The article claims that the Paris Agreement favors developed countries of the North - do you agree? Give at least three supporting reasons why.
2. What was the most surprising thing you learned about the negotiation of the Paris agreement?

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[Olivia Locke](#)

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1. I do agree with this. I think it sounds like all countries have had to compromise to reach an agreement, however, the stakes of that compromise are very different for the global north vs south. Developed, northern countries might begrudge the fact they agreed to more ambitious goals than they would have preferred, but ultimately what they have agreed to is very reasonable and ultimately non binding. On the other hand, less developed countries, especially low lying island countries, have had to compromise to agreements which are not sufficient to maintain their way of life in these regions. If powerful countries who emit the greatest amounts do not hold them selves to the agreement there is little that smaller and less developed countries can do in response.

I think this mirrors many situations where power imbalance can be seen. The least privileged communities fight to exist and to be seen, and the most powerful communities respond by begrudgingly relenting and allowing progression while complaining of the inconvenience this presents. This can be seen in racial, gender based, and classist inequalities.

2. I did not realize the highly structured and highly secretive way in which the Paris agreement was held. It makes sense that a highly structured schedule would be necessary to reach an agreement, but it also seems that the choice of who was invited to each meeting could have a large impact on the overall agreement. Without knowing more details it is hard to know, but it seems that biases in forming these groups could certainly have aided in directing the agreement to be more favorable for developed countries.

[← Reply](#)



[Antonio Rodriguez](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/15905>

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-I like that you connected it to many power imbalance situations, I agree with this

-It seems like there was definitely bias when choosing these secret committees; and it seems like some countries were completely unsure as to what would come up on the final draft.

2/2

[← Reply](#)



[Ashna Misra](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/94031>

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I think it's super important that you pointed out the varying stakes that people have in climate agreements. Especially since, as mentioned a couple times, if big countries like the States didn't sign the agreement nobody would have taken it seriously.

I definitely agree with your take. On the other hand smaller nations may have felt confused by the amount of changes happening completely without their input. I wonder what kind of role Canada or other generally mediating countries may have had in these talks.

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[Ashna Misra](#)

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3/3

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[Michael Horner](#)

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1. The article claims that the Paris Agreement favors developed countries of the North - do you agree? Give at least three supporting reasons why.

I agree that the agreement favours developed countries of the North. The main point of the agreement that favours developed countries is the lack of financial remuneration for developing countries. This includes the clause that does not allow for this to change in the future. The Paris Agreement also allows for carbon trading, which allows any country to offload their carbon emissions to other countries until the stocktaking process occurs. The stocktaking process is also friendly to developed countries who have more infrastructure and as a result may take longer to make the changes needed to reduce carbon emissions. Finally, since the agreement is not legally binding, developed countries who do not meet their contributions will remain the best equipped to deal with the environmental consequences of climate change. Developing countries with less resources will not be as fortunate and will have no political mechanism for seeking compensation.

Overall, I do not think it is meaningful to focus on this distinction. Developed countries, by definition hold most of the geopolitical power, and it is not surprising that the agreement was constructed to reflect this.

2. What was the most surprising thing you learned about the negotiation of the Paris agreement?

I was most surprised to find that the negotiation process was mostly private as well as how the final text of the agreement was presented. This did not match up with the picture of international discussions that I had in my head, although now it does make sense to me why the negotiations were done this way.

← Reply



[Alexis Lytle](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/38541>

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2/2 I agree, this paper did not line up with how I envisioned international negotiations. I wonder if this is fairly common practice or an exception based on the need for efficient dealings with so

many conflicting demands.

← Reply



[Ashna Misra](#)

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Excellent job pointing out the specific points. If you took a look at that news link as well it mentions how Brazil was trying to find a way to double count their forests as carbon offsets. It's true that the Paris agreement, like any other global agreement, favours those with money and power. It could be valuable to do a showcase of the risk for island nations and how incoming refugees could affect developed nations.

Totally agree, when I imagined these talks I had the picture of the UN general assembly in mind. That said, the general assembly hardly gets anything done so small meetings were definitely more time effective albeit less transparent.

3/3

← Reply



[Katie Reeder](#)

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1. I do agree. Firstly, for the Paris Agreement to be ratified, countries responsible for 55% of the emissions need to sign on. As developed nations have the largest carbon footprint, the agreement will not succeed without their presence. Using this influence, Northern countries negotiated to remove legally binding mitigation and finance, and succeeded. Negotiators recognized that the U.S would simply leave the talks if agreements were legally binding. In the end, it was the US that weakened mitigation commitments for developed countries in the new agreement. Secondly, Northern countries managed to tweak the Paris Agreement into an agreement to focus on mitigation while ignoring adaptation (important to least developed and island states); dodges legal obligations on finance, compensation, and technology transfer; and includes strong international transparency for national mitigation actions. Lastly, Northern

countries changed the wording of the agreement to their benefit. A majority of countries (106 states, to be precise) demanded to prevent a temperature rise of 1.5°C. Northern countries preferred 2 degrees instead. The US also demanded a single word change: Developed countries “should” rather than “shall” undertake economy-wide quantified emission reductions”. In effect, the United States weakened the whole process.

2. I think that the most surprising thing was the weight of the United States in the negotiations. I had a bit of an idealistic vision of climate talks being somewhat democratic, but I was really disheartened to see how the U.S essentially overruled the majority of countries that wanted to shoot for 1.5 degrees. I was also shocked at the way that the press was excluded, and the extent to which backroom dealings shaped the final agreement. The authors' description of Saudi striking a deal with the US really undermined my limited faith in international institutions. Sad react.

← Reply



[Alexis Lytle](#)

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2/2 I agree, it was both surprising and disheartening to see how much of an influence the US had in these talks, and how they chose to use that power to create an agreement with little regard for other countries. The balance between the need for privacy/efficiency and the need for transparency/accurate media coverage was interesting to me, and although I see the rationale for keeping things relatively secret from the public and even the delegates present, it ends up looking pretty sketchy in some regards.

← Reply



[Jackson Herron](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/31047>

5 Feb 2019

2/2

The US is just the worst aren't they!? They did place such an outsized role in the negotiation, weakening the entire agreement from the ambition for 2°C, not accepting a legally-binding character, and limiting financial assistance to developing countries. Then they turn around and threaten to pull out of the agreement entirely... Sad react.

Another reason that the economically developed countries stand to benefit - their better ability to adapt to climate threats.

[← Reply](#)



[Antonio Rodriguez](#)

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5 Feb 2019

1. I agree that the countries of the North had a more impactful say in the discussions as other countries want them to stay in the deal and will therefore sacrifice some of their demands in order to keep the northern countries in the deal. Most of the contribution from climate change comes from northern countries like USA and China, which is not really being taken into account in the PA; and they had a lot of impact in the discussions. From the reading, it seems like these countries had more of a say about transparency, financial and legal topics that were discussed. Most of these northern countries were mostly concerned about their self and not about the effects of countries closer to the equator or in more vulnerable places.

2. I found it really surprising that the USA was able to change the word 'shall' to 'should' which completely changes the effect of the sentence. There was no discussion about this either, they made the change as a technicality when proof reading the PA. I was also surprised how there were many topics that were secret discussions with only few countries participating and no written records of the discussion or agreements. Some were then added to the PA at the end so many countries were surprised about the clauses since they were not involved in the discussions. For some countries, there were even contradictory statements on the PA compared to what was discussed the in the secret sessions.

[← Reply](#)



[Taran Bains](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208520>

5 Feb 2019

I feel like majority of countries think about themselves and how these changes will affect them. And I definitely agree that it is shocking how the USA has that much control over these sorts of things. Its wild.

2/2

[← Reply](#)



[Jackson Herron](#)

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2/2

I do agree that a lot of countries sacrificed their demands in order to keep the economically advanced countries (primarily the US) in the deal - most notably a lack of legally binding character and a limitation on the financial assistance to developing countries. And then the US turns around and tries to pull out of the agreement! It's a shame.

I do however disagree that the economically developed countries contributing the most to climate change are not accounted for in the Paris Agreement. There is language that these countries should have 'increased ambition' for mitigating their emissions. I admit however that this is vague language. China also has a significant amount of the world's population, so though their emissions are high, on a per capita basis they are actually quite low.

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[Melissa Prado](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/3017>

5 Feb 2019

First, this article was an eye-opener to something I had not turned so much of my attention before. In regards to the first question, the article uses several examples to support the claim that this agreement favors developed nations, for example, several northern countries opposing to financial commitments and claiming that any change will have seismic effects on the negotiations and will wreck the entire deal. I do see how changing the language in order not to create actual operational goals is something that developed countries did push for in this agreement. The establishment of smaller goals such as the 80 -95 instead of net emission by 2050 are examples that show us that governments are not entirely committed to taking action. Connected to this is that something that surprised me about the article was the part when they mentioned that the last 2 days of the COP21 were for entirely private consultations and that Brazil, the EU, and key island states said that they were not fully informed of the break-throughs that were reached in private. That just shows the incredible role of secrecy in diplomatic negotiations. The article made me reflect on the fact that civil society delegates were actually left out of any negotiations, climate change is not something that we can afford to continue to speak about behind closed doors.

Another important point to raise is how we may think it is a matter of everyone has to lose something, however, the issues of adaptation, capacity building, and technology transfer were the weakest sections in the PA, and the ones that are probably the most important for least

developed nations and the islands. The article puts this very well when saying, that the islands may have lost on adaptation, but still got to sing a song outside the plenary hall.

← Reply



[Taran Bains](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208520>

5 Feb 2019

You make some really interesting points and I definitely agree with you, it is surprising how not everyone was aware of the info being exchanged behind closed doors.

2/2

← Reply



[David Ontaneda](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/27548>

5 Feb 2019

2/2

I agree that secrecy and a lack of transparency is troubling when it comes to climate change, yet having participated in a UN council I can also see where private meetings can be very useful (for better or for worse). For example, if you want to lobby for or against something, it is much more effective to have smaller meetings, where you don't run the risk of misinterpretation, having others unite against you and a general inefficiency in decision making. Ultimately these are negotiation tactics and politics, and like you say, it is probably not pertinent in a talk on climate change. If we all have a common goal then transparency will triumph; I think the problem is that not all countries have common goals. Given this fact, I do think it's possible that France's tactics (the secrecy) could have actually been beneficial to the meeting.

← Reply



[Alexis Lytle](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/38541>

5 Feb 2019

The article claims that the Paris Agreement favors developed countries of the North - do you agree? Give at least three supporting reasons why.

I agree with this statement. For one, no statements regarding liability and compensation for permanent damage was included. This is not to say that I think these terms could have been productively negotiated in such a short amount of time; it just seems that an agreement which does not address already existing damage is unfair to the countries who have done less to contribute to climate change overall. Another reason the agreement favoured developed countries is that it does not clearly outline how technology transfer will be handled, meaning developing nations with less technological resources could have a difficult time trying to get help from these nations. And third, because the developed nations had more political power, their demands were guaranteed in order to avoid stalling the negotiations.

What was the most surprising thing you learned about the negotiation of the Paris agreement?

I was surprised to learn how much negotiating was done in secret/unofficial meetings. The fact that the organizers kept many of the results secret until the last minute seems frustrating for those who were present at the conference, but overall does make sense if the goal was efficiency. I was also not aware of how many bilateral agreements and other types of alliances there were, which had a heavy impact on the terms of the final contract.

← Reply



[Olivia Locke](#)

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2/2

I really agree with your last point. I think the fact that developed nations have more power and ability to stall negotiations if they do not like the direction they are heading in makes it very hard to have an agreement that is truly equal.

This was my reaction aswell, I understand why they wanted to do it this way but it certainly could be frustrating if a country felt their representatives were excluded from a certain conversation.

← Reply



[David Ontaneda](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/27548>

5 Feb 2019

I like how you give them credit on how making agreements on compensation would be difficult in a two week timeframe, yet the article did speak on how many things were negotiated before the summit, and really even a provision stating that it will be done would have been better than nothing. Overall great response.

← [Reply](#)



[Jackson Herron](#)

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5 Feb 2019

1.

I agree that the Paris Agreement favors developed countries because of their enhanced ability to adapt to climate change, but that there is some fairness in the language of "increased ambition" for developed countries to reduce their emissions. Developed countries have a disproportionate historical contribution of greenhouse gases, yet the article states that developed nations closed ranks to prevent any institutional liability and compensation for climate damages. The Agreement does call for developed countries to reduce their emissions with more ambition than developing countries "in light of national circumstances." Yet, there is no legally binding character for emissions reductions and the language is all very vague. The Paris agreement is light on aid to developing countries, only including a floor of \$100 billion a year in a climate fund starting in 2020. Even then, the US under the Trump Administration is trying to pull out of the Agreement because they think there is an unfair burden on the US economy. This just goes to show the Paris Agreement is contentious and that a more just agreement may not have ever been achieved. The main reason I think developed countries are favored by the Paris Agreement is that they are better positioned to adapt to climate impacts, whereas developing nations in tropical regions will experience severe climate impacts and have a harder time adapting. Let's face it, the Agreement is by no means a guarantee we will avoid significant climate change, and the developed countries are most prepared to adapt.

2.

I was most surprised the secretive nature of the negotiation of the Paris Agreement, and how quickly it all came together. I didn't ever realize that it was a few people negotiating behind closed doors that developed the world's framework for combatting climate change. These negotiators act on behalf of elected officials (for the most part), but this seems far from a transparent and democratic process where the will of the public has much bearing on the result.

[← Reply](#)



[Michael Horner](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208938>

5 Feb 2019

2/2

1. There are three or more reasons in here.
2. You and I both. It seems like a lot of people were surprised about this.

[← Reply](#)



[Olivia Locke](#)

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5 Feb 2019

2/2

I agree with your idea that although it is unfair, trying to implement something that is more fair would be very challenging politically. It seems like a hard balance to find between pushing for change and not pushing too hard and having countries back out and do nothing.

I hadn't thought about the method this used as being undemocratic, but that is a good point. I don't know how they could make the process include the voices of citizens of each country more thoroughly, but this seems like it would help make the agreement something that the public would hold their governments accountable to more so than they currently do.

[← Reply](#)



[Taran Bains](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208520>

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1. I agree with that statement. They changed one word in the final document because of the USA, and they didn't put any specific numeric goals because the USA would not have signed it.

"The new climate deal meets all key demands of the US and is based on a model of global climate

governance that Japan proposed in the early 1990s: a “pledge and review” system (Andresen 2015)."

They also had closed door meetings with the key players, which would be the developed countries of the North, so that demands could be discussed in private and then later revealed to ensure that most of the 'key players' demands were met.

2. I was interested by the closed door meetings but not super surprised. I just wasn't aware of how the negotiations went about for the Paris Agreement, so learning how the entire thing was implemented was interesting to learn. But I wouldn't say that politicians doing shady things behind closed doors is surprising.

← Reply



[Michael Horner](#)

(<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/208938>)

5 Feb 2019



2/2

1. These are 3 reasons.

2. This was also to my surprise. People seem to be happy with the process though so it must have some merits.

← Reply



[Katie Reeder](#)

(<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/11862>)

5 Feb 2019



2/2! All good points.

← Reply



[David Ontaneda](#)

(<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/27548>)

5 Feb 2019



1. The article claims that the Paris Agreement favors developed countries of the North - do you agree? Give at least three supporting reasons why.

I personally do agree.

To start, when indicating who lost and won what, he shows how the island states lost on adaptation and loss & damage, and their win was a "strong reference to 1.5 degrees as a goal," yet it is stated that global emission targets were not explicit.

Additionally, if you notice in that same statement; if the EU "won" on loss and damage, and the island states "lost" on loss and damage, there is a clear polarity here. As many developing countries will face the brunt of the consequences of climate change, the issue of loss and damage is crucial for their future, while developed countries who are either luckier geographically, or held responsible financially, could find that helping developing countries in this case isn't in their best interest.

Similarly, on the issue of finance, developed countries stood together against developing countries, (specifically "against provisions that could lead to liability and compensation"); and won.

"Several Northern countries opposed making financial commitments, and even suggested reversing previous pledges of climate finance."

This sounds like the developed countries came out on top, both by publically being able to market an amazing multilateral deal, and escaping on some key responsibilities.

2. What was the most surprising thing you learned about the negotiation of the Paris agreement?

Maybe not as much surprising as disturbing was learning that the US, under Obama, was so instrumental in weakening the deal and reducing their responsibility to actually achieve some sort of progress.

Some key moments in the US's infamous diplomacy:

- waiting until literally the last minute to renounce all responsibility ("the US demanded a single word change: Developed countries "should" rather than "shall" undertake economy-wide quantified emission reductions.")
- being the classic bully: "If we insist on legally binding, the deal will not be global because we will lose the US" (top EU official)."
- The US were climate deniers before trump?! :o.. "The US, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait joined forces to prevent the conference fully embracing the IPCC's findings"

← Reply



[Antonio Rodriguez](#)

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/26675/users/15905>



- Very true that there is a clear polarity in interest between the developed and developing nations. Developed nations have a much higher impact on decision and want to make it easy for them even though they are the main contributors to emissions.

- It is crazy how much power the USA had in the making of the PA! The shall/should thing is insane. Many people in the government officials and lobbyist were climate deniers mainly because it goes against their interests --

2/2

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[Katie Reeder](#)

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5 Feb 2019

2/2.

All great points. I was also disturbed by the amount of agency that the US had in shaping the PA. From a climate justice standpoint, it's infuriating to see how Northern countries which made much of their wealth (through direct colonialism and/or neocolonialism) off island countries or countries in vulnerable regions, are now weakening agreements that could help curb the gnarliest effects of climate change, or at the very least, help these countries to adapt. Boo.

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