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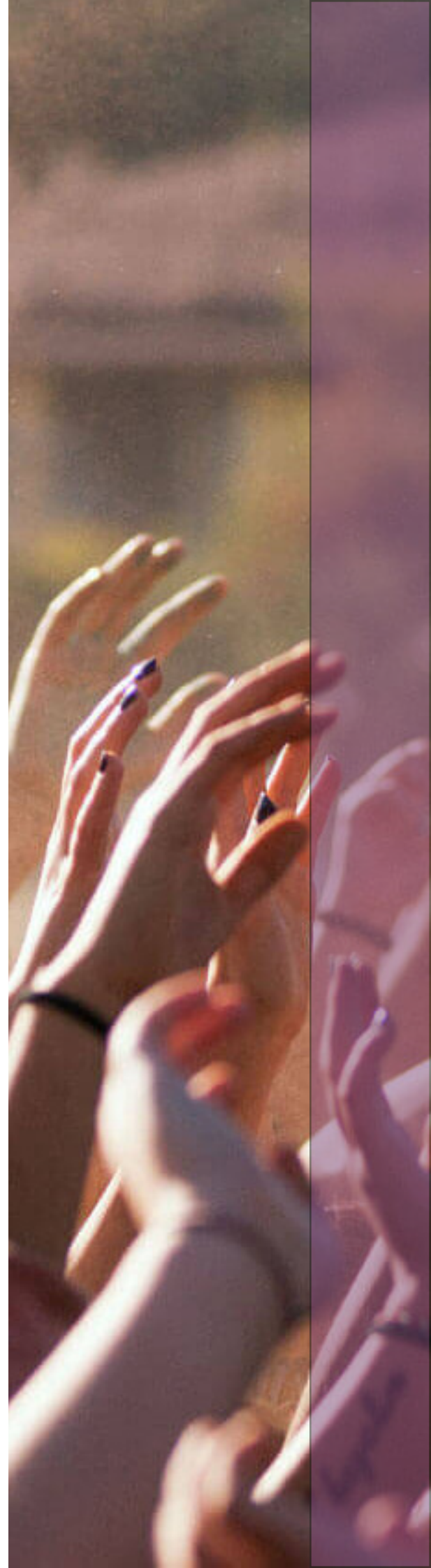
Understanding the links between multilateralism & democracy to tackle global challenges more effectively

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Introduction

The challenges posed by climate change and the erosion of democracy are inextricably linked. Climate change threatens not only the environment but also the stability and prosperity of nations, exacerbating social and political tensions that can undermine democratic institutions. Conversely, transparent, inclusive, and accountable governance will be indispensable to reaching and implementing multilateral accords in the field of climate change. This brief seeks to examine the interplay between democracy and multilateralism in facilitating collaboration among nations to achieve shared goals related to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The first section reviews challenges to democracy at the multilateral level, underscoring exclusionary practices in UNFCCC negotiations themselves and elaborating on some lessons that can be learned from observing negotiations at the UNFCCC, including that democratic countries are not necessarily those that feature the best results or deliver the most concrete action. Thus, this section emphasises that these complexities do not neatly align with the democratic-non-democratic axis. Understanding the multifaceted nature of the challenges at hand is crucial for developing effective global strategies.

The second section of the brief takes stock of the criticism voiced against democratic governments, which are largely represented among the countries having ratified the Paris agreements. Delving into the national dynamics, including populism, it reviews some key issues associated with democratic political systems, such as short-termism and their vulnerability to the influence of lobbies, which arguably hinder their ability to respond effectively to climate change. These aspects have nurtured criticisms of democracies about the relevance of democratic institutions to provide a rapid and effective response to the challenges posed by climate change. However, by and large, democratic settings represent a clear asset when designing and implementing inclusive responses to climate change.

Against this backdrop, the brief aims at reviewing some key processes and issues that need to be considered when asking the following question: what are good democratic practices for climate action?

This overarching question provides the thread to this brief and to the Expert Roundtable convened by the Kofi Annan Foundation and the Graduate Institute's Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy.

The third section of the brief proposes to lay some ground for that debate. It develops four main themes that connect to both multilateral and domestic levels. Each theme builds on an elaboration of some "lessons learned", across the four axes that represent the entry points to the Roundtable discussion.

1. DEMOCRACY AND CLIMATE: MULTILATERAL CHALLENGES

In 1988, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) jointly established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Gathering several hundred scientists, the IPCC is responsible for informing governments and reviewing national or international policies related to the climate issue. Its first assessment report led to the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, which led to the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC was the first major international cooperation recognizing the existence of climate change and its effects. This convention set the objective of “stabilization of GHG concentrations in the atmosphere at a level which makes it possible to prevent any dangerous anthropogenic interference on the climate system” (Article 2) and introduced the principle of “common responsibility but differentiated”.

While international climate agreements require the maximum collaboration of nations to produce tangible effects, divergent national interests have been playing out. On climate change mitigation, developing countries have formed alliances in UN climate negotiations: claiming their right to development, they pointed to the historical responsibility of developed countries in greenhouse gas emissions and their responsibility to cover the costs of mitigation actions. In this context, the Paris Agreement, ratified by almost all the nations of the world, was seen as a considerable success. With its bottom-up and participatory approach, this agreement succeeded in convincing most states to commit concretely to the fight against climate change. A more democratic approach to climate negotiations has therefore borne fruit. The subsequent challenge, faced by climate multilateralism, has been to transform commitments into concrete results. Implementation practices at the domestic level are therefore under scrutiny, as is the link between democratic systems and the fight against climate change at the domestic level.

Thus, exploring the link between democracy and climate at the multilateral level means both examining the democratisation of the negotiations themselves, as well as the resulting climate action within democratic systems domestically. To gauge the effects and the significance of democracy across these two levels, we highlight two dimensions: 1) formal institutional arrangements associated with democratic decision-making and 2) democracy as a normative ideal of participation (which *de facto* democratic political institutions may uphold to varying degrees) which are deemed desirable based on the fact that it contributes to principles of equality, liberty, inclusiveness, or the realisation of popular will. Terms such as “democratisation” refer to efforts to further such democratic principles across governance settings.

1.1 Democratising climate negotiations

In this sense, studies on ‘global democracy’ are interested in the possibility of shaping global society or even international organisations in accordance with the values and rules of democracy. Scholars and practitioners note the need to reconsider the traditional boundaries of our political communities because of interdependence, including around common, planetary issues such as the climate crisis (Archibugi *et al.*, 2012). Corresponding policy and action-oriented work examine how democratic principles are upheld, including equity in representation and transparency, can be further improved at the global level.

While UNFCCC decision-making processes ensure the equitable participation of all signatory countries – each Member State has one vote, regardless of its size, population, or level of development – whether they represent a level playing field is complicated for several reasons. Indeed, the formal equality between Member States is not fully reflected in climate negotiations. First, consensus-based decision-making is desirable in theory but, when observing how it is implemented, it becomes clear that some parties use their vote as a form of veto power, granting them disproportionate power. Second, developed countries generally have large delegations with significant technical and negotiating expertise, while developing countries often rely on one-person delegations. This asymmetry of resources and capabilities often gives wealthier countries a strong position in negotiations. In addition, the countries with the highest rates of GHG emissions, notably the United States and China, generally have considerable weight in the discussions. Their participation is essential for climate agreements to be effective. Conversely, countries unable to offer significant emissions reductions or significant financial support often have little negotiating power. However, some developing countries have managed to increase their influence by uniting in coalitions.

For example, Chin-Yee *et al.* (2020) point out that the Group of African Negotiators (GNA) has strengthened over the past decade. By uniting the majority of countries on the African continent around a common narrative and shared goals, this coalition has become one of the most cohesive groups in the UNFCCC processes. Likewise, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) has played an active role in climate negotiations since its creation (Aykut and Dahan, 2015). Bringing together the island states of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Bangladesh, and a few other countries, this coalition has influential representatives, which allows it to weigh more in the negotiations than its economic weight might suggest. Together, these countries, which are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, succeeded in having a financing fund adopted for losses and damages, intended for the countries most affected by irreversible losses caused by global warming, during COP 27. It remains that the fund has so far been placed under the aegis of the World Bank, with no clear obligations for rich countries to contribute.

Reinforcing democratisation of COPs includes addressing the imbalance between Member States and civil society organisations. The former wield formal decision-making power within the UNFCCC process, with each nation having a designated number of delegates representing their interests. This setup inherently prioritises the voices and agendas of governments over those of civil society organisations. While observer status is granted to accredited to such organisations, their influence is often limited to informal channels, side events, and advocacy efforts outside the official negotiating sessions. This power asymmetry can result in decisions that may not fully reflect the diverse perspectives, expertise, and priorities of civil society stakeholders, particularly those representing marginalised communities and vulnerable populations.

The asymmetry between Member States and civil society in UNFCCC COPs is exacerbated by disparities in resources, access, and capacity. While some civil society organisations possess significant expertise and resources to engage effectively in climate advocacy, many face challenges such as limited funding, capacity constraints, and logistical barriers to participation in COP meetings, which are often held in distant locations and require substantial financial investments. As a result, certain voices within civil society, particularly those from the Global South and grassroots organisations, may struggle to make themselves heard amidst the dominant narratives and agendas advanced by wealthier and more influential actors. This represents an area where greater democratisation is needed.

Imbalances also exist within civil society at COPs. Authors such as Grosse and Mark (2020) and Bullon-Cassis (2021) noted exclusionary practices against Indigenous groups in climate COPs, highlighting, among others, disparities in attention with the youth climate movement. The research on the environmental and youth climate movements has brought attention to the power asymmetries that exist both within and between these groups. Problematically, non-state actors with access to climate talks also include representatives of the fossil fuel industry. Their participation is only increasing: the Kick Big Polluters Out Coalition found that a record number of 2456 fossil fuel lobbyists have been granted access to the COP 28 summit in Dubai (Global Witness, 2023).

1.2 Domestic democratic systems and participation in climate talks

Studies on climate change cooperation have also shown that democracies tend to be more active in international negotiations and more likely to keep their political commitments (Lindvall 2021). Still, the connection between democratic governance and effective participation in multilateral climate negotiations is not straightforward. The case of the United States serves as an illustrative example. Despite its democratic principles, the United States' international climate policy has faced challenges, raising questions about the correlation between democratic governance and environmental responsibility. The United States, for example, declined to join the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, opposing it on the grounds that it exempted developing nations from mandatory emissions cuts. Twenty years later, the United States announced it would withdraw from the Paris Agreement, in the context of President Trump's turn toward pro-fossil fuel policies and "America First" isolationism.

Oil-producing countries are another illustrative example: despite the democratic structures of some oil-producing countries, their representatives may advocate for policies that support their fossil fuel industries, leading to tensions between democratic governance and environmental sustainability. At COP 28, closing statements showcased how difficult it was to reach the compromise on the first Global Stocktake, pointing to a lack of a clear reference to fossil fuel phaseout, weak language on coal and methane, and loopholes associated with so-called "transitional fuels" (IISD report, 2023). The reliance of many democracies on fossil fuel exports for revenue complicates efforts to align national interests with the collective goal of combating climate change, highlighting the intricate interplay between democracy, economic interests, and environmental diplomacy in the context of COP negotiations.

Nonetheless, with the exceptions of Canada, the US and Norway, most fossil fuel exporters are not democracies. Observation of the dynamics of multilateral negotiations suggest that delegations from non-democratic oil producing countries, which include Saudi Arabia, China, and Russia, seek to hinder multilateral progress at a very fundamental level. An illustrative example is Saudi Arabia's involvement in IPCC negotiations. This involvement encompasses attempts to dilute the language regarding the trustworthiness of climate science and future predictions. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has advocated for the inclusion of carbon capture and storage technologies as "unavoidable", a move widely interpreted as part of broader strategies to evade or reduce the process of decarbonisation (IISD report, 2023). To the contrary, in the same negotiations, oil-producing democracy Norway supported language showcasing the causal chain from emissions to warming of the climate system, and promoting the transition to non-fossil fuel energy such as electricity from photovoltaics and wind (ibid).

The link between democracy and climate impact needs to be situated in a broader economic and developmental context: most full democracies are in fact industrialised and high-income countries,

and for this reason they emit comparably high levels of greenhouse gases per capita. The European Union, Japan and the United States, representing three large democratic entities, are accountable for about two-thirds of all historic carbon emissions (Lindvall, 2021). The multilateral context of negotiations is therefore complicated by the fact that the crisis is, in a way, caused by the same actors who need to propose solutions. At the same time, democracies generally perform much better than non-democratic states in climate policies. When referring to the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) as a standardised framework to compare the climate performance of 63 countries and the EU (which together account for over 90% of global greenhouse gas emissions)¹ one can observe that among the 13 highest-scoring countries, seven are classified as full democracies in the Democracy Index of The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Democracy is an advantage when it comes to tackling the climate crisis: mechanisms of citizens' participation, free flows of information, trust in institutions and pathways of assessment and evaluation represent crucial elements that make democracies better equipped than authoritarian regimes to address issues of great complexity such as climate change.

2. DEMOCRACY AND CLIMATE: DOMESTIC CHALLENGES

Overall, a large part of the scholarship contends that democracies are more inclined to adopt pro-climate policies and actively participate in international negotiations (Lindvall & Karlsson, 2023). This can be explained by several characteristics of democratic systems that make them, *a priori*, more likely to act to protect the environment.

2.1 Democratic accountability

On the one hand, democratic governments are accountable to their citizens. Citizens can influence the political agenda through the ballot box, but also by directly exerting pressure on the government through demonstrations. The mobilisation of civil society can thus promote the adoption of more ambitious climate measures. Conversely, autocrats are often seen as primarily concerned with preserving their power and maximising their personal gains. On the other hand, democracies guarantee access to information through freedom of the press and research. The absence of restrictions imposed on the media and research institutes can allow for better awareness of climate change among the population as well as the formulation of appropriate political measures. The rule of law that is characteristic of democracies is essential to provide for equitable action. It is important to note that one of the SDG16 targets is to promote the rule of law *at both national and international levels* to ensure equal access to justice for all.

However, while democracies actually enact more climate policies, their results remain limited in terms of reducing GHG emissions (IPCC, 2023). No state has currently implemented a climate plan that enables it to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement (Climate Action Tracker, 2024). In this context, what are the challenges faced by democracies and how to respond to them?

¹ <https://ccpi.org/>

First, what Grabbe (2023) calls “the climate democracy mismatch” refers to the two dimensions of territory and time: “Climate change transcends the boundaries of democracy in terms of time and geography. It also challenges the concept of political choice at the heart of democracy”. While democratic political systems tend to favour a short-term vision, climate change requires long-term political commitments (Thompson, 2010; Smith, 2021). Electoral cycles tend to orient the political debate towards the immediate satisfaction of voters, because politicians are primarily concerned with their re-election. In addition, voters are often more concerned about immediate issues such as employment and purchasing power. Voters will not easily give up their affluent lifestyle for uncertain benefits (Lindvall, 2021). The complexity of climate change is clearly one of the main reasons why democracies have failed to deal with the crisis. In this perspective, it can be difficult to impose lifestyle changes on an electorate in order to tackle a problem whose impacts will be felt most by future generations.

Second, the influence of powerful interest groups, such as the fossil fuel industry, affect decision-making. These lobbies exploit the fragmentation of opinions within democracies in order to block or delay political initiatives in favour of the climate. They also influence public debates by financing communication campaigns. For example, Brulle (2019) showed how several large companies in the coal, rail, and steel sectors acted in a coordinated manner with trade associations, foundations, and public relations firms to oppose measures aimed at mitigating carbon emissions in the United States. Bailer and Weiler (2014) analysed the way in which pressure from national industries influences the choice of democracies in international climate negotiations. Overall, they found that democracies are generally more willing to finance projects aimed at reducing GHG emissions in other countries, rather than imposing reduction targets on their own national industries.

Therefore, efforts to develop and support democracy around the world need to be sustained, including to promote effective responses to climate change. At the same time, it is necessary to undertake certain measures, activities and reforms to make democracies more able to tackle the climate crisis.

2.2 Institutional and political contexts

As early as the 1970s, Heilbroner (1976) and Ophuls (1977) suggested that certain aspects of democratic regimes, notably individual freedoms, should be downsized to face ecological and demographic risks. They argued that environmental protection requires profound societal changes, emphasising that infinite economic growth is not compatible with the protection of natural resources. Ophuls concluded that a more coercive form of government might even be necessary to impose this lifestyle change on populations. Over the past ten years, as the climate threat has become more pressing, this argument has generated renewed interest among researchers (Gilley, 2012; Beeson, 2019). A stream of publications has interrogated what an authoritarian governance, led mainly by a scientific and technocratic elite, would do in terms of responding to environmental challenges such as climate change. It leads, for example, to question whether and how to learn from China’s centralised approach that is characterised by massive investment in renewable energy.

On the contrary, a range of studies have argued that the fight against climate change requires strengthening democratic systems and tackling social inequalities. Lindvall and Karlsson (2023) show that the capacity of democratic governments to reduce their GHG emissions varies depending on many factors, including the level of economic growth, dependence on fossil fuels, equality in household income, and corruption. Citizens of countries with greater inequalities are more likely to

oppose policies to reduce emissions. While low-income citizens may assess that the costs of these measures are unfairly distributed, high-income citizens may be reluctant to abandon their carbon-intensive lifestyles. D. and M. Karlsson (2023) conclude that it would be relevant to further study this dimension to better understand the links between democracy and climate.

In addition, corruption hinders the ability of institutions to adequately implement and enforce environmental laws and regulations (Povitkina, 2018). This is particularly relevant to developing countries that struggle with weaker democratic institutions and that bear the greatest brunt of climate change. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) (2021) has underlined the importance of fighting corruption in order to improve the capacity of democracies to fight climate change. It recommends in particular strengthening judicial systems and transparency in order to mitigate corruption.

Across contexts, responding to the climate crisis has provoked a variety of democratic challenges and conflicts. A clear tension can be observed between attempts to depoliticise climate change, for example by anchoring debates in science-based and technological remedies, while at the same time, social movements and other political actors openly politicise climate change by relating it to issues of social and environmental justice. A useful study coordinated by Marquardt & Lederer (2022) has mapped a range of arenas where the politicisation of climate change has been happening and highlighted some mechanisms at work. In this context, populist movements have had an ambiguous role. While leaders such as Donald Trump, Rodrigo Duterte and Jair Bolsonaro were at the forefront of mobilisations against climate change mitigation efforts, Marquardt & Lederer argued that populist voices on the left and the right brought about a re-politicisation of climate change across all continents. This politicisation may be seen positively from the democratic point of view as it means that the issue of climate change has moved to the political sphere and to the realm of democratic politics. The problems of populism and short-termism are central to ongoing political processes across democracies. For example, in the case of the EU, ahead of the upcoming European Elections, European politicians keen on winning the approval of farmers protesting what they perceive as unjust measures are tempted to limit the implementation of the European Green Deal.

Overall, the central question for elected representatives, as well as for the actors involved in climate action, is how this politicisation of climate change could be harnessed towards effective political action.

3. DISCUSSION POINTS FROM LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

Against this backdrop, the brief proposes to lay some ground for asking the following question: what are good *democratic practices* for climate action?

3.1 Lessons learned from the implementation of the Paris Agreement

COP 28 in 2023 saw the completion of the first Global Stocktake (GST) after the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015. The GST is a comprehensive assessment of the world's progress on climate action, which is due to take place every five years. Anchored in Article 14 of the Paris Agreement, and is intended to inform Parties to the Agreement on their progress against its goals, including but

not limited to limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C. The GST evaluates progress against the three long-term goals of the Paris Agreement, listed under Article 2:

- Drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions to keep global temperature rise below 2°C and ideally 1.5°C (Article 2.1.a)
- Build resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate impacts (Article 2.1.b)
- Secure finance and support for low-carbon and climate-resilient development (Article 2.1.c)

Nonetheless, a narrow focus on long-term goals is insufficient, as demonstrated by the strong reactions policy implementations can trigger among segments of the population, such as the Yellow Vest movement. The Yellow Vest movement, originating in France in late 2018, emerged as a manifestation of socioeconomic discontentment against rising fuel taxes and the perceived neglect of rural and working-class communities under the presidency of Emmanuel Macron.

Understanding the Yellow Vest movement indeed necessitates contextualising it within the broader discourse of socioeconomic justice and, more broadly, recognising the imperative of inclusive policy-making to address the concerns of marginalised communities amidst transitions towards sustainable development. It is important to note that the Yellow Vests do not oppose climate change reform. In their list of 42 demands, they specifically called for the creation of a hydrogen car industry and a tax on fuel and kerosene for ships and aeroplanes (Mediapart, 2018). Instead, the Yellow Vests argued they opposed forcing rural and working class populations to pay for the wealthier, urban classes rapid rise of industrialization.

It thus becomes evident that democracies must acknowledge diverse realities and competing claims. Central to this discussion is the imperative to contemplate and design a just transition—a framework that prioritises equity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability in economic transformations. Rooted in grievances over economic disparity and political disenfranchisement, the Yellow Vest movement underscored the imperative for policymakers to navigate towards a just transition. Addressing the question of how to ensure fairness and inclusivity in transitioning to more sustainable practices is crucial for effective climate policy in democratic nations.

The idea of “just transition” seeks to ensure that policy changes are not only sustainable but also equitable. Initially gaining prominence within the labour movement, the concept of just transitions aimed to address the potential displacement and job losses that can be caused by shifts towards more sustainable practices. (Mexi, 2023).

A Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) was adopted by Member States at COP 28, though observer organisations lamented that certain countries continue to block any reference to unions in the Global Stocktake and elsewhere (ITUC, 2023), thus raising the question of which stakeholders should be involved in defining, and implementing, the transition. Further unpacking what a truly “just” transition may entail—and what blind spots may exist—remains essential. This could include considerations of multifaceted forms of climate justice which may be important to communities, including marginalised: these include procedural, distributive, restorative, and intergenerational justice (Cañizares et al. 2024).

QUESTION: What are examples of the “just transition” done right?

3.2 Lessons learned about the role of social movements

The growth of grassroots environmental mobilisations in recent years – which include the youth-led Fridays for Future movement, as well as a range of other movements such as Extinction Rebellion, Letzte Generation, and others – highlights, among others, the necessity for democracies to listen to the voices of their citizenry beyond elections. The movement Extinction Rebellion explicitly calls for a Citizens’ Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice. Their rationale is as follows: “If we are going to avoid disaster, we will have to make difficult choices for the long term, collaboratively, in a fair way that isn’t biased towards a powerful or wealthy minority. We need to modernise the political system so that it can deal with the problems of today’s world, and work better for everyday people. To do that it has to include everyday people.” (Extinction Rebellion, 2024)

This calls for exploring potential forms of deliberative democracy, including the consideration of Climate Assemblies and citizen consultations, as mechanisms for incorporating public perspectives into the policymaking process and fostering sustained climate action. Some authors (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2019; Willis, Curato & Smith, 2023) indeed see deliberative democracy as a path to improving the structure of democratic systems.

This approach to democracy emphasises deliberation and the active engagement of citizens in political decision-making processes. Instead of just voting for representatives, people are encouraged to discuss openly, exchange ideas and seek solutions together. According to these authors, deliberative democracy offers several advantages in the fight against climate change. Deliberation allows citizens to go beyond private preferences, often influenced by their immediate environment, to arrive at more considered judgments. Additionally, the emphasis on the power of the best argument would make it more difficult for lobbies to publicly defend their short-term interests.

These perspectives have been met with some scepticism, including with regards to how the outcomes of such deliberative processes would—and should, considering the often random and small selection of participants in Citizens Assemblies—be considered by policymakers. Experiments to date have been found lacking: France’s first Citizens’ Climate Convention was devised and undertaken in answer to the Yellow Vests Protests. Yet it came under fire after more than half of the proposals from citizens were dropped from the French climate law.

QUESTION: Can greater deliberative democracy lead to bolder climate action? How do democratic/non-democratic settings impact governmental and non-governmental climate action?

3.3 COPs and democratisation

The democratisation of spaces such as the yearly UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) is crucial for effective climate governance.

Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, several initiatives have been put in place to encourage the participation of non-state actors in the implementation of climate agreements. These initiatives have been referred to as “orchestration”, a mode of governance where international organisations act as “orchestrators”, mobilising intermediary actors (civil society, private actors, local governments, citizens, etc.) in order to implement their objectives (Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2017). One of the first orchestration initiatives under the UNFCCC was the Lima-Paris action program,

orchestrated by the French government (President of COP 21) in collaboration with the UNFCCC Secretariat and the Secretary-General of ONU. This program consisted of days of action and thematic events where private actors, municipalities, environmental NGOs, indigenous populations, and scientists were invited to speak about their actions for the climate. In addition, two “High Level Champions” were appointed in order to strengthen the action of non-state actors. According to Bäckstrand and Kuiper (2017), these initiatives facilitated civil society's access to the definition of the UNFCCC agenda and encouraged synergies between civil society and States. However, they note that certain categories of non-state actors, notably women's groups and indigenous peoples, have requested greater diversity of participants. This suggests that these groups still feel underrepresented despite having access to these events.

Orchestration efforts then intensified with the establishment of the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action in 2016. According to Stevenson and Dryzek (2019), these efforts mark progress towards a deliberative democratisation of climate governance. Indeed, these authors emphasise that electoral democracy is not possible on a global scale, but believe that deliberative democracy is entirely applicable. They therefore propose to conceive of global climate governance as a deliberative system including the UNFCCC processes, scientific assessments, national governments, civil society organisations, and activists. From this perspective, orchestration initiatives make it possible to increase the democratic legitimacy of climate governance by promoting the sharing of discourse and perspectives on the approaches to adopt in the face of climate change. This promotes a more inclusive and transparent decision-making process within the UNFCCC. These authors insist on the need to persevere on this path. They suggest drawing inspiration, for example, from the Open Working Group set up by the UN to finalise the content of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and organising mini transnational deliberative publics on climate issues.

The orchestration initiatives initiated since the Paris Agreement in 2015 have also been welcomed by several NGOs and international organisations (Adequations, 2023; IUCN, 2023). However, several of them emphasise that these initiatives have so far produced few concrete results. In particular, the IUCN maintains that it is essential to continue to encourage the participation of indigenous populations, who are the first to face the consequences of climate change. A platform for local communities and indigenous peoples as well as a Working Group were set up in 2021 to promote the exchange of experiences and knowledge of these communities. However, indigenous populations have received less than 1% of climate change funding to date (CI, IUCN, 2023).

Democratising this often closed or exclusive space could also mean empowering dissenting or diverging voices, such as that of young people. Research has shown that this should go beyond offering young people speaking slots but should also include financing their participation as well as resisting the tokenisation of these voices by corporate or political actors in climate COPs (Bullon-Cassis, 2024). Furthermore, other stakeholders, such as future generations, are increasingly being considered: the upcoming Summit of the Future in September 2024 may address the possibility of a UN Special Envoy for Future Generations as well as other institutional reforms or initiatives that protect and enshrine the rights of future generations.

Another entry point is the delegation's composition itself. Inclusion of youth and indigenous delegates, however, vary even among democratic countries. Initiatives such as the Climate Youth Negotiators Programme (CYNP) seek to encourage Member States to include youth delegates by training, connecting, and empowering youth negotiators to participate meaningfully in the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations. This requires bridging gaps in funding for delegations with more limited means, as well as advocating for more open, heterogeneous, and collaborative work cultures within delegations themselves.

QUESTION: How can multilateral settings such as the UNFCCC negotiations be further democratised?

3.4 Sectoral lessons and a transnational civil society

UNEP's 2020 Emissions Report proposes a "6-sector solution" to the climate crisis (UNEP, 2020). A sector-based approach to keeping the world below the 1.5°C mark indeed has multiple benefits: it can guide government policies to reduce GHG emissions, as well as help identify offending corporations and actors. It can also help address climate anxiety—an emotion linked, among others, to increased political apathy (Yale Sustainability, 2021)—by offering clearer, and more actionable, paths to action, including at the individual level. This has led many to reconsider some of their consumption habits, particularly around food and transport.

Nonetheless, national policy-making and individual actions such as reduced consumptions may not suffice. These approaches demonstrate how issues within these sectors often transcend national boundaries and cannot be effectively tackled within the confines of individual countries. They underscore the importance of mobilising efforts that extend beyond national borders, highlighting the necessity for collaboration and coordination on a transnational scale to effectively address challenges and achieve meaningful solutions.

Indeed, international transport, including aviation, shipping, and long-distance road transport, contributes to around 15% of GHG emissions, while food systems, which includes agriculture, contribute to roughly 20-25% of GHG emissions. UNEP's Emissions Gap Report 2023 found that all sectors, apart from transport, have fully rebounded from the drop in emissions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and now exceed 2019 levels (UNEP, 2023).

To ensure the democratic nature of sector-specific transnational approaches, there is an urgent call for the involvement of a transnational civil society. Collaborative efforts across borders benefit significantly from a critical framework that takes into account global commodity chains, global production networks, and institutional entrepreneurship (Levy, 2008). These frameworks aid in comprehending the dynamics of international management and production, which are essential for addressing sector-specific challenges. Moreover, the significance of transnational advocacy efforts by civil society organisations in enhancing global human rights performance across the global value chain has been underscored (Murdie & Davis, 2011).

The engagement of the private sector and the adoption of voluntary regulatory standards by firms in response to global social activism contribute to shaping global business regulations (Vogel, 2008). Organisations such as the World Economic Forum, responding to the climate and biodiversity crises, have called for companies to treat "nature" as a stakeholder, thus extending stakeholder capitalism past human-centrism (WEF, 2020). These regulations have the potential to impact sector-specific challenges yet necessitate an active transnational civil society to shape what this shift could mean and hold the process accountable. To date, such civil society pressure has mobilised sporadically and mostly locally around climate litigation cases against both States and corporations, supported by

developments such as the recognition by the General Assembly that a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a human right in July 2022.

Nonetheless, the mobilisation of a transnational civil society is complicated by the non-democratic systems of most offending parties: indeed, the Carbon Majors Database Report, launched in April 2024, found that, while 80% of these global emissions from 2016 through 2022 can be traced to just 57 corporate and state producing entities, investor-owned companies account for only 25% of these emissions. Nation-state producers account for 38% of emissions in the database, while state-owned entities account for 37% (Carbon Majors Database, 2024). This trend is not news: historically, the Report argues, investor-owned companies only account for 31% of all emissions tracked, with Chevron, ExxonMobil, and BP the three largest contributors respectively. Conversely, state-owned companies are linked to 33% of the database total, with Saudi Aramco, Gazprom, and the National Iranian Oil Company being the largest contributors, and nation-states account for the remaining 36%, with China's coal production and the former Soviet Union the largest contributors (ibid).

QUESTION: What are best practices for collaborative efforts across borders to address sector-specific challenges democratically and effectively?

Conclusion

This brief sought to offer a more nuanced take on the relationship between democracy and climate action at the multilateral level. This endeavour is particularly important given the contemporary challenges faced by countries with well-established democratic systems, including the rise of populism, increasing polarisation, and issues of inequity and representation raised by various social movements. Over the past two decades, concerns regarding not only climate change but also issues of gender, race, and economic disparities have been at the forefront of societal discourse. The evolving landscape of democratic governance, coupled with ongoing social and political movements demanding greater inclusivity and accountability, underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of democracy's role in addressing complex global challenges such as climate change.

By distinguishing between formal democratic systems and democracy as a normative idea/democratisation as efforts to get closer to it, this brief also proposes to extend the analysis beyond institutional politics. This enabled it to underscore at, among others, the need to democratise climate negotiations, noting this effort is crucial to ensure equitable participation and decision-making. Other emerging issues in the intersection of climate change and democracy bring forth the pressing concern of citizenship and the complex dynamics surrounding climate refugees. As the effects of climate change intensify, the displacement of populations due to environmental factors is becoming increasingly prevalent. However, defining who qualifies as a climate refugee presents significant challenges and raises important questions regarding citizenship rights, legal protections, and international cooperation.

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