

Accelerating Climate Action: The Politics of Nonstate Actor Engagement in the Paris Regime

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Abstract

The 2015 Paris Agreement is often depicted as a turning point for global climate governance. Following years of diplomatic gridlock, it laid the foundations for a new global climate regime that invites states to partner with nonstate actors in the transition to the low-carbon society. This article critically examines the political rationalities that inform the pluralization of climate politics after Paris and the turn toward cooperative modes of governing. Drawing on an analysis of initiatives led by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that were launched to engage nonstate actors in the evolving Paris regime, we identify a global governmentality that mobilizes nonstate actors as active and responsible partners in the quest for rapid and deep decarbonization. In its search for cooperative and efficient forms of problem management, we argue, this form of rule nurtures a global space free from friction and opposition where businesses, investors, and industry are elevated as the real partners of government.

The goals are set, the science is clear, tools are there, and needed actions are defined—let's all work together in a holistic and integrated manner to make the required changes happen.

—High-Level Champions 2018–2019, *Yearbook of Global Climate Action*

In mid-November 2020, the High-Level Champions for Global Climate Action convened the Race to Zero Dialogues under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The event was held online during the two weeks originally planned for the twenty-sixth Conference

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of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow and was devised to build momentum for accelerated action toward the goals of the Paris Agreement.¹ By bringing together speakers from business, cities, financial institutions, and civil society in reflection upon the actions required for deep decarbonization, the Dialogues sought to demonstrate that it is both possible and necessary to transition to a net-zero carbon world by 2050. As outlined in the opening speech by UN secretary-general António Guterres, “we have the tools to decarbonize our societies, but the window of opportunity is closing.”² To close the gap between the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement and the emission cuts required to keep global mean warming well below 2 degrees Celsius, Guterres called on states to partner with nonstate actors and commit to carbon neutrality by 2050.

The Race to Zero Dialogues offer an example of the “catalytic cooperation” that informs global climate governance after Paris (Hale 2020). Rather than blaming actors for not doing enough, the 2015 Paris Agreement created a climate policy architecture that seeks to incentivize ambitious climate action by supporting first movers, benchmarking good practices, and iterating commitments (Hale 2020, 86). To build coalitions across states, businesses, cities, and civil society is a central aspect of this catalytic mode of governing. In the COP21 decision accompanying the Paris Agreement,³ “non-Party stakeholders” are formally recognized as agents of change that can accelerate the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient society. Since the launch of the Marrakech Partnership on Global Climate Action in November 2016, the UNFCCC is thus actively tapping the potential of the range of voluntary and cooperative climate initiatives unfolding across regions and sectors. This mobilization of nonstate climate action is today also a central theme in studies of global climate governance. Rather than approaching private climate experimentation and innovation as a sideshow to the main game of UN climate diplomacy (Bulkeley et al. 2014), a growing scholarship now agrees that nonstate decarbonization initiatives represent a core feature and central driver of the “polycentric” (Dorsch and Flachslund 2017; Jordan et al. 2018), “transnational” (Abbott 2012; Bulkeley et al. 2014; Widerberg and Pattberg 2017), and “catalytic” (Bernstein and Hoffmann 2018; Hale 2016) UN climate regime organized around the Paris Agreement (hereinafter referred to as the Paris regime).

In this article, we ask what political rationality informs the pluralization of climate politics after Paris and the turn toward catalytic and cooperative modes of governing. Informed by studies of global governmentality (Larner and Walters 2004; Sending and Neumann 2006), we approach political rationalities as a constitutive element of climate governance itself that defines and shapes the

1. <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero/race-to-zero-november-dialogues-programme>, last accessed February 24, 2022.
2. Opening speech by António Guterres, UNFCCC Race to Zero Dialogues 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttPV4RMF5iQ&feature=youtu.be>, last accessed February 24, 2022.
3. UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.21.

field of possible climate action beyond and across states. It is a concept that invites us to consider the systematic ways of thinking and forms of knowledge that inform how nonstate actors are enrolled in the Paris regime and the specific techniques and practices employed to guide and direct their behavior. Our analysis draws on documents produced by the UNFCCC in relation to the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action and the Momentum for Change initiative. When navigating through this material, we asked how nonstate climate action is discursively imagined and represented, which practical techniques are employed to give voluntary climate initiatives meaning and effect, and, ultimately, what forms of behavior and political subjectivity these techniques foster on the road toward the low-carbon society.

The article is organized as follows. First, we review the scholarship on nonstate climate action in the Paris regime and outline how studies of global governmentality can help to interrogate the configurations of knowledge and power they rest upon and project. Second, we identify and detail three practical techniques mobilized to govern nonstate contributions to the Paris Agreement: *quantification*, *exemplification*, and *partnering*. We end by discussing how these governmental technologies arrange and direct nonstate involvement in global climate governance. Our study suggests that contemporary efforts to align the activities of businesses, investors, cities, and civil society with the objectives of the Paris Agreement are animated by the search for order and coherence in an increasingly fragmented and complex governance landscape. Informed by the language of collaboration, acceleration, and low-carbon transformation, this global governmentality seeks to engage nonstate actors as active and responsible partners in the quest for rapid and deep decarbonization. However, by restricting the realm of desirable climate action to that which can be quantified, showcased, and upscaled, it remains silent on the disruptions and disagreements that underwrite the politics of decarbonization. Driven by the quest for rational and efficient problem management, we argue, this neoliberal form of rule nurtures a global space free from friction and opposition, where businesses, investors, and industry are elevated as the primary partners of government.

Global Climate Governance After Paris

The twenty-first UN Climate Conference in Paris in December 2015 is often depicted as a turning point for global climate governance. Following many years of diplomatic gridlock, it laid the foundations for a new global climate regime that invites all states to contribute to the goal of keeping global mean warming well below 2 degrees Celsius.⁴ In contrast to the legally binding targets and timetables for emission reductions included in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement rests on a decentralized pledge-and-review system that requests states to submit NDCs but retains their freedom to determine the scope and

4. UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.21.

character of their contributions. While this flexible policy architecture was central to the diplomatic breakthrough in Paris, so was the involvement of “non-Party stakeholders” in the new climate regime (Bäckstrand et al. 2017; Hale 2016). Rather than presenting states as the only governors of climate change, the COP21 decision explicitly calls on businesses, cities, and regions to contribute to the implementation and upscaling of national climate mitigation and adaptation plans.⁵

The formal recognition of nonstate actors as agents of change resonates with studies of global governance. Since global governance was born as a research agenda in the 1990s, it has offered a particular way of thinking through the character of global life (Biermann 2014; Hewson and Sinclair 1999). In the first volume of the journal *Global Governance*, James Rosenau (1995) pointed to the increasing complexity of international relations and the myriad agents that now are involved in the steering and shaping of social relations across different spatial levels. Rather than referring to a distinct sphere of global life, global governance was here mobilized to make sense of the vast number of rule systems that now extend beyond and across the territorial state system (Rosenau 1995). In the study of international climate politics, global governance has offered a powerful analytical lens for the broader regime complex of actors involved in collective efforts to tackle climate change (Andonova et al. 2009; Keohane and Victor 2011). Over the past decades, governance scholars have charted the rise of networked, market-oriented, and soft governance arrangements, such as emissions trading systems, offsetting standards, carbon-labeling schemes, and city networks (Bäckstrand 2008; Bulkeley et al. 2014; Green 2014; Hoffmann 2011). Rather than assuming that the innovative thrust will spring from a multilateral treaty regime, work in this field has suggested that policy innovations and decarbonization pathways are more likely to emerge “bottom up” through transnational, experimental, and polycentric forms of steering (Bernstein and Hoffmann 2018; Bulkeley et al. 2014; Jordan et al. 2018).

Jordan et al. (2015) note how these analytical efforts to probe the complex world of transnational climate governance have spilled back into the UNFCCC negotiations and facilitated the diplomatic engagement with nonstate actors in the lead-up to COP21 in Paris. Already in 2011, the UNFCCC secretariat launched the Momentum for Change initiative to “shine a light on the enormous groundswell of actions underway across the globe.”⁶ In 2014, these efforts were ramped up when the UNFCCC secretariat, together with the COP20 presidency in Peru, launched the online platform Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA) to track and showcase climate initiatives by companies, cities, regions, and investors. The same year, the incoming French COP21 presidency joined the partnership and launched the Lima–Paris Action Agenda (LPAA) to increase the exposure of transnational climate action and thereby “create a

5. UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.21.

6. Momentum for Change Annual Report 2017, <https://unfccc.int/resource/mfc2017/>.

positive narrative of solutions and ambitions” (Chan et al. 2016, 241). By COP21, the LPAA had mobilized more than 10,000 commitments by cities, companies, investors, and civil society. As Chan et al. note, the scale and substance of this groundswell were well recognized by government negotiators and explain the reference to “non-Party stakeholders” in the official COP21 decision. To strengthen voluntary climate action pre-2020, COP21 also appointed two High-Level Champions.⁷ Instated on two-year mandates, the High-Level Champions act on behalf of the COP presidency to serve as a bridge between states and non-Party stakeholders, for instance, by coordinating events and engaging with stakeholders.

In recent years, much scholarly energy has been directed toward the range of activities set in motion since COP21 to catalyze nonstate contributions to the Paris Agreement. Orchestration is a concept often used to describe these efforts. As Abbott et al. (2015) outlined, *orchestration* refers to a soft and indirect form of rule that seeks to nudge intermediary actors, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), business organizations, and transnational city networks, to incentivize their members and constituents to pursue shared policy objectives in the absence of hierarchical government. In contrast to command and control, it works through the agency of nonstate actors and their ability to responsibly carry out regulatory functions. In the expanding literature on nonstate climate orchestration, effectiveness and legitimacy are central research themes. Multiple studies have presented methods for quantifying the emission reduction potential of the UNFCCC’s orchestration platforms (Hsu et al. 2019; Roelfsema et al. 2018), and some have asked questions about their participatory quality, transparency, and accountability (Bäckstrand and Kuyper 2017). While concerns have been raised about the skewed geographical representation and inadequate monitoring of nonstate climate initiatives (Chan et al. 2019), work in this field generally presents nonstate actor involvement in the Paris regime as a positive development that will help states build capacity for deep decarbonization (Bernstein and Hoffmann 2018; Chan et al. 2018).

Thus far, less analytical attention has been directed to the power at work in the actual practices of nonstate orchestration and how these indirect and soft modes of governance structure and shape the field of possible action on the road to the low-carbon society. To this, we turn next.

Structuring the Field of Possible Climate Action

In the following sections, we examine how the UNFCCC operates to align the dispersed and complex world of transnational climate action with the objectives of the Paris Agreement. Following Michel Foucault and the broad field of governmentality studies that his work has inspired (e.g., Larner and Walters 2004;

7. UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.21.

Rose et al. 2006; Rose and Miller 1992), we are interested in the systematic ways of thinking and acting that inform how nonstate governance is accomplished in the Paris regime. Although heterogeneous and far from a unified theory, Foucault-inspired governmentality studies share a common concern for critically examining the role that knowledge production plays in the formation of modern governmental practices (Rose-Redwood 2006, 469). The governmental knowledge that interested Foucault and his followers extends well beyond ideas. As Rose and Miller (1992) outlined, it includes the range of theories, forms of expertise, and rationalizations that render political problems thinkable and calculable, on one hand, and the set of techniques, procedures, and practices through which authorities act on these problems to transform them, on the other. Analyses of governmentality typically explore how these “rationalities” and “technologies” of government, modes of thinking and forms of intervention, constitute themselves mutually and translate into each other (Bröckling et al. 2011, 11).

The conception of government that Foucault’s work has inspired offers a particular way of thinking about power. In contrast to sovereign power, which is concerned with the sovereign’s rule over territory and its subjects, Foucault (1991, 93) described governmentality as a dispositional form of rule concerned with ordering people and things. In its widest sense, it refers to all those regimes of knowledge and practice that aim to shape, guide, and direct the conduct of persons in the light of certain principles and goals. Rather than being something that a person, an institution, or a state can possess, power is here tied to the multifarious and dispersed ways of knowing and acting that structure and shape the field of possible action of subjects (Lemke 2012, 17). Governmentality studies have thus been described as a field of inquiry that decenters questions of political power by pointing at its numerous discursive and practical manifestations (Larner and Walters 2004). Instead of analyzing power in terms of actors (their intentions, interests, and resources) or structures (such as economic forces), it invites empirical tracing of the styles of thought and administrative procedures, routines, and techniques that inform how we govern and are governed in the present (Rose et al. 2006, 84; Triantafillou 2012, 32).

When studying global climate governance from this vantage point, we may ask how nonstate climate action is constituted as a domain of cognition, calculation, and evaluation in the Paris regime and what practical techniques are employed to assemble, shape, and order the activities of geographically dispersed businesses, cities, and NGOs. Rather than imposing constraints on the governed, we see power as deeply ingrained in the complex matrix of knowledges and practices that now work upon nonstate actors in the Paris regime and thereby constitute particular agents, objects, and spaces of global politics. As Larner and Walters (2004, 16) outlined, this analytical move means “‘bracketing’ the world of underlying forces and causes, and instead examining the different ways in which the real has been inscribed into thought.” The complex and polycentric world described by global governance studies thereby becomes one

political imagination among many, rather than an underlying logic of our global present. Foucauldian analytics of government invite us to open up this political imagination to critical scrutiny, and ask what sorts of relationships with ourselves, others, and the world it makes possible. By gaining clarity on the conditions under which we think and act in the present, we can clear a space for thinking and being otherwise and thereby make possible the introduction of new players, rules, stakes, and relationships into the global game of climate governance (Burchell 1996, 33).

Method and Material

This study analyzes documents produced by the UNFCCC and the High-Level Champions in relation to the multiple nonstate orchestration initiatives launched under the UN climate regime. The documents were selected after a detailed search through the UNFCCC website, seeking reports, work programs, and informational material that outline the purposes, goals, and functions of UNFCCC-led initiatives to induce nonstate climate action (the full list of analyzed documents is found in Table 1). Our study also includes multiple visits to the online NAZCA portal. In previous research, scholars have used this portal to assess the distribution and aggregated effects of nonstate climate pledges (Climate South 2018; Hsu et al. 2016). In this article, by contrast, we approach NAZCA as one of several governmental technologies that seeks to assemble and direct voluntary contributions to the Paris Agreement. To contextualize these documents and tools, we also observed the opening and closing sessions of the Race to Zero Dialogues held online on November 9 and 19, 2020. We selected this initiative as an example of a global space where the facilitation and acceleration of nonstate climate action is rationalized and justified in close interplay with the High-Level Champions, government representatives, investors, businesses, municipal officers, and environmental activists.

However, in line with previous studies of climate governmentality (e.g., Lövbrand and Stripple 2014), our analysis is less concerned with “the who” than it is with “the how” of governing. Although efforts to induce nonstate climate action indeed involve numerous actors—including UN officials, data providers, organizations, and academics—we do not presuppose or search for a center of power from which governing is conducted. Instead, we are interested in “the complex of mundane programmes, calculations, techniques, documents, and procedures through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental ambitions” (Rose and Miller 1992, 175). We trace this heterogeneous and dispersed “regime of practices” (Foucault 1991, 79) by analyzing materials from multiple UNFCCC-led initiatives during the period 2016–2021. While these initiatives are imbued with different mandates and functions, we seek to identify common ways of reasoning (who and what is in need of government?) and the more or less systematic forms of governing such problematizations make possible.

Table 1
Material Included in the Analysis

<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Title</i>
Climate Neutral Now	Outlining the Climate Neutral Now Pledge 2016 Informational brochure
COP23 and COP24 presidents	Talanoa Call for Action
Global Climate Action	Global Climate Action 2018: Examples of Good Practice
High-Level Champions	Road Map for Global Climate Action 2016 Launch: Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action 2016
High-Level Champions and Marrakech Partnership	Achievements 2019 Race to Zero Dialogues 2020, opening and closing ceremonies
Marrakech Partnership	Climate Action Now: Summary for Policymakers 2017, 2018 Indicative Marrakech Partnership Work Programme for 2019 Marrakech Partnership Work Programme 2017–2018, 2019–2020, 2020–2021 Note from the High-Level Champions Yearbook of Global Climate Action 2017, 2018, 2019 Climate Action Pathways 2019 (Executive Summary and Action Table): Energy, Human Settlements, Industry, Land Use, Resilience and Adaptation, Transport, Water
Momentum for Change	Annual Report 2017, 2018
Global Climate Action Portal	Global Climate Action Portal (NAZCA) (multiple accesses, 2018–2021)

All material can be accessed through the UNFCCC website.

Our analysis centers around three analytical questions: first, what practical techniques are advanced to assemble, shape, and guide nonstate climate action under the Paris regime; second, what systematic ways of thinking and knowing do these techniques rest upon and project; and third, how are nonstate actors imagined and molded as political subjects, and toward what end? When reading the documents included in this study, we first highlighted text segments that

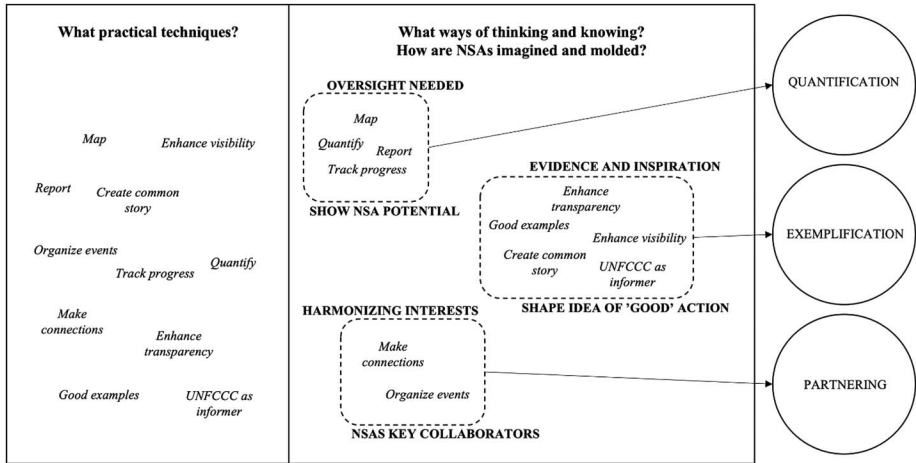


Figure 1
Overview of the Process of Analysis

(left) Initial identification of dispositional techniques, (middle) analysis of modes of reasoning and problematization, and (right) identification of technologies of government.

responded to the first research question. The analysis resulted in the identification of eleven dispositional techniques, including “report,” “create common story,” and “organize events” (Figure 1). As a second step, we traced the ways of thinking and modes of reasoning used to justify the employment of these techniques and how these forms of knowledge constitute nonstate actors as objects and subjects of government. The material was approached inductively to avoid reproducing any preunderstanding of the role of nonstate actors in international politics. To ensure analytical transparency, the results section includes numerous quotes that exemplify the sorts of text segments we coded (Creswell 2014).

Accelerating Action Toward the Goals of the Paris Agreement

On November 8, 2016, the first two High-Level Champions—Laurence Tubiana (France) and Haikima El Haite (Morocco)—presented the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action. The launch was held during the first week of COP22 in Marrakech and was widely attended by government delegates, inter-governmental agencies, business actors, city representatives, and media. Dedicated to “cooperative action among Party and non-Party stakeholders,” this new partnership was presented as an opportunity to accelerate action toward the goals of the Paris Agreement. As Laurence Tubiana highlighted, to keep global mean warming well below 2 degrees Celsius, we need to build catalytic

linkages across all sectors of society, and the Marrakech Partnership “provide[s] a stable basis for governments and non-state actors to align their efforts.”⁸

Since the launch of the Global Climate Action Agenda, the High-Level Champions have undertaken numerous initiatives in collaboration with the UNFCCC secretariat to assemble and align nonstate climate action with the objectives of the Paris Agreement. The techniques and platforms are continuously evolving, with the 2020 Race to Zero Dialogues as a recent example. While originally devoted to pre-2020 action, the work of the Global Climate Action Agenda was extended to the post-2020 period at COP25 in 2019.⁹ In the following pages, we present the three distinct technologies of government that emerge from the rich material produced to track, compare, incentivize, and upscale voluntary contributions to the Paris Agreement.

Quantification

The first technology is oriented toward quantifying the vast array of voluntary climate pledges and actions made by cities, businesses, investors, regions, and civil society organizations. To counter the lack of oversight of the complex world of transnational climate action, quantification is a technology that seeks to assemble and align spatially and organizationally dispersed actors with the goals of the Paris Agreement. Already during the launch of the Marrakech Partnership, a systematic quantification of the mitigation potential of voluntary climate initiatives was presented as the foundation of ambitious climate action. As the two High-Level Champions highlighted, both state and nonstate actors have “called for greater coherence and clarity” to enable effective collaboration and accelerate the scale and pace of pre-2020 climate action.¹⁰ In response to these calls, several techniques for monitoring, reporting, and verifying (MRV) nonstate initiatives and pledges have been promoted through UNFCCC channels.

The NAZCA portal, also known as the Global Climate Action Portal, is the centerpiece of these efforts. This online registry tracks and visualizes information on mitigation and adaptation commitments made by nonstate actors based on initiatives registered with a number of data providers, such as the Carbon Disclosure Project, the Climate Bonds initiative, and the UN Global Compact (Global Climate Action Portal¹¹). In 2019, the portal was relaunched with increased possibilities for cross-country comparisons to inspire replication as well as links to states’ NDCs (Achievements 2019).¹² While designed as a

8. <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/marrakech-partnership-for-global-climate-action-launched-as-cop-cmp-hold-closing-plenaries/>, last accessed February 24, 2022.

9. UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.25.

10. <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/marrakech-partnership-for-global-climate-action-launched-as-cop-cmp-hold-closing-plenaries/>, last accessed February 24, 2022.

11. Accessed November 9, 2020.

12. High-Level Champions and Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action: Achievements 2019, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Marrakech_Partnership_Achievements_2019.pdf, last accessed March 8, 2022.

“platform where non-Party stakeholders from around the globe ... can display their commitments” (Global Climate Action Portal), the registered actions have thus far been dominated by cities and companies. Of the approximately 27,000 actions registered in NAZCA in February 2021, cities accounted for 11,915, companies for 8,740, investors for 2,348, and regions for 669. Since the portal only accepts quantifiable pledges, it does not track or display protest actions or grassroots campaigns undertaken by the broader climate movement. Of the 2,293 actions registered by civil society organizations, none referred to initiatives by environmental NGOs or activist networks like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Fridays for Future, or the like. Instead, the civil society category in NAZCA is populated by foundations, universities, and faith-based associations, many of which have pledged to divest from fossil fuels.

In parallel to NAZCA, the UNFCCC and the High-Level Champions also make use of Yearbooks to track progress, impacts, and results from voluntary climate initiatives. In these documents, the momentum of global climate action is regularly demonstrated in numbers, for example, “seventy-two cities worldwide, representing 425 million citizens have publicly committed to develop and begin implementing ambitious climate action plans.”¹³ Similar to the registrations in NAZCA, the numbers of activities displayed in the Yearbooks rarely translate into clear mitigation estimates. Although the UNFCCC encourages nonstate actors to set quantifiable goals and targets, the Yearbooks are primarily used to signal “that the groundswell of climate action under the Marrakech Partnership is growing and diversifying.”¹⁴ As a governmental technology, quantification thus serves two primary purposes. First, by “recording and recognizing the climate actions of a diverse range of stakeholders,” the statistics provided by NAZCA and the Yearbooks allow the UNFCCC secretariat and the High-Level Champions to map, summarize, and evaluate the state of global climate action.¹⁵ The catalytic logic underpinning these numerical efforts is that “a clear, comprehensive view of both individual and cooperative climate action” will inspire greater ambition among Parties and non-Party stakeholders.¹⁶

Second, the NAZCA portal and Yearbooks of Global Climate Action seek to “provide transparency and accountability for new initiatives.”¹⁷ As such, they bring nonstate actors under an incipient transparency mechanism exposing registered actors to the possibility of being held accountable for nonachievement. Although NAZCA’s MRV framework is voluntary, the portal’s call for quantifiable and comparable climate pledges encourages nonstate actors to keep their

13. Yearbook 2018, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/GCA_Yearbook2018.pdf, last accessed March 8, 2022.

14. Yearbook 2017, 21, https://unfccc.int/tools/GCA_Yearbook/GCA_Yearbook2017.pdf, last accessed March 8, 2022.

15. Work Programme 2020–2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/MP_Work_Programme_2020-2021.pdf, last accessed March 8, 2022.

16. Yearbook 2018, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/GCA_Yearbook2018.pdf, last accessed March 8, 2022.

17. Global Climate Action Portal, <https://climateaction.unfccc.int>, last accessed March 8, 2022.

emissions and ambitions in check. By inviting cities, companies, investors, and civil society to align freely with the objectives of the Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC seeks to mobilize nonstate actors as responsible and self-regulating subjects capable of channeling political will formation (Sending and Neumann 2006). This effort to govern “through freedom” is characteristic of neoliberal forms of rule. Rather than seeing the world of free subjects as in opposition to government, neoliberalism has been described as a form of government focused on shaping and guiding subjects capable of responsibly exercising that freedom (Dean 2010; Sending and Neumann 2006). While activating and empowering nonstate actors to voluntarily contribute to the Paris regime, the NAZCA portal and Yearbooks offer expectations, standards of behavior, and quality control systems to monitor, measure, and render calculable the performance of these “free subjects.”

Exemplification

Exemplification is another neoliberal technique employed in UNFCCC-led initiatives to showcase and catalyze ambitious climate action. As a governmental technology, exemplification is dispositional and guides action on the road to the low-carbon society. By compiling good practices, it “bring[s] confidence to the international climate change negotiations”¹⁸ by “illustrat[ing] the growing scale and scope of global climate action.”¹⁹ Exemplification assumes a lack of evidence for climate actions that *work*, which in turn necessitates showcasing “concrete solutions” that “tell the story of our success.”²⁰ As argued in the 2020–2021 Marrakech Partnership Work Programme, “the work, achievements and progress against the ... objectives ... must be regularly communicated to build a common understanding of the current direction of climate action and to develop coherent messages.” To do this, “evidence of systemic transformation will be proactively and continuously amplified through impactful language and storytelling with the overarching goal of ‘communicating for change.’” This exemplification and communication of success stories rest on arguments of urgency and upscaling. “By sharing what is working successfully, efforts can be focused on actions that have a higher chance of success, ambition can be increased at a faster rate, and climate action can be increased in scale and speed.”²¹

To offer inspiration, confidence, and proof of implementation, the Global Climate Action Agenda employs several techniques. The most striking example is the report titled “Global Climate Action: Examples of Good Practices.” This

18. Yearbook 2017.

19. Yearbook 2019.

20. Momentum for Change Annual Report 2017, <https://unfccc.int/resource/mfc2017/>, last accessed March 8, 2022.

21. Good Practices Report 2018, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/GCA_TD_GoodPractices_2018.pdf, last accessed March 8, 2022.

annual report provides “snapshots of success stories from actors in different sectors, different regions, and at different levels,” with the aim of “demonstrat[ing] what is working well and what could work elsewhere.” The Climate Action Pathways, developed in 2020 by the High-Level Champions in collaboration with companies, cities, and civil society organizations, take the practice of exemplification one step further. Introduced as a “blueprint for a 1.5 degree world,”²² the Pathways “set out the forward-looking actions needed to achieve that future”²³ in relation to six thematic areas²⁴ (energy, human settlements, industry, land use, transport, water) and the crosscutting issue of resilience. Each Pathway consists of two parts. First, an executive summary presents a vision statement for the low-carbon society in 2050. Second, the action table defines actions required to get there (e.g., policies, technological innovations, services) and the steps that different actors need to take at different times.

By designating what counts as “good practice,” the Global Climate Action Agenda sets a frame for the initiatives and forms of behavior that the UNFCCC would like to see from “non-Party stakeholders.” Successful actions promoted in the Yearbooks, for instance, are those that contribute to a range of sustainable development goals, such as building resilience, protecting livelihoods, or developing renewable energy.²⁵ For the “Lighthouse Activities,” awarded under the Momentum for Change initiative, successful actions are selected based on their scalability, replicability, innovative and transformative potential, and ability to deliver verifiable social and environmental benefits.²⁶ These selection criteria effectively define the realm of desirable climate action and incentivize nonstate actors to comport themselves accordingly. Although the 2020 Lighthouse Activities display a diversity of small-scale climate initiatives (e.g., solar microgrid infrastructures in Himalayan villages and carbon-neutral ecotourism in Caribbean islands), upscaling is a central principle and goal of all these exemplification practices. Good practices and solutions are those that can be replicated and transported to other locales and thereby turned into business cases with high mitigation potential. Consequently, business actors take center stage through these practices of exemplification and are thereby elevated as key agents of climate governance.

Partnering

In parallel to quantifying and showcasing the groundswell of transnational climate action, the work of the Global Climate Action Agenda also involves a reframing of political participation in terms of cooperation rather than conflict.

22. UN Climate press release, December 13, 2019, available at: <https://unfccc.int/news/global-climate-action-presents-a-blueprint-for-a-15-degree-world>, last accessed March 8, 2022.

23. Work Programme 2020–2021.

24. A Climate Action Pathway for the thematic area “Oceans and Coastal Zones” is forthcoming.

25. Yearbook 2019.

26. Momentum for Change Annual Report 2017, <https://unfccc.int/resource/mfc2017/>, last accessed March 8, 2022.

By portraying all “non-Party stakeholders” as partners of government, now united in the pursuit of the same overall goal, the Action Agenda works to minimize friction and downplay conflicting political objectives and agendas. As governmental technology, partnering takes several forms. First, the High-Level Champions themselves embody the rationale of partnering and constantly invent new means of linking “actions on the ground” with the formal UNFCCC process (Road Map 2016).²⁷ Acting as representatives of the Chilean COP25 presidency and the UK COP26 presidency, Gonzalo Muñoz and Nigel Topping describe their work as “integration of action, across all levels of government and sectors.”²⁸ The designation of government diplomats as champions of this process is highly symbolic and aims to spur “Parties into seeking out partnerships with the various non-Party stakeholders all for the purpose of accelerating climate action and increasing ambition” (Summary for Policymakers 2018).²⁹

Second, partnering is practiced through regular high-level events and activities at the annual COPs and Regional Climate Weeks. The function of these events is to let “non-Party stakeholder leaders demonstrate high-impact collaborative solutions, launch new initiatives, make ambitious announcements and raise public awareness.”³⁰ By displaying scalable and transferable climate actions, nonstate actors are elevated as indispensable partners of government and key to collective problem management. A recent example is the “Race to Zero Campaign,” launched by the High-Level Champions to build “the largest ever alliance to achieving net zero carbon emission by 2050 at the latest.”³¹ By mobilizing momentum around the shift to a decarbonized economy, the campaign seeks to send the signal that business, cities, regions, and investors are united in meeting the Paris goals. During the Race to Zero Dialogues in November 2020, the High-Level Champions brought together partners and supporters of the campaign to discuss what it will take to achieve net-zero emission by 2050. The Dialogues were informed by the slogan “Together we can win this race” and were described by High-Level Champion Gonzalo Muñoz as “a masterpiece in radical collaboration.”³²

As governmental technology, partnering works to bridge any tensions and oppositions across the worlds of national, international, and transnational climate action. Through mechanisms of collaboration, coordination, and dialogue, it sets out to reconcile and harmonize conflicting interests and thereby foster cooperative relations on the road to the low-carbon and climate-resilient

27. High-Level Champions, document titled Road Map for Global Climate Action, <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/high-level-champions-climate-action-roadmap.pdf>, last accessed March 8, 2022.

28. Work Programme 2020–2021.

29. Marrakech Partnership report titled Climate Action Now: Summary for Policymakers 2018 https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/unfccc_spm_2018.pdf, last accessed March 8, 2022.

30. Work Programme 2019–2020.

31. <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero-campaign>, last accessed February 24, 2022.

32. Race to Zero Dialogues Opening Session, November 9, 2020, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttPV4RMF5iQ> at 2:37, last accessed February 24, 2022.

society. By framing all actors as vital for deep decarbonization, it is a technology that effectively blurs the public–private boundary and turns transnational climate action into an integral part of the UN climate regime. Through the practice of partnering, the “non-Party stakeholder” category is also filled with meaning in relation to both what these actors are expected to do (what types of actions are highlighted) and who they are (which actors are brought into the spotlight).

At the closing session of the Race to Zero Dialogues, youth activist Maria Melanidis problematized the forms of agency and subjectivity promoted by the Marrakech Partnership on Global Climate Action. “I feel that we are spending a lot of time, attention, and resources on groups that already have resources. The Race to Zero Dialogues feature big industry and multinational corporations, rather than the groups on the frontlines.”³³ In response to this critique, High-Level Champion Gonzalo Muñoz articulated the political rationality that underpins the Global Climate Action Agenda: “We want to move forward towards net zero as soon as possible. To do so we have to work with those who might be resistant. Big industry has the capacity and power and need to be convinced in order for us to accelerate the transformation. We have little time and therefore need to decide which are the most efficient tactics.”³⁴

The Politics of Nonstate Actor Engagement

Many have described the adoption of the Paris Agreement as a fundamental shift in global climate governance. Rather than organizing the global response to climate change around a centralized legal regime with binding emission targets, the Paris Agreement rests upon a decentralized policy architecture that seeks to foster and incentivize voluntary action by creating a positive “upward spiral” of ambition (Bernstein and Hoffmann 2018; Hale 2020; Sachs 2019). In this catalytic governance regime, nonstate climate innovation and experimentation does not feature as a sideshow to the main game of interstate negotiations. The UNFCCC has instead brought cities, businesses, investors, and regions “into its very core” (Hale 2016, 13) and is now actively involved in the orchestration of voluntary contributions to the Paris Agreement (Bäckstrand and Kuyper 2017).

In this study we have asked what political rationality informs the pluralization of climate politics after Paris and the turn toward soft and catalytic forms of governance. Rather than approaching the complex and dispersed Paris regime as a form of existence that is simply given to us, we have here approached it as a site of governmentality that constitutes particular agents, objects, and spaces of global politics. To examine how power and rule operate in this global space, we traced the modes of thinking and forms of intervention that underpin the

33. Race to Zero Dialogues Closing Session, November 19, 2020, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrftCwLMx1w> at 3:06:45, last accessed February 24, 2022.

34. Race to Zero Dialogues Closing Session, November 19, 2020, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrftCwLMx1w> at 3:10:15, last accessed February 24, 2022.

Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action and the UNFCCC secretariat's Momentum for Change initiative. When analyzing the many documents and activities generated by these two initiatives, we identified *quantification*, *exemplification*, and *partnering* as three central governmental technologies by which authorities now seek to enroll nonstate actors in the Paris regime. These technologies are informed by several underlying principles and goals, many of which resonate with advanced or neoliberal forms of rule. First, we found that the practical efforts to track, map, benchmark, and showcase voluntary climate initiatives are animated by the search for order and coherence in an increasingly complex and polycentric climate regime. Through various technologies of quantification, numerous UNFCCC-led initiatives and tools now seek to assemble and align spatially and organizationally dispersed actors with the objectives of the Paris Agreement. However, rather than constituting a problem of control, the freedom and autonomy of these actors are mobilized as a resource for legitimate and effective governance. Through what Dean (2010, 193) calls "practices of liberty," businesses, cities, investors, and civil society organizations are shaped, guided, and molded into responsible and self-regulating subjects capable of taking on governance functions.

Second, the many practical mechanisms and techniques devised to galvanize and catalyze nonstate climate action respond to the need for rapid and deep decarbonization. By telling success stories and showcasing scalable and transferable climate solutions, the UNFCCC secretariat and the two High-Level Champions seek to give states confidence to ratchet up their climate ambitions and thereby close the global emissions gap. While devised to harness the creative and innovative potential of the many climate initiatives and solutions unfolding across sectors and regions, we found that these practices of exemplification are highly dispositional and actively involved in ordering people and things (Foucault 1991). Driven by the quest for accelerated action toward the goals of the Paris Agreement, they constrain the realm of possible climate action to that which can be replicated and turned into business cases with high mitigation potential. By making upscaling and commercialization prized attributes, exemplification is thus a technology that highlights business and industry actors at the expense of the less resourceful (Death 2011, 15). Although the Race to Zero Campaign calls on all societal actors to participate in the process of decarbonization, successful agents of change are those "non-Party stakeholders" who can demonstrate high-impact solutions and thereby chart the map to the low-carbon and climate-resilient society.

Finally, the governmental technologies examined here are driven by the quest for rational and efficient forms of problem management. Through mechanisms of collaboration, coordination, and dialogue, they set out to bridge any disagreements, tensions, or conflicts across public and private domains. The soft and indirect modes of governance employed by the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action and the Momentum for Change initiative thereby become a sort of boundary for the political. Preoccupied with efficient and

consensual problem solving, they represent a form of rule “that takes place after goals are set and deliberations, argument, struggle, contest, and competition have played out” (Latham 1999, 43). While involving businesses, cities, regions, investors, and civil society organizations as active partners in formulating and implementing decarbonization pathways and road maps, the UNFCCC-led initiatives included in our study leave little room for contestation over the characteristics of the decarbonized society (what future do “we” want?) and the sorts of transformations required to get there (what needs to be transformed?). By portraying decarbonization as an intrinsically synergic process, they remain silent on the disagreements, struggles, and disruptions that most likely will characterize the journey to the low-carbon and climate-resilient society.

Faced with the dangers of a rapidly warming world, it is tempting to assert that the solutions to climate change now are at hand. After a decade of diplomatic gridlock and failure, the UNFCCC process seems to be back on track and building momentum for ambitious climate action. Although the Paris Agreement’s voluntary and flexible policy architecture has been criticized for its “dangerous incrementalism” (Allan 2019), it has also been widely embraced by scholars of global governance as a space where productive linkages across the worlds of multilateral and transnational action can be forged (Betsill et al. 2015; Chan et al. 2019). It is too early to tell whether the “catalytic cooperation” (Hale 2020) set in motion in Paris will be enough to break entrenched carbon lock-ins and build capacity for deep decarbonization. However, a neoliberal and market-oriented global space that elevates businesses, investors, and industries as indispensable partners of government can easily detract attention away from the social, economic, and political orders most in need of transformation. While engaging a broad range of actors in collective problem solving, consensus-seeking forms of climate governance run the risk of neutralizing the opposition and radicalism of environmental movements and function as a technique for sustaining the unsustainable (Death 2011, 12).

As the Paris Agreement approaches its first round of global stocktaking, we thus call for a (self-)critical governance agenda that reflects on “its limits, silences, and unwanted legitimations” (Latham 1999, 49). Such an agenda will interrupt the fluency of the global governance narrative and critically examine what sorts of relationships with ourselves, others, and our warming world it makes possible. At a time when the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient world is more urgent than ever, questions like “whose transition?” and “to what ends?” must be kept close at hand.

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