

# History of Climate Policy

2023-04-21

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### Required Reading (everyone):

- Climate Casino, Ch. 17–18.
- The Climate Fix, Ch. 6.
- Web Page: M. Maslin, “A Short History of International Climate Change Negotiations – from Rio to Glasgow,” (University College, London, 2021).

### Reading Notes:

There are three readings. Start with the blog by Mark Maslin that gives a short history of international climate negotiations. Then read the chapters from *Climate Casino*, and finally read the chapter from *The Climate Fix*.

- Pielke (*The Climate Fix*) and Nordhaus (*Climate Casino*) offer different accounts of the history of international treaties and policies to manage climate change. Pay attention to what each author says.
- Much of the focus is on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), signed in 1992 and ratified by all 193 member states of the United Nations. Maslin’s short history of climate negotiations gives the history of this.
  - Four important milestones in this process were:
    1. Establishing the international treaty (UNFCCC) that laid out the basic principles of responsibility to protect the world from dangerous climate change. The treaty was signed in 1991 and came into force in 1994.
    2. The Kyoto Treaty, which spelled out in detail what each country’s responsibilities were under the UNFCCC. The Kyoto treaty was signed in 1997. It became legally binding once 55 countries had ratified it, which didn’t happen until 2005. The US never ratified it, and the treaty expired in 2012.
    3. The Copenhagen Agreement, signed in 2009, which replaced the Kyoto Treaty. The nations knew that the US Congress would not ratify a new treaty, so they developed an Agreement instead, which was not legally binding.
    4. The 2015 Paris Agreement, which established a schedule for each country to reduce emissions in order to try to limit warming to no more than 2°C, and preferably less than 1.5°C.
  - The UNFCCC is legally binding on its signatories, and requires them to “stabiliz[e] greenhouse gases concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would avoid dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.” A problem is that the Framework did not define what constituted “dangerous anthropogenic interference,” or spell out any specific actions that the signatories would have to take under the treaty.

- In subsequent years, much of the world's scientific and climate policy elites arrived at a rough consensus that raising the average temperature of the earth by more than 2°C relative to preindustrial temperatures would constitute dangerous interference. Both Nordhaus and Pielke present critical examinations of this judgment.
  - The details of implementing the pledge under UNFCCC (both defining “dangerous interference” and deciding on specific actions) was left to subsequent negotiations, and the signatory nations have met every year at “conferences of parties” (COPs) to hammer out details. The most important implementation agreement was a treaty signed in Kyoto in 1998, but never ratified by the United States, and it expired in 2012, but was superseded by the Copenhagen Treaty in 2009. Both Nordhaus and Pielke discuss the Kyoto treaty and its pros and cons.
- As you read this history and the discussion of the goal of limiting warming to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures, try to become familiar with the history and think critically about the kinds of policies that were pursued and those that were not given serious consideration.