

# **Leadership in the Eyes of the Beholders: Perceptions of Climate Change Leadership among UNFCCC Negotiation Participants<sup>1</sup>**

Charles Parker, Christer Karlsson, Mattias Hjerpe, and Björn-Ola Linnér

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**Paper presented by Charles Parker (Charles.Parker@statsvet.uu.se)**

**Department of Government, Uppsala University**

## **Abstract**

There is widespread consensus that effective leadership will be required in order to successfully address the climate change challenge. Presently there are a number of self-proclaimed climate change leaders, but leadership is a relationship between leaders and followers. An actor aspiring to be a leader needs to be recognized as such. Despite its fundamental importance for leadership relationships, the demand side of the leadership equation has been comparatively neglected by past research. In this study we are looking for leaders by analyzing the perceptions of climate change leadership among UNFCCC COP 14 participants. Our results show that the climate change leadership mantle will have to be worn by more than one actor. Among the leadership candidates the EU was most widely recognized as a leader, however, only a small minority reported that they saw the EU as the only leader. The data also show that the US and the G77 thus far have failed to impress potential followers and it was China that clearly emerged as the second strongest leadership candidate.

**KEY WORDS:** Climate change; leadership; followers; views on leadership; COP 14.

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## Introduction

The advocates of immediate and far-reaching measures to address climate change all emphasize the importance of *leadership*. Scholars have found that resource capabilities, legitimacy, and credibility are imperative for effective leadership.<sup>2</sup> However, one basic prerequisite that is needed if leadership efforts are to bear fruit has been relatively neglected in the literature, namely the demand for leadership and the presence of prospective followers. Leadership is, as Arild Underdal reminds us, “a relationship between leaders and followers.”<sup>3</sup> It follows then that both parties to this relationship are important for a leadership relationship to come into existence and an actor aspiring to be a leader needs to be recognized as such: there can be no leaders without followers.

Despite its fundamental importance for leadership relationships, the demand side of the leadership equation has been a fairly neglected feature in studies on efforts to forge global governance arrangements. With the exception of a few important studies,<sup>4</sup> scholarly attention has mainly been directed towards the supply side of the leadership relationship. Work on efforts to address the climate change challenge is no exception to this rule. A great number of articles and books have in recent years been devoted to analyzing the who, how, and why of the supply side of global climate change leadership.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, limited research efforts have been devoted to examining the demand side of the leadership relationship in the post-Kyoto era. As a consequence we know a lot about the would-be

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<sup>2</sup> Young, 1991, 304; Underdal 1994, 185; Elgström 2007, 455; Parker and Karlsson 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Underdal 1994, 181.

<sup>4</sup> Gupta and van der Grijp 1999; Gupta and van der Grijp 2000; Elgström 2007.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Ringius 1999; Gupta and Ringius 2001; Vogler 2005; Groenleer and Van Schaik 2007; Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007.

climate change leaders but hardly anything about the followers and their views on leadership.

Based on the results of the few studies that actually have examined this subject we have reason to believe that views on leadership may vary according to three different factors. First, since where you stand usually has something to do with where you sit, it can be expected that geographical belonging matters. In a study on perceptions of the EU's role in the climate change regime based on 67 interviews conducted in 1997-98, Gupta and van der Grijp show that EU interviewees and respondents from states outside the EU have different views on the EU as a leader. The latter tended to be more critical of the leadership provided by the EU.<sup>6</sup> In his analysis of EU's leadership role in international multilateral negotiations, Ole Elgström on the basis of little over fifty interviews also found a similar effect, although in his view the difference between EU respondents' and outsiders' perceptions was "smaller than could be expected."<sup>7</sup> Still, within the World Trade Organization (WTO) EU respondents portrayed EU leadership as indisputable while interviewees from non-EU states had a more mixed impression of the EU's leadership role.

Second, views on leadership may vary among different groups of individuals depending on their specific roles and characteristics. Arild Underdal hypothesizes that the extent to which groups are well-informed and the strength of their preferences are factors that may affect the demand for leadership.<sup>8</sup> Applying this reasoning to the climate change issue we would expect, for example, that groups of actors who are—relatively speaking—less

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<sup>6</sup> Gupta and van der Grijp 2000, 76-77, 81.

<sup>7</sup> Elgström 2007, 457.

<sup>8</sup> Underdal 1994, 182.

informed (say national parliamentarians) are more in need of guidance and leadership than groups of actors that are better informed (say chief negotiators) on the subject matter.

Third, perceptions of leadership may vary from issue to issue. In their study of the climate change regime in the late 1990s Gupta and van der Grijp found that different actors were perceived as leaders on different issues. The EU, for example, was regarded leader when it came to setting targets for reductions, whereas the Alliance of Small Island States was “seen as leading the negotiations by pushing for a protocol.”<sup>9</sup> The tendency of perceptions of an actor’s leadership to differ from one issue to another was also affirmed in the Elgström study. The EU’s bid for leadership in international multilateral negotiations is perceived differently in the cases of the United Nation’s Forum on Forests (UNFF) and the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species (CITES), compared to its role in the WTO, as “it is mainly within the WTO that the EU is actual portrayed as a leader.”<sup>10</sup>

The aim of this study is to increase our knowledge of the demand side of leadership relationships by studying the perceptions of prospective followers concerning potential leaders in the field of global climate change politics. More specifically, we ask whether there are any leaders in the international effort to confront climate change, and if so, who they are? By utilizing unique survey data collected at the 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP 14) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Poznań we are able to shed some light on which actors are actually recognized as playing a leading role in the climate negotiations. Drawing on leadership theory and previous research results in the

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<sup>9</sup> Gupta and van der Grijp 2000, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Elgström 2007, 456.

field, we also seek to provide evidence that can help confirm whether or not perceptions of leadership vary according to geographical belonging, roles, and issues.

The data used in this study stem from a survey conducted at the UNFCCC COP 14 meeting. Respondents were asked to indicate which actor or actors they believed to be leaders in the field of climate change as part of a survey of a strategic sample of the nearly 9,600 participants at the Poznań conference. Rather than providing respondents with a fixed number of alternatives, we used an open-ended question to tap into their views on which actors they recognized as playing a leading role in the climate negotiations: “Which countries, party groupings and/or organizations have, in your view, a leading role in climate negotiations?”<sup>11</sup> Surveys were distributed face-to-face at the conference venue during the first week one and during the high-level segment in week two. A total of 233 completed surveys were collected, 105 in the first week and 128 in the second week of the COP. In our sample we attempted to capture responses from the two largest categories, i.e. we concentrated on targeting members of party delegations, such as negotiators and representatives of government agencies, and NGO representatives. The two smallest participant categories, media and representatives of UN and other Intergovernmental organizations, were not our primary focus. The questionnaire was designed to single out researchers and business representatives among the NGO representatives. The primary roles and geographical composition of the respondents and total COP attendance are contained in table 1.

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<sup>11</sup> In this paper, we only report results for the four actors most frequently mentioned as playing a leading role in the field of climate change: the EU, the US, China and G77. Other countries, such as individual EU member states (these answers are not included in the results for the EU), and non-governmental organizations were recognized as leaders by some respondents, but no other actor came close to the same levels of recognition as the four we concentrate on in this article.

*Table 1: Primary role and geographical belonging of COP 14 participants and respondents, (No and percentages)*

<i>Primary role</i>	<i>All COP 14 participants</i>	<i>Respondents' primary roles</i>	<i>Respondents' geographical belonging</i>	
Party delegate	45%	43%	Africa	13% (30)
NGO representative	40%	47%	Asia	25% (58)
UN representative	6%	6%	Europe	36% (84)
Media representative	9%	3%	North America	9% (21)
			Latin and South America	6% (15)
			Oceania	3% (6)
			No answer	8% (19)
	<b>100% (9 576)</b>	<b>100% (233)</b>		<b>100% (233)</b>

The study proceeds in three steps: In the next section we turn our attention to the supply side of global climate change leadership and two of the most notable self-proclaimed leaders in the field: the European Union and the USA. In the penultimate section we analyze the perceptions of prospective followers and the final section offers our main conclusions.

### **The Supply of Leadership: Self-Proclaimed Leaders**

Studies of international cooperation in general and multilateral negotiations in particular report that leadership is a crucial determinant of success or failure in efforts to address transnational problems and forge global governance arrangements.<sup>12</sup> Leadership makes a

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<sup>12</sup> Lindberg and Scheingold 1970; Young, 1991; Sjöstedt, 1994; Underdal, 1994; Hampson and Hart, 1995.

difference by establishing a “relationship of influence in which one actor guides or directs the behavior of others toward a certain goal.”<sup>13</sup>

There are three different modes of leadership, each of which can be an important instrument of influence as a group of actors search for solutions to joint problems. *Structural* leadership rests on the ability to take actions or deploy power-resources that create incentives, costs and benefits in a particular issue area.<sup>14</sup> *Directional* leadership rests on taking unilateral action and is accomplished by the demonstration effects of leading by example.<sup>15</sup> *Idea-based* leadership (also referred to as entrepreneurial, intellectual or instrumental), is concerned with problem naming and framing and the promotion of particular policy solutions to collective problems.<sup>16</sup>

It can be argued that leadership is especially important in the area of climate change for at least two different reasons: First, due to the fact that the climate change issue is highly complex. The leadership literature has recognized that the greater the complexity—both in terms of the number of actors involved and the intricacy of the problem at hand—the more important will the presence of leadership be.<sup>17</sup> The climate negotiations are maddeningly intricate as they now involve over 190 countries and touch on a wide range of issues in multiple policy areas.

Second, the stakes involved are high and there are easily identifiable short and long term costs involved as actors try to forge solutions to counter the climate change threat. No one

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<sup>13</sup> Underdal 1994, 178.

<sup>14</sup> Young 1991, 288–289; Underdal 1994, 186.

<sup>15</sup> Underdal 1994, 183–185; Gupta and Ringius 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Young 1991; Malnes, 1995.

wants to be a “sucker” and the fear of being placed at a competitive disadvantage in the global economy means that states are unwilling to take meaningful action in the absence of international cooperation that requires similar commitments from other states.<sup>18</sup> International agreement in the field of climate change therefore run the risk of becoming a victim of the “law of the least ambitious party,” which holds that “collective action will be limited to those measures acceptable to the least enthusiastic party.”<sup>19</sup>

Leadership is essential in situations like these where stakes are high and commitments to act can be blocked by collective action problems. By making the first move a leader provides a model others may want to emulate and removes uncertainty about whether the leader is actually devoted to action rather than just engaging in cheap talk.

The importance of leadership in the field of climate change has repeatedly been recognized by the world community and past agreements have explicitly identified who is supposed to shoulder the mantle of leadership. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change states that the richer countries of the OECD, particularly the US and the large member states of the EU-15, should take the lead in committing to emission reductions and providing support for climate action in poorer countries, through the common but differentiated responsibilities principle. More recently, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has emphasized that the “developed countries need to take a clear lead,”<sup>20</sup> and Al Gore, in his Nobel lecture, urged the world’s biggest polluters—“those nations that weigh

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<sup>17</sup> Underdal 1994, 182-83.

<sup>18</sup> Hurrell and Kingsbury 1992, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Underdal 1980, 36.

<sup>20</sup> Ki-moon 2008.

heaviest in the scales where earth is in the balance”<sup>21</sup>—to form an alliance to meet the challenge ahead.

Looking at the history of leadership on climate change we find that there have been primarily two actors taking turns in acting as leaders. In the early days of atmosphere protection politics the US played the leading role. However, as negotiations for an international climate convention began in the early 1990s, there followed a period of co-leadership between the US and the European Union. From 2001 to 2007 the US withdrew from international climate change negotiations and the EU emerged as a leader on this issue. With Barack Obama’s rise to power we have currently two self-proclaimed climate change leadership candidates.

Time and again EU leaders have declared the ambition to lead on climate change. The EU’s overarching goal is presented as nothing less than “[l]eading global action” against climate change “to 2020 and beyond.”<sup>22</sup> By reaching an agreement on an extensive climate and energy package the EU believes to have confirmed its position as a credible leader on climate change. The energy commissioner Stavros Dimas argued that the final deal struck in December 2008 should send “a clear signal to our international partners about our determination to address climate change and should convince them to follow our example.”<sup>23</sup>

The outcome of the COP 15 meeting in Copenhagen, which failed to produce the legally binding agreement that the EU was seeking, was a huge disappointment for the EU and a

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<sup>21</sup> Gore 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Council of the European Union 2007, 10–11.

substantial blow to its leadership aspirations. When push came to shove, the EU's strategy of leading by example did not succeed in convincing the other major emitters to follow suit and accept binding emission cuts.

The US, on the other hand, has had a complicated relationship with multilateral efforts to address climate change, oscillating from engagement to disengagement.<sup>24</sup> In the early stages of dealing with this problem, US support was an important driver in getting political discussions about climate change to take off at the global level. In 1992, George H.W. Bush attended the Rio Earth Summit and the US was among the first countries in the world to ratify the UNFCCC. The US, during the Clinton-Gore administration, played an active role in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations and the contents of the final deal strongly reflected many US preferences. Despite signing the Kyoto Protocol, the Clinton administration felt it had no chance of achieving the necessary political support to ratify the Protocol and decided not to put it forward for Senate approval. Under the administration of George W. Bush, the US reversed its policy of multilateral engagement. Shortly after taking office Bush declared his opposition to the Kyoto Protocol and made it clear that the US would not observe it. From the summer of 2001 to 2007 the US essentially stood on the sidelines of the international climate negotiations. It wasn't until December 2007, at COP 13 in Bali, that the US returned to the international negotiating table in any meaningful way and, after some initial resistance, added its support to the "Bali roadmap".

Under George W. Bush the US went from a prospective leader to laggard, however, since the 2008 election of Barack H. Obama, the US has attempted to return to what it sees as its

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<sup>23</sup> European Commission 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Kjellén 2007.

traditional global leadership role. While campaigning for the presidency Obama promised US leadership in tackling climate change and expressed willingness to work together with the international community in devising strategies to do so. In Copenhagen, it was clear that the US was once again willing to play an active role in the international climate negotiations and, although it was not willing to put commitments on the table that went beyond those contained in proposed domestic legislation, it did work for and sign on to the Copenhagen Accord. Though it was far short of what the scientific consensus says is needed to address the climate problem, the accord is the most substantial climate commitment the US has made in a multilateral context in many years.

The list of possible leadership contenders may even be extended as to include countries such as China and Brazil. China's recent behavior suggests that it is less willing to observe former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping's well-known proscription to "never take the lead" and instead is increasingly focusing on his exhortation, contained in the second half of that same famous quote, "to do something big."<sup>25</sup> China may be coming to the realization that doing something big will require leadership and that its growing structural power now makes this a viable option. In recent years, Chinese overseas activities have increased tremendously fuelled by rapid economic growth and increasing levels of foreign direct investment.

We do not at this point have the full story on why COP 15 failed to produce an ambitious successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol. It is clear, however, that China's negotiating preferences were pivotal in shaping the final outcome in Copenhagen. Time will tell if

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<sup>25</sup> Johnson 2009.

China is indeed aiming for a climate change leadership role, but, by dint of its economic size and its growing international clout, China already plays a key role in determining the fate of international climate cooperation and may very well emerge as a future leader, particularly among developing countries.

There is apparently no shortage of leadership contenders in the field of climate change. Ever since its decision to save the Kyoto Protocol the EU has strived to portray itself as a leader on climate change. More recently, since President Obama took office, the US is once again eager to be seen as a leader on climate change. Alongside these self-proclaimed leaders, which historically also have been the main movers in the struggle to meet the climate change challenge, we find less obvious but still possible candidates as future leaders. Now, the key question is if the current leadership candidates have managed to become recognized as leaders by the prospective followers? The next step in our looking for leaders effort will be to examine the demand side of the leadership equation.

### **The Demand for Leadership: Hesitant Followers**

Let us now shift focus to the demand side of climate change leadership and analyze which actors are perceived as leaders on climate change. It may be worth recalling that our aim is not to chart the levels of *support* for the different policies and leadership services offered by potential leaders. We seek rather to answer the factual question of which actors are currently *recognized* as leaders on climate change.

As we see in table 2 below, the European Union is the actor most commonly viewed as a leader on climate change as 62 percent of all respondents identify the EU as having a

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leading role in the climate change negotiations. China comes second and is recognized as a leader by almost half of the COP 14 participants. The G77 and the US respectively are viewed as leaders by just over a quarter of all respondents. It bears recalling that the survey was conducted in December 2008, i.e. after the US presidential election but before President Obama was inaugurated. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the perceptions of US as a leader were still heavily influenced by the actions of the Bush administration.

*Table 2: Actors perceived as leaders on climate change, by party grouping (percentages)*

	<i>EU as leader</i>	<i>US as leader</i>	<i>China as leader</i>	<i>G77 as leader</i>
EU-citizens	77	43	55	34
G77-citizens	50	15	50	38
Umbrella group-citizens	56	33	33	11
Environmental Integrity Group-citizens	70	30	50	0
US-citizens	50	38	38	13
<b>All</b>	<b>62 (14)<sup>26</sup></b>	<b>27 (0)</b>	<b>46 (1)</b>	<b>27 (4)</b>

An important conclusion to be drawn from table 2 is that there is no clear single leader on climate change. The EU is keen to be viewed as *the* leader on climate change, but, as the data reveal, only 14 percent of the respondents view the European Union as the only leader. On the other hand, none of the other actors comes even close to being perceived as the sole leader. The general picture emerging from the data then is that the world lacks a

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<sup>26</sup> The numbers in brackets represent the percentage of respondents who viewed this actor as the only leader in their answers of the open-ended question on leadership. If instead we include those who report they see this actor *together* with some other actor as the only leader, the percentages increase slightly, (e.g. some respondents who say they see the EU as a leader also mention an individual EU member state or the IPCC alongside the EU).

single undisputed leader on climate change. This resembles the situation of the 1990s which Gupta and van der Grijp described as a situation where “leadership is shared” among a number of actors.<sup>27</sup>

Our finding that the EU is the actor most widely recognized as a leader on climate change holds even if we exclude from our analysis those respondents which represent the various leadership candidates in the capacity as members of the official delegations. This is noteworthy, because, strictly speaking, such respondents cannot be classified as prospective followers. By controlling for self-identification among the official delegates, that is by concentrating exclusively on those respondents which truly can be defined as prospective followers, we can see that the main results are more or less unchanged. The percentage of respondents (EU-delegates excluded) that identified the EU as a climate leader remained the same (62 percent), and among EU-delegates the level of recognition was marginally higher with 64 percent reporting that they saw the EU as playing a leading role in the negotiations. In fact, when controlling for self-identification, the only significant difference we found relates to the G77. As almost half (48 percent) of the G77-delegates see the G77 as playing a leading role in the climate negotiations,<sup>28</sup> the level of recognition for the G77 as a leader drops from 27 to 21 percent if G77-delegates are excluded from the analysis.

It is also noteworthy that the structural position and the aggregate power held by different actors do not seem to be particularly important explanatory factors with regard to the leadership perceptions of prospective followers. For example, the US has the greatest

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<sup>27</sup> Gupta and van der Grijp 2000, 81.

combined power resources and its position as one of the two largest GHG emitters makes it a key player in the field of climate change. At present, of the various leadership contenders, the US has the greatest potential to exercise structural leadership. Nevertheless, the US is only recognized as a leader by roughly a quarter of all respondents. This indicates that diplomatic engagement and perceptions concerning an actor's commitment to addressing the climate issue matters. An actor's structural position and its potential for exercising resource based leadership are simply not sufficient for it to be widely recognized as a leader. The lack of active participation by the Bush administration in the UN global climate change process seems to have profoundly impacted the extent to which the US was regarded as a leader on climate change by COP 14 participants.

### *Geographical belonging*

Let us now start breaking down the data by first looking at views on leadership as it relates to *geographical belonging*. To exercise leadership effectively an actor needs to be acknowledged as a leader across the board and not only by a small subset of close supporters. To what degree are the leadership contenders on climate change acknowledged as leaders outside their borders? Table 2 clearly shows that geographical belonging matters. Whereas 62 percent of all respondents view the European Union as a leader three quarters of EU-citizens do so. In all groups we find the same pattern: geographical belonging matters.

However, while respondents are more likely to view "their" actor as a leader we also find some evidence that it is indeed possible to be recognized as a leader across the board. The EU, for example, is perceived as a leader by roughly half of the G77 and US-citizens in the

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<sup>28</sup> There were too few US and Chinese delegates in the sample for us to draw any meaningful

survey, and the G77 is almost as widely perceived as a leader among EU-citizens as it is by respondents from within the G77 group.

The importance of geographical belonging becomes even clearer if we break down the data to the regional level.

*Table 3: Actors perceived as leaders on climate change, by regional belonging (percentages)*

	<i>EU as leader</i>	<i>US as leader</i>	<i>China as leader</i>	<i>G77 as leader</i>	<i>n</i>
Africa	38	24	62	33	21
Asia	63	14	35	26	43
Europe	75	42	52	29	52
North America	54	38	46	8	13
South and Latin America	57	14	64	64	14
Oceania	50	17	17	17	6
N/A	67	20	27	7	15
<b>All</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>164</b>

A number of important conclusions can be drawn from table 3. First, it becomes apparent that the US finds it very difficult to be recognized as a leader in South and Latin America as well as in Asia. Just above ten percent of the respondents from these regions see the US as a leader on climate change. Respondents from Africa and Oceania are somewhat more likely to identify the US as a leader on climate change, but those that acknowledge the US as a leader are clearly concentrated in Europe and North America.

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conclusions on differences between these groups and the overall sample.

Based on a rather limited number of responses, a second conclusion of interest is that recognition of the G77 as a leader is especially strong in South and Latin America. In other regions only a minority of respondents (ranging from 8 to 33 percent) recognize the G77 as a leader whereas 64 percent of respondents from South and Latin America look to the G77 for leadership. These regional differences regarding the G77's status as a leader should be seen against the backdrop of Brazil's strong position in the Group of 77.

As the world's tenth largest economy, Brazil has the potential for exercising structural leadership and for wielding substantial influence among developing countries. When it comes to climate change, Brazil has been an important player in the past as it hosted the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, and also played an important role in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations. Over the years, Brazil has on a number of occasions demonstrated its ambition to be a driving force within the Group of 77. Even if the formal leadership of the G77 is linked to the rotating chairmanship, Brazil has come to occupy an informal leadership position within the Group of 77.<sup>29</sup>

From table 2 we concluded that EU and China are the two actors most widely regarded as leaders on climate change. From table 3 an interesting picture emerges when it comes to the exact pattern of recognition of these two leadership contenders. The data reveals that respondents from Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania tend to look to the European Union for leadership, whereas respondents from Africa and South and Latin America to a higher degree see China rather than the EU as a leader on climate change.

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<sup>29</sup> Viola 2004, 42; Lahsen 2007, 187.

The survey also reveals a striking difference in that almost twice as many African respondents view China as one of the leaders rather than the G77. Evidently this reflects China's intensifying overseas activities and the more visible and active role China has taken in recent years in the intergovernmental climate change negotiations.

### *The Importance of Roles*

In order to exercise effective climate change leadership an actor needs to be recognized as a leader first and foremost by those actors who will determine the outcome of the negotiating efforts to find a successor agreement to replace the Kyoto protocol. How different leadership contenders are perceived by government representatives and negotiators is therefore crucial. However, it may also be important to be recognized as a leader by other types of elite actors, e.g. interest organizations, researchers and media representatives, as these may have the power to influence the general picture of an actor's importance and standing in terms of leadership.

The respondents' views on leadership by primary role are presented in table 4 below. The number of negotiators, government and NGO representatives is large enough to enable comparisons between these groups. The other categories are too small to provide statistically meaningful comparisons but are still included as indicative results.

*Table 4: Actors perceived as leaders on climate change, by primary role (percentages)*

	<i>EU as leader</i>	<i>US as leader</i>	<i>China as leader</i>	<i>G77 as leader</i>	<i>n</i>
Negotiator	62	16	68	46	37
Government	54	22	30	22	37
NGO	55	33	45	28	40
Research	85	31	31	15	13
Business	75	33	50	25	12
UN and IGO	56	31	31	11	9
Media	80	20	20	0	5
Other	73	27	45	27	11
<b>All</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>27</b>	164

Interestingly enough the EU was most often mentioned as a leader on climate change policy by respondents in all categories but one. Among negotiators, China was instead the actor most commonly perceived as a leader. Also the G77 was recognized by almost half the negotiators as a leader whereas only 16 percent of the negotiators reported they saw the US as a leader in the field of climate change.

If we instead look solely at how government representatives view the different leadership contenders we find numbers more in line with the overall picture. How should this substantial difference—especially when it comes to how China is perceived as a leader—between negotiators and government representatives be understood?

If we break down government representative and negotiator data by regional belonging we see that the different geographical composition of these two primary role categories does not explain the differences in leadership perceptions.

Table 5: Actors perceived by negotiators and government representatives as leaders on climate change, by regional belonging (percentages)

	<i>Negotiators</i>					<i>Government representatives</i>				
	<i>EU</i>	<i>US</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>G77</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>US</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>G77</i>	<i>n</i>
Africa	40	20	80	20	5	43	43	71	43	7
Asia	40	0	60	40	10	50	17	8	17	12
Europe	89	33	67	33	9	50	33	33	33	6
North America	-	-	-	-	0	100	25	50	0	4
South and Latin America	70	20	80	80	10	33	0	33	33	3
Oceania	50	0	0	0	2	33	0	0	0	3
<b>All</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>

If we first concentrate on leadership perceptions among negotiators we see that a vast majority from all regions, with the exception of Oceania, see China as a leader on climate change. In Africa, Asia, Europe, as well as South and Latin America, identification of China as a leader well exceeds the average identification rate of 46 percent in the overall sample (see table 4). If we turn our attention to government representatives we see that recognition of China as a leader is considerably lower on average and also varies considerably across geographical regions. Fewer than one out of ten of the Asian government representatives see China as a leader whereas seven out of ten of the respondents representing African governments do so. Still, in all regions negotiators are more inclined than government representatives to see Chinas as a leader.

One explanation for the difference in leadership perceptions between negotiators and government representatives could be that negotiators are more likely to base their views on

the actual work being done by Chinese representatives inside the climate regime, whereas government representatives' perceptions may reflect this group's diversity and, in many cases, greater distance from the negotiations. Negotiators are, as a rule, much better informed of the actual work being carried out in the climate change regime as they are personally involved in the negotiations. The government representative category is a more heterogeneous one. While it includes government experts that are closely tied to the negotiations, many of them have other government functions and lack firsthand knowledge of what is unfolding in the negotiation process.

In conclusion, the important difference in leadership perceptions between these key groups may reflect a view among negotiators that China is playing an increasingly active role in the on-going climate negotiations, as opposed to a more general, and perhaps somewhat outdated, image of China's climate change policy and its role in world politics. That over 70 percent of African government representatives report they see China as a leader on climate change can be understood against the backdrop of China's importance to the G77 and its active involvement in many African countries – as aid donor, trade partner, and investor.

#### *Issue Specific Leadership?*

Due to the fact that climate change spans a vast array of sectors and since the climate change negotiations address multiple issue areas, it may be difficult for any one actor to be recognized as a leader on all of the different issues that fit under the climate change rubric. This raises an interesting question: Is there issue specific leadership within the climate change field?

*Table 6: Actors perceived as leaders on climate change, by issue interest (percentages)*

	<i>EU as leader</i>	<i>US as leader</i>	<i>China as leader</i>	<i>G77 as leader</i>	n
Mitigation	64	26	47	29	85
Future agreements	63	25	51	32	70
Adaptation	56	25	51	32	85
Equity	46	21	54	46	28
Energy	67	35	46	25	52
CCS	65	46	54	27	26
<b>All</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>27</b>	

Table 6 above presents the actors perceived as leaders on climate change by issue interest and the data mainly confirms the general pattern of dual leadership featuring the EU and China in the leading roles. However, the pattern emerging from the data does indicate that there is some justification for speaking about issue specific leadership within the field of climate change.

First, when it comes to the issues of reaching future agreements and mitigation, the EU and China hold strong positions and are clearly the two actors to which prospective followers look to for leadership. Perceptions of China’s leadership on these issues is somewhat higher than its overall leadership recognition, nonetheless the results confirm the overall picture of a shared leadership between the EU and China.

However, when we turn our attention adaptation and equity issues we see that the EU is perceived as a leader to a much lesser degree than its overall shares. Less than fifty percent

of those who report an interest in equity see the EU as a leader. On these issues the respondents are as, or even more, likely to look to China for leadership. It is also significant that the G77 to a far higher degree is seen as a leader by those reporting an interest in equity.

A third interesting feature is that the US scores substantially higher as a leader among those who report an interest in the issues of energy and carbon capture and storage (CCS). The US position is still fairly weak, but almost half of those who report an interest in CCS see the US as a leader. This result makes sense in light of the fact that the US aggressively promoted technological solutions to address the climate problem in *fora* such as the major emitters meetings started by the Bush administration. The EU's position as a leader is once again reaffirmed and China, which has been garnering attention for its recent large investments in clean energy, also emerges as a possible candidate for leadership with regards to energy and CCS.

The main conclusion to be drawn from table 6 is that there is indeed some justification to speak of issue specific leadership concerning climate change. It is also interesting to note that the pattern we have discerned bears some resemblance to the Bali building blocks. First, when it comes to the issues of a future agreement and mitigation, it is evident that the EU and China are both perceived as occupying leadership roles. On issues concerning adaptation and equity, however, a more fragmented picture emerges and the EU's position as a leader is much weaker. On these issues China and even the G77 matters as much as the EU. Finally, when it comes to the issues of technology development and energy, we find a third leadership constellation as the US is also perceived as a leader alongside the EU and China.

## **Conclusions**

During the preparations leading up to the COP 15 Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, it was repeatedly emphasized that leadership would be imperative if the world was to reach a new global climate change agreement. Prior to the conference, both the European Union and the US declared they were prepared to step up to the plate and provide the necessary international leadership to confront the climate change challenge. However, the Copenhagen Accord, while hailed as a meaningful step forward in some quarters, was seen as a disappointing failure by others. The inability of any one leadership candidate to mobilize widespread support for its vision of a final deal was presaged by our results from COP 14 which showed a fragmented pattern of leadership recognition.

Previous research on leadership has predominately focused on the supply side of leadership and the different modes of leadership a potential leader might deploy in the pursuit of its ends. It is an obdurate fact, however, that leadership status is conferred by the existence of followers.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the demand side of leadership is, at the very least, of equal importance and yet it has received scant attention in the literature. In this study we have focused on perceptions of leadership and the presence of followers in the field of climate change. Do the self-proclaimed leaders have any followers?

Ever since the EU took on the mission to save the Kyoto Protocol it has devoted much energy to portraying itself as a leader on climate change. The data show that among the various leadership candidates the EU is most widely recognized as a leader—almost two-thirds of the respondents report they see EU as a leader on climate change. However, the data also show that we do not have a single undisputed leader in the international effort to

combat climate change. Although the European Union was most likely to be recognized as the primary leader on climate change, only a small minority (14 percent of all respondents) reported they saw the EU as the only leader on climate change. Our data clearly suggest that within the field of climate change, particularly as the scope of the negotiations expands, the leadership mantle will have to be worn by more than one actor. It is evident among the COP 14 participants that the US and the G77 were not seen as leaders. Instead, according to our survey results, China is emerging as the main leadership contender alongside the EU.

When breaking down the data we found three important dimensions of leadership recognition:

First, there was a strong geographical component, as the various leadership contenders were more widely recognized as leaders in their “home constituencies” than among respondents in general. These results are in line with what could be expected given what previous research has found.<sup>31</sup> Given the size of our sample we were able to detect, however, that the effect of geographical belonging concerning leadership perceptions was not equally strong in all subgroups. EU-citizens and respondents from the G77 countries were the ones most likely to identify “their” candidates as leaders. Also, while the US was much more likely to be viewed as a leader on its home soil, it was striking that only a third of respondents from North America saw the US as a leader on climate change. It is also noteworthy that China was most widely recognized as a leader not in Asia, but rather in Africa as well as South and Latin America.

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<sup>30</sup> Underdal 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Gupta and van der Grijp 2000; Elgström 2007.

A second important dimension is linked to the different roles of respondents. An overwhelming majority (75-85 percent) of media representatives, researchers and business people saw the EU as a leader. However, if we look at the actors more closely involved in the actual business of negotiating a new climate agreement we find a radically different picture. In these groups views on leadership confirm the overall pattern of shared leadership between EU and China. However, an important difference was detected between negotiators and government representatives, as China was actually more commonly perceived as a leader among negotiators. That the actors which are best informed of what is going on “backstage” see China as the primary leader, is an indication of China’s growing importance in the negotiating proceedings.

Finally, there is also some evidence of issue specific climate change leadership—much like Gupta and van der Grijp reported a decade ago—and the pattern observed bears some resemblance to the Bali building blocks. China and the EU clearly emerge as leaders when it comes to mitigation and the issue of future agreements. However, among those respondents who reported an interest in adaptation and equity issues, China was the strongest leadership candidate whereas the EU’s position as a leader was substantially weaker. On the issues of energy and CCS, leadership was again shared between the EU and China, but on these issues the US was also seen as a leader by a substantial proportion of respondents.

Climate change is an extremely complex issue and effective leadership is probably a necessary prerequisite if the world is to make the changes needed to address the climate

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change challenge. However, it is no easy task to provide effective leadership on such a multifaceted issue which involves high stakes for all parties involved.

Structural, directional, and idea-based leadership can all be important elements of a successful strategy to combat climate change. How do we relate our findings to the three modes of leadership?

With regard to the EU, it seems that the directional and idea based leadership strategies employed by the EU resulted in high levels of leadership recognition in Poznań. However, the distance between what was achieved at COP 15 in Copenhagen compared to what the EU was seeking, suggests that the EU will need to do a better job of melding these leadership modes with structural leadership as well as partnering more effectively with other structurally significant actors if it is to achieve more substantive negotiation results.

The levels of leadership recognition for China suggest that its vision of what developed and developing countries should do to address the climate challenge, which can be seen as idea-based leadership, has resonated with many, particularly with the African participants. Also, China's aggressive investment in clean energy technology can be interpreted as directional leadership and has resulted in fairly high levels of recognition in that area.

Our results concerning the levels of leadership recognition for the US at COP 14 and the difficulties the Obama administration encountered during the negotiations in Copenhagen, show that leadership recognition and negotiating results cannot be achieved solely through structural leadership.

Moreover, our results indicate that it will be difficult for any single actor to successfully play all these different leadership roles. Ideally a number of actors would join forces to form a leadership complex to aggressively confront the challenge of climate change.

During the late 1980s and the 1990s the EU and the US worked together and offered co-leadership on climate change. This cooperation came to an abrupt end in 2001 when the US administration under President George W. Bush declared that the United States would not observe the Kyoto Protocol. The impact of this decision is clearly seen in our results, which, we should remember, are snapshots of perceptions at a given point in time and could be subject to change as events evolve. For example, the fact that respondents did not see the US as a leader may be largely an effect of the Bush administration's eight years of disengagement on this issue. The reversal of US policy and the active US presence in Copenhagen could dramatically alter perceptions of the COP 15 participants. With President Obama in the White House there is a real possibility that the US will return to its role as a climate change leader and be willing to act as a constructive partner with the EU or other international partners such as China. However, from the perspective of potential followers and judging from the perceptions of surveyed COP 14 participants, the US has a lot of work to do. In fact, in Poznań the majority of potential followers were turning first and foremost to the EU and China for leadership.

Our results point towards the conclusion that it is not just EU or US action or the transatlantic relationship that are the most important factors for achieving global cooperation, but rather it is relations with China that will increasingly matter. While it would be ideal if the main leadership contenders were able to form a leadership complex to address the climate change challenge, their different interests and their varying visions of

what should be done, which appeal to vastly different groups of potential followers, indicate that it will be difficult to bring together the leadership ingredients conducive to reaching a negotiating breakthrough.

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