

■ Strengths and weaknesses of COP21

World political leaders officially signed up to the Paris Agreement in April 2016. As of February 2017, 195 UN members had signed the treaty, 132 of whom had ratified it. The Paris Agreement requires all parties to put forward their best efforts through 'nationally determined contributions' (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead. This includes requirements that all parties report regularly on their emissions and on implementation efforts.

The Paris Agreement's central aim is to avoid a temperature increase of 2°C, and make every effort to limit the increase to a lower target of 1.5°C. Additionally:

- GHG emissions will be allowed to rise for now (but technologically enhanced carbon capture will be needed later this century to reduce GHG levels).
- Emissions targets will be set by countries separately, but reviewed every five years. After each five-year review, emissions levels will be decreased further.
- The Agreement also provides for enhanced transparency of action by insisting that accurate emissions records will be kept and made available to all other countries.
- Wealthy countries will share their low-GHG science and technology with developing countries and the most vulnerable countries.
- Wealthy countries will provide finance for low-income nations most affected by anthropogenic climate change.
- Developed countries that have historically contributed a large proportion of the anthropogenic GHG stock in the atmosphere will recognize the 'loss and damage' inflicted on poor countries because of climate change. In doing so, they acknowledge that the sources of GHG emissions may be spatially distant from the countries most impacted by them.

Some strengths and weaknesses of the outcomes from COP21 Paris Agreement are shown in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Strengths and weaknesses of the COP21 Paris Agreement

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Getting 195 countries to agree on anything is a major achievement! ■ From a scientific perspective, COP21 gives us hope that so-called 'dangerous climate change' across all continents can be avoided. ■ From an economic perspective, the agreement gives countries time to decarbonize their economies 'without sacrificing economic prosperity on the altar of environmental wellbeing'. ■ From a political perspective, it allows all governments to hold each other to frequent account regarding emissions levels and targets. Ten-year reviews, for instance, would be too infrequent. ■ Finally, from the perspective of poorer, low-lying countries like Bangladesh, elements of COP21 'promise a degree of justice for those adversely affected by wealthier countries' previous GHG emissions'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Massive GHG reductions will be required by 2050 to keep the temperature increase below 2°C; some countries may find it too expensive to phase out things like coal-fired power stations over the required timescale. ■ If a country is hit by an economic recession or experiences political change, its priorities may alter and climate could slip down the domestic agenda. (In the USA, President Trump has reversed decisions made by President Obama was, for instance.) ■ Replacing fossil-fuel economics with renewable-energy ones sufficient to maintain decent lifestyles requires technologies that have yet to be invented. ■ The Paris Agreement is 'merely a statement of intent, albeit an important one. The key to its success or failure lies in...the fine details of how countries respond when one or more fail to honour their commitments'.

Source: Noel Castree, *Geography Review* 30 (1)

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In 2017, US President Donald Trump announced the USA would withdraw from the Paris Agreement. However, the Mayors of many US cities have said they will continue to act, at the local scale, to reduce emissions in line with the Paris Agreement.