Navigating Power Dynamics in Global Climate Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for Global Citizens' Assemblies in COP Meetings

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Preface

What do non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and stakeholders in the Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings think of global citizens' assemblies? How can advocates of global citizens' assemblies generate awareness about this democratic innovation among actors in global climate governance?

This technical paper addresses these and other critical questions. Through a power-mapping analysis, Dahlia Simangan and Truong Pham examine possibilities for deepening alliances and docking global citizens' assemblies in COP meetings. This technical paper is part of the Global Citizens' Assembly Network's (GloCAN) research on the external governance of global citizens' assemblies, particularly the ways in which the impact of these assemblies can be connected with the wider initiatives of civil society groups.

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Key Findings

This technical paper maps the power dynamics between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders in the meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The results from the survey and interviews with representatives of NGOs admitted to COP meetings aim to inform how global citizens' assemblies can achieve and maintain influence in global climate governance and sustain engagement with other civil society organisations (CSOs).

1. **Most survey respondents described their interaction with other actors involved in COP meetings as collaborative**, especially with fellow NGOs, followed by other CSOs who are not formal observers, and the media.

2. **They also consider most actors they interacted with supportive and influential, although other admitted NGOs and CSOs are not necessarily the most influential**. Party delegates are considered the most influential, but not necessarily the most supportive.

3. **Most survey respondents agree that ordinary people's participation is important for global climate governance, and COP meetings could do more by** integrating ordinary people's work or voices.

4. **Most survey respondents are unaware of global citizens' assemblies.** Of the 14 respondents who interacted with the Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis, 13 had collaborative interactions, and 1 had both collaborative and contentious interactions.

5. **While most survey respondents had not interacted with the Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis, most are open to working with them.**

6. **Most interview respondents recognise the influential role of the private sector in the negotiations due to their financial resources**. However,

they described some businesses and corporations as not necessarily or concretely advocating for climate action.

7. **Interview respondents recognised the practical challenges of bringing more people into global climate governance** and suggested better planning and coordination. Doing so requires a democratic process facilitated by equal access to scientific knowledge and bridging the Global North-Global South divide.

Recommendations

Our study recommends the following pathways toward meaningful collaboration between global citizens' assemblies and other stakeholders attending COPs.

1. **Sustain engagement with NGOs, as they are the most receptive to the influence of global citizens' assemblies**. Such engagement can revolve around building networks and alliances, raising awareness, and obtaining and sharing information and expertise, as these activities correspond with the organisational objectives and indicators of success among survey respondents. Collaboration with NGOs and other non-state actors can enact bottom-up systemic change in global climate governance.

2. **Enhance or initiate collaborative engagement with the private sector over shared interests in climate action**. While there are ongoing private-public collaborations surrounding global climate governance, a mechanism for regular discussions between CSOs, citizens' assemblies, and businesses is imperative. These discussions could be organised within COP or in conjunction with regional networks. Such a mechanism will help close the gap between advocates without sufficient financial capacity and corporate interests that undermine climate action.

3. **Improve access to scientific knowledge about climate change and its impacts.** Ordinary people are not always aware of the science of climate change and the political dynamics in COP meetings, limiting their

potential to influence negotiations. It is crucial for citizens' deliberations to draw on this knowledge to make a meaningful impact on global climate governance. As intermediaries between government and communities, NGOs can help make scientific knowledge and climate negotiations more accessible to the public.

For comments and invitations for further conversation, please contact Dahlia Simangan at simangan@hiroshima-u.ac.jp.

Background

Climate governance refers to a set of legal instruments, institutional frameworks, and other mechanisms aimed at addressing the causes and impacts of climate change, from mitigation to adaptation and across various levels of decision-making and scales of implementation. At the intergovernmental level, the United Nations (UN) facilitates the global regime for climate governance through the annual COP meetings. COP is the central decision-making body of the UNFCCC. Since 1995, parties to the UNFCCC, adopted in 1992, congregate annually to discuss, negotiate, and decide on global climate action. In addition to spaces for formal diplomatic processes (i.e. Blue Zone), COP meetings also provide spaces (i.e. Green Zone) for civil society events and activities to encourage broader participation and media coverage.

As climate change worsens, the global governance regime is also evolving in terms of targets and logic to consider urgent and new challenges. This evolution can be observed over the years—from the political challenges of implementing binding agreements under the Kyoto Protocol (COP3) to broader but voluntary participation encouraged through the Copenhagen Accord (COP15) and the catalysing pledge-and-review process in the Paris Agreement (COP21).[1] In these stages, the role of non-state actors has also expanded and become more integrated into the UNFCCC, as they are increasingly expected to contribute to climate action.[2] Non-state actors in COP meetings include international and regional organisations, development agencies, businesses, media organisations, research and academic institutions, and NGOs.

The range of actors and institutions involved in climate governance makes it challenging to navigate their interrelations, particularly how they shape each other's interests and preferences, influencing participation and decision-making processes. Since power influences forms of governance, it is imperative to understand how power is expressed and perceived.

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[1] David Held and Charles Roger, "Three Models of Global Climate Governance: From Kyoto to Paris and Beyond," *Global Policy* 9, no. 4 (2018): 527–37.

[2] Karin Bäckstrand et al. "Non-State Actors in Global Climate Governance: From Copenhagen to Paris and Beyond," *Environmental Politics* 26, no. 4 (July 4, 2017): 561–79.

Power dynamics occur across levels (global, national, or local) and at various spaces (closed, invited, or created), expressed or perceived visibly or invisibly.[3] These dynamics are influenced by material, institutional, or ideational sources of power. One commonly referred to definition of power is the probability of achieving specific objectives within a social milieu despite resistance.[4] Particularly in contexts of advocacy and change, power lies not only in authority and legitimacy, but more so in the ability or agency to make a choice and the institutional context in which such a choice is transformed into actions or outcomes.[5] Narrative power changes worldview; governing power drives decision-making; and people power enhances individual and collective agency and capacity.[6] In this taxonomy, power is a resource that can be channelled toward change and enhanced through participation.[7] Hence, to understand power is to situate it within practices and pathways for participation.

This paper focuses on the participation of non-state actors, particularly NGOs admitted to COP meetings. It is also important to examine the participation of NGOs in global climate governance because of their enhanced function of representation despite questions of legitimacy and accountability to groups they formally represent in COP meetings.[8] Alongside other stakeholders, NGOs interact with a complex network of actors with different structures of governance (global, national, or local levels), resources (material, institutional, ideational, or social), and capacities (making a choice or enacting a change).[9] In this complex web of relations or interactions, levels of influence and support are crucial factors for understanding power dynamics, which could signal collaborative or contentious interaction.

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[3] John Gaventa, "Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis," *IDS Bulletin* 37, no. 6 (2006): 23–33; see also, Aishwarya Manchani, "Designing Global Citizens' Assemblies for Impact: A Power Mapping of Key Actors Operating in and around the United Nations System" (GloCAN: Global Citizens' Assembly Network, 2024).

[4] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (University of California Press, 1978).

[5] Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinsohn, "Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators" (World Bank, February 2005).

[6] Katie Fox and Margaret Post, "Evaluating Power Building: Concepts and Considerations for Advocacy Evaluators," *New Directions for Evaluation* 2021, no. 171 (2021): 59–70.

[7] Fox and Post.

[8] Jonathan W. Kuyper and Karin Bäckstrand, "Accountability and Representation: Nonstate Actors in UN Climate Diplomacy," *Global Environmental Politics* 16, no. 2 (2016): 61–81.

[9] Jens Marquardt, "Conceptualizing Power in Multi-Level Climate Governance," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 154 (2017): 167–75.

Some NGOs have the comparative advantage in certain climate governance activities according to the power sources they use: "symbolic (legitimacy/ability to invoke moral claims), cognitive (knowledge, expertise), social (access to networks), leverage (access to key agents and decision-making processes), and material (access to resources and position in the global economy) powers."[10] Non-party stakeholders, such as NGOs, play an important role in transmitting broader societal concerns into party negotiations, but they currently have limited space for formal interventions.[11] On the other hand, their participation may also have detrimental effects. During the COP15 meetings in Copenhagen, the combination of increased registration, poor logistical planning, and security concerns from outsider tactics limited the participation of NGOs in formal processes.[12] As Dana Fisher put it, "Ironically, the more civil society actors try to participate—and the diversity of the perspectives represented by the civil society actors involved—the less access they are likely to have."[13]

Negotiations during COP meetings under the UNFCCC not only provide a valuable case study for observing power dynamics, but they also offer insights into how global citizens' assemblies can be integrated into global climate governance. The value of national citizens' assemblies in tackling complex global challenges, including climate change, is now broadly acknowledged.[14] Deliberative practices that are embedded in citizens' assemblies can be an enabling environment for balancing interests and localising policies. At the same time, there are challenges to how citizens' assemblies can directly impact policymaking,[15] and concerns surrounding the legitimacy of their

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[10] Naghmeh Nasiritousi, Mattias Hjerpe, and Björn-Ola Linnér, "The Roles of Non-State Actors in Climate Change Governance: Understanding Agency through Governance Profiles," *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 16, no. 1 (2016): 113.

[11] Wolfgang Obergassel et al. "From Regime-Building to Implementation: Harnessing the UN Climate Conferences to Drive Climate Action," *WIREs Climate Change* 13, no. 6 (2022): e797.

[12] Dana R. Fisher, "COP-15 in Copenhagen: How the Merging of Movements Left Civil Society Out in the Cold," *Global Environmental Politics* 10, no. 2 (2010): 11–17.

[13] Fisher, 16.

[14] Rebecca Willis, Nicole Curato, and Graham Smith, "Deliberative Democracy and the Climate Crisis," *WIREs Climate Change* 13, no. 2 (2022): e759; Lennart Kuntze and Lukas Paul Fesenfeld, "Citizen Assemblies Can Enhance Political Feasibility of Ambitious Climate Policies," SSRN Scholarly Paper (2021); Laura Devaney et al. "Deepening Public Engagement on Climate Change: Lessons from the DEvaCitizens' Assembly," Environmental Protection Agency Research Report, April 2020, https://www.epa.ie/publications/research/climate-change/Research_Report_314.pdf.

[15] Rebecca Wells, Candice Howarth, and Lina I. Brand-Correa, "Are Citizen Juries and Assemblies on Climate Change Driving Democratic Climate Policymaking? An Exploration of Two Case Studies in the UK," *Climatic Change* 168, no. 1 (2021): 5.

representation, organisation, and knowledge dissemination, among other issues.[16] Overall, implementing policy recommendations derived by citizens' assemblies depends on power dynamics and institutional capacity.[17]

This paper considers the above factors in analysing meaningful and impactful pathways for broader citizen participation in COP meetings. Developed around COP negotiations, the Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis aimed to bring the voices of ordinary people to multilateral negotiations on climate governance. Members of the Global Assembly presented their recommendations online at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021.[18] UN Secretary-General António Guterres endorsed the initiative as "a practical way of showing how we can accelerate action through solidarity and people power."[19] To sustain such an initiative, it is vital to identify the actors in COP meetings that can support and influence the voices of ordinary people and pathways for collaboration between NGOs and citizens' assemblies in future COP meetings. This direction also overlaps with two of the questions posed in the Global Assembly's evaluation report.[20] First, how can the Global Assembly achieve and maintain influence in the UNFCCC process? And what is the Global Assembly's relationship with other civil society groups? This paper responds to these questions.

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[16] Rebecca Sandover, Alice Moseley, and Patrick Devine-Wright, "Contrasting Views of Citizens' Assemblies: Stakeholder Perceptions of Public Deliberation on Climate Change," *Politics and Governance* 9, no. 2 (2021): 76–86.

[17] Pancho Lewis et al. "The Messy Politics of Local Climate Assemblies," *Climatic Change* 176, no. 6 (2023): 76.

[18] Global Assembly Team, "Report of the 2021 Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis: Executive Summary," November 2022, http://globalassembly.org.

[19] Global Assembly Team.

[20] Nicole Curato et al. *Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis Evaluation Report* (Australia: University of Canberra, 2023).

Research Design

Power mapping is used to examine the effects and distribution of power held by players or actors in various contexts, such as political negotiations, social movements, and organizational structures.[21] Power is influenced by several factors, including modes of governance, scale and level of operations, and access to material and non-material resources. Given that power dynamics are fluid and certain power orientations could have adverse effects, power mapping helps elucidate relations, strategies, and influence. Power mapping encompasses the identification of stakeholders and their interconnections, the representation of these interconnections through diagrams or charts, and the analysis of their interests and capacities.[22] It also entails historical, cultural, social, and economic contextualisation of their power dynamics and the generation of actionable recommendations.[23] In global climate governance, more specifically, power mapping aids in identifying and evaluating the role of non-state actors in influencing state parties' negotiations and enlisting support for climate action.

For this study, we integrated a power-mapping exercise in an online survey distributed from November 13 to December 13, 2023, to all NGOs formally admitted to COP meetings.[24] We used Qualtrics® to design and disseminate the survey through an anonymous link. Out of the 135 responses, 78 had nearly complete answers to the survey questions, forming the basis of our descriptive statistics. We used STATA for the statistical analysis, while R and Python were employed for data visualisation.

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[21] Eva Schiffer, "The Power Mapping Tool: A Method for the Empirical Research of Power Relations" (Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute, February 2007).
[22] Anita Tang, "Power Mapping and Analysis," The Commons: Social Change Library, February 20, 2019, https://commonslibrary.org/guide-power-mapping-and-analysis/.
[23] Tang.
[24] We relied on the contact information publicly available on the UNFCCC website. <https://unfccc.int/process/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/admitted-ngos/list-of-admitted-ngos> Our survey invitation to some email addresses bounced, and some contact persons were no longer involved in the listed NGOs. The survey was also distributed around the time when COP28 was being held in Dubai. We believe these factors influenced the survey response rate.

The limited number of responses is the main constraint of this study. While the survey results are not generalisable, they provide some insights for future investigations of power dynamics in COP meetings. To substantiate the survey results, we also interviewed respondents who indicated their interest in being interviewed. The interview was held online via Zoom and semi-structured, revolving around the following main questions. First, in what capacity do you participate in COP, and why is it necessary for you or your institution to participate in COP meetings? Second, who supports citizen participation in COP meetings, and what institutions and practices enable this support? Third, who holds influence in global climate governance, and what institutions and practices enable this influence? Seven interviews were done in English, and one was in French, subsequently translated into English. All interviews were transcribed and coded using MAXQDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The interview transcripts were coded, and MAXQDA's visual tools were then used to generate an intersection map, representing the links between different actors, their sources of power, and the nature of their interactions.

Results and Discussion

Participation

Figure 1 depicts the geographical distribution of the survey respondents.[25] Western Europe had the most responses, followed by Africa, and Latin American and the Caribbean States. NGOs admitted to COP are grouped into nine constituencies: business and industry NGOs (BINGO), environmental NGOs (ENGO), local government and municipal authorities (LGMA), indigenous peoples organisations (IPO), research and independent NGOs (RINGO), trade union NGOs (TUNGO), women and gender (WGC), youth NGOs (YOUNGO), and Farmers.[26] While NGOs are allowed to have multiple constituencies, they need to select only one primary constituency. Most survey respondents belong to ENGO (43.3%) and RINGO (42.5%), reflecting the overall constituency affiliation of all admitted NGOs.[27] Few respondents belong to IPO (6.3%), YOUNGO (5.7%), WGC (1.8%), and BINGO (0.4%). No respondent belongs to LGMA or TUNGO.[28]

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[25] The coordinates are based on the IP addresses of the survey respondents as the question about their location was optional in the questionnaire.

[26] UNFCCC, "Statistics on Admission," accessed January 16, 2024, https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/statistics-on-non-party-stakeholders/statistics-on-admission.

[27] UNFCCC.

[28] We combined Farmers and IPOs in the survey options.

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of survey respondents

When asked about their objectives for participating in COP meetings, we adopted the list of roles of non-state actors resulting from a more extensive survey conducted by Nasiritousi et al. during COP17 and COP18.[29] Among the listed objectives, the three most common are building networks and alliances, raising awareness, and obtaining and sharing information and expertise (Figure 2). This selection corresponds with their common activities in COP: network meetings with delegates, speaking at meetings, and organising or participating in the green zone (Figure 3). As for their indicators of success, participating in COP meetings, campaigning/raising awareness, building coalitions, and organising events or side events received the most responses (Figure 4). These top indicators also correspond with the most selected objectives and activities.

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[29] Nasiritousi, Hjerpe, and Linnér, "The Roles of Non-State Actors."
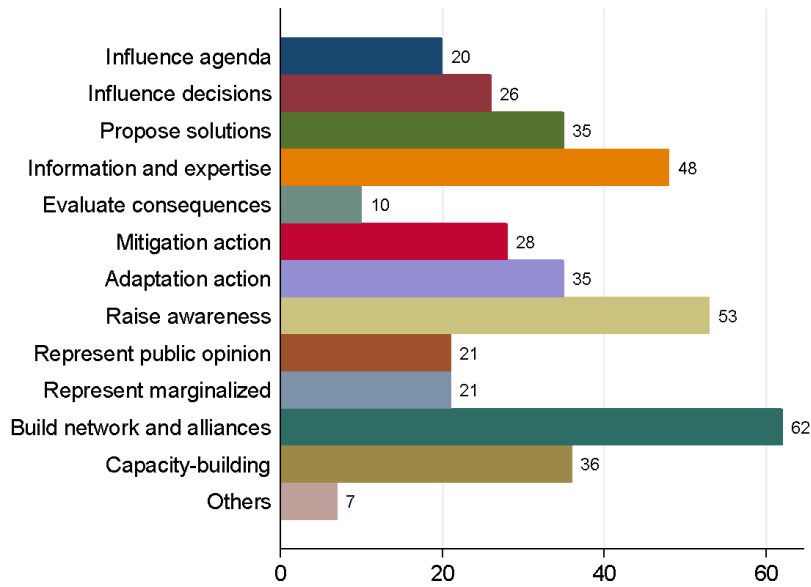
Figure 2. Organisations' objectives for attending COP meetings
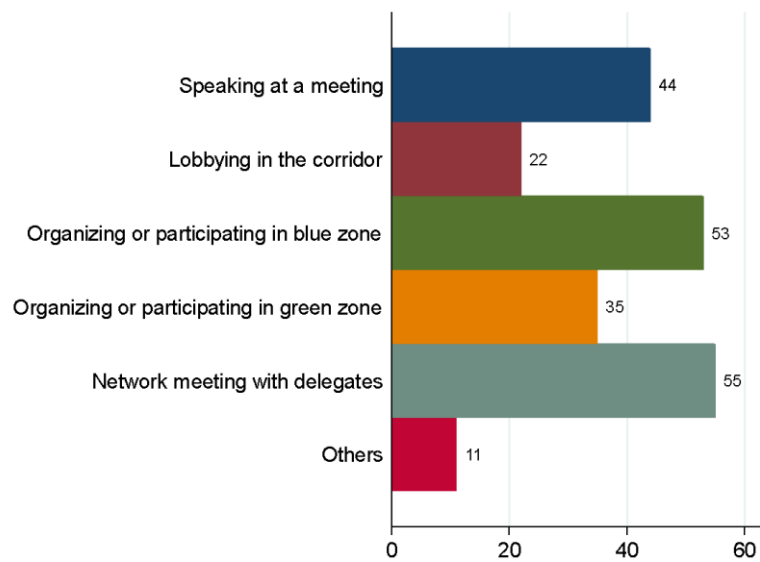
Figure 3. Organisations' activities during COP meetings
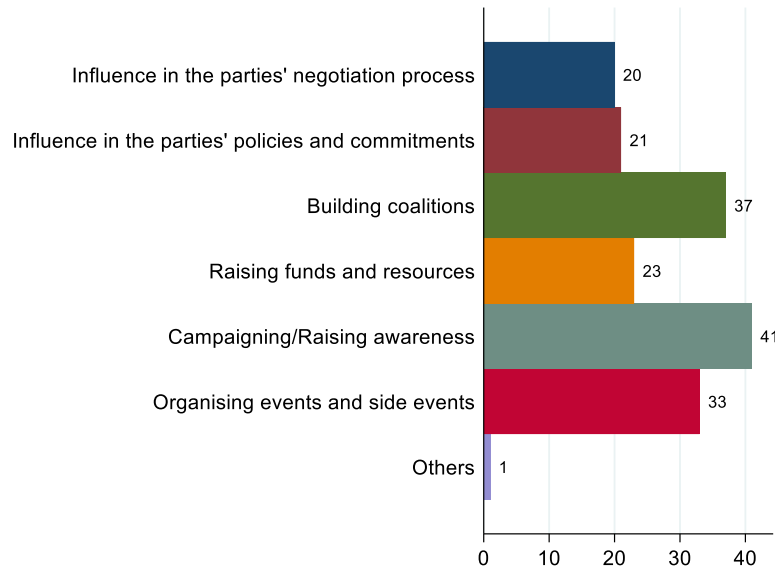
Figure 4. Organisations' indicators of success from participating in COP meetings.

Interaction

Most respondents described their interaction with COP stakeholders as collaborative. When disaggregated according to groups, they mainly collaborate with fellow NGOs, followed by other CSOs and media (Figure 5). Party delegates, UN agencies, and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) had the most "no direct interaction" responses among the groups. This lack of interaction is likely a reflection of the "disconnect between negotiators and non-party stakeholders due to the nature of negotiations taking place in separate spaces…, but also due to growing agendas and the complexity of the process."[30]

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[30] Alexandra Buylova, Naghmeh Nasiritousi, and Björn-Ola Linnér, "The Future of the UNFCCC" (Mistra Geopolitics, November 2023), 5, https://www.mistra-geopolitics.se/publications/future-of-the-unfccc/.
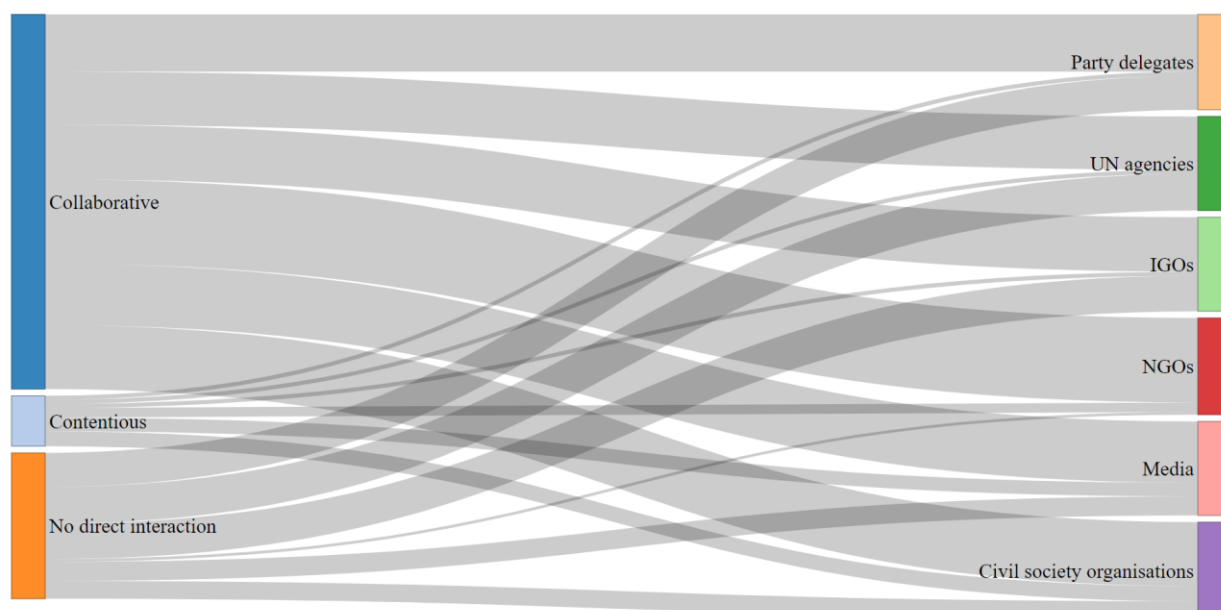
Figure 5. NGOs' interaction with other groups in COP meetings

Respondents are mostly collaborative with Western European and Other States, followed by African, and Latin American and Caribbean States (Figure 6).[31] Asian States received the least "contentious" response, although the "collaborative" and "no direct interaction" responses were almost even. Among the party delegates, Eastern European States had the least responses for "collaborative", although it is also almost even with "no direct interaction", and had the most "contentious" response, albeit very minimal. The geographical distribution of the respondents might have influenced these results.

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[31] We acknowledge that interest-based party groupings (e.g., Arab States and Least Development Countries) are referenced more commonly during the negotiations, but we used the traditional five regional groups. Note that in the Western European and Other States Group, "Other States" include Australia, Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the United States of America, but not Japan, which is in the Asian Group.
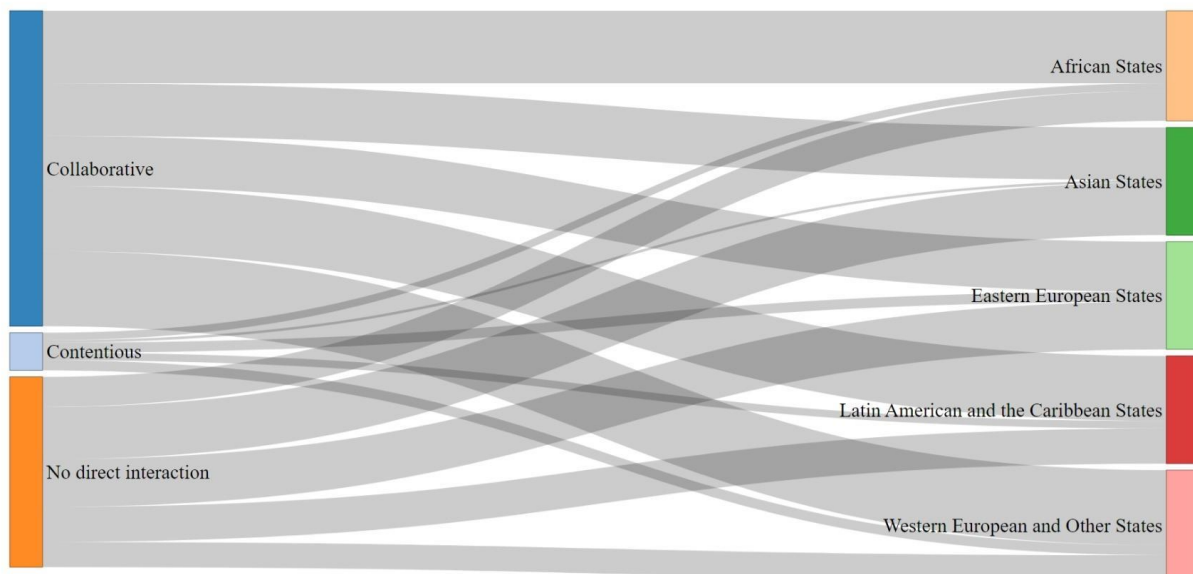
Figure 6. NGOs' interaction with party delegates at COP meetings

Regarding constituency, the respondents are mostly collaborative with ENGO, followed by YOUNGO, RINGO, Farmers and IPO, and WGC (Figure 7). These results can be explained by the constituency most respondents belong to, i.e. ENGO and RINGO. It is worth noting, however, that BINGO and TUNGO had more "contentious" or "no direct interaction" responses than "collaborative."
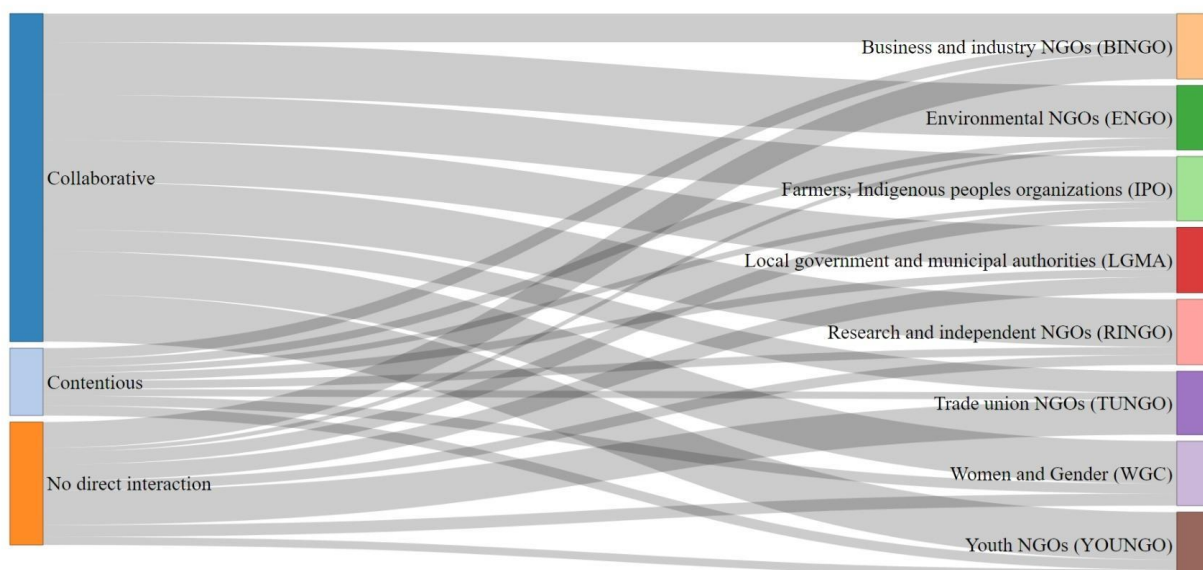
Figure 7. NGOs' interaction with other NGOs based on constituency

Influence and Support

Drawing on the power mapping graph developed by Whelan,[32] we gauged support scores by asking respondents to rate each stakeholder's support level for their organisation's objectives. These ratings were based on a 5-point Likert scale, with options ranging from "strongly oppose" (coded as 1) to "strongly support" (coded as 5). Concurrently, respondents evaluated the influence of each stakeholder using a similar scale that ranged from "not influential" (1) to "highly influential" (5). To facilitate more effective visualisation, we converted these discrete support and influence scores into continuous variables by adding a random value between 0 and 0.5 to each score. This technique was applied solely to enhance the clarity of markers in the power mapping graphs.

Respondents consider most stakeholders to be supportive and influential (Figure 8). However, some view their fellow admitted NGOs and other CSOs as supportive, but not necessarily influential. The same can be said for UN agencies, IGOs, and the media. Notably, party delegates are the only group that received low support ratings. They are perceived as the most influential, but not necessarily the most supportive. (Supplementary Figure 1 of the Appendix.) These results align with previous findings that the potential of citizens' assemblies for systemic transformations is higher if supported by non-state actors with sufficient resources rather than being formally integrated into state-led processes and institutions.[33]

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[32] James Whelan, "Process Guide: Power Mapping," The Change Agency, accessed January 16, 2024, https://thechangeagency.org/power-mapping/.
[33] Claire Mellier and Stuart Capstick, "How can citizens' assemblies help navigate the systemic transformations required by the polycrisis? Learnings and recommendations for practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and civil society" (Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA), May 2023).
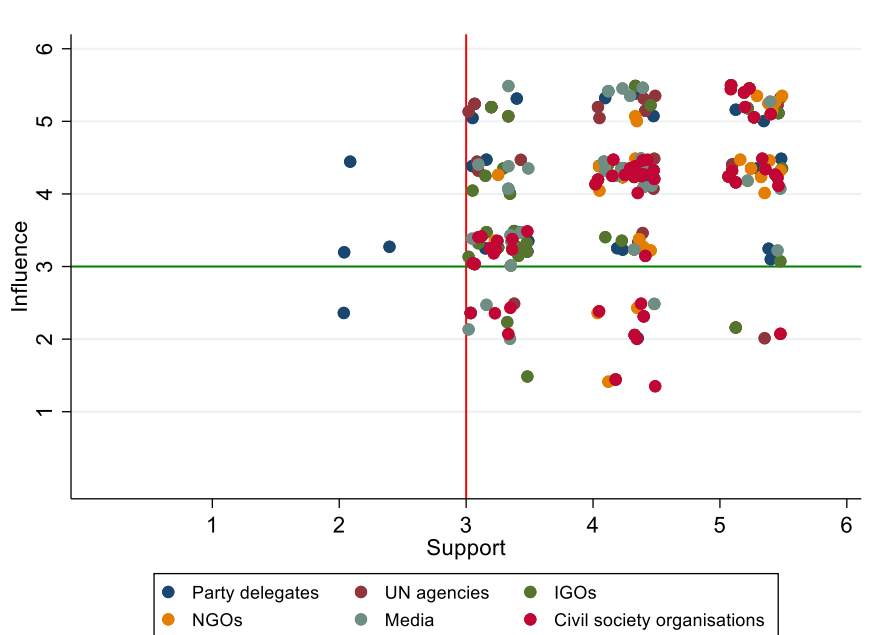
Figure 8. Power mapping of different groups involved in COP meetings from the perspective of NGOs

The perceived influence of party delegates varies according to regional groupings (Figure 8). Asian States, Eastern European States, and Western European and Other States had more responses pertaining to low levels of influence compared to African States and Latin American and Caribbean States. The groupings with responses indicating low levels of support are Asian States and Western European and Other States, while African States had the most responses of high support (Supplementary Figure 2 of the Appendix).
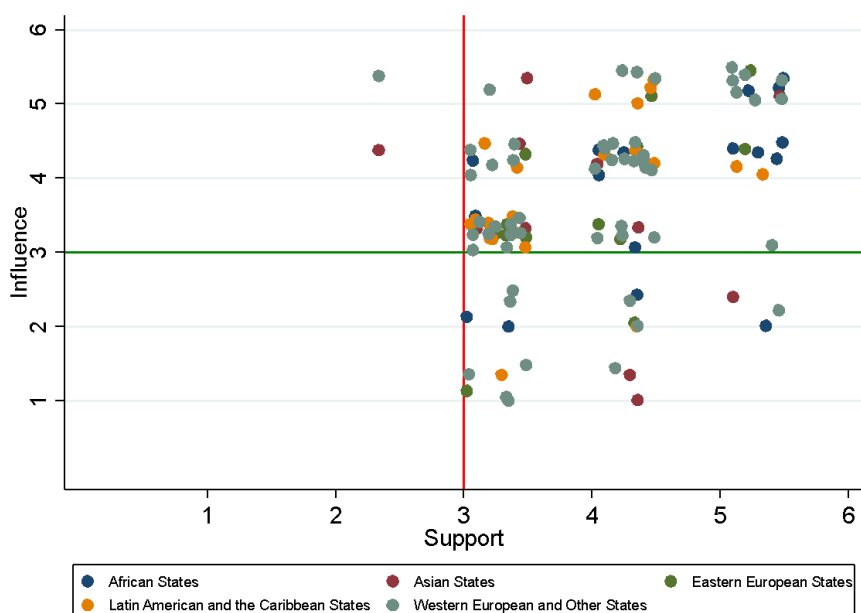
Figure 9. Power mapping of party delegates to COP meetings from the perspective of NGOs

As mentioned earlier, NGOs are also perceived to be generally supportive but not necessarily influential (Figure 10). For responses indicating low levels of support from fellow NGOs, BINGO had three responses, and ENGO, LGMA, and TUNGO had one each. WGC received the most responses of low levels of influence, although the difference is minimal compared to other constituencies. Overall, ENGO is perceived to be either "supportive" or "extremely supportive", while the other constituencies had more "neutral" responses. (See Supplementary Figure 3 of the Appendix.)
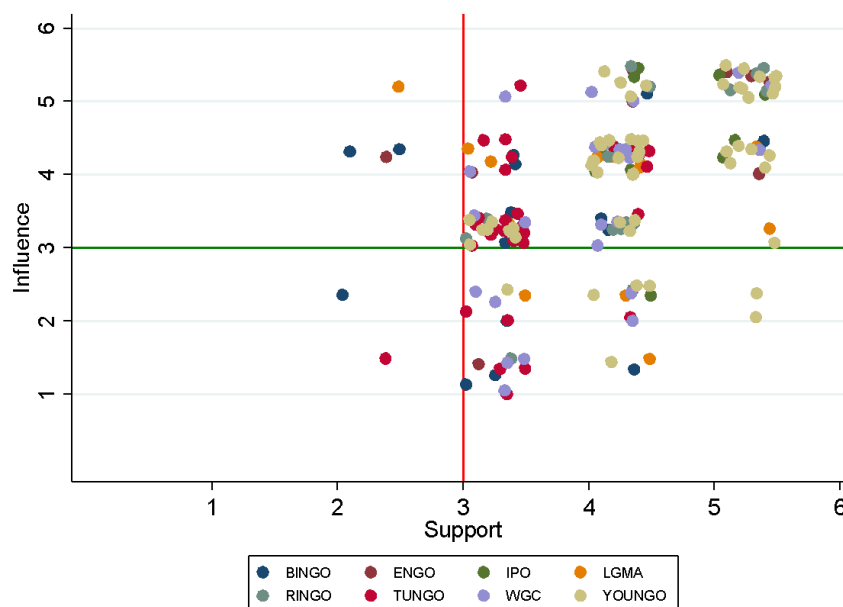
Figure 10. Power mapping of NGOs based on constituency in COP meetings from the perspective of NGOs

Perception of ordinary people's participation

85% agree or strongly agree that ordinary people's participation is important for global climate governance, and that COP meetings could do more when integrating ordinary people's work or voices (Figure 11). This percentage, however, does not fully correspond with the only 44% of respondents who disagree or strongly disagree that COP meetings are not the right platform for ordinary people and the 50% who disagree or strongly disagree that COP meetings are inclusive of ordinary people. The potential explanation for this

discrepancy is that COPs were not originally designed for ordinary people's participation. Nevertheless, 44% disagree or strongly disagree that COP meetings have mechanisms for broader participation.
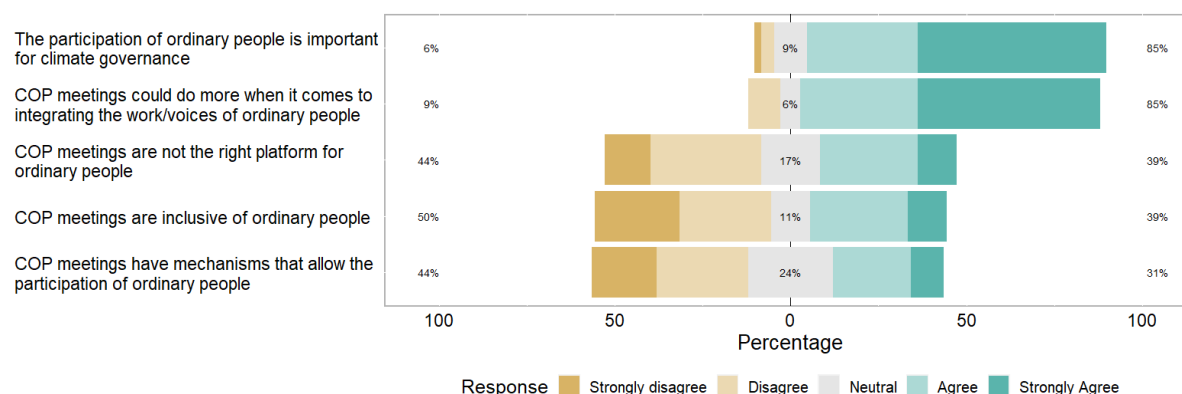
Figure 11. Perception of ordinary people's participation in global climate governance

While most respondents do not know the interaction between COP stakeholders and global citizens' assemblies, owing to the fact that they are not familiar with the work of the latter, they opined that NGOs are generally the most receptive to the influence of global citizens' assemblies, followed by CSOs who are not formal observers, media, IGOs, and UN agencies (Figure 12). Party delegates are seen as least receptive, with 15% of the respondents viewing them as resistant to the influence of global citizens' assemblies.
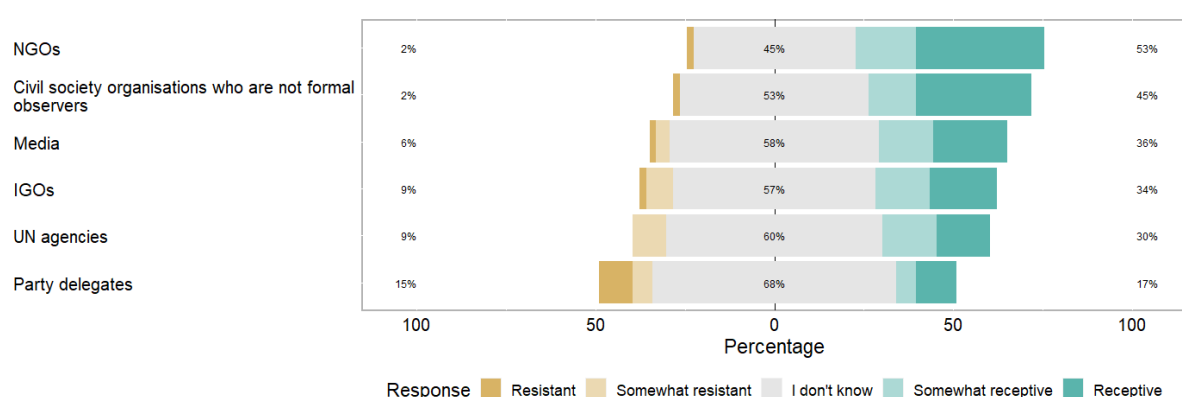
Figure 12. NGOs' perception of how different groups involved in COP meetings receive or resist the influence of global citizens' assemblies

Among party delegates, the responses do not vary significantly, but African states received the most responses for receptiveness, followed by Western European and Other States, Latin American and Caribbean States, and Asian

States (Figure 13). Although they also received more responses indicating receptiveness than resistance, Eastern European States had the least responses indicating receptiveness to global citizens' assemblies.
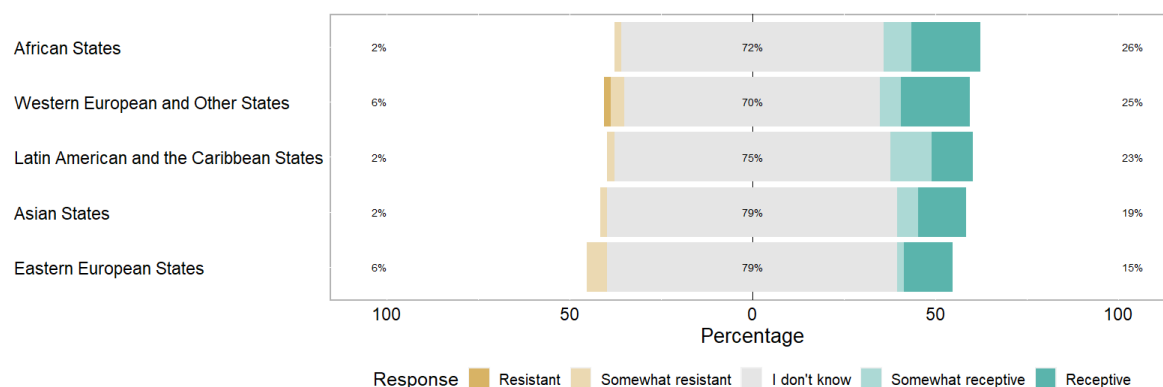
Figure 13. NGOs' perception of how different party delegates to COP meetings receive or resist the influence of global citizens' assemblies

Among constituencies, ENGO is viewed as the most receptive, with the majority of the respondents (53%) perceiving them as either "receptive" or "somewhat receptive" (Figure 14). Although the differences are minimal, YOUNGO received the most responses indicating receptiveness, followed by WGC, RINGO, IPO and Farmers, and LGMA. TUNGO and BINGO each had 21% of the respondents perceiving them as either "receptive" or "somewhat receptive". Results show that BINGO is considered the least receptive, with 15% of the respondents viewing them as resistant to the influence of global citizens' assemblies.
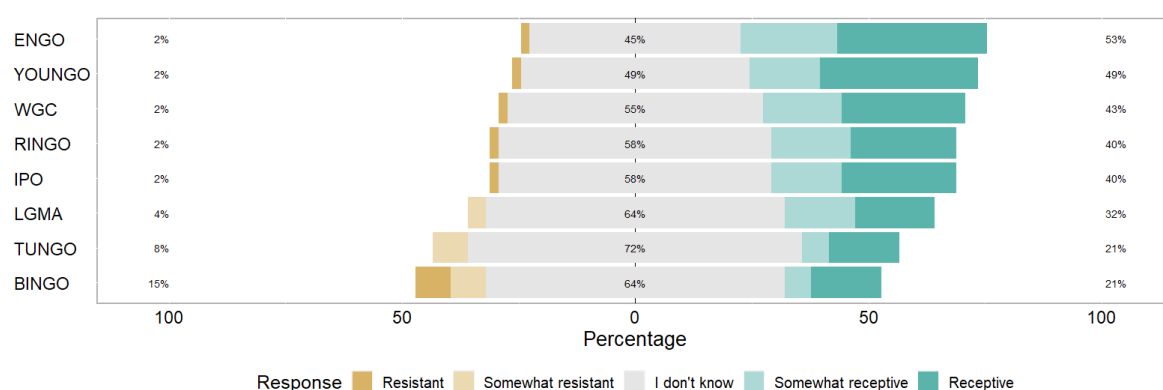
Figure 14. NGOs' perception of how other NGOs, based on constituency in COP meetings, receive or resist the influence of global citizens' assemblies

Of the 14 respondents who interacted with global citizens' assemblies, 13 had "collaborative" interactions, and one had both "collaborative" and

"contentious" interactions. Most respondents had not interacted with the Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis, but most are open to working with them. Of the six respondents who had interaction, three described it as "collaborative", and the other three described it as both "collaborative" and "contentious". All 6 of them perceive the work of the assembly as either "important" or "extremely important", both from their personal and organisational perspectives (Figure 15).
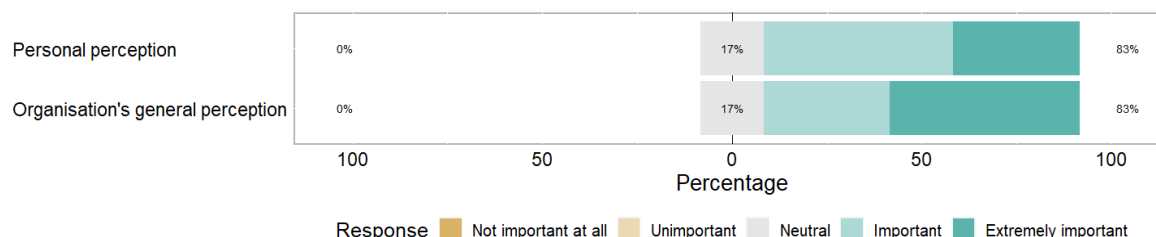
Figure 15. NGOs' perception of the work of the Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis

Power Dynamics

The interview results helped elucidate the actors, their sources of power, and the nature of their interactions. Powerful countries, host countries, industrialised countries, international and regional organisations, and the private sector are influential actors in global climate governance, but not necessarily the most supportive. African countries, the Global South, smaller countries, and the UN are supportive but not necessarily influential. The support and influence of the UNFCCC and governments depend on the issue areas or agenda. In terms of power sources, funding and material resources, ideational or normative power, people power through networking, and capacity building all influence the outcomes of interactions between actors, as explained in the following paragraphs.

One of the prominent clusters in the intersection map consists of the private sector, funding, and high influence (Figure 16). Most of the interview respondents recognise the influential role of the private sector due to their financial capacity. A respondent working for an organisation based in Europe observed lobbyists for petrol and gas influencing the negotiations.[34] However,

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[34] Respondent A, December 15, 2023.

as one respondent representing an organisation in Africa described, those with financial resources do not necessarily have concrete plans for mitigating climate change.[35] The presence of the private sector creates animosity and distrust from the perspective of NGOs, according to a respondent representing an organisation based in South Asia, especially with businesses and corporations taking centre stage in COP meetings.[36] But he also recognised the importance of collaborating or initiating good partnerships with the private sector. The increasing presence of the private sector is part of the process to broaden participation. As explained by a respondent involved in a Nordic research organisation, the collaboration between states, civil society, and businesses helped push the momentum toward the adoption of the Paris Agreement at COP21.[37]
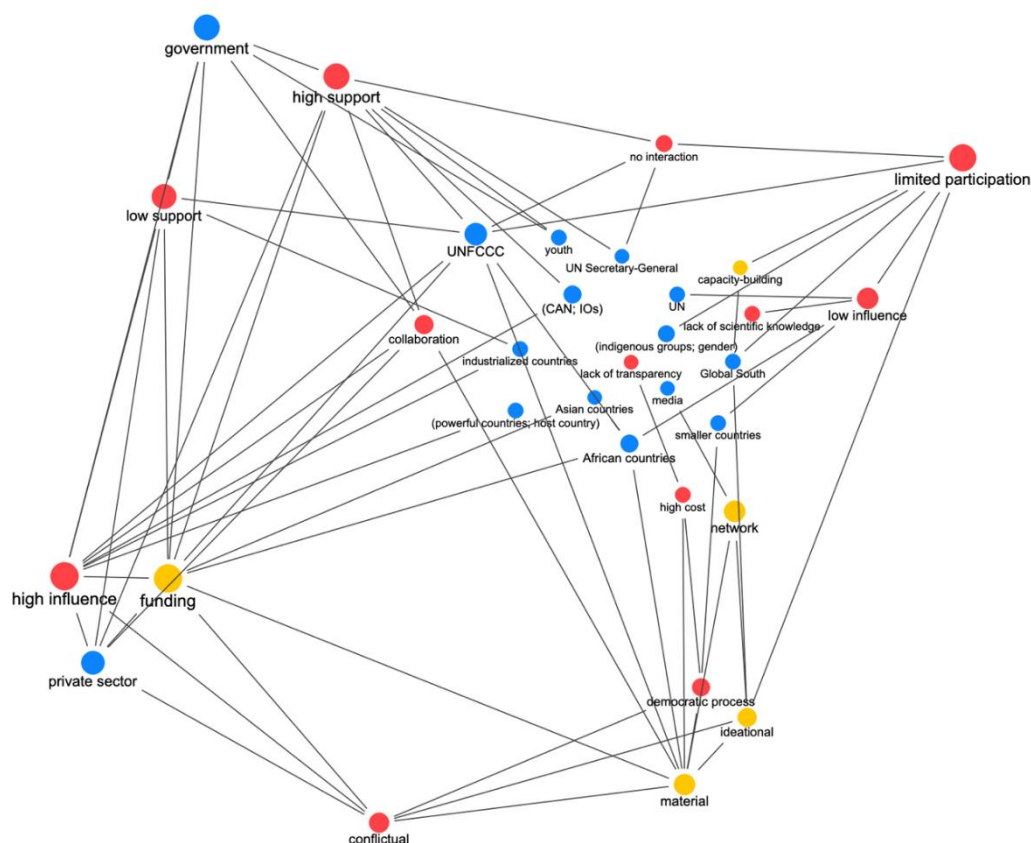
Figure 16. Intersection map of actors (blue), sources of power (yellow), and nature of interaction (red) based on interviews. The circles represent the codes—the larger the circle, the greater the frequency of code occurrence.

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[35] Respondent B, December 16, 2023.
[36] Respondent D, December 20, 2023.
[37] Respondent F, December 29, 2023.

The second noteworthy cluster in the intersection map is the link between government, low support, and high support. This contrasting perception signifies either competing or overlapping interests. NGOs' interaction can be collaborative if the government's agenda is aligned with their advocacy. According to a respondent based in South America, their organisation did not have the support of the previous government.[38] The level of government support also depends on the nature of their delegation to COP meetings. For example, some delegations include members of civil society, thereby increasing public representation, while others are more open to listening to petrol and gas lobbyists, which often contradicts NGOs' initiatives.

The common refrain among interview respondents was limited participation or, more specifically, unequal access to COPs and its numerous meetings. As reflected in the intersection map, limited participation is linked to low influence and no interaction, indigenous groups, smaller countries, the Global South, capacity building, and ideational (sources of power). Despite the increase in the size of venues and the number of admissions to COP meetings, due to capacity limits, for instance, some respondents felt restricted from participating in plenaries. During COP28 in Dubai, a respondent observed how some party delegates could not enter the negotiation room because of the large number of people in the venue.[39] Another respondent felt the organisers intentionally limited their interaction by cordoning off some sections for party delegates from observers.[40] Even the registration for virtual participation, which aims to broaden participation, ignores technological constraints, such as access to the Internet.[41]

Continued capacity-building, specifically through obtaining scientific knowledge about climate change to be able to follow the negotiations, and the advocacy to represent ordinary people and amplify their voices, are the factors motivating the respondents to continue their participation in COP. One respondent representing an organisation in West Africa said that although they do not have sufficient means, they continue sending at least one representative to COP meetings to represent their agenda and explore collaboration toward

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[38] Respondent E, December 28, 2023.
[39] Respondent A.
[40] Respondent D.
[41] Respondent D.

common goals.[42] Relatedly, as one respondent raised, it is difficult to decide for everybody, and to do it effectively requires knowledge sharing and a democratic process.[43] Such a democratic process necessitates bridging the Global North-Global South divide, which is still evident in COP meetings.[44] However, there is a concern among NGOs about COP meetings being held in authoritarian states, with some expressing their intention to boycott COP29 in Azerbaijan.[45] The president of Azerbaijan recently announced a no-women organising committee for COP29, which received criticisms from gender parity advocates.[46] These and other issues could potentially be reinforced in subsequent meetings if cultural dominance and unequal distribution of global economic resources remain unrecognised and unaddressed.[47]

Despite practical shortcomings and representation issues, the respondents remain in favour of broadening participation in global climate governance by including civil society and ordinary people. To echo one respondent's view, broader participation is never a burden to the negotiations.[48] Overall, the respondents recognised the practical challenges of bringing more people and suggested better planning and coordination. The respondent from South America expressed her enthusiasm for future COP meetings, specifically COP30 in Brazil. To quote her: "This is an immediate work that people are trying to do, making sure that [COP30 in Brazil] will be a COP of social movements and ordinary people that will leave a legacy...in the long-term, not just [during] the 12 days of the COP.[49]

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[42] Respondent G, January 3, 2024. A similar sentiment was also shared by Respondent C, December 18, 2023.
[43] Respondent E.
[44] Respondent D.
[45] Respondent F.
[46] Damian Carrington, "Azerbaijan Appoints No Women to 28-Member COP29 Climate Committee," *The Guardian*, January 15, 2024.
[47] Hannah Hughes, "Actors, Activities, and Forms of Authority in the IPCC," *Review of International Studies*, online first (2023) 1–21.
[48] Hughes.
[49] Respondent E.

Future Research

The potential of global citizens' assemblies to be docked into global climate governance can be realised through their meaningful collaboration with other relevant actors, specifically NGOs and other CSOs. Doing so, however, necessitates enhanced awareness of the power dynamics that could impede or facilitate their influence. The results of the power-mapping exercise reported in this paper could help citizens' assemblies and their allies navigate power dynamics in COP meetings in order to influence climate negotiations meaningfully. While our analysis focused on the perspectives of admitted NGOs, we hope to extend this study to subsequent COP meetings and expand our scope beyond NGOs to broader participation in global climate governance. We are exploring opportunities for research collaboration to enhance and integrate our survey design with other studies and undertake a more representative sample for interviews.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Nicole Curato and Nardine Alnemr for leading this collaborative project and for their support throughout the process of completing this research. We also would like to thank Kari de Pryck, Aishwarya Machani, Franziska Maier, and the rest of the GloCAN members for engaging meaningfully with our research plan. This research would not have come to fruition without the participation of our survey and interview respondents, whose expertise and experience helped us understand the challenges and opportunities for more inclusive global climate governance.

Appendix
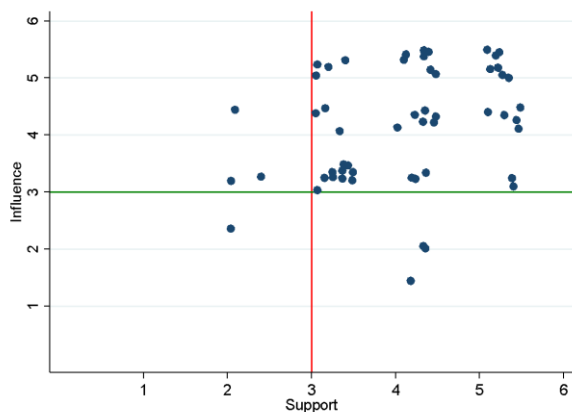
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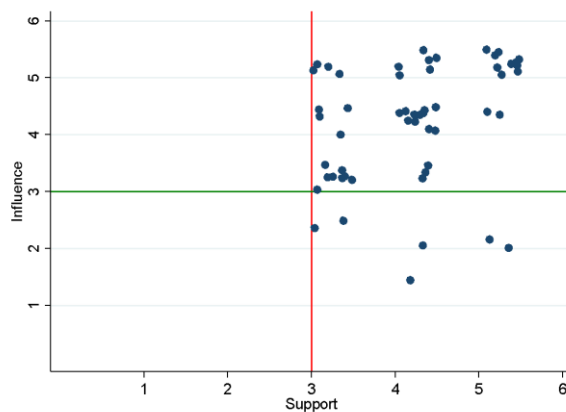
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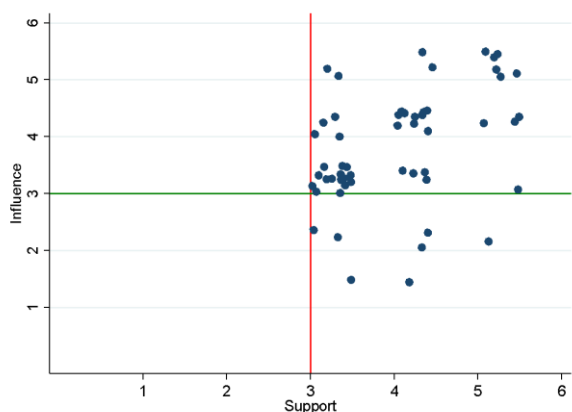
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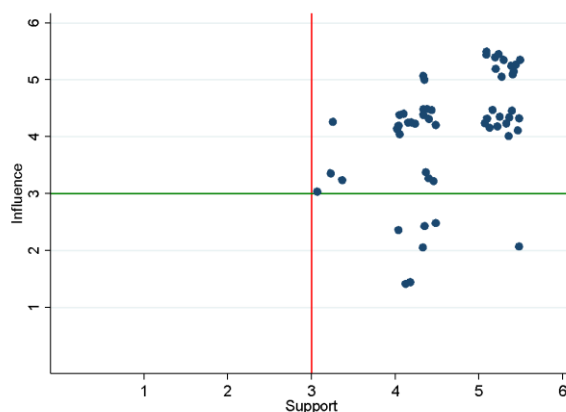
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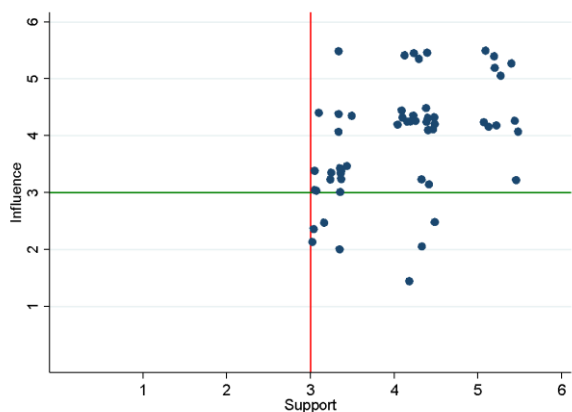
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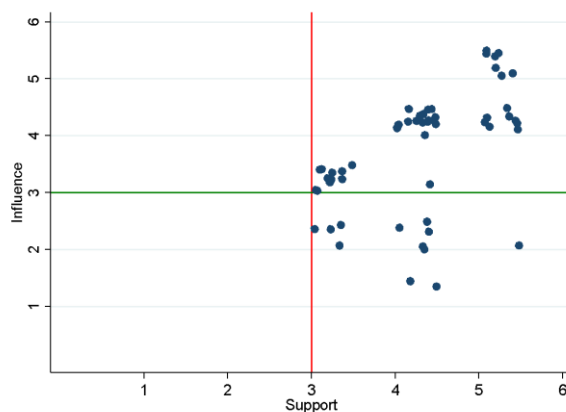
Figure 1f. Civil society organisations

Supplementary Figure 1. Disaggregated power mapping of different groups involved in COP meetings from the perspective of NGOs
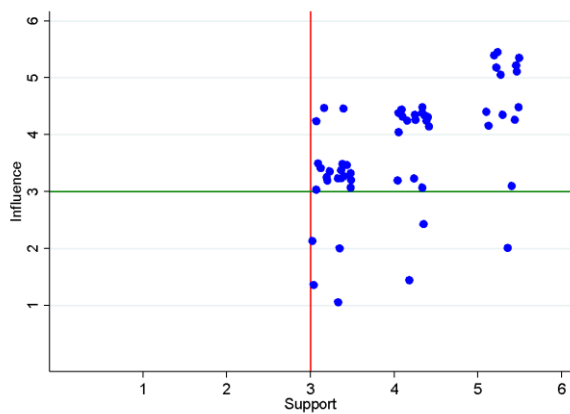
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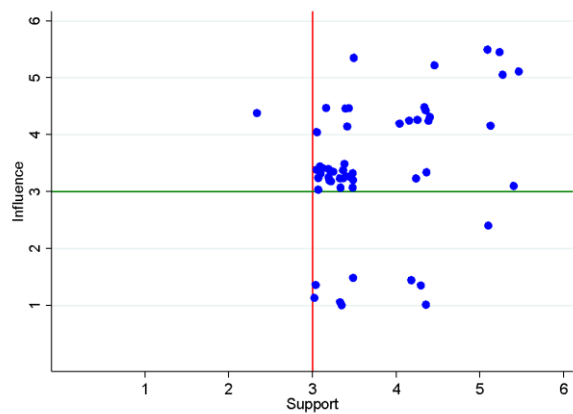
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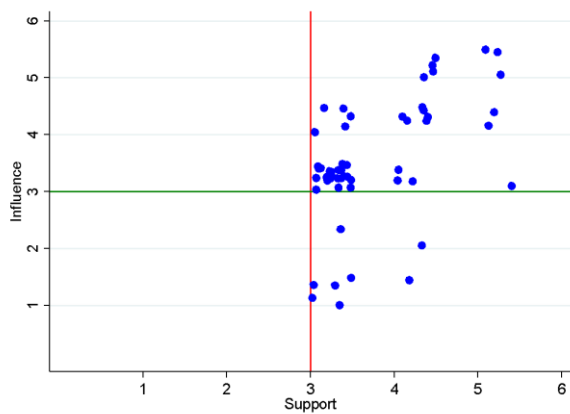
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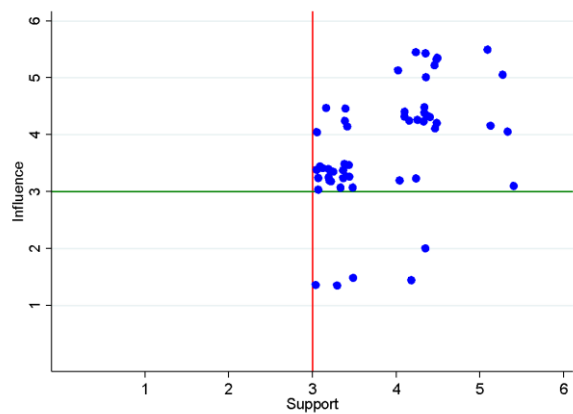
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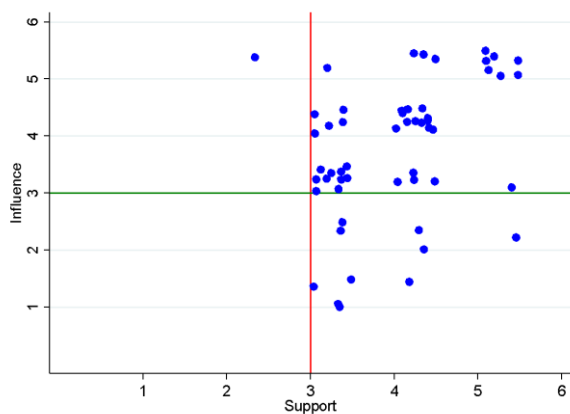
Figure 2e. Western European and Other States

Supplementary Figure 2. Disaggregated power mapping of party delegates COP meetings from the perspective of NGOs
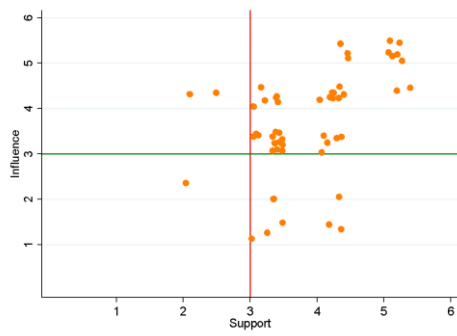
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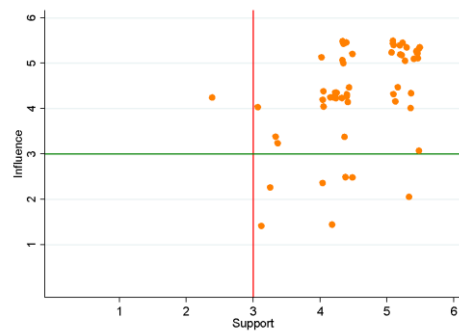
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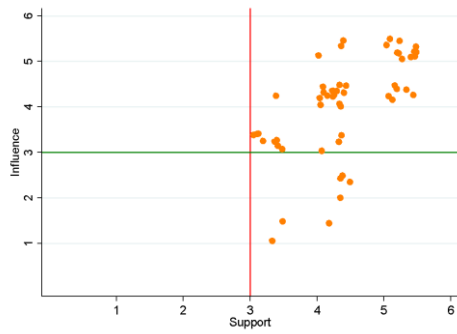
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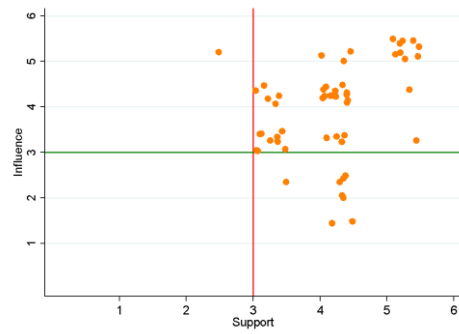
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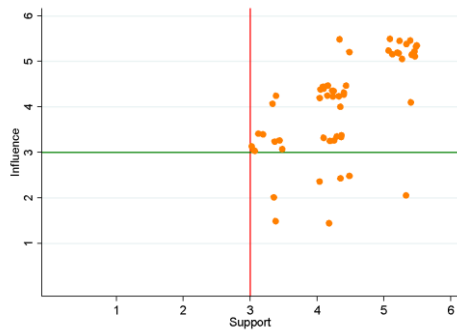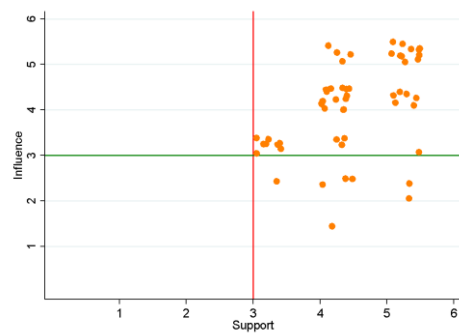

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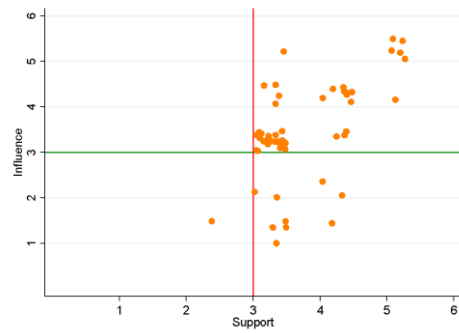
Figure 3f. TUNGO

Figure 3g. WGC

Figure 3h. YOUNGO

Supplementary Figure 3. Disaggregated power mapping of NGOs based on constituency in COP meetings from the perspective of NGOs