

# Leadership by Example in the Implementation Phase of the Paris Agreement: Comparing Current Climate Strategies of the EU, the US and China

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## **Abstract**

The climate crisis and the fight against it is one of the most complex challenges humanity faces right now. In situations like this, theory and empirical research on international governance has highlighted the vital importance of leadership to promote action and cooperation. A closer look at theoretic and empirical contributions in the field, however, reveals massive research gaps that seriously hamper our understanding of climate leadership. This paper contributes to closing many of the gaps found. Studying exemplary leadership in the implementation phase of the Paris Agreement, we use qualitative content analysis and a thorough conceptualization of an “ideal” climate strategy to analyse and compare current climate strategies of the three major emitters and leadership candidates: the European Union, the United States and China. Our analysis unsurprisingly finds the EU the most ambitious actor and potential exemplary leader among the three, but also reveals that China’s strategy is in various aspects more far-reaching than its US counterpart. In addition, our conceptualization of climate leadership and our analysis provide policy recommendations for improving real-life climate strategies.

**Keywords:** climate leadership, global governance, European Union, United States, China, climate strategies, Paris Agreement