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THE EU'S CLIMATE LEADERSHIP AS NORMATIVE SOFT POWER: DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY AND GLOBAL CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

Eman Zahid[*1], Umair Ahmad[2], Nabeel Arshad[3]

[*1]*BS IR from the Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of Gujrat*
[2]*MPhil IR, University of Management and Technology Lahore*
[3]*BS IR, University of Gujrat*

[*1]zamna3456@gmail.com, [2]f2025353022@umt.edu.pk, [3]nabeelarshed10@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *
Eman Zahid
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ABSTRACT

European Union (EU) operates as a primary force in international climate governance while people associate it with the concept of "normative power Europe." The study evaluates EU climate leadership to determine whether it operates as genuine normative soft power. The research investigates whether EU climate leadership results in effective international impact while assessing how internal democratic legitimacy supports this impact across the fragmented international regulatory system. The study uses constructivist norm theory and legitimacy scholarship and regime complexity approaches to analyze the Copenhagen (2009) and Paris (2015) negotiations and the European Green Deal implementation after the Paris Agreement. The research shows that EU climate leadership operates as normative soft power under particular situations. Democratic unity within an organization enables that organization to establish trustworthiness with its external partners, which leads to successful alliance formation and regulatory expansion throughout its distributed governance system. The presence of domestic divisions and uncertainties about implementation processes decrease the strength of recognition and negotiation power. The EU uses normative soft power in climate governance by establishing credibility through its recognition process, which makes its leadership dependent on specific political situations.

Keywords *European Union, Normative power Europe, Climate leadership, Democratic legitimacy, Soft Power, Global Climate Governance, Regime complexity*

INTRODUCTION

Climate change governance has emerged as the main battleground for current international relations because it transforms how countries exercise power and develop laws and conduct global negotiations. The European Union (EU) has developed its climate change mitigation strategy through more ambitious emissions reduction goals and the creation of the Emissions Trading System (Directive 2003/87/EC) and the European Green Deal framework, which combines these systems into one unified structure. The Union's climate and energy framework for 2030 demonstrates how its internal governance system uses both mandatory rules and adaptable governance methods to operate (Oberthür & Pukowska, 2019). The EU participates in climate politics through its development of regulatory standards and its efforts to promote international environmental norms instead of using military power or control over resources. The European

Union uses its power to establish international standards through norm diffusion to create global governance frameworks which serve as non-coercive methods to establish international order (Manners, 2002).

The effectiveness of such leadership, however, remains contested. In competitive bargaining situations, Whitman 2013 and Parker and Karlsson 2017 research shows that researchers doubt whether normative ambition can lead to permanent diplomatic power. The Copenhagen negotiations show how declaratory leadership fails because major emitters controlled the negotiations which prevented ambitious mitigation commitments from achieving central bargaining power (Groen et al. 2012, Kilian and Elgström 2010). Climate governance functions through a fragmented regime complex which contains conflicting institutional frameworks and scattered decision-making power (Keohane and Victor 2011). The power dynamics of polycentric systems require organizations to evaluate their influence based on their recognition, coalition positioning, and institutional embeddedness (Bulkeley 2012).

The evaluation process of EU climate leadership becomes more complex when democratic legitimacy inside the EU intersects with its ability to establish norms in external relationships. The process of achieving normative influence depends on establishing credibility which requires proof of internal unity and continuous execution of policies according to Scharpf (2009). The Union's democratic deficit debate (Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Moravcsik, 2002) shows how internal conflicts affect external perceptions of commitment sustainability. The ability of external leadership claims to persuade people decreases when distributive conflicts and implementation disputes and institutional fragmentation create problems for organizational unity.

EU climate leadership operates through its demonstration of climate policies yet requires recognition of its international partnerships which form the basis of its authority. The external power of the system arises from two factors which include the domestic institutional trustworthiness and the worldwide recognition of its divided governance system. The combination of normative power theory and legitimacy research together with regime complexity theories establishes a framework that shows how EU internal political stability enables the union to shape international climate change governance.

Research Problem

The European Union (EU) functions as a normative power because it spreads its norms to other countries instead of using military power to achieve its international goals (Manners, 2002; Diez, 2005). Research studies have investigated the European Union's climate diplomacy and its negotiation techniques and the way it spreads its regulations throughout international climate agreements (Bäckstrand & Elgström, 2013; Oberthür & Dupont, 2021).The research studies do not connect with the discussions about the democratic legitimacy of European Union institutions which exist as separate fields of study (Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Scharpf, 2009).

The implementation of climate transition policies creates conflicts about resource distribution among different member states. The credibility of external commitments depends on domestic institutional cohesion during the burden-sharing discussions about the Fit for 55 package (Rosamond & Dupont, 2025). The fragmented climate regime complex which includes multiple decision-making centers and shared governance systems (Keohane & Victor, 2011; Bulkeley, 2012) enables leaders to form connections through their relationships with others instead of relying on their formal powers.

The analytical gap, therefore, exists because researchers currently lack a unified framework which can demonstrate how internal democratic legitimacy affects EU climate leadership as normative soft power in global climate governance.

Research Aim

The analysis measures the degree of EU climate leadership power as a normative soft power system while assessing its democratic legitimacy for international power and credibility in a system of divided authority.

Research Question

To what extent does internal democratic legitimacy determine how effectively the European Union uses its climate leadership as normative soft power to operate in global climate governance?

Literature Review

Normative Power Europe: Identity, Authority, and Contestation

Normative Power Europe has fundamentally changed the way people debate The European Union's role in international relations. Manners (2002) proposed that the European Union should be understood as a political entity which establishes international order through its worldwide distribution of multilateralism and human rights and environmental protection norms. The system of authority in this framework operates through its power to achieve legitimacy and through its ability to convince others and through its established system of governance based on rules. The European Union exercises external power through its ability to create regulations which establish standards and shape what people expect from the EU.

Subsequent research has both refined and challenged this assertion. Diez (2005) showed that normative power functions through relational and discursive relationships because the EU establishes its identity through its differences with power-political entities. Social processes create normative authority which does not exist as an intrinsic quality. Whitman (2013) further warned against conflating rhetorical commitment with measurable influence, highlighting the risk that normative self-representation may mask limited structural leverage. The combined effects of these interventions demonstrate a persistent theoretical conflict because NPE shows how the EU understands itself but empirical proof of its normative authority remains inconsistent.

The main conflict in climate governance becomes most visible through this particular point of contention. The EU has maintained environmental protection as its primary international identity component but experts still argue about how climate leadership impacts its ongoing global power. The field of normative power research contains numerous theoretical concepts but it fails to provide adequate understanding of particular governance systems through its general research approach. The political landscape of climate change demonstrates its testing ground for assessing normative soft power through its combination of extensive regulations and multiple levels of governmental coordination.

Norm Diffusion, Soft Law, and Governance Architecture

The diffusion of norms theory provides evaluative instruments which assess the practical application of normative leadership. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) define norms as processes which start from entrepreneurial actors and then flow through socialization until they reach complete internalization. The process-oriented model demonstrates how organizations establish their power by using persuasion and legitimacy while building alliances with others. The enforcement mechanisms of climate governance systems require special attention because they operate with restricted power.

Abbott and Snidal (2000) present an international governance framework which differentiates between hard law and soft law. The framework of soft law arrangements consists of framework agreements and reporting mechanisms and voluntary commitments, which create international cooperation because binding enforcement lacks political support. Climate governance exemplifies such hybrid institutional design. The Paris Agreement establishes soft obligations, which lead to ongoing accountability through its nationally determined contributions and transparency frameworks.

The climate governance system lacks a single governing system that operates through established executive power. According to Keohane and Victor (2011) the system operates as a fragmented international system which consists of institutions that only partially share their boundaries with each other. The international system allocates its power among three different types of governing structures which include multilateral institutions and regional bodies and transnational organizations. Bulkeley (2012) and Hale (2016) further emphasize the polycentric

architecture of contemporary climate politics, in which states coexist with cities, corporations, and civil society networks as governance actors. Bäckstrand et al. (2017) demonstrate non-state actors control the post-Copenhagen and post-Paris governance system because they establish network-based authority structures.

The decentralized systems require leaders to gain power through means other than establishing control over their operations. Leaders must establish their authority through governance networks while benefiting from their recognized abilities. Norm diffusion theory shows how ideas spread in society but it fails to account for the domestic political systems that support Norm entrepreneurs. The institutional coherence of an organization requires its members to maintain their commitments for the entire duration of their relationships with others who hold power over them.

Empirical Trajectories of EU Climate Leadership

The European Union climate diplomacy research shows complex results according to empirical studies. The first studies showed the European Union as an emissions reduction leader who used international treaties to strengthen its domestic policy goals (Schreurs & Tiberghien, 2007). The ability to establish domestic mitigation measures through international agreements created diplomatic legitimacy for the country.

Yet leadership ambitions failed to create strong influence in their respective roles. The main polluting countries controlled essential negotiation spaces during the Copenhagen talks according to Groen et al. The results demonstrated that countries could only reach their stated goals through their actual diplomatic activities. Parker and Karlsson (2017) established their evidence-based approach to leadership research by showing that leadership needs empirical research to validate its claims instead of using normative standards as proof.

The research shows adaptive recalibration instead of simple decline. Bäckstrand and Elgström (2013) describe the EU as a “leadiator,” combining mediation and coalition-building within a fragmented diplomatic context. The EU achieved its objectives through coalition alignment during the Paris negotiations which improved its transparency efforts and long-term temperature target (Oberthür & Groen, 2018). The evidence suggests that normative soft power functions through coalition centrality instead of single-entity control of agendas.

Recent studies show that climate leadership operates as part of broader regulatory frameworks. The concept of "Market Power Europe" which Damro developed in 2012 shows how regulatory standards give large integrated markets their fundamental power. Climate governance uses carbon pricing and border adjustment mechanisms as instruments which demonstrate how regulatory externalities create external incentives. The EU 2030 climate and energy framework shows hybrid governance through its combination of legally binding targets and flexible execution methods according to Oberthür and Pukowska 2019. The EU climate policy evolution which Oberthür and von Homeyer 2023 examined shows how the European Green Deal unifies regulatory practices while creating new external effects.

The studies reveal three main research areas which include negotiation performance measurement and coalition dynamics study and regulatory externalization assessment. The studies fail to show internal democratic legitimacy which functions as a systematic factor that determines normative authority.

Democratic Legitimacy and Political Sustainability

Parallel discussions about EU democratic legitimacy examine two main aspects of institutional accountability and public participation. Moravcsik (2002) disputes claims of systemic democratic deficit because he shows that the EU constitution contains mechanisms for indirect accountability. The authors of Follesdal and Hix (2006) study electoral contestation which restricts the ability of citizens to participate in democratic processes. Scharpf (2009) presents a valuable distinction which separates input legitimacy based on public participation from output legitimacy that emerges from successful policy implementation.

The European Union maintains its climate governance system through its dependence on output legitimacy. The European Union has established its emissions reduction goals because the two factors of regulatory effectiveness and emissions reduction performance provide evidence for its ambitious targets. The climate transition policies of member states create distributional effects which make input legitimacy more important throughout the process. Rosamond and Dupont (2025) show that the political dynamics of the Fit for 55 package create conflicts between scientific climate goals and public opposition which leads to legitimacy disputes that now affect climate policy decisions. Liefferink and Wurzel (2017) show that environmental leadership requires ongoing political support from all governance levels within the multilevel governance framework.

The existing legitimacy literature suffers from limited integration with European Union climate diplomacy research. The internal democratic dynamics of organizations function as essential factors which determine how organizations interact with outside authorities.

Toward an Integrated Framework

The study of normative power theory and regime complexity research and EU climate leadership studies and democratic legitimacy studies maintains separate analytical methods across these fields of research. Identity and discourse make up the main focus of normative power accounts although these accounts fail to measure internal democratic cohesion as a factor that affects their capacity to influence others. The research on climate leadership studies negotiation results together with regulatory spread but it does not provide a proper framework to understand how legitimacy functions as an essential factor. The research on regime complexity demonstrates how decentralized systems function yet it does not provide enough information about how international legitimacy impacts governance network members.

The combination of these elements enables researchers to define European Union climate leadership as an interconnected and situation-dependent relationship. Normative authority does not derive solely from identity claims, nor from regulatory ambition alone. The process develops through domestic institutional legitimacy which interacts with recognition in decentralized governance systems. The internal democratic legitimacy functions as an essential element that determines how effectively normative soft power operates within divided political systems.

Research Gap

Existing scholarship on EU climate leadership remains divided into three separate research areas which include normative power theory and assessments of diplomatic and regulatory performance and studies of democratic legitimacy. Normative power debates focus on identity and discourse yet they fail to explain how internal democratic unity affects a nation's ability to project its power abroad. Empirical studies investigate both negotiation results and the spread of regulations yet they consider domestic legitimacy only as a background element which does not influence their findings. Legitimacy scholarship examines two elements which include the need for institutional responsibility and the operation of multiple governance levels but it fails to connect domestic political conflicts with the reach of international power. Regime complexity theory identifies climate governance as a decentralized system which operates through interdependent relationships but it fails to explain how internal political sustainability affects recognition within divided governance systems.

The mechanisms that domestic legitimacy controls EU climate leadership operations as normative soft power remain insufficiently developed as a theoretical framework which currently exists within polycentric global climate governance.

Theoretical Framework

The EU climate leadership functions as a normative soft power resource which operates through its existing governance systems that lack institutional unity. The combination of normative power theory with democratic legitimacy scholarship and regime complexity creates a framework for achieving conceptual understanding.

Normative Power Europe conceptualizes the EU as an actor who uses his norm distribution power to create international order changes instead of using his coercive material power. The existence of normative authority which exists through automatic means and permanent structural methods cannot exist. The EU establishes its external impact through social acknowledgment of its claims and through maintenance of its commitments according to subsequent research findings. The process of normative leadership functions through relational connections because external parties develop influence when they view commitments as trustworthy and long-lasting and embedded within institutional frameworks.

The theory of democratic legitimacy establishes the domestic requirements which establish the credibility of democratic systems. Scharpf's (2009) distinction between input legitimacy (participatory inclusion) and output legitimacy (policy effectiveness) shows how multilevel governance systems develop their trustworthiness. The ongoing application of climate regulations together with the unified position of member states and their established political commitments create a solid framework to assess long-term regulatory projections. The consistent operation of domestic institutions provides international partners with a trustworthy indicator of institutional credibility.

The structural framework of global climate governance establishes the foundation for this dynamic according to regime complexity theory. The climate political system operates through a fragmented regime complex which contains multiple institutions that share power instead of centralized control (Keohane & Victor 2011). Polycentric systems require their leaders to build coalitions which set agendas through networked coordination instead of using hierarchical power. Organizations need recognition from multiple parties before they can effectively exert influence.

Normative soft power operates as a conditional relationship which emerges through the credibility recognition process. The first step establishes that internal democratic legitimacy acts as a trust-building mechanism which people consider trustworthy. The second step shows how perceived reliability within governance networks leads to people recognizing him. The third step shows that recognized individuals gain power to shape decentralized global climate governance agendas.

Research Design

Research Methodology

The research uses a qualitative case study method which follows theoretical frameworks to investigate how internal democratic legitimacy affects EU climate leadership through its normative soft power capacity. The process tracing method enables researchers to discover the causal links between domestic institutional coherence and external recognition within complex governance systems. The analysis focuses on three theoretically significant cases: the Copenhagen (2009) negotiations, the Paris (2015) negotiations, and the post-Paris European Green Deal phase. The researchers selected these cases to study how EU member states can influence diplomatic negotiations which lead to different regulatory outcomes based on their perceived credibility within two distinct operational environments. The research uses European Council conclusions, European Commission communications, UNFCCC negotiation documents, and official legislative texts as empirical materials which are validated through peer-reviewed scholarship to strengthen evidence validity and decrease bias in interpretation.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review will rely on the peer-reviewed articles of the major journals in the field of International Relations, European integration, and environmental regulation such as the *Journal of Common Market Studies, Journal of European Public Policy, Global Environmental Politics,* International Organization, and Environmental Politics. Scopus and Web of Science searches were done to ensure indexing to trace citation, and targeted search done in Google Scholar. The keywords used were; Normative Power Europe, EU climate leadership, democratic legitimacy, regime complexity and polycentric governance. To ensure conceptual currency, selection was done based on theoretically grounded contributions and

business-level empirical studies with the most citations, not exceeding five years old.

Limitations

The analysis uses both documentary evidence and secondary scholarship as its main sources because it does not use elite interviews or perception-based surveys. The process tracing method enables researchers to identify credibility-based mechanisms yet it fails to provide measurements of the magnitude of these mechanisms or the actual perceptions held by outside observers. The research restricts its analysis to three important political moments which enable researchers to study climate diplomacy through deeper analysis and more powerful theoretical frameworks than they would obtain through examining all EU climate diplomacy work. The research establishes specific scope conditions which prevent researchers from making broad statements but these conditions suit the study's purpose which investigates how internal democratic legitimacy affects power dynamics among various factions within a divided regime system.

Analysis and Findings

The EU climate leadership shows its power as normative soft power according to the investigation which compares Copenhagen 2009 and Paris 2015 and the European Green Deal period after the Paris Agreement. The research uses process tracing to show that democratic legitimacy serves as an essential element which creates credibility for negotiating parties and governance networks to gain recognition which enables them to control agenda-setting in the fragmented regime complex (Keohane & Victor 2011).

Copenhagen (2009): Normative Ambition Without Relational Recognition

The European Union established its 20–20–20 climate framework before COP15 which included an Emissions Trading System that became legally binding and a commitment to achieve 20% greenhouse gas emission reductions from 1990 levels by 2020 which would increase to 30% under a complete agreement. The European Council conclusions and their supporting legislative measures established binding commitments for the EU to support multilateralism through rules-based international agreements.

The EU emerged as a limited power at Copenhagen because its regulatory system prepared it for the negotiations. The research shows that key negotiations happened through limited diplomatic channels which the United States and emerging market countries controlled, which diminished European Union influence (Groen et al., 2012; Kilian & Elgström, 2010). The European Union preferred to establish formal treaties but Copenhagen produced a political agreement which functioned as a nonbinding accord.

The climate governance system distributes its governing power to multiple groups and governing bodies according to its regime complexity framework (Keohane & Victor 2011). The architecture failed to create relational embeddedness because its normative goals did not automatically create operational links between its components. The EU made institutionally valid commitments but they failed to secure necessary coalition support during the critical time period.

The domestic institutional elements created additional difficulties which restricted progress. The EU member states established climate targets but their different approaches to negotiation and burden distribution created obstacles to diplomatic unity. Scharpf's (2009) distinction between output and input legitimacy clarifies the constraint: output legitimacy (regulatory performance) existed, but visible political unity in external bargaining was weaker. Organizations need to show their policies through actual internal coordination to establish their credibility. Copenhagen thus demonstrates that institutional ambition without established coalition centrality fails to create effective normative soft power.

Paris (2015): Credibility, Coalition Centrality, and Adaptive Leadership

The Paris negotiations demonstrate strategic changes which emerged from the limitations imposed by Copenhagen. The EU supported a flexible treaty framework which used nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and transparency requirements and review processes as

its foundation. The design of the system more effectively matched the UNFCCC process which operated after COP15 through its decentralized framework.

The empirical research demonstrates that the EU played a role in creating alliances with the High Ambition Coalition while working together with small island nations and progressive greenhouse gas emitters to establish permanent temperature targets and monitoring systems under the Paris Agreement (Oberthür & Groen, 2018). The leadership process functioned through mediation and alliance-building which Bäckstrand and Elgström (2013) define as "leadiatorship" instead of executing control through a hierarchical structure.

The European Union's credibility improved beyond its 2009 level because two visible conditions proved their existence. The European Union developed an implementation history for its 2020 climate and energy framework by 2015 which included operational carbon market systems and growing renewable energy sources. The member states achieved more uniformity their long-term decarbonization goals. The two factors increased output legitimacy according to Scharpf 2009 which helped decrease uncertainty among negotiation partners about their commitment to the agreement.

The institutionalization of transparency requirements together with the 1.5–2°C temperature framework development process showed norm diffusion through coalition-driven persuasive activities which created cascade effects according to Finnemore and Sikkink 1998. The system of polycentric governance enabled organizations to establish their power through trustworthiness instead of using power imbalance which existed between different entities.

Paris shows that normative soft power gains its effectiveness when a country's internal policy credibility matches its strategic coalition ties to the complex regime system.

The European Green Deal: Regulatory Externalization and Conditional Market Power

The period after the Paris agreement brought fundamental changes to European Union climate leadership. The European Green Deal which first appeared in 2019 and which later became active through its legislative packages establishes a unified climate policy framework that covers trade and industrial operations and financial systems. The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) which became part of this wider regulatory framework connects carbon pricing with market access requirements while extending European Union climate regulations to areas outside its national borders.

The development demonstrates how normative systems and market power systems interact with each other. The regulatory framework of Damro's (2012) "Market Power Europe" system shows how European market regulations create incentives for external parties to comply with its standards. The current phase of influence functions through economic ties between nations instead of using diplomatic methods to achieve its goals.

The process of regulatory diffusion must proceed through specific steps before it achieves full recognition of its norms. External actors may interpret CBAM as either environmental standard-setting or geoeconomic leverage. The durability of normative authority depends on people who assess its legitimacy.

The context becomes important because domestic political dynamics become essential. The Fit for 55 reforms together with Green Deal implementation create distributional disputes among member states about energy expenses and industrial competitiveness and social equity. The internal legitimacy disputes of the EU establish the political framework which governs climate policy development according to Rosamond and Dupont 2025. Institutionalization improves output legitimacy yet the presence of visible disputes creates doubt about the future stability of policy governance.

The ability to attain credibility based on the decentralized compliance system of the fragmented regime complex operates through internal operational stability. The regulatory framework enables structural impact, yet the fundamental authority of regulations depends on the ability of domestic politics to maintain operational stability.

Cross-Case Mechanism: Legitimacy as a Conditioning Variable

The three cases show that a single cause exists throughout their duration. The internal democratic legitimacy of a system controls its external influence through its effect on credibility. The coalition networks and negotiation arenas use credibility as the basis for recognizing people. Decentralized governance systems use recognition to allow their members to shape the agenda.

Copenhagen shows its ambition through its achievements which it needs to establish through international diplomatic recognition. Paris demonstrates its credibility through practical execution and its efforts to build diplomatic partnerships. The Green Deal establishes regulatory control which requires domestic political support to maintain its power of authority.

The leadership system in polycentric climate governance operates through relationship-based connections instead of hierarchical structures according to Bulkeley 2012 and Hale 2016. The emergence of normative soft power occurs through the combination of institutional coherence and strategic adaptability and governance network recognition. Domestic unity decreases which leads to credibility loss and subsequent recognition decline and finally reduced ability to influence others.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of Copenhagen (2009) and Paris (2015) and the European Green Deal phase shows that European Union climate leadership operates as normative soft power which requires domestic institutional credibility to establish institutional power within a divided international system (Keohane & Victor, 2011). The power to influence others through normative aspirations exists only when external parties acknowledge the internal political strength of decentralized governance systems.

The Copenhagen negotiations demonstrated that declaratory leadership has fundamental structural limitations. The European Union entered COP15 with its 2020 climate and energy framework which included both an emissions reduction commitment and a conditional escalation offer but this institutional framework did not enable the EU to control the final outcome of the Copenhagen Accord. The research findings show that essential document creation happened with limited negotiation space which major emitting countries controlled while EU countries faced exclusion from the process (Groen et al. 2012 Kilian Elgström 2010). The EU established domestic mitigation commitments but internal conflicts about negotiation flexibility and burden sharing prevented the member states from working together to handle diplomatic matters. The EU climate leadership evaluation shows that organizations which display strong self-presentation do not gain negotiation power automatically (Parker Karlsson 2017 Whitman 2013). The case of Copenhagen shows that coalition centrality serves as the only path to achieve normative impact from institutional readiness.

Paris shows a recalibration which better matches the complexity of its governing systems. The European Union chose to adopt a mixed system which combined national commitments and transparent procedures instead of using a fixed top-down legal structure. The strategic change successfully decreased the opposition from major greenhouse gas emitters while maintaining elements of rule-based governance. The High Ambition Coalition increased the EU's ability to negotiate with other parties in international negotiation networks according to Oberthür and Groen (2018). The leadership maintained its operations through mediation and bridge-building which matched the Bäckstrand and Elgström (2013) definition of "leadiatorship" instead of using agenda control. The EU Emissions Trading System and renewable energy directives proved their implementation power which led to better output legitimacy according to Scharpf (2009). The Paris Agreement established institutionalized transparency and review systems because the coalition of countries pushed for these measures. The organization gained its normative authority from its ability to be trusted instead of its power to control others.

The European Green Deal represents a transition from diplomatic methods which seek to persuade others toward methods which achieve regulatory

authority through externalization. The EU establishes climate standards through economic interdependence by connecting market access to carbon pricing requirements which it implements through the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. This development shows how normative power interacts with market power (Damro, 2012). External actors create influence through structural systems which they use for their own purposes when they need to stop trade violations. The regulations which exist do not give authorities complete power to establish legitimacy standards. The public disputes about how the Fit for 55 reforms will affect different groups show that transition policies remain politically vulnerable. The decentralized regime complex operates through multiple compliance points which create a system that defines policy durability for its external partners (Keohane & Victor, 2011). The strength of regulatory powers depends on the ability to maintain national unity.

The capacity of internal democratic legitimacy to influence external authority relationships serves as a vital conditional factor in all cases. The domestic institutional coherence of a system increases its credibility for international partners which leads to fundamental relationship connections between coalition partners and the power to shape policy decisions in multiple governing systems (Bulkeley, 2012; Hale, 2016). Domestic fragmentation decreases bargaining power according to regulatory goals which organizations want to achieve.

The current research results show that established views about Normative Power Europe need to be revised. Climate governance needs identity claims and regulatory capacity because both elements together create its normative authority. The system produces results when political sustainability together with strategic adaptability and coalition embeddedness unite inside its fragmented governance frameworks. EU climate leadership exists as a combination of normative elements and structural components because its institutional systems depend on authentic performance to maintain their existence.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The European Union demonstrates its external activities through climate governance activities, which treat normative soft power as a conditional requirement instead of an inherent capacity. The authority of normative power depends on how institutional unity within an organization combines with its ability to be recognized in distributed governance systems. The research introduces a new perspective through which Normative Power Europe research needs to be studied because it shifts focus from identity-based assertions to credibility as an observable research tool. The study expands existing research on regime complexity by showing how people in divided systems create power through their domestic obligations and their coalition affiliations. The process of governance in polycentric systems requires leadership to build credibility through relationships which connect internal organizational trust with external institutional power.

Policy Implications

Climate leadership requires both institutional stability and political stability to maintain itself while regulatory standards do not suffice for achievement. External parties assess commitment reliability based on two domestic factors which include distributive stability and predictable implementation pathways. In decentralized governance systems with geopolitical competition, the existence of active policy changes diminishes negotiating power because organizations maintain their commitment to high standards. International treaty organizations use institutional coherence to gain better results from their external negotiations and regulatory dissemination activities.

Research Implications

Further the current research needs to investigate how external parties evaluate credibility during domestic power struggles because this will help researchers better understand how legitimacy-based authority operates. The research will compare different climate organizations to

determine whether their internal democratic unity affects their external power relations through European Union specific patterns or through universal leadership behaviors found in divided political systems.

Conclusion

The European Union demonstrates its climate leadership through more than its regulatory objectives and institutional growth. The European Union's climate governance credibility depends on its internal political unity during three historic stages which include Copenhagen and Paris and the European Green Deal. Domestic consensus for implementation creates greater uncertainty reduction which enables coalition members to control agendas more effectively. The establishment of strategic fragmentation together with internal contestation leads to a loss of normative authority despite organizations maintaining their policy goals.

The fragmented regime complex with its multiple centers of power and shared decision-making processes operates under a system where leadership functions through relationships instead of following a hierarchical structure. The European Union demonstrates that organizations need both strategic adaptability and institutional stability to succeed more than their public statements. Negotiation and regulatory networks develop their power through commitments which parties consider trustworthy.

The normative soft power of climate governance depends on the political sustainability of its framework. European climate leadership will maintain its strength through proper implementation of its objectives according to existing international circumstances which presently contest its mission.

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