

FOUNDATIONAL MODULE

Climate Justice Policy



CLIMATE JUSTICE
INSTRUCTIONAL
— TOOLKIT —

What's in this module?

Description

This module discusses current climate and environmental justice policy in the US and in international law, including the Paris Agreement and the Green New Deal.*

Contents

6 parts
2 videos
3 readings
4 activities
3 case studies
2 optional projects

Key Resources

- [Global Center for Climate Justice: The Green New Deal Resource Hub](#)
- [How can policy and policymaking foster climate justice? A qualitative systematic review](#)
- [Climate Plans Remain Insufficient: More Ambitious Action Needed Now](#)
- [The Federal Funding Primer on Climate Justice: Executive Summary](#)



*Disclaimer: As you may know, recently, some climate-related websites have been taken down. We have done our best to find archived links or alternate sites. Please email us at cjrabe@mit.edu if you find a broken link.

Learning Objectives

01

Understand the importance of policies in realizing climate justice goals

02

Examine currently implemented and proposed climate policies

03

Evaluate the effectiveness of real world climate justice policies

04

Research and **assess** local climate justice policies in the Boston area

Warm up

What climate justice policies are you aware of?

- What do you know about them?
- In your opinion, how effective are they?

Turn to a partner or small group and brainstorm your ideas.



Introduction

PART 1



What is Climate Justice Policy?

Definition

Climate justice policy refers to actions, strategies, and regulations aimed at addressing the unequal distribution of climate change impacts and promoting fairness, equity, and human rights in climate action. These policies recognize that certain populations bear a disproportionate burden of the consequences of climate change, despite contributing less to its causes.

CJ Policy takes a human rights approach to climate action

This ensures that individuals and communities have access to clean air, water, food security, health services, and a safe environment, regardless of their socioeconomic status or background.

Tuvalu's Minister for Justice, Communication & Foreign Affairs Simon Kofe gives a COP26 statement while standing in the ocean in Funafuti, Tuvalu November 5, 2021. Tuvalu Foreign Ministry | via Reuters



The Different Levels of CJ Policy

01

International

The UN Loss and Damage Fund would provide financial support to countries that are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of climate change. Funded by wealthy nations, philanthropists, and actors within the private sector, the current commitments amount to about \$661 million.

02

National

The Environmental Justice for All Act aims to remedy the history of environmental racism and injustice in the U.S. by strengthening existing civil rights and environmental laws, and making community input and cumulative assessment required in federal decision-making processes.

03

Regional

The Fulton County Environmental Justice Initiative is an environmental health initiative with the goal to ensure that no demographic group is disproportionately affected by adverse environmental conditions created when pollution sources are located in BIPOC and low-income communities.

04

Local

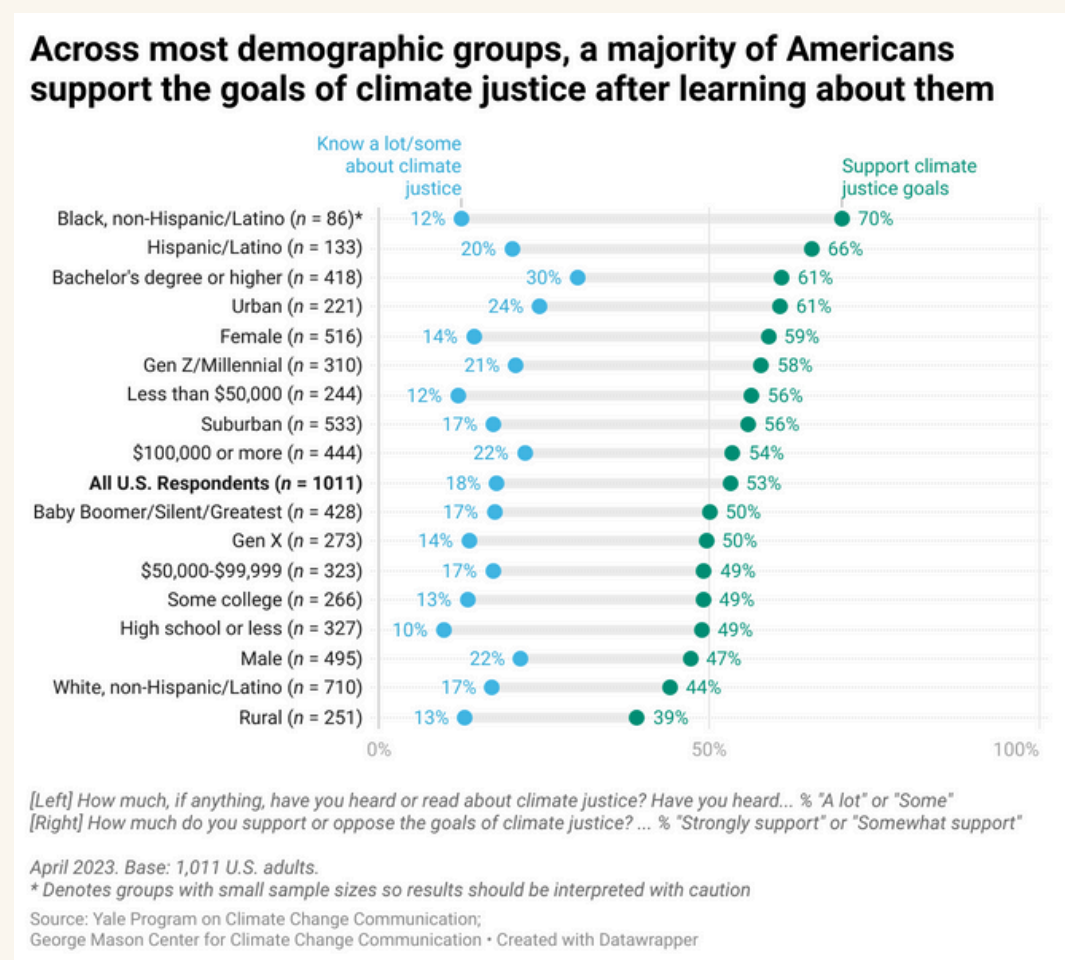
The Municipal Bank of Los Angeles (MBLA) is a non-profit financial institution owned by the city that aims to support economic growth, community reinvestment, and financial stability by investing in projects that support energy-efficient affordable housing, climate justice, and small businesses.

See parts 2-4 for a deeper dive on each level of CJ policy

Who Supports Climate Justice in the US?

01

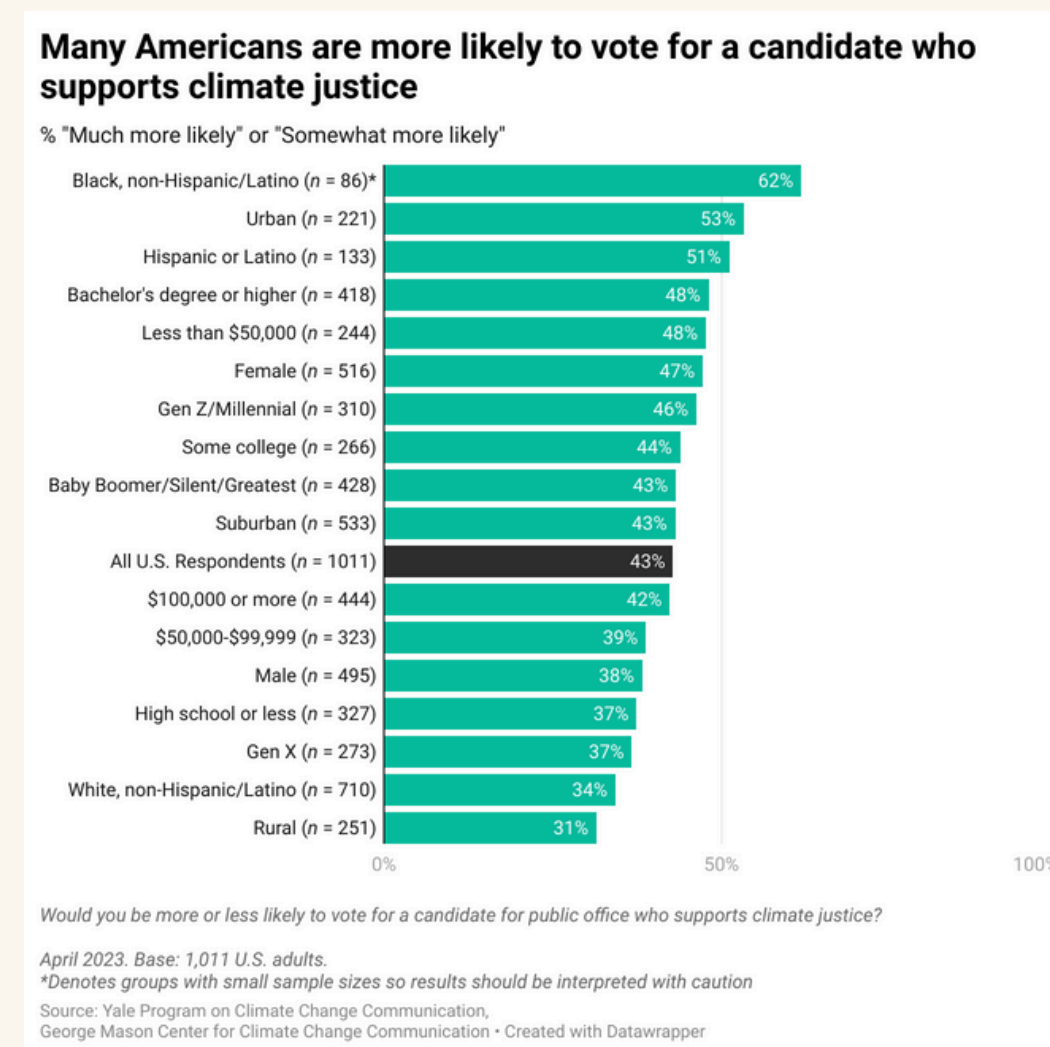
Climate Justice Awareness and Support



Carmen et. al., 2023

02

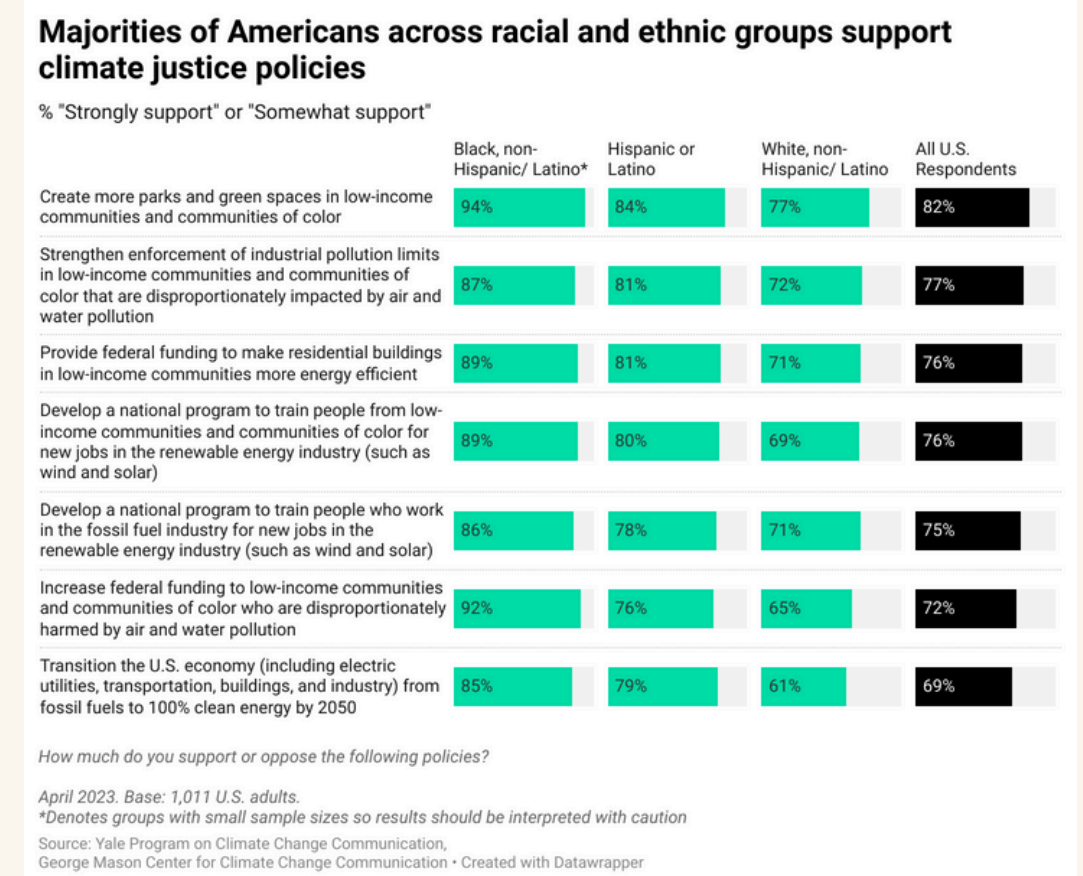
Voting for Candidates Who Support Climate Justice



Carmen et. al., 2023

03

Climate Justice Policy Support



Carmen et. al., 2023

[Learn more here](#)

Review: *How can policy and policymaking foster climate justice?*

Summary of argument

1. There is disproportionately low attention to climate justice even when attention to climate change is high
2. This lack of energy for reform relates to a losing battle of ideas
3. There needs to be radical changes to policy and policymaking to transform the economy and society while addressing climate change
4. There is a major gap between what is required and what happens
5. These problems prompt debates among climate justice scholars (and activists) about how to respond

What are some ideas *you* have for how policy(making) can foster climate justice?



CJ Policy at the International Level

PART 2



The Paris Agreement

Definition

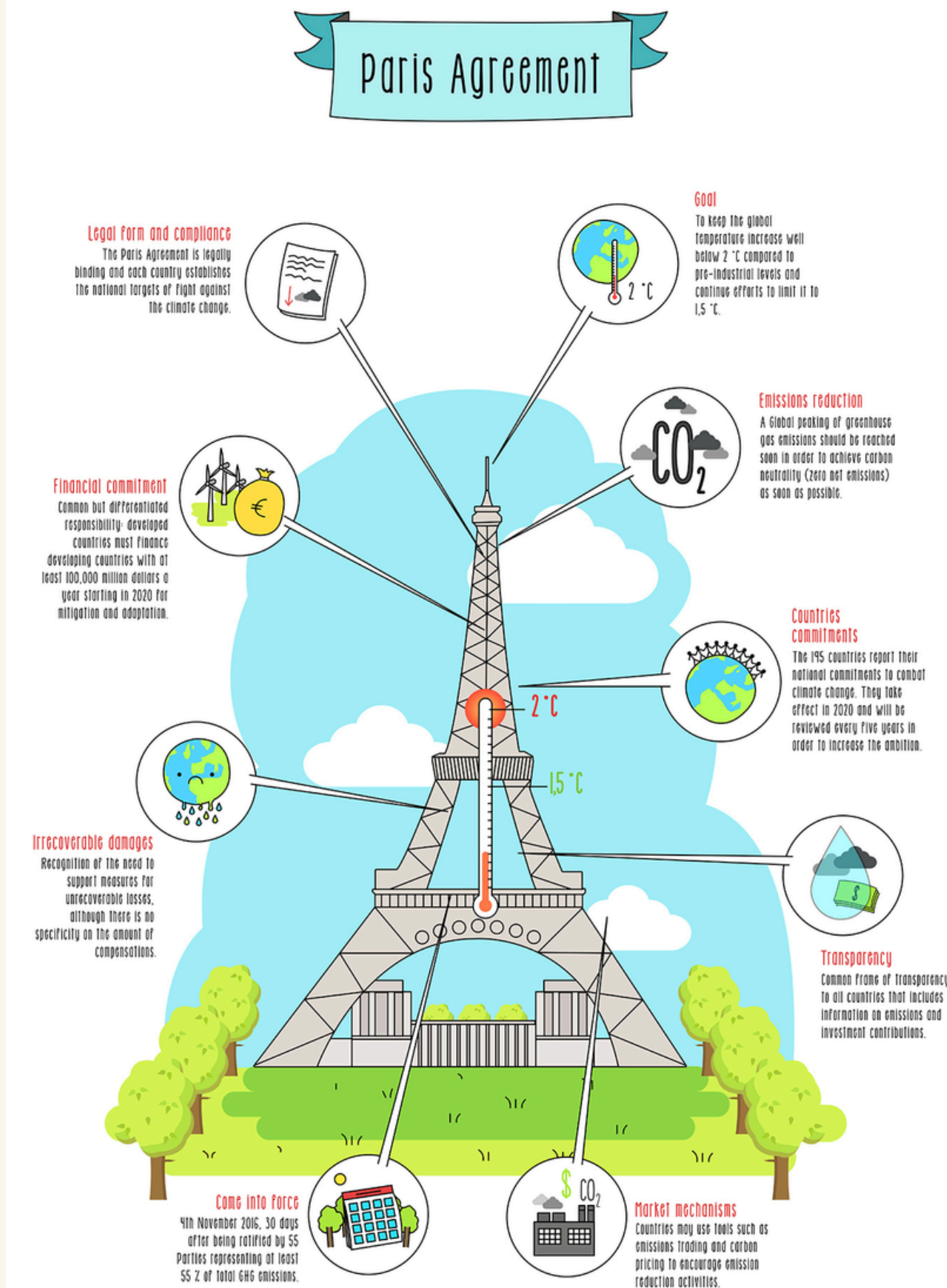
The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change that was adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015.

The goal of the Paris Agreement

The goal is to keep the global average temperature below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, but ideally strive for a temperature increase of only 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Watch this video from the UN to learn more

[What is the 'Paris Agreement', and how does it work?](#)

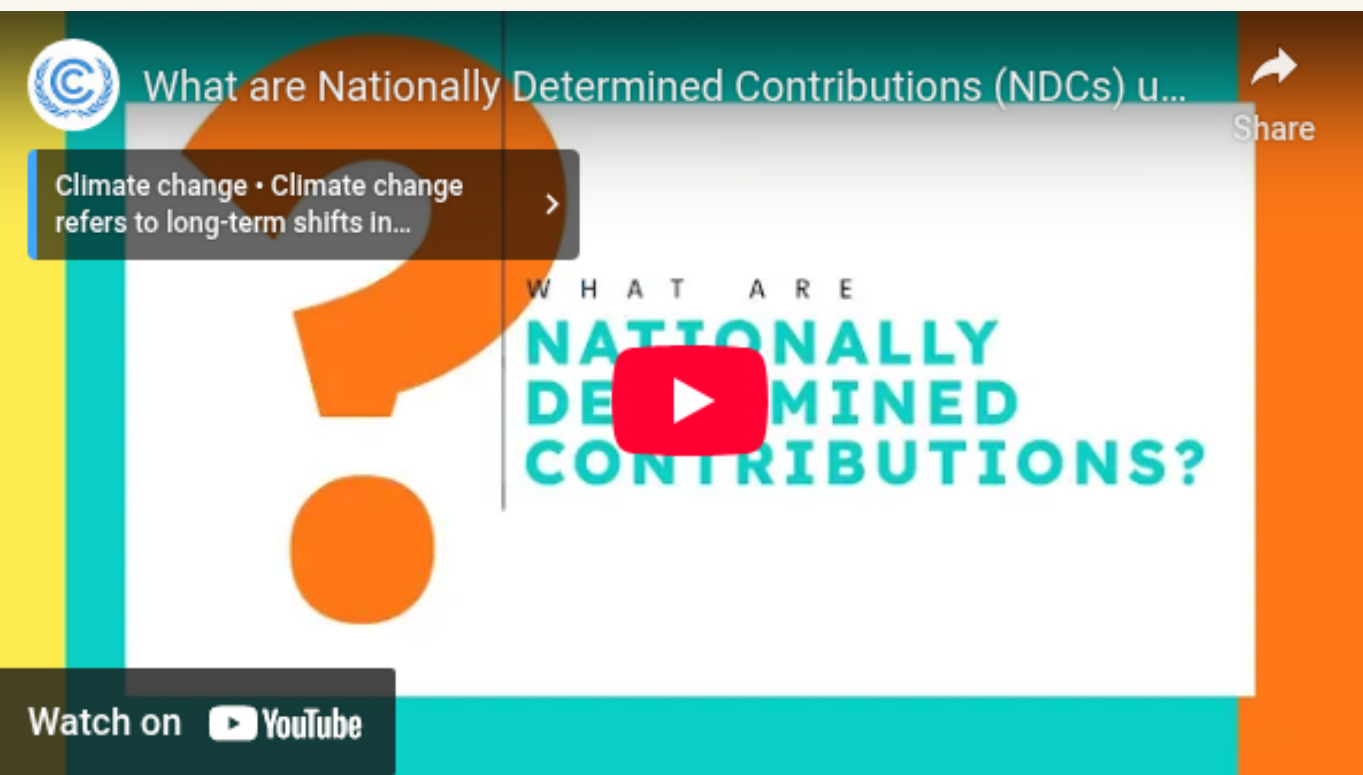


ACTIVITY #1

AN INTRODUCTION TO NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS

Watch

What are Nationally Determined Contributions?



Post-video discussion question

Based on what you saw in the previous video, do you think NDCs are an effective way to enforce environmental standards?

Compare and Contrast

1. From the public UN registry of NDCs, pick two countries of interest, preferably one developed nation and one developing nation.
2. Click under "Title" to read over each country's NDC goals.

Discussion questions

- Between the two nations, what differences do you notice?
- How are their contributions framed differently in terms of mitigation goals, strategies, and resources?

Review: *Climate Plans Remain Insufficient*

Key Argument

"We are still nowhere near the scale and pace of emission reductions required to put us on track toward a 1.5 degrees Celsius world. To keep this goal alive, national governments need to strengthen their climate action plans now and implement them in the next eight years." – Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of UN Climate Change

What does this article reveal to you about the efficacy of international agreements like the Paris Agreement in furthering climate justice?

Consider whether climate justice can be achieved without successfully combatting climate change first.



From: UN Climate Change

ACTIVITY #2

A DEEPER DIVE INTO INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE JUSTICE POLICY

Before class

Create three groups and assign each group one reading:

- *The domestic politics of international climate commitments*
- *Climate policy co-benefits: a review*
- *A sectoral perspective on international climate governance*

Read and annotate

Read your group's assigned article and make annotation of key points, data, quotes, etc. The goal is to be familiar with the findings of your reading ahead of the next class meeting.

Small group discussion

Allow each group to meet for 10–15 minutes to discuss their takeaways from the reading and come up with a uniform summary that can be shared with the class. Consider using a shared presentation (i.e. Google Slides) that each group can add a bullet point summary to.

Share out with the class

Each group should share a summary of the article's key points with the class. The goal is to give enough information so that people who didn't read the article still have a sufficient understanding of its content and significance.

CJ Policy at the National Level in the U.S.

PART 3

"No Planet B - Funeral for our future - Melbourne - IMG_3561" by John Englart (Takver) is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.



The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

What is the IRA?

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) was signed into law in 2022, and offers \$370 billion in grants, loans, rebates, incentives, and other investments to build a new clean energy economy. So far, funding from the IRA is financing 119 federal programs.

How does the IRA further climate justice?

The IRA "prioritizes creating shared prosperity, making the nation more resilient to growing threats to health and well-being, and driving critical economic investments to historically underserved communities, particularly those living with legacy pollution."

President Biden, joined by Democratic members of Congress, signs the Inflation Reduction Act into law during a ceremony in the White House on Tuesday.
Mandel Ngan/AFP via Getty Images



The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)

What is the BIL?

The \$550 billion Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, signed in 2021, aims to improve U.S. infrastructure. It focuses on funding projects related to transportation, broadband internet, and climate, energy, and the environment. So far, the BIL is supporting over 350 federal programs.

How does the BIL further climate justice?

One of the overarching focus areas of the BIL is to support underserved communities. For example, one of the main environmental programs focuses on environmental remediation to "address the legacy pollution that harms the public health of communities, create good-paying union jobs, and advance long overdue environmental justice."

The Justice40 Initiative

What is the Justice40 Initiative?

The Justice40 Initiative aims to ensure that 40% of the benefits of certain Federal climate, clean energy, affordable and sustainable housing, and other investments go to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.

What programs make up the Justice40 Initiative?

New programs created by the IRA, BIL, and America Rescue Plan all further Justice40, but many federal agencies have also adjusted their existing funding programs to further Justice40. The [Justice40 Initiative Covered Programs List](#) includes all 518 Justice40 programs.



The Justice40 Initiative

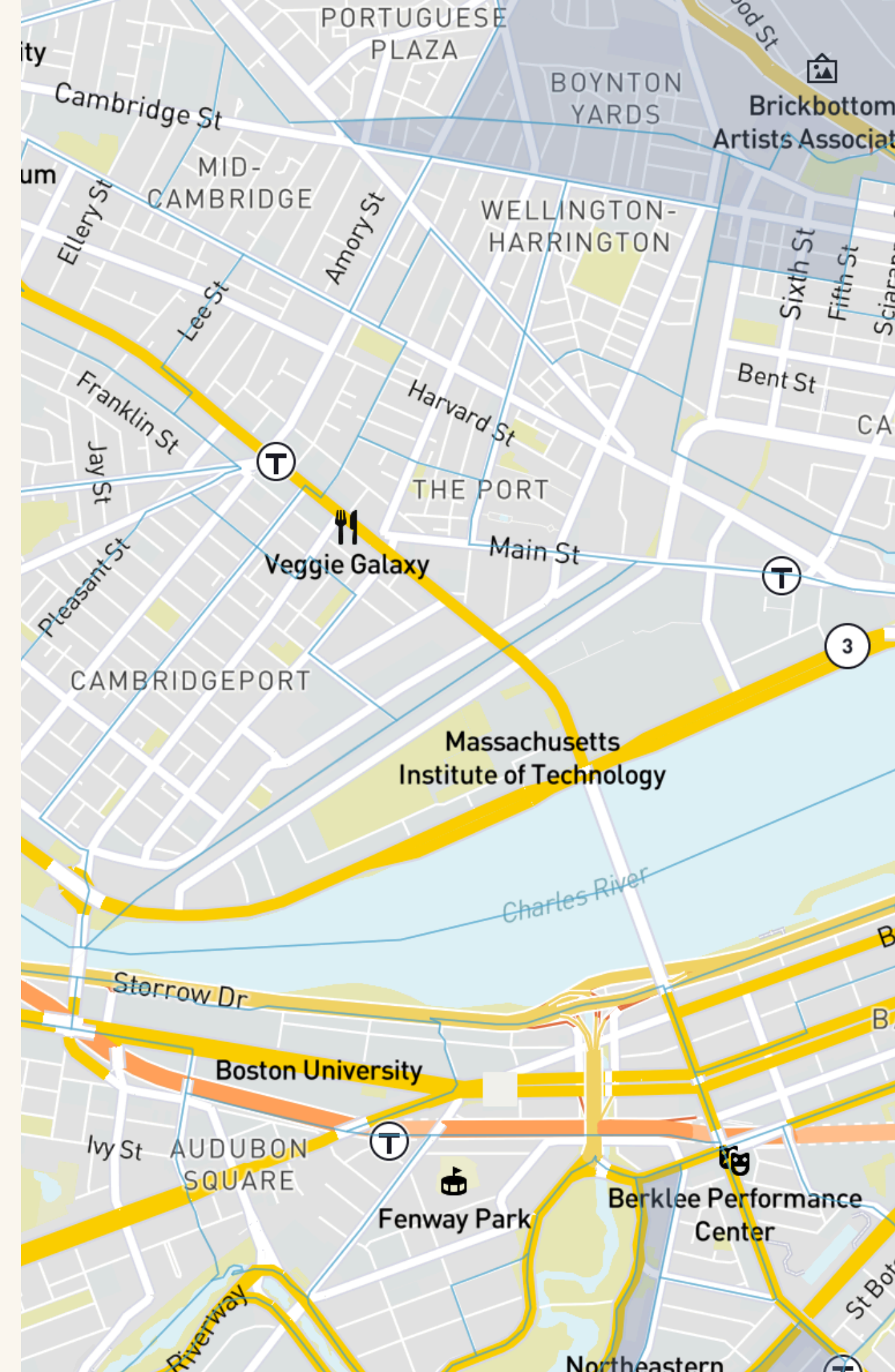
How are communities involved in the Justice40 Initiative?

The White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council advises the executive administration on how to address current and historic environmental injustice. Members of the council come from diverse backgrounds, and have knowledge about or experience in environmental justice, climate change, disaster preparedness, or racial inequity.

What is the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)?

The Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) is an interactive mapping tool to identify disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. The CEJST is the federal government's primary tool for identifying disadvantaged communities that are geographically defined for any covered programs under the Justice40 Initiative.

[Learn more about Justice40](#)



Review: *The Federal Funding Primer on Climate Justice*

Purpose

This Federal Funding Primer on Climate Justice provides a roadmap for navigating the funding opportunities provided by Justice40, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

"The success of the BIL, IRA, and Justice40 covered programs in advancing justice will come down to how accessible they are to our communities, and what implementation really looks like on the ground."

[Get access to the full primer here](#)

Executive Summary

The Federal Funding Primer on Climate Justice *A Complete Guide for Understanding Justice40, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law*

**By Tara Steckler, Meghan Walker,
and Nina Schlegel, with Daniel Faber**

Designed by Nikki McCullough

April 2024
First Edition



Case Studies on CJ Policy at the Regional & Local Levels

PART 4



ACTIVITY #3

CASE STUDIES ON LOCAL/REGIONAL LEVEL CLIMATE JUSTICE POLICY

Choose a case study

In small groups of 3–5, pick one of these case studies to examine:

- [Ithaca, NY](#)
- [Dekalb County, GA](#)
- [England](#)
- [Boulder Valley, CO](#)
- [Chicago, IL](#)

Research your case study

Start with the initial resource provided to you, but then dig deeper by researching:

- Other perspectives on the topic of the initial resource
- Local social and political history relating to CJ policy
- More recent information relating to the topic of the initial resource or CJ policy
- Local GND/CJ policy organizations and movements

Present your findings

In your small group, give a 5-minute presentation on your assigned case study. Be sure to include:

- A brief description of the topic discussed in the initial resource
- History of CJ policy in the area (if applicable)
- Recent policy developments (if applicable)
- At least 2 different (ideally local) perspectives on CJ policy
- Any GND/CJ organizations and movements you found

ACTIVITY #4

CASE STUDIES ON LOCAL/REGIONAL CLIMATE ACTION PLANS

Choose a case study

In small groups of 3–5, pick one of these case studies to examine:

- Boston, USA
- Hong Kong
- Nairobi, Kenya
- Los Angeles, USA
- São Paulo, Brazil

Research your case study

Within your group, skim through the climate action plan for your case study, and then discuss

- The goal(s) of the climate action plan
- Its policy focuses
- To what extent justice is mentioned

Present your findings

In your small group, give a 5-minute presentation on your assigned case study. Be sure to include:

- The goal(s) of the climate action plan
- The main policy focuses
- Your group's evaluation of to what degree climate injustice is being/will be addressed
- Any other observations that you may have

The Green New Deal

PART 5

Excerpted from Posters for a Green New Deal by Creative Action Network, foreword by Demand Drummer (Workman). © 2020. Illustration by Isabelle Vandeplassche



Introduction to the GND

What is the Green New Deal?

The Green New Deal (GND) was originally a proposed set of economic stimulus packages and policy initiatives that aimed to address climate change and economic inequality. It was first introduced in the United States by Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey in February 2019.

The evolution of the Green New Deal

While the GND began as a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives, it has evolved into a global movement. A GND no longer refers to one piece of legislation in one country. GNDs are being implemented at local and regional levels around the world, with some GNDs being specific to certain issues (i.e. A GND for Boston Public Schools).



Elements of the Green New Deal

01

Transitioning to renewable energy sources

The GND emphasizes the shift away from fossil fuels and the promotion of renewable energy technologies such as solar/wind power.

02

Upgrading/expanding Infrastructure

The GND aims to improve energy efficiency in buildings, modernize transportation, and invest in resilient infrastructure to withstand the impacts of climate change.

03

Investing in a green workforce

The GND creates well-paying jobs in industries related to renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture, and other sustainability-minded fields.

04

Promoting environmental justice

The GND addresses the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized communities and to ensure that the benefits of a clean energy transition are equitably distributed.

Green New Deal Action Areas

Affordable
Housing

Health + Just
Recovery

Circular
Economy and
Zero Waste

Climate Change
Adaptation

Good Jobs in a
Green Economy

Food Justice +
Resiliency

Energy
Democracy

Decommodi-
fication of
Necessities

Divest +
Reinvest

Sustainable +
Equitable Land
use

Water Justice

Transforming
Institutions +
Processes

Transportation
Justice

Click on each action area to learn more

Critiques + The Red Deal

Critique from the Indigenous Environmental Network

"...we remain concerned that unless some changes are made to the resolution, the Green New Deal will leave incentives by industries and governments to continue causing harm to Indigenous communities...We can no longer leave any options for the fossil fuel industry to determine the economic and energy future of this country. And until the Green New Deal can be explicit in this demand as well as closing the loop on harmful incentives, we cannot fully endorse the resolution."

What is The Red Deal?

The Red Deal Indigenous Action To Save Our Earth is an action plan for decolonization in Turtle Island and beyond that is divided into three parts: End the Occupation, Heal Our Bodies, and Heal Our Planet. The Red Deal is a political plan to decolonize a world for all.



From: The Red Nation

Learn more from [The Red Nation](#) and the [Indigenous Environmental Network](#)

ACTIVITY #5

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Read and Review

Pick an action area that interests you and review the case studies and/or reports available that interest you. Take some notes to discuss your thoughts in your group.

Green New Deal Action Areas



Analyze

Examine the policy frameworks and mechanisms employed in each case study. Identify key elements such as community engagement, inclusive decision-making processes, funding mechanisms, and the integration of social and environmental considerations.

Evaluate

Assess the outcomes and impacts of the implemented policies on addressing environmental inequities. Evaluate indicators such as improved access to clean water and air, reduced pollution, enhanced community resilience, job creation, and empowerment of marginalized groups.

Discuss

Discuss your analysis and evaluation in a small group. Be sure to share which action area that you selected.

Beyond the Module

PART 6



PROJECT OPTION #1

Evaluate the Effectiveness of Proposed Policies

Central Question

Knowing what you know now, can you apply the Green New Deal as a framework for your learning in class?

Instructions

1. Pick a section from the *Boston Green New Deal Report* and do some research on the importance of issues in this space, and evaluate the effectiveness of proposed policies.
2. Be prepared to discuss and present your ideas to your peers next class! You may choose any format to present (slides, infographic, video, etc.)

PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT
OF COOPERATIVE HOUSING

ADDRESSING THE
“GREEN GAP”

AFFORDABLE GREEN
ENERGY TRANSITION

DIVEST/REINVEST IN A
CLIMATE JUST FUTURE

FARE-FREE EXPRESS
TRANSIT ROUTES

HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE
FOOD

FINANCING
INFRASTRUCTURE EQUITY

GROWING THE SMALL
BUSINESS COMMUNITY

JUSTICE FRAMEWORK &
AUDIT

ECO-DISTRICTS FOR JUST
DEVELOPMENT

JUST TRANSITION
EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

RENTERS RIGHT TO
COUNSEL

SHIFTING SERVICES FROM
POLICE TO COMMUNITY

CREATE AN URBAN
CLIMATE CORPS

Essay on the Impact of Climate Justice Policy

Prompt suggestion

Consider the impacts of a climate justice policy of your choosing. Then, pick a region, municipality, community group, or specific policy issue to limit the scope of your research. Write a 2–3 page paper on your topic, and be sure to connect your points back to the idea of climate justice.

To get you started, here some examples of what your topic could be:

- The impact of the Infrastructure Reduction Act on Indigenous communities
- The impact of justice-centered environmental health policy in the Southeastern U.S.



Additional Resources

- The [Green New Deal Resource Hub](#)
- The [Just Transition](#) module
- [Climate Justice Alliance's Policy Resources](#)
- [*Voter Suppression and the Polluter Industrial Complex*](#) (report)
- [Inflation Reduction Act Guidebook](#)
- [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Guidebook](#)
- [Climate Action Tracker](#)
- [Global Center for Climate Justice](#)

For more resources on climate and environmental justice: **Please explore other modules in the Climate Justice Instructional Toolkit.**



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