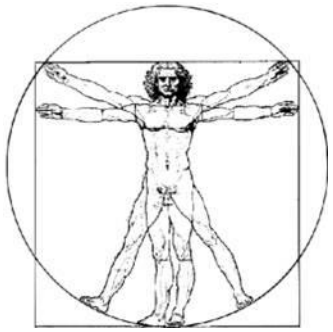

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Quo Vadis COP?

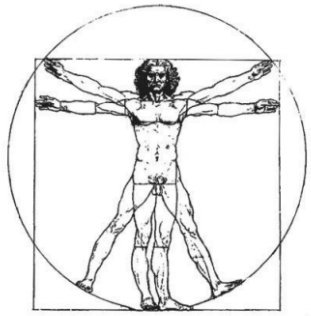
Professor Benito Müller

Director ecbi, Convener, International Climate Policy Research, ECI, University of Oxford

14 June 2026 ecbi Bonn Seminar

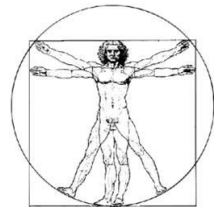
Environmental *Change* Institute eci

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



Quo Vadis COP?

Future Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings under the UNFCCC – Settled and Fit for Purpose



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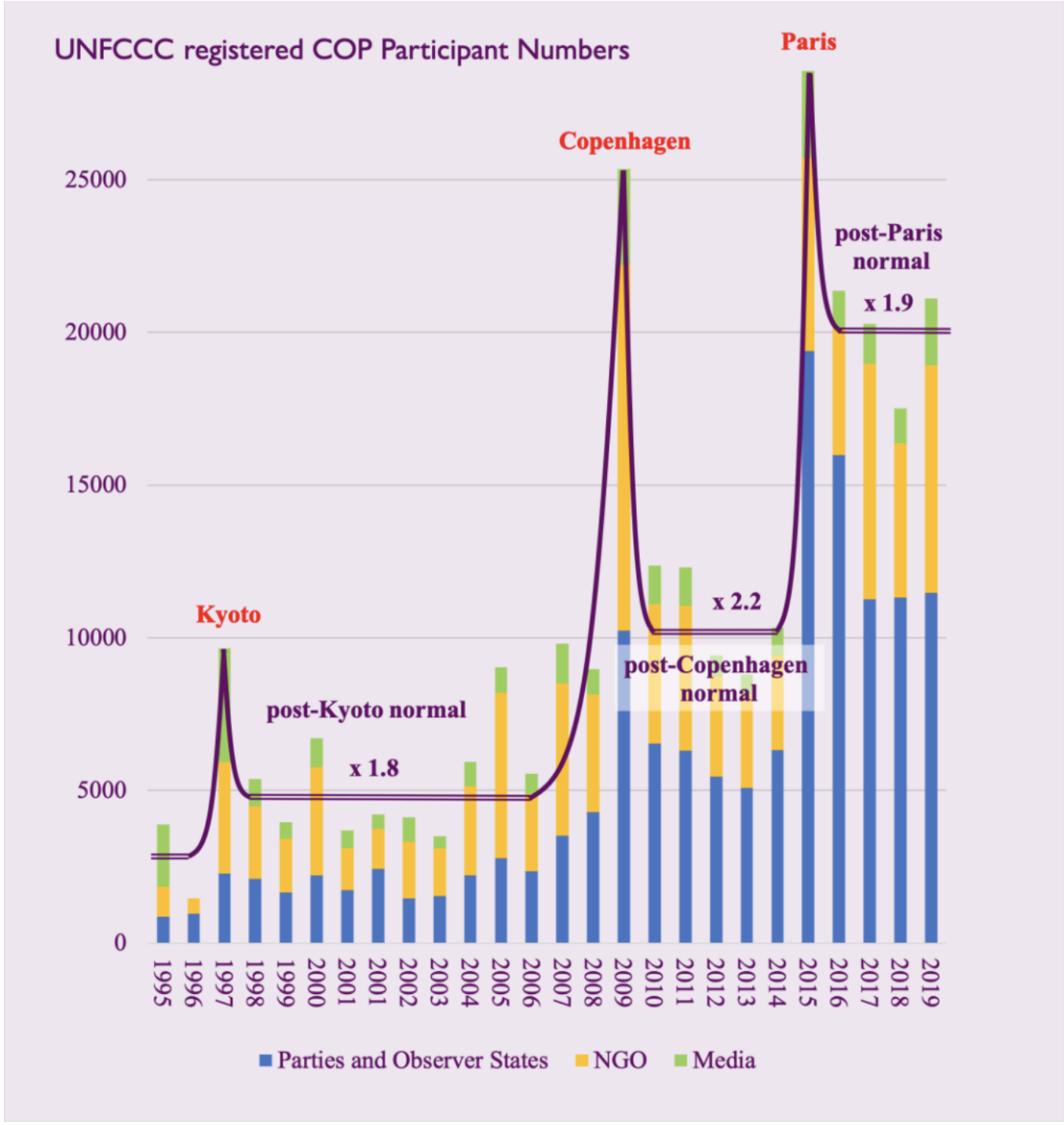
March 2021

Benito Müller, Jen Allan, Matthias Roesti, and Luis Gomez-Echeverri

with a Foreword by
Marianne Karlsen, Chair of the SBI

March 2021


UNFCCC registered COP Participant Numbers
Paris
Copenhagen
25000
20000
15000
10000
5000
0
post-Paris
normal
x 1.9
Kyoto
x 2.2
post-Copenhagen
normal
post-Kyoto normal
x 1.8
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
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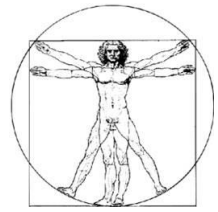
2018
2019
Parties and Observer States
NGO
Media



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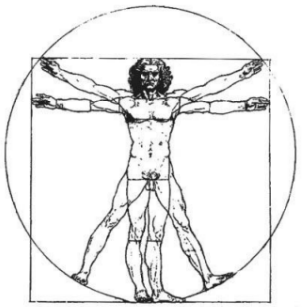
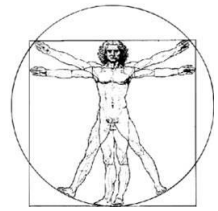


Quo Vadis COP?

Future Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings under the UNFCCC – Settled and Fit for Purpose



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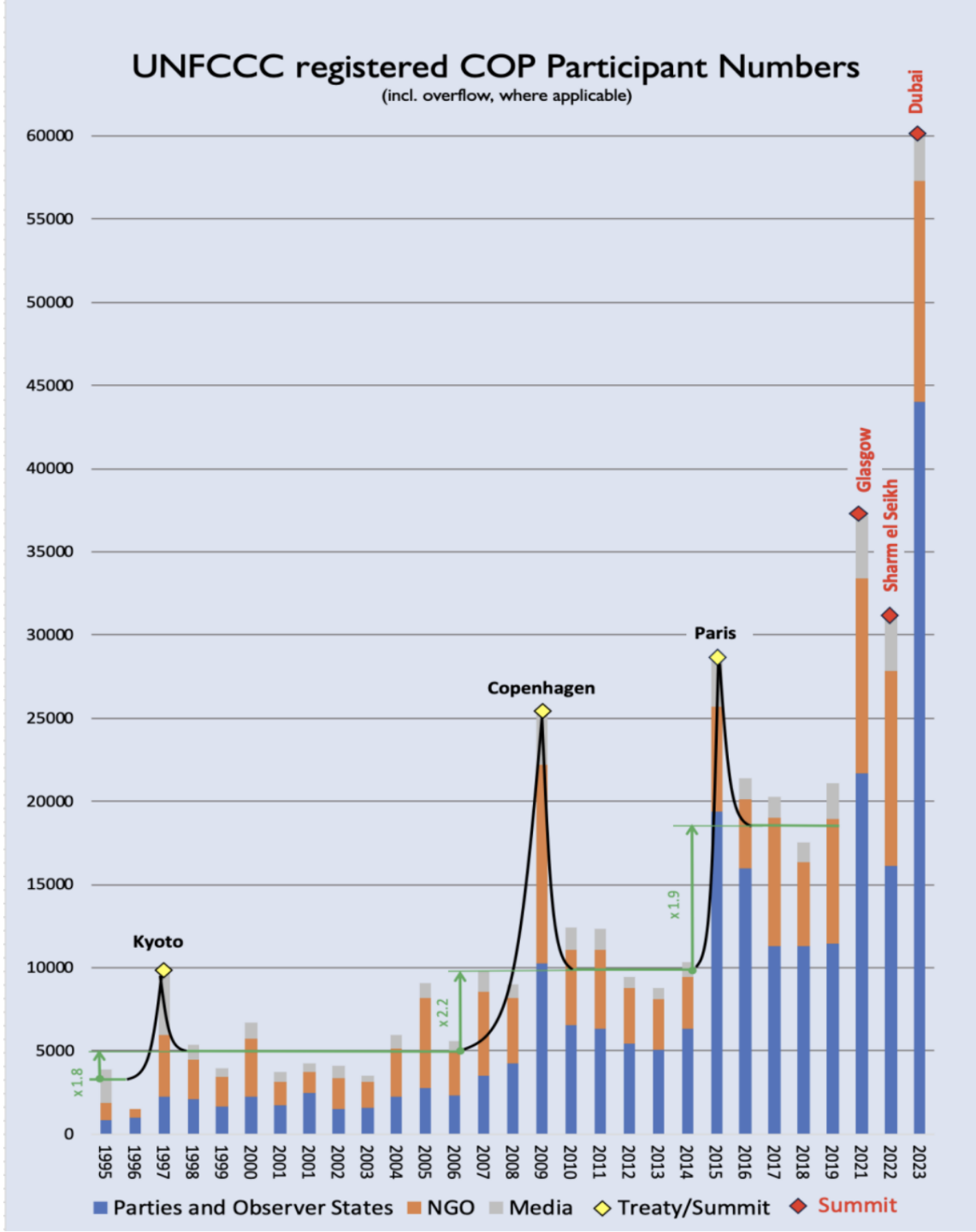
2024 Update

December 2024

Benito Müller, Jen Allan, Matthias Roesti, and Luis Gomez-Echeverri

December 2024


UNFCCC registered COP Participant Numbers
(incl. overflow, where applicable)
60000
55000
50000
45000
40000
35000
30000
25000
20000
15000
10000
5000
0
Dubai
Glasgow
Sharm el Seikh
Paris
Copenhagen
Kyoto
x1.8
x2.2
x1.9
1995
1996
1997
1998
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2000
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2001
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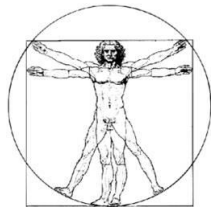
2022
2023
Parties and Observer States
NGO
Media
Treaty/Summit
Summit



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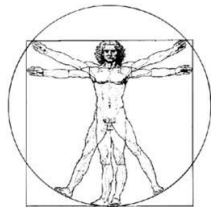
Three Concerns



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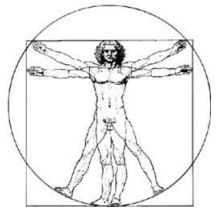
The 2024 Update focuses on three major issues arising from such 'mega-COPs':

- **Equity concerns** – the most climate vulnerable states can no longer afford to preside over or host a COP and showcase their plight; indeed, even larger countries with higher capacities shy away from hosting mega-COPs, drastically reducing the inclusiveness of the multilateral process.
- Negotiations benefit from **serendipitous encounters** between participants, but the size of mega-COPs prevent this from happening easily.
- Last, but not least, mega-COPs pose a serious **reputational risk for the multilateral climate change negotiations.** Not only is there the risk of the mega spectacle leading to an inflation of the general public's expectations on outcomes, but they may even pose an obstacle to appreciate the successes of more focused outcomes such as the Global Stocktake, enhanced transparency reports, and new Nationally Determined Contributions. The hype may lead to expect outcomes which are not meant to be delivered by negotiations in implementation mode, leading to the perception of these events as overblown multilateral jamborees/junkets.

Solution: Disaggregate the COP Jamborees



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The Update identifies a triad of distinct events happening at current COPs: **Negotiations** (sessions of the governing bodies and SBs), **summit meetings**, and **trade expos**. All are, no doubt, important but they do not have to happen at the same time in the same place. The fact that they currently are co-located at take place concurrently was not a matter of design but happened mainly for the sake of organizational convenience.

Decentralization. This is why we propose to spatio-temporally disaggregate the mega-COP triad as follows:

- **COP Sessions (Negotiations)**: To be held (purely as sessions of the governing bodies and SBs) in Bonn at the World Conference Center (where capacity is 5,000 participants), following the model of the mid-year SB sessions (without a ministerial high-level segment).
- **COP Presidency (Climate) Su**mmits: To be held (if possible, only in specific years when political leadership is required) in the COP Presidency's region (possibly in conjunction with the Expos) or at the UN in Geneva. For NDC submission years, the Summit could be held nine months before the COP, when NDCs are due.
- **COP Presidency (Climate) Expos**: To take place in the UN Region holding the rotating COP Presidency (but not necessarily in the country of the Presidency).