

Predicting Paris

Forecasting key outcomes from COP 21 using an expert survey

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this research note is to make a forecast of key outcomes from the upcoming COP 21 (November 30th – December 11th 2015) publicly available prior to the COP. This note is part of a larger project on forecasting the outcome of COP 21, and reports on the results from an expert survey. The survey questions were developed jointly by the project team, and are defined so that they can both be analyzed in quantitative models (which requires ordinal response options) and answered by experts.

The larger research project involves Prof. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (New York University), Prof. Detlef Sprinz (Potsdam University), Prof. Frans N. Stokman and Prof. Robert Thomson. The project will apply a range of complementary approaches for forecasting key outcomes of COP21. The two other notes will report on the findings from applications of non-cooperative game theoretic models. One has already been published.¹ After COP 21 we intend to analyze the accuracy and usefulness of our forecasts, and to compare them to each other.

2. The expert survey

We distributed the survey by email to 105 experts. Through participation in several projects and events relating to the negotiations, the authors have gathered a list of contacts who follow the current negotiations closely. We received 39 responses, which gives a response rate of 37%.

The experts were instructed to answer what they think the content of the new agreement and decision at COP21 will be. The introductory text underlined that it was important to enter the expected outcome even if it deviated from the positions they advocate.

¹ Frans N. Stokman and Robert Thomson 2015 "Forecasting the Paris 2015 UNFCCC Negotiations - The Exchange Model's Analysis of Developments and Potential Obstacles to Reaching an Agreement". Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/pvfcyyn>

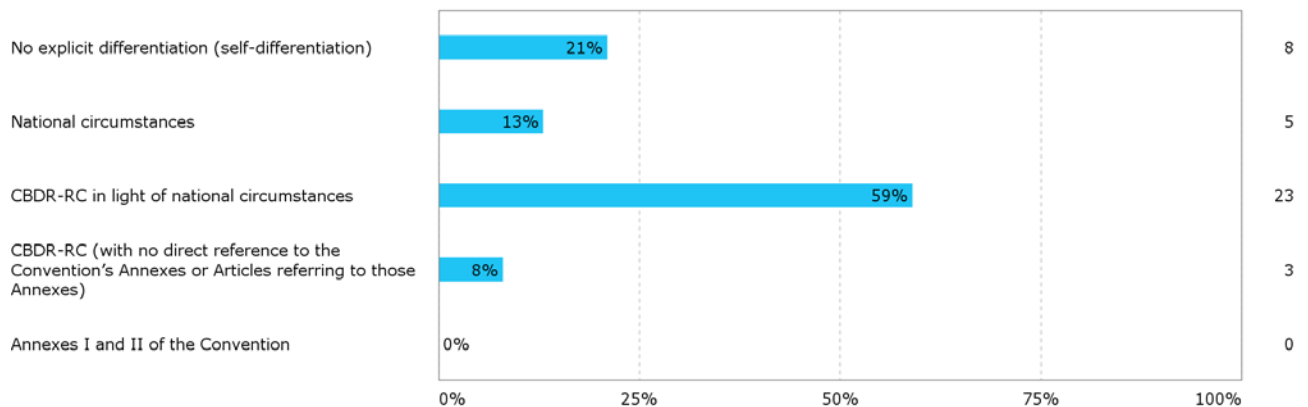
In addition to the 13 substantive questions, we also asked respondents about their regional affiliation and their role. While we did not expect to obtain a representative sample, it is useful to know if the responses might be biased in any particular direction. The invited experts were fairly well distributed across regions, but those who responded were primarily (82%) from the UNFCCC region “Western Europe and others (including the USA)”. Simple tests indicate that the respondents from other regions do not provide answers that are markedly different from the dominant group. One third of respondents were researchers, and one quarter were party delegates (negotiators). The rest were consultants, NGO representatives, former party delegates and journalists.

The respondents were also given the opportunity to provide comments to each question and to the survey overall. Many of the comments reflect that the respondents would have liked more nuanced response options. The need to be able to define clear positions for each actor in the model analyses, the need to have an ordinal ranking of the options, and to have a manageable number of options all point us in the direction of having relatively few options, which means that they will in some instances be somewhat general.

The survey questions are presented as section headings below. The response options are listed in the corresponding figures. For each question, we provide the complete distribution of answers, and a brief summary of the most relevant comments we received.

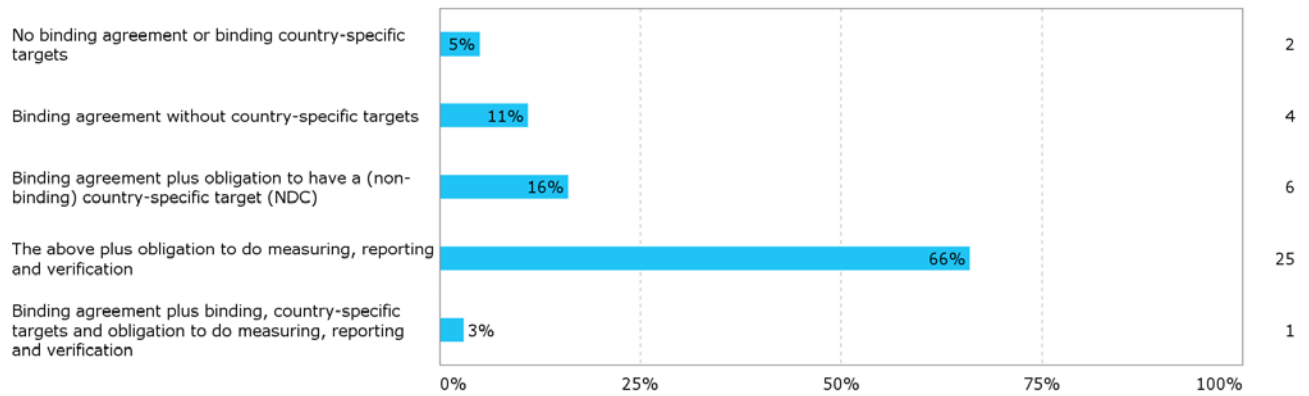
2.1 What will be the main principle(s) for differentiating efforts?

Almost 60% of respondents believe the principle will be “CBDR-RC in light of national circumstances”, although a sizable minority (21%) believe there will be no explicit differentiation. Several respondents pointed to the fact that the options are not necessarily mutually exclusive as different principles might apply to different areas of the agreement or decisions.



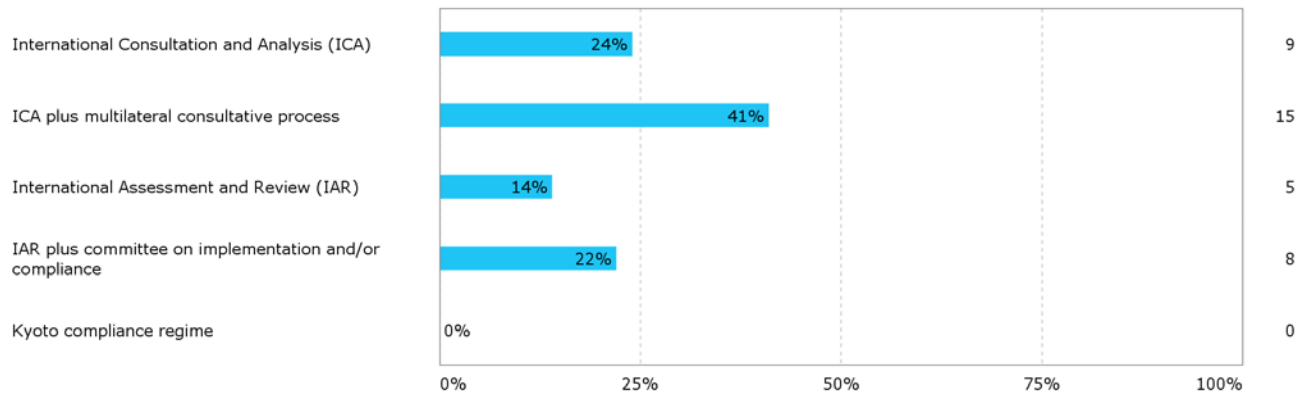
2.2 To what extent will the agreement and its components relating to mitigation targets be internationally legally binding?

Two thirds of the respondents believe that there will be a binding agreement plus obligation to have a (non-binding) country specific target (NDC) and an obligation to do measuring, reporting and verification. Most of the remaining respondents believe in the less binding options.



2.3 Regarding mitigation, what will be the minimum MRV and compliance provisions any country faces?

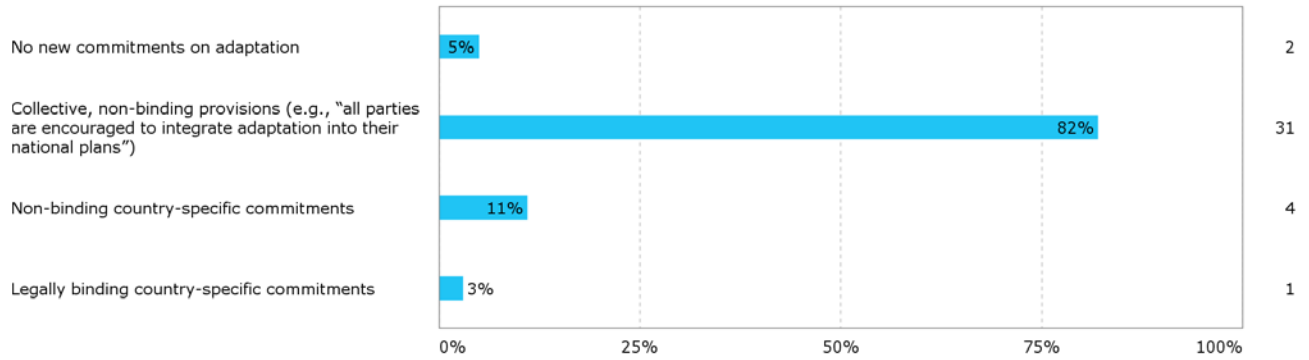
Almost two thirds of the respondents believe the agreement will involve international consultation and analysis (41% with a multilateral consultative process in addition), and not the more stringent options such as international assessment and review or a Kyoto-type compliance regime.



Some respondents pointed out that the requirements will probably be different for developed and developing countries (the way the survey question was phrased opens allows for this possibility albeit not explicitly).

2.4 Regarding adaptation, to what extent will targets be country-specific and internationally legally binding?

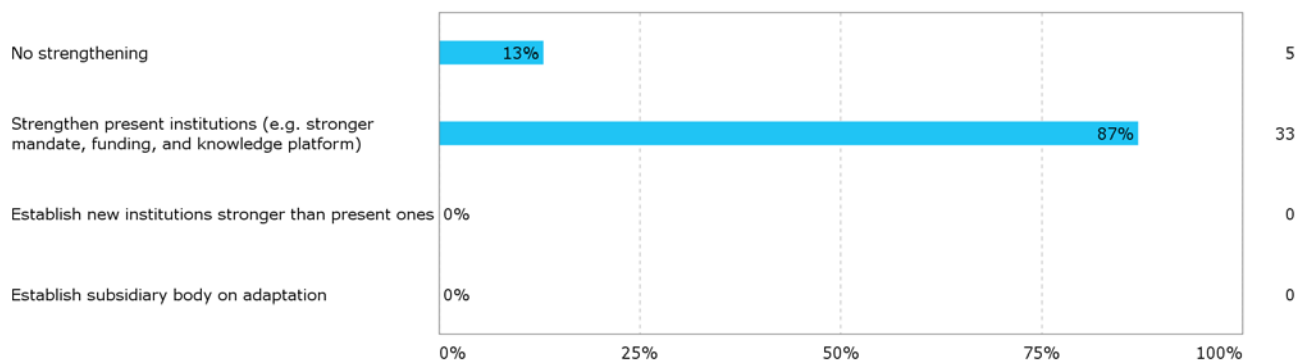
This is one of the two questions with the highest degree of agreement among our respondents. 82% believe the adaptation targets will be in the form of collective, non-binding provisions.



It was pointed out that the options are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Two respondents pointed to likely outcomes which were not included among our options, for instance the option to express country-specific contributions in the (I)NDCs.

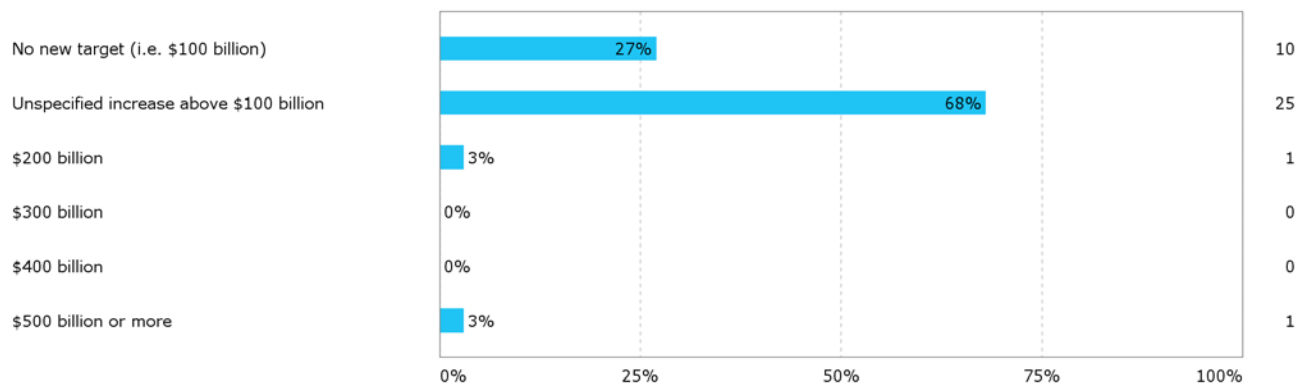
2.5 To what extent will the institutional framework for adaptation be strengthened?

This was the question with the highest rate of agreement among our respondents: 87% believe the present adaptation institutions will be strengthened. No respondents believe new and stronger institutions or a subsidiary body will be established.



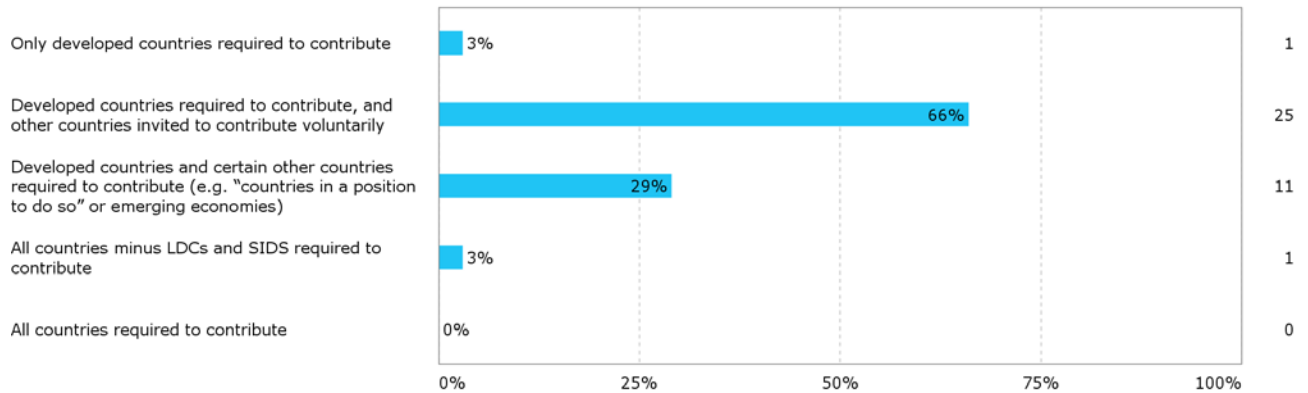
2.6 What will the size of agreed finance volume to be mobilized (private and public) by 2030 (per annum)?

95% of respondents believe there will be no new target for climate finance or only an unspecified increase above the current pledge of USD 100 billion per year from 2020.



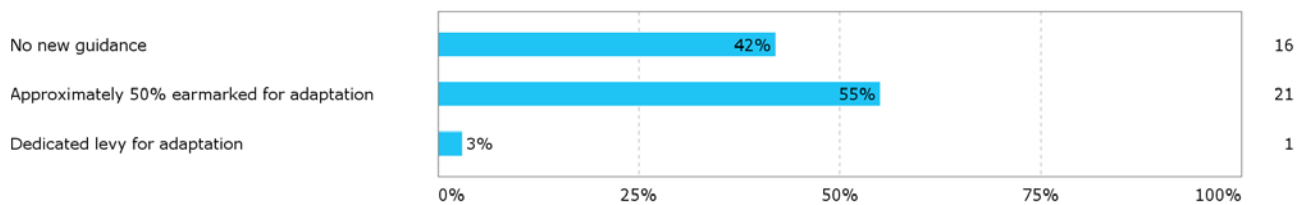
2.7 Who will be requested to pay for climate finance?

The responses were clustered around two similar and potentially overlapping options: 97% believe developed countries will be required to contribute and that other countries will be invited (66%) or required (29%) to contribute. The reason the two options might overlap is that one of the suggested solutions is that “countries in a position to do so” should contribute to climate finance. As this does not provide a clear definition of who should contribute, this could be considered equivalent to an invitation to contribute (for those who want to define themselves as “in a position to do so”).



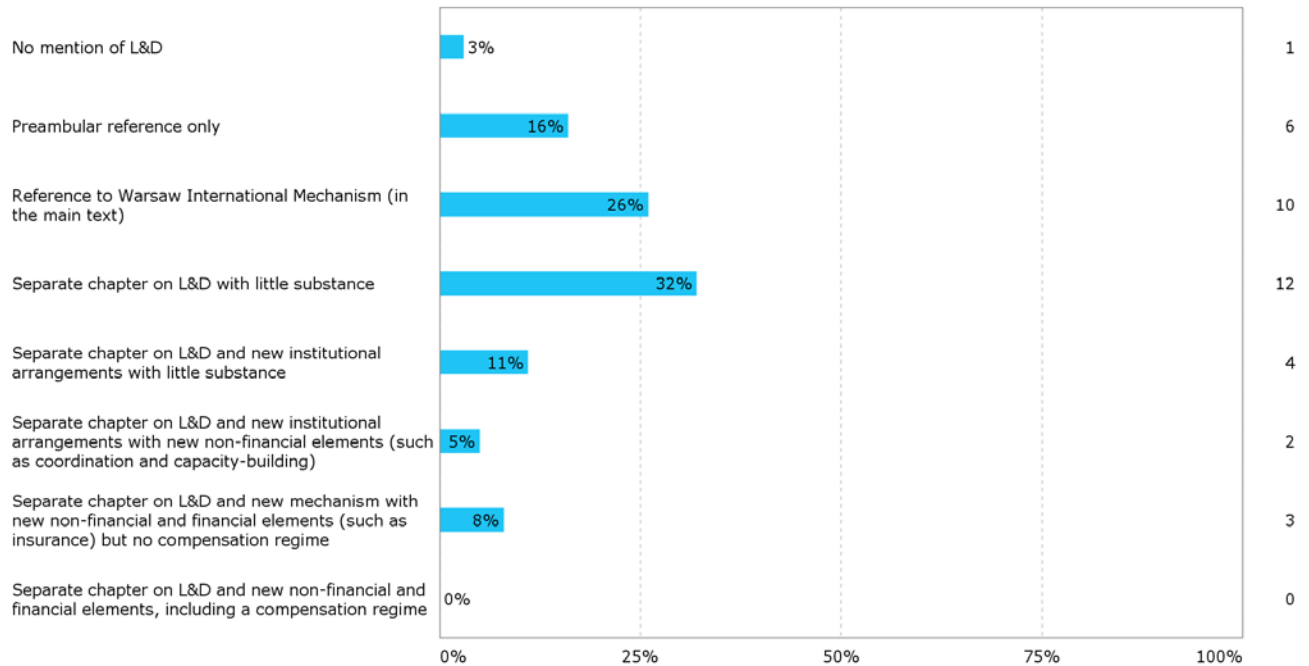
2.8 Will there be new guidance on earmarking funds for adaptation?

A majority of respondents believe approximately half the funds will be earmarked for adaptation, but a sizable minority (42%) believe there will be no new guidance. In this instance the comments indicate that the actual outcome is likely to lie somewhere between these two options as several respondents asked for more options in between these two alternatives. Some suggested either 30 or 40% earmarked for adaptation, or a qualitative term such as “strengthening the balance” in favour of adaptation.



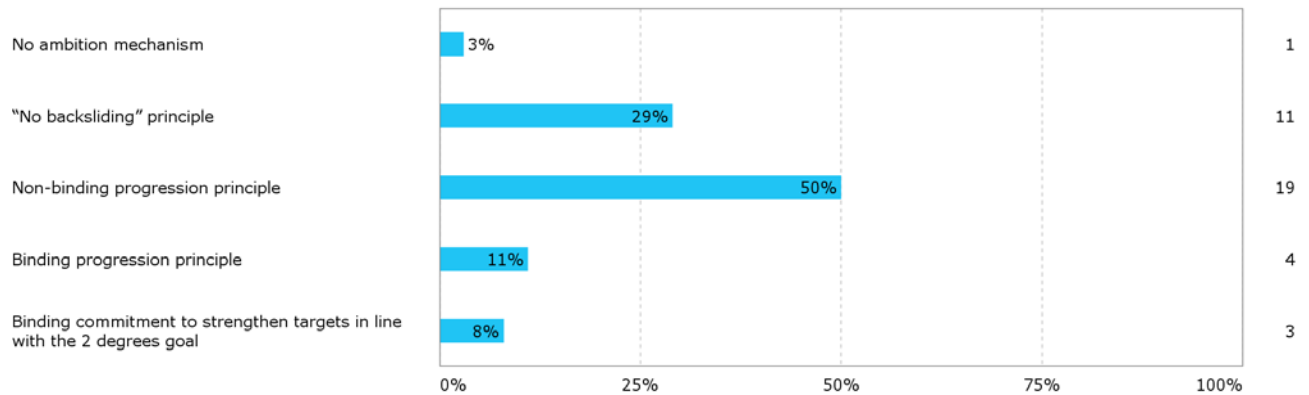
2.9 To which degree will loss & damage (L&D) be included in the agreement?

This question will be one of the most contentious issues at COP 21, and it was one of the questions with the lowest degree of agreement among our respondents. With the exception of a separate chapter on loss and damage including a compensation regime, all options received some support. A separate chapter on loss and damage with little substance was most frequently chosen as the most likely outcome, but that only amounted to 32% of the respondents. 26% think there will be a reference to the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage in the main text, whereas 16% think such a reference will be placed only in the preamble. Just under a quarter of the respondents (in total) think there will be a separate chapter on loss and damage with new institutional arrangements of some sort.



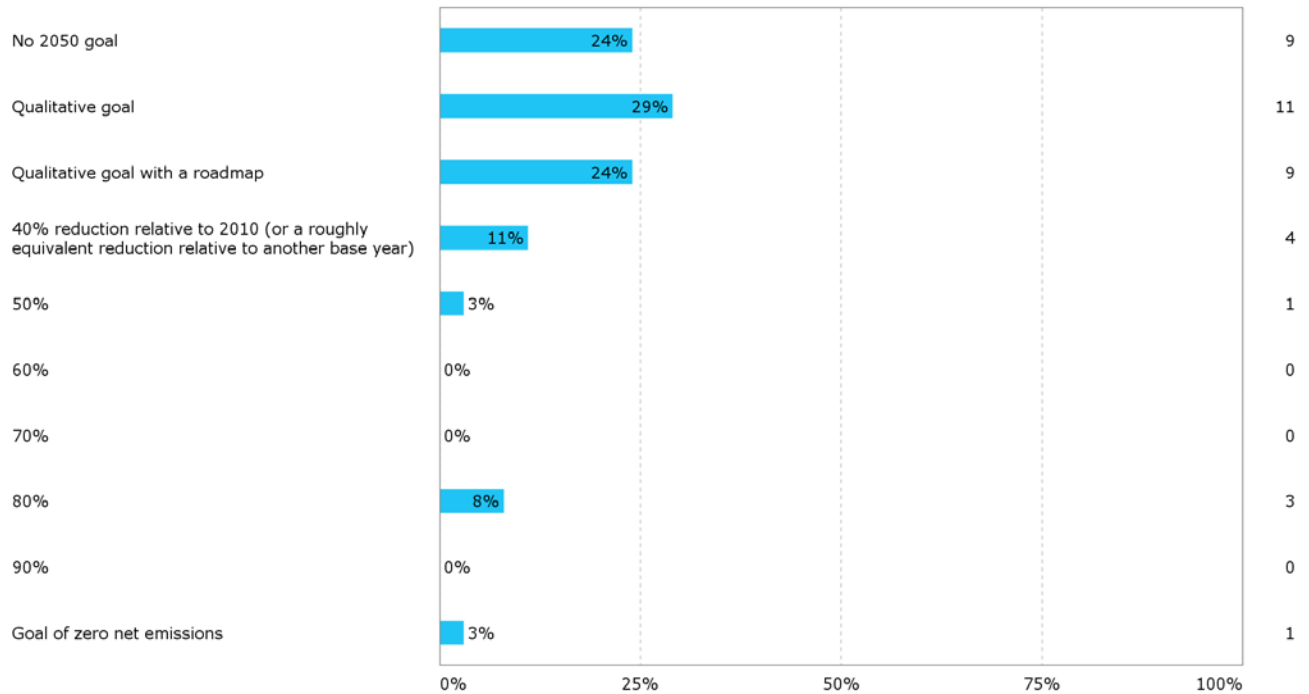
2.10 Will there be a mechanism for strengthening commitments over time?

Exactly half the respondents believe there will be a non-binding progression principle, and the majority of the remaining respondents believe it will be some weaker principle (such as no backsliding).



2.11 What (if any) goal will be set for reducing emissions by 2050?

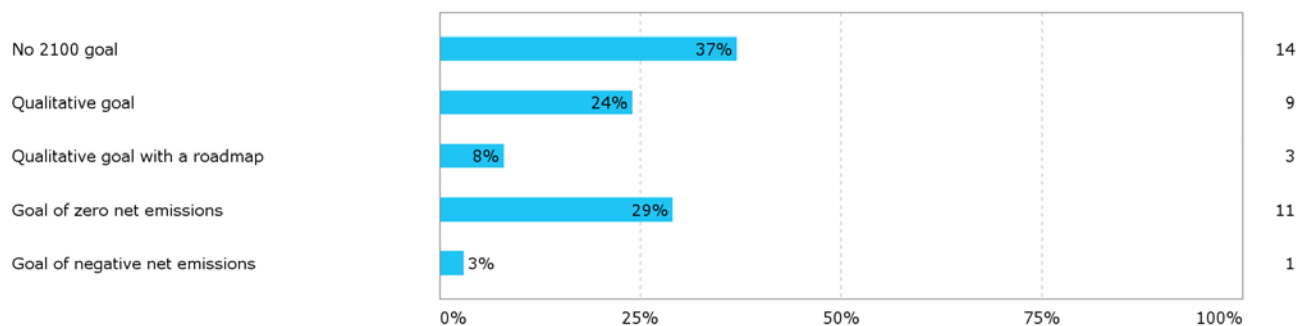
The responses are spread across a wide range of options. However, only 24% of respondents think there will be a quantitative goal for 2050. The most frequently chosen option is a qualitative goal (29%), followed by equal support for no goal (24%) and a qualitative goal with a roadmap (also 24%).



One respondent mentioned that the long-term goal would likely be expressed in terms of net decarbonisation, or a similar concept, without an explicit goal for 2050. It was also pointed out that we did not include the range used by the IPCC (40-70%) among our options. The reason for this was that applying a (wide) range would make it difficult to rate positions on a clear ordinal scale.

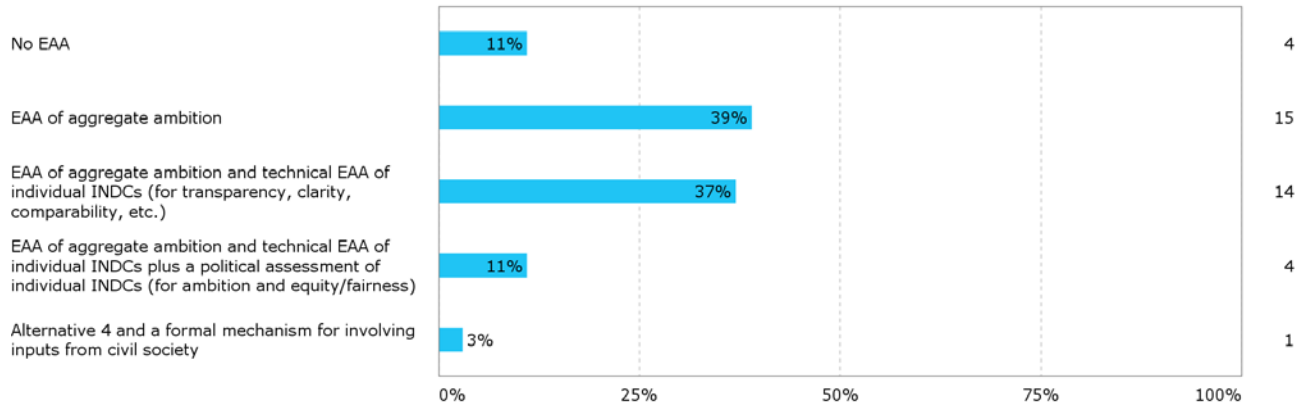
2.12 What (if any) goal will be set for reducing emissions by 2100?

As for the question about a 2050 goal, there is no strong agreement among our respondents regarding whether, and if so, what kind of goal for 2100 will be adopted. A little more than a third think there will be no goal, and 24% think there will be a qualitative goal. In contrast with the question for 2050, a sizable minority (almost a third) think there will be a quantifiable goal, either in the form of a zero net emissions goal or a negative net emissions goal.



2.13 Will the agreement include provisions for ex-ante assessment (EEA) of INDCs in future contribution periods?

The responses clustered around two related options. Ex-ante assessment of aggregate ambition (39%) was chosen most frequently, closely followed by the same option plus technical assessment of individual INDCs (37%).



One respondent noted that a likely outcome would be a “political assessment”, for instance in the form of a Q&A session (this option was, for instance, discussed at COP20 in Lima).

4. Analyzing the forecasts

After COP 21 the project team will compare the forecasts to each other and to the actual outcome. This will provide valuable insights about the ability of different approaches to forecasts the outcomes of highly complex negotiations. There are many potential outcomes that are outside the scope of what we have analyzed (both in terms of questions asked and response options). The perhaps most obvious one is that the parties do not reach agreement in Paris, or that they postponed the decision on some of the issues we have analyzed.