

(August 2024). India's Climate Diplomacy in a Multipolar World: Strategy, Constraints, and Emerging Leadership

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India's Climate Diplomacy in a Multipolar World: Strategy, Constraints, and Emerging Leadership

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Abstract

Climate change has become a central issue in international relations, reshaping diplomatic priorities and global governance structures. In a multipolar world, emerging economies play a crucial role in balancing developmental needs with environmental commitments. This paper examines India's climate diplomacy through a political economy and international relations framework. Using the Climate Diplomacy Strategy Framework (CDSF), the study analyses strategic positioning, structural constraints, and emerging leadership roles. The paper argues that India's climate diplomacy reflects a calibrated approach that balances developmental imperatives with global environmental responsibilities, positioning it as an increasingly influential actor in global climate governance.

Keywords: Climate diplomacy, international relations, political economy, multipolarity, global governance

JEL Classification: F50, Q54, O19, D73

1. Introduction

Climate change has evolved into a defining issue of global governance, influencing international negotiations, economic policy, and diplomatic relations. The transition toward a multipolar international system has further reshaped climate diplomacy, as emerging economies assume greater responsibility in global environmental governance.

India occupies a unique position within this landscape. As a major developing economy with significant developmental priorities, it must balance domestic growth imperatives with international climate commitments.

This paper argues that India's climate diplomacy is characterised by strategic balancing, where developmental priorities, institutional constraints, and leadership aspirations interact to shape its global engagement.

2. Literature Review

This study draws upon three interconnected bodies of literature:

2.1 Climate Diplomacy and Global Governance

Climate diplomacy is increasingly viewed as a core component of international relations, involving negotiation, cooperation, and institutional coordination (Falkner, 2016; Keohane & Victor, 2011).

2.2 Political Economy of Climate Policy

Political economy approaches highlight the interaction between development, economic structure, and environmental commitments (Stern, 2007; Rodrik, 2014).

2.3 Multipolarity and Emerging Powers

The shift toward a multipolar world has increased the role of emerging economies in shaping global governance structures (Ikenberry, 2011; Hurrell, 2006).

This paper integrates these perspectives to analyse climate diplomacy as both a strategic and institutional process.

3. Analytical Framework: Climate Diplomacy Strategy Framework (CDSF)

The CDSF evaluates climate diplomacy across three interrelated dimensions:

3.1 Strategic Positioning (SP)

Refers to how a state aligns its diplomatic stance within global climate negotiations.

This includes:

- * balancing development and sustainability objectives
- * engagement in multilateral institutions
- * coalition-building with other economies
- * negotiation strategies in international forums

Strategic positioning reflects the broader geopolitical and economic context in which climate diplomacy operates.

3.2 Structural Constraints (SC)

Refers to domestic and systemic factors that limit policy flexibility.

This includes:

- * developmental priorities and economic structure
- * energy requirements and resource dependence
- * institutional capacity constraints
- * global governance asymmetries

Structural constraints shape the boundaries within which diplomacy is conducted.

3.3 Emerging Leadership (EL)

Refers to the ability to influence global climate governance through institutional engagement and normative contributions.

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This includes:

- * participation in international initiatives
- * agenda-setting capacity
- * institutional partnerships
- * contribution to global governance frameworks

Emerging leadership reflects the transition from participation to influence.

4. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative political economy and international relations approach, involving:

- * institutional analysis of climate governance structures
- * review of diplomatic engagement patterns
- * synthesis of academic and policy literature
- * conceptual modelling through CDSF

The methodology focuses on structural and institutional dynamics rather than event-specific analysis.

5. Strategic Positioning in Climate Diplomacy

Strategic positioning is central to climate diplomacy in a multipolar world. States must navigate competing priorities while maintaining credibility in international negotiations.

India's approach reflects a balancing strategy that integrates developmental considerations with global engagement. This includes participation in multilateral frameworks and coalition-based diplomacy.

From a political economy perspective, strategic positioning enables alignment between domestic priorities and international commitments.

CDSF Assessment: Strategic Positioning — Moderate to High

6. Structural Constraints and Policy Boundaries

Climate diplomacy operates within structural constraints shaped by economic and institutional factors. Developmental imperatives, energy demand, and infrastructure requirements influence policy flexibility.

Institutional capacity also affects implementation and negotiation outcomes. Constraints do not necessarily weaken diplomacy but shape its strategic direction.

CDSF Assessment: Structural Constraints — High

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7. Emerging Leadership in Global Climate Governance

Emerging economies increasingly contribute to shaping global governance frameworks. Leadership is expressed through participation in initiatives, agenda-setting, and institutional collaboration.

India's role reflects a gradual transition toward leadership, characterised by active engagement and institutional contributions.

Leadership in climate diplomacy is not defined by dominance but by influence and coordination.

CDSF Assessment: Emerging Leadership — Moderate

8. Discussion

The Climate Diplomacy Strategy Framework demonstrates that climate diplomacy is a function of strategic alignment within structural constraints. Leadership emerges through sustained institutional engagement rather than unilateral action.

This integrated perspective highlights the importance of balancing domestic priorities with global responsibilities.

9. Conclusion

This paper concludes that India's climate diplomacy in a multipolar world reflects a calibrated and institutionally grounded strategy. Strategic positioning, structural constraints, and emerging leadership collectively shape its global role.

Effective climate diplomacy requires alignment between domestic economic structures and international governance frameworks.

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