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Beyond Climate Commitments: Foreign Policy, Power Asymmetries, and the Politics of Global Climate Governance

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ABSTRACT

Global climate governance takes place in a highly politicized environment shaped by foreign policy interests, geopolitical issues, economic disparities, and unequal power dynamics. This study provides an analysis of the effectiveness and equity of global climate governance, or its absence, outside the realm of formal climate commitments, to determine how foreign policy, power asymmetries, and strategic interests affect this. A qualitative research design was used to systematically analyse 60 international climate-governance documents from 2015–26, including climate agreements, COP decisions, Nationally Determined Contributions, national climate policies, diplomatic statements, negotiation documents, and institutional reports. Documents were selected using purposive sampling and analyzed using thematic and critical content analysis to examine patterns of foreign policy interests, power asymmetries, climate finance, justice, representation, and implementation. The findings revealed that 47 (78.3%) documents focused on foreign-policy interests, 44 (73.3%) documents focused on climate finance, and 42 (70.0%) documents reflected geopolitical power considerations. Economic capacity was the most commonly mentioned dimension of power imbalance, in 43 documents (71.7%), with 41 documents (68.3%) referring to financial influence. Implementation challenges were mentioned in 41 documents (68.3%), including, in 43 documents (71.7%), insufficient climate finance. The study found that global climate governance needed to be more accountable, financiers more equitable, representatives more inclusive, technology transfer more effective, and the interests of developing countries taken into account; all of these needed to help diminish structural inequality and increase implementation.

Keywords: *Climate Governance, Climate Justice, Foreign Policy, Geopolitical Power, Power Asymmetry, Sustainability.*

Citation: APA

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Introduction

Climate change is now clearly from becoming an environmental policy issue to an arena of international politics, diplomacy and geopolitical competition. Although the Paris Agreement has developed a global governance framework for climate action for everyone, the governance of climate change is still in the hands of the state in an international system that is unevenly distributed in terms of political, economic, technological and institution-building capacity of states. The evidence in the current paper reveals extreme differences in the capacity of certain countries to push the negotiations and policy results of global climate governance: the more influential countriess are likely to have much greater power to steer global climate governance than less influential countries (Wang & Fang, 2024). The institutionalisation of global climatic governance has also injected the conflicts over sovereignty and the global side-effects of global climatic change, resulting in disorientating disparities in climate governance responsibilities and benefits between the Global North and the Global South (Steig, 2025). Recent Analysis focuses therefore on two ways in which present-day global climate institutions mirror and uphold existing geopolitical structures, and makes the climate action appear as a 'collective' and 'shared responsibility' (Hafezi & Wood 2026; Mohanty 2025).

In this regard, the foreign-policy aspect of climate governance has taken added importance, bringing with it a ceaseless flux of climate with development and energy strategies, national security and technological competition and trade. The development of climate policies is not carried out outside the systemic context of strategic interests of states; climate diplomacy is growing a part of foreign-policy agendas aimed at securing supplies of energy, expanding technological competitiveness, international influence and, last but not least, domestic economic interests. More recent studies on climate diplomacy reveal how the interference of geopolitical tensions into the cooperation between the states on climate goals and into the course of international climate action can affect the ability to cooperate on climate targets. In the recent studies regarding climate diplomacy, it has been observed that climate geopolitical tensions are now emerging affecting the cooperation between countries on climate targets and impacting the orientation of international climate action (Gasimova, 2024). There is, however, also climate leadership among geopolitical considerations; for example, as demonstrated at the recent Climate Security Summit, the EU has embraced linkages between climate and foreign policy and resetled the global power balance (Earsom & Petri, 2025; Bremberg et al., 2025). The impacts of policies on climate and energy can be distributed, depending on the country's global political and economic situation (Skalamera, 2025).

The importance of power asymmetries is emphasized in the context of the various bargaining power of states with varying resources, in international climate negotiations. Representative positions, financial resources, diplomatic relations, economic power and technological advances may have a remarkable impact on global climate agendas. The differences between countries in participation and impact in international climate governance pointed by Wang and Fang (2024) indicates that international climate decision making is not an act of equal political actors. More recently, it's been argued that the post-institutionalization of global climate governance masked geopolitical asymmetries in favour of sovereign state commitments (Gifford, 2024) and by emphasising the implementation approach within a voluntary climate governance strategy (Chiandler, 2007). The commitments from the Global South point of view have also been condemned for instance on various fronts of finance and loss and damage (L&D, loss and damage) (Mohanty 2025).

Background of the Study

International climate justice and its conventional formulating emerged out of a conflict between the global and the state-level aspects of environmental governance, disproportionate in its nature of collective and state-based environmental action and advancing the conflicting interests and sovereignties. The conventional formulating of international climate justice developed out of a tension between collective and state environmental action and advancing different interests and sovereignties. An important institutional development was the Paris Agreement as it involved almost all countries in the common framework and provided ample flexibility in the contribution to climate change by the states. Steig (2025) points to the drawbacks of existing governance frameworks of climate change, and argues that technical solutions can push responsibility and decision-making for climate change governance to the margins, while framing questions of responsibility and political accountability in obscure terms.

Despite theuredic debates focused upon climate responsibility, and the respective strengths and weaknesses of North-South and South-North perspectives, the Global North–Global South divide has remained at the heart of such discussions due to the historical emissions, economic resources, vulnerabilities, and political power that inform somewhat conflicting interpretations regarding climate responsibilities. The more recent research suggests that North–South dynamics remain a crucial factor in climate and Earth-system governance, such that powerful countries are still disproportionately represented, on Earth system governing forums, agendas and decisions. Overall, Mohanty (2025) shows that the very nature of the climate negotiations is disadvantageous to many developing countries, somewhat especially in the mobilization of climate finance and in the compensating for loss and damage. Such disparities can also be seen in the political part of climate finance. According to Gifford (2024), climate-finance justice is becoming an emergent discipline and a topic studying the inequitable distribution of financial means across territories and the equity of funding climate initiatives from the Global North to Global South (MM Alam, MMA Ansari, 2026).

The context of global politics plays into addressing the climate change issues has become even more complicated by problems related to energy insecurity, technological competition, problems of energy chains, and changes in the forms of international cooperation. Climate diplomacy now does this in the context of competing for renewables technologies, the critical minerals, industrial capacity and energy security – a part and parcel of the process of decarbonization. The EU increasingly faces pressure from geopolitical factors and this is increasingly influencing the EU's climate strategies and casting doubt on ‘EU foreign policy as climate leader assumptions’ (Bremberg et al., 2025). Excluding the differential effects on partner countries overlooked in the financial distribution impacts, climate action and geopolitical influence at partner-counties level links are also emerging, with the European and Chinese case of climate diplomacy as a key example (Skalamera, 2025). As powerful countries dominate and have disproportionate influence in multilateral environmental agreements, they can raise structural limitations and power inequalities can remain a major hurdle in current climate diplomacy, argues Hafezi and Wood 2026.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the relationship between states' foreign policy priorities and their climate action and engagement with global climate governance.
2. To examine the impact of power imbalances on climate negotiations, decisions and policy results.
3. To examine the role geopolitical, economic and strategic interests play in bringing international climate commitments to fruition.
4. To evaluate challenges in the pursuit of equitable and effective global climate governance and possible actions to enhance climate justice, representation and accountability.

Research Questions

Q1. What impact does foreign policy have on states' climate policy agenda and on states' engagement in global climate governance?

Q2. How do the power dynamics affect climate negotiations, decision-making and the governance processes?

Q3. What is the of the international climate commitments in terms of their implementation regarding their impact on geopolitical, economic and strategic interest?

Q4. How do we enhance equity, climate justice, representation, and accountability within global climate governance?

Significance of the Study

This study is important as it shifts the formal climate commitment testing to look at the political and structural processes that shape the negotiation and implementation of such commitments. The study links the concepts of foreign policy, power asymmetries and climate governance, offering a more comprehensive overview of why international efforts to combat climate change sometimes yield unequal results when it comes to shared environmental goals. It adds to debates on academics regarding the nature of climate diplomacy and global governance, in pointing to the role of North–South and geopolitical interests, economic capacities, institutional power and international inequalities. The study is likewise germane for policy makers and international organisations as it highlights the need for equitable representation, easy access to finance for climate action, enhanced accountability, and paying attention to developing countries interests.

Literature Review

Foreign Policy and Climate Diplomacy

Thinking about climate diplomacy in recent years has shifted in regard to whether it is a foreign policy or an environmental initiative. In the light of ‘contemporary climate diplomacy', Doussis and Dikaios (2025, p. 255) argue that international policies aiming at climate change are incorporating the climate dimension into the realm of external action, and connecting the climate issue with other fields of international cooperation. This notion that climate diplomacy has to pay more attention to national ambitions has been made a main tenet of warm geopolitics since Chhatiawala (2024) showed that interests and strategic priorities of states differ when they embark on climate cooperation. The agreement on positions of mutual consensus in climate negotiations is seen as cloudy from the perspective of the State's role agreeing on targets for environmental protection. Instead, their level of commitment, preferred modes of policymaking, and willingness to cooperate is influenced by the national interests. However, Gasimova (2024) refers to increasing inter-dependence between climate diplomacy and geopolitical tensions and the interplay of greater international climate action and international relations (MM Alam, 2026).

Also, climate-policy plays a more prominent role in international strategic interests, through new formats of “climate cooperation.” This Study presents the concepts of climate clubs, alliances and partnerships and examines the impacts that the institutional arrangements, underpinned values and institutions' functions have on international cooperation. The study concludes that the cooperation can be effective in moving forward climate ambition but works as it takes into consideration interests and principles in those institutions as established. Other factors affecting the energy transition that are now the focus of strategic negotiation between states that are part of climate diplomacy has been pointed out by Chhatiawala (2024), who centers on critical minerals or bilateral cooperation.

A thread of recent studies, based on the complexity of security and geopolitical shifts in the past and climate changes in recent years, emphasizes this connection between climate diplomacy and security. Climate-security arguments have yet to simply ignore the idea that climate change can be both a security threat to existing international institutions or a bolster that's helping to strengthen those institutions, and they should also explore whether current international security systems might in fact increase climate risks—particularly if they are powered by private interests. Climate-security discussions do not only need to be prepared to confront the notion that the sphere of international security creates climate threats, or can contravene them, they must also be able to consider just how international security in itself can be a source of exacerbating climate risks if climate-security negotiations are under the auspices of private interests. Likewise, Dalby (2024) argues for the broadened range of security considerations on climate change, and a different kind of framing: Client focus, rather than geopolitical concerns, should be the more general or universal focus. Austin et al. (2024) take this critically re-thinking approach by challenging the use of the logic of climate security and identifying the security of "whom".

Power Asymmetries and Global Climate Negotiations

This is also the case in the current debate over power asymmetries in climate governance. To capture the material capabilities, institutional influence, agenda-setting capacity and access to knowledge that are different among states, some recent research captures the nature of the interaction between states rather than that between formally equal states. This literature demonstrates that coalitions in developing countries can influence the international agenda, a clear example being the absence of material differences between the coalition partners.2 That means that in addition to formal institutions, power can be manifested as coalition-building as well. It shouldn't be surprising to find for another reason – because there's a new take on the definition of power that doesn't emerge from the economic or military strength of the people who are using it. States with less material power can define (claim) and arrange norms but can influence via collective bargaining, negotiation blocs, or through agenda setting strategies or partnerships.

The paper which is an interpretation of the negotiations from a critical Third World perspective, in the name of Reyndo Mohanty (2025), says that many countries and communities in the Global South are consistently losing out in climate negotiations in terms of access to funding for climate action and in access to funds for loss and damage coverage. The inequalities are not only found in negotiation outcomes, but may also affect the type of knowledge institutionalized, policy interests, and type of responsibility for climate impacts. Recent studies on the institutional governance of the global climate have also revealed inequalities in the institutional responsibility and power related to UN climate governance that were introduced by the new state-based institutional entities. To understand the dynamics of today's fourts of climate governance, one needs to consider the Historical and Institutional life of the institution that is important in the definition of problems, establishment of priorities and distribution of responsibility.

A difference in access to financial, technological and institutional resources can also influence the way a climate policy is implemented due to power differences. Within mitigation processes in the "North", there is generally more capacity for action and participation, and there is often a conflict of power between the assistance and the assistance recipients of international climate financing mechanisms. However, developing countries have limited resources to invest in mitigation and adaptation; and state power in international climate finance is not equally balanced. Recent scholarship on climate-finance justice focuses on assessing financial relationships between Global North and Global South not just simply in terms of aggregates of financial flows (Gifford, 2024).

Energy Transition Plan

A range of climate cooperation instrument types show vastly different capacities to create shared norms, develop common initiatives and spur economic transformation, von Luepke et al. (2024) state. They believe that the institutions design and the basic rules of co-operation are pivotal in the success cooperatives can refer in international cooperation. Europe's State-centric system of the climate regime scheme also presents itself as a contradiction between macro-scale of climate impacts and the sovereignty of the States. Recent study of the institutionalisation of global climate governance shows that this tension took hold within the UN climate framework, and helped sustain the lack of equality in the sharing of climate responsibilities.

This unskews the negotiating table for developing nations, as Mohanty (2025) states, and existing tools of loss and damage funds and climate finance do not seem to mirror this state of affairs for developing nations on climate, as has been argued. Likewise, studies in North–South relations have been carried out in recent years, which have detected persistent trends of domination in which agents of power shape international processes and agendas while those of the south are still comparatively marginal. Research also indicates that features of fairness and also agreements on mutually agreeable standards for any institutional design which seeks to reduce polarization between countries also increase the needs for cooperation for addressing issues relating to climate. Published research into cooperation likewise indicates a need for institutional designs that are fair and also involve agreements on mutually acceptable standards to reduce polarization amongst developed and emerging economies (von Luepke et al., 2024).

The research conversation suggests that there is considerable potential for more research exploring the link between foreign policy, power asymmetry and the working of a "good mix" in international politics. Several studies have examined one specific part of international politics, such as aspects that are related to climate diplomacy, geopolitical competition, institutional inequality, climate finance, security and north-south relations. Yet, on the other hand, Chhatiawala (2024) abovementioned the significance of incorporating national interests into any climatological framework of climatological consideration for the public policy of national climate diplomacy, and Conca and Dabelko (2024) illustrated the way the structural characteristics of the international system could be analyzed. Existing arrangements of power are also at play today in climate governance and remain entrenched in the current institutional systems, as revealed by new institutional studies. This study extends the analysis on these aspects, making foreign policy and power asymmetries interact in the analysis of the politics of global action on climate change. This approach does not simply involve counting the sheer number of—and perhaps just the desire for—a climate commitment, but instead examines the political conditions for the formation of interests, who holds responsibility for what and why the interest produces unequal results even if there are many of them.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study was qualitative in nature, which explored the link between foreign policy, power imbalance and global governance for climate change. The qualitative design applied was found to be the appropriate design as the study we were interested in involved our discussion of political interests, diplomatic strategies, institutional structures, negotiation practices, climate responsibilities, geopolitical relationships, and none of these could be measured. It analysed global climate governance as a political process through which States and international institutions discussed their commitments to climate change, under unequal configurations of political, economic and technological power.

Population and Sample

It was comprised of the documents on international climate governance reaching around the globe and of policy materials created by the governments and international organisations and other key climate institutions. The sampling of documents was by a purposive method, documents directly related to foreign policy, climate diplomacy, international negotiations, climate finance, power relations, climate justice, and implementations of climate commitments were dealt with. The final sample comprised 60 documents, such as international climate pact, COP decisions, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), national climate-policy documents, diplomatic statements, international negotiation documents, and institutional reports. The documents spanned the time window 2015–2026, which meant that the study could investigate changes after the Paris Agreement and subsequent shifts in international climate politics.

Data Sources

This study was based on Secondary Document Data. The main documentary sources were the Paris Agreement, the decisions of the UNFCCC, the outcome documents of COPs, the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), national climate strategies, climate-finance documents, government documents, diplomatic communications and, reports from international organisations. A conceptual and analytical framework for the study has also been developed based on the analysis of peer-reviewed scholarly articles. Emphasis was given to particular attention to official documents, which came from formal national positions, priorities for policies, institutional decisions and negotiated outcomes. The data base of the case studies was created through the government, institutional and scholarly materials, which formed a very comprehensive base data from which one could examine climate governance from a political, diplomatic and geopolitical perspective.

Data Collection Procedure

A systematic documentary review process was used to gather data. Documents were first identified based on their links with the research objectives and research query, in order to answer the research questions. The documents were then filtered by date of publication, institutional authenticity, global climate governance relevance and explicit reference to foreign policy and/or power relations. A series of documents were screened and then assembled into thematic boxes, covering foreign-policy interests, geopolitical competition, economic power, climate finance, technological capabilities, climate justice, international representations, accountability and implementation. Each document was reviewed for relevant sections and were recorded based on each document's relationship with the analytical framework of the study.

Data Analysis

The data obtained was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis and critical content analysis. Selected documents were analysed using thematic analysis to identify the recurring concepts, arguments, patterns and relationships. Initially the coding categories were formulated based on the research goals and foreign policy interests, geopolitical power, economic asymmetry, diplomatic influence, climate finance, technological power, climate justice, representation, accountability, and implementation. All documents were examined systematically, information relevant for the study was coded, similar codes were subsumed within larger themes and the intertheme relationships were studied. The analysis also evaluated the difference between the set of developed countries and set of developing countries in terms of priorities, responsibilities and negotiating strategies.

Results and Analysis

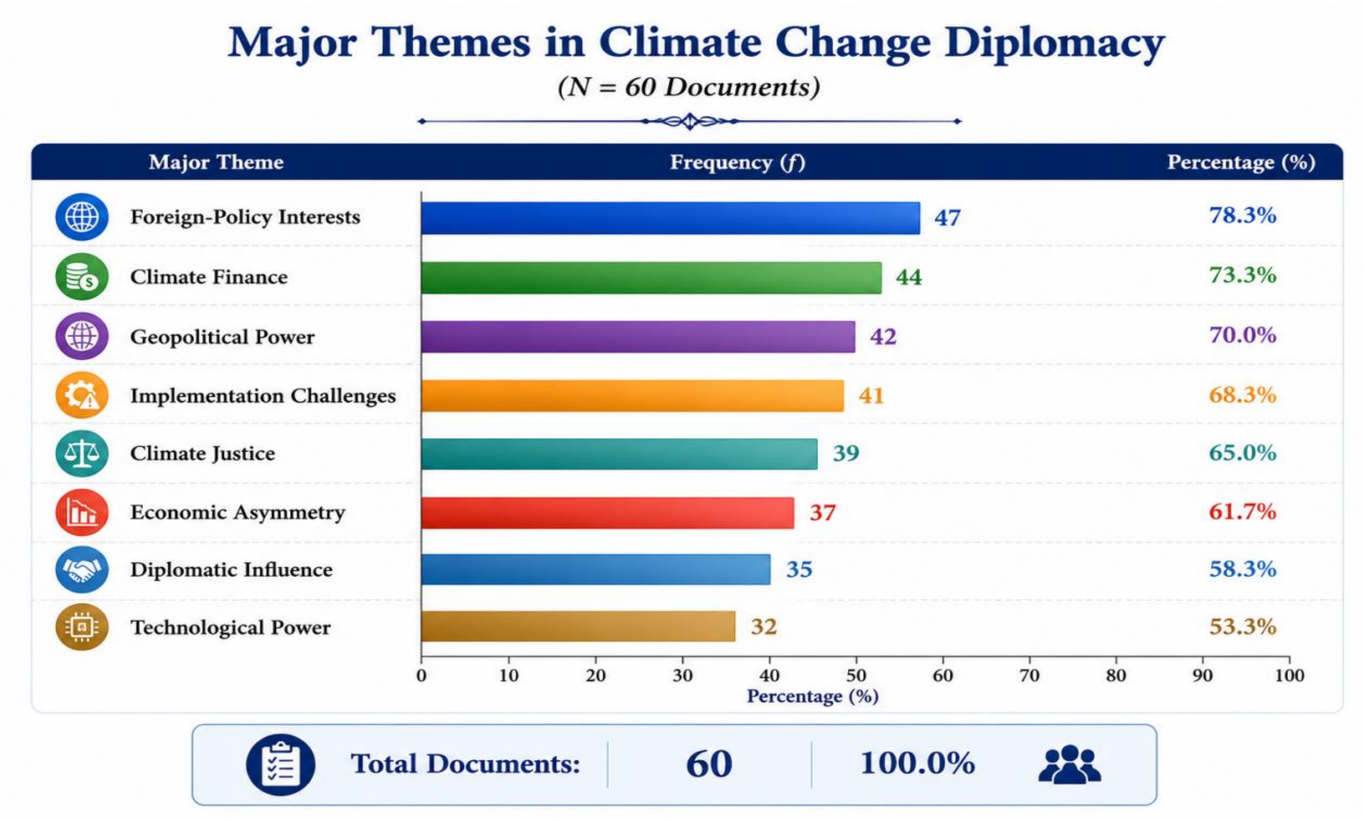
Overview of the Documentary Findings

Table 1: *Frequency and Distribution of Major Themes Identified in Global Climate Governance Documents*

Major Theme	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Foreign-Policy Interests	47	78.3
Climate Finance	44	73.3
Geopolitical Power	42	70.0
Implementation Challenges	41	68.3
Climate Justice	39	65.0
Economic Asymmetry	37	61.7
Diplomatic Influence	35	58.3
Technological Power	32	53.3
Total Documents	**60**	**100.0**

As revealed in the results in Table 1, foreign-policy interests were the predominant theme identified, with 47 of the 60 documents (78.3%) including some mention of foreign policy. This discovery suggests a close linkage between climate commitments and general national strategies. Climate policies often were linked with energy security, economic competitiveness, international influence, trade, national development, and strategic autonomy. Climate finance was the second most frequently mentioned theme, with its presence mentioned in 44 documents (73.3%). The results showed that access to finances emerged as a key topic of conversation around global climate governance. The documents often dealt with financial commitments, adaptation support, mitigation support and financing, loss and damage, availability of resources and responsibilities of developed countries. There were also a strong representation of geopolitical power and implementation challenges, however, appearance of geopolitical power in documents was 70.0% and implementation challenges in documents was 68.3%. The results of these findings proved that inequality in the political influence existed in both the negotiation and the implementation process of the climate commitment.

Figure 1: *Frequency and Distribution of Major Themes Identified in Global Climate Governance Documents*



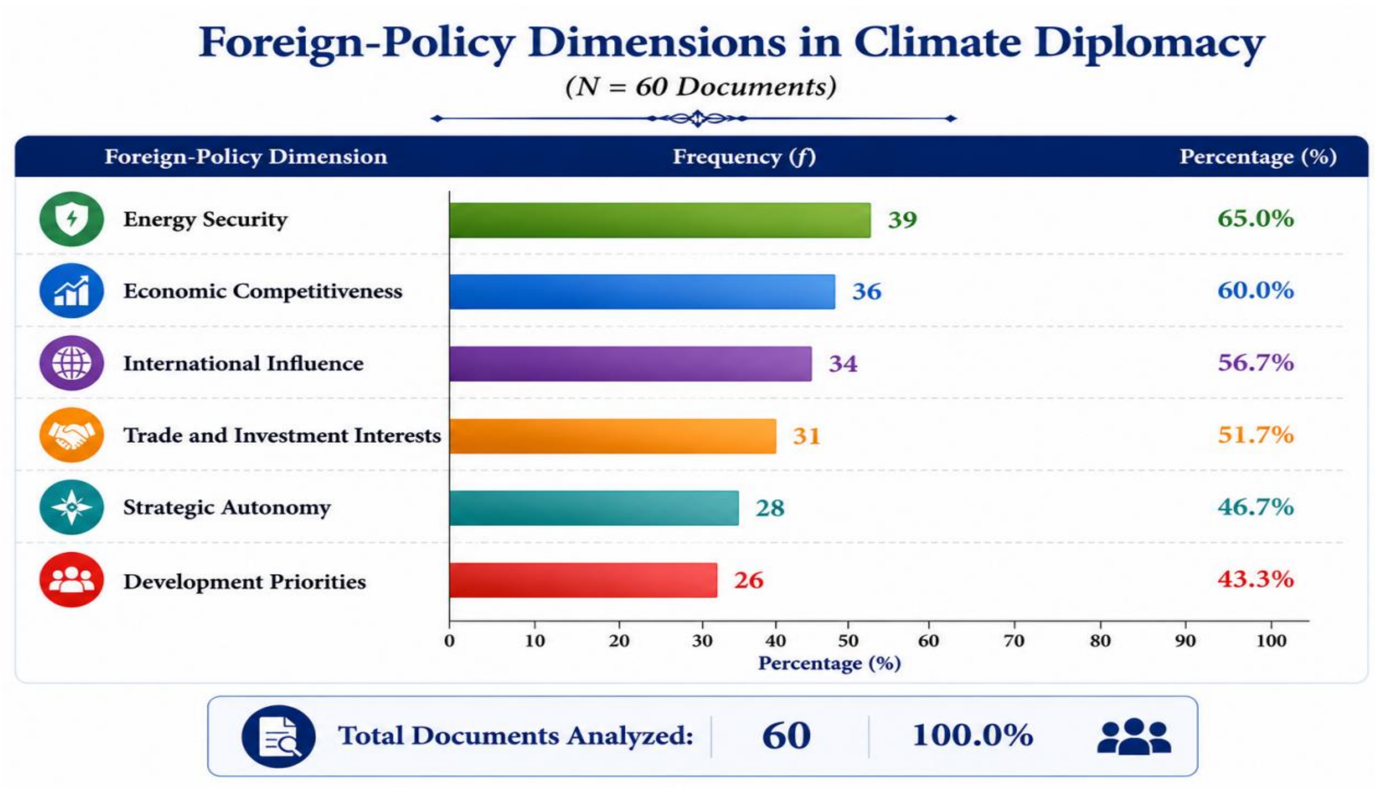
Foreign Policy and Strategic Interests

Table 2: *Foreign-Policy Dimensions Identified in the Documentary Analysis*

Foreign-Policy Dimension	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Energy Security	39	65.0
Economic Competitiveness	36	60.0
International Influence	34	56.7
Trade and Investment Interests	31	51.7
Strategic Autonomy	28	46.7
Development Priorities	26	43.3

The findings showed that energy security is the most common foreign-policy element that has been found in 39 documents or 65.0%. States were often related to energy supply and energy independence, energy portfolio diversification, and protection against external energy jolts. This pattern showed that there was no one-sidedness in the shift towards low-carbon energy, which was not perceived only from the environmental angle. Another relationship between climate and foreign policy was apparent in 36 documents (60.0%), with investments in economic competitiveness. The documents highlighted the quantitative economic aspects of decarbonisation such as ‘Industrial transformation', 'green technologies, 'Clean-energy investment', and ‘New and growing markets for low carbon'. Influence and international trade and investment interests were cited in 34 (56.7%) and 31 (51.7%) of the documents. It has been concluded that climate diplomacy also presented opportunities to enhance states' international status.

Figure 2: *Foreign-Policy Dimensions Identified in the Documentary Analysis*



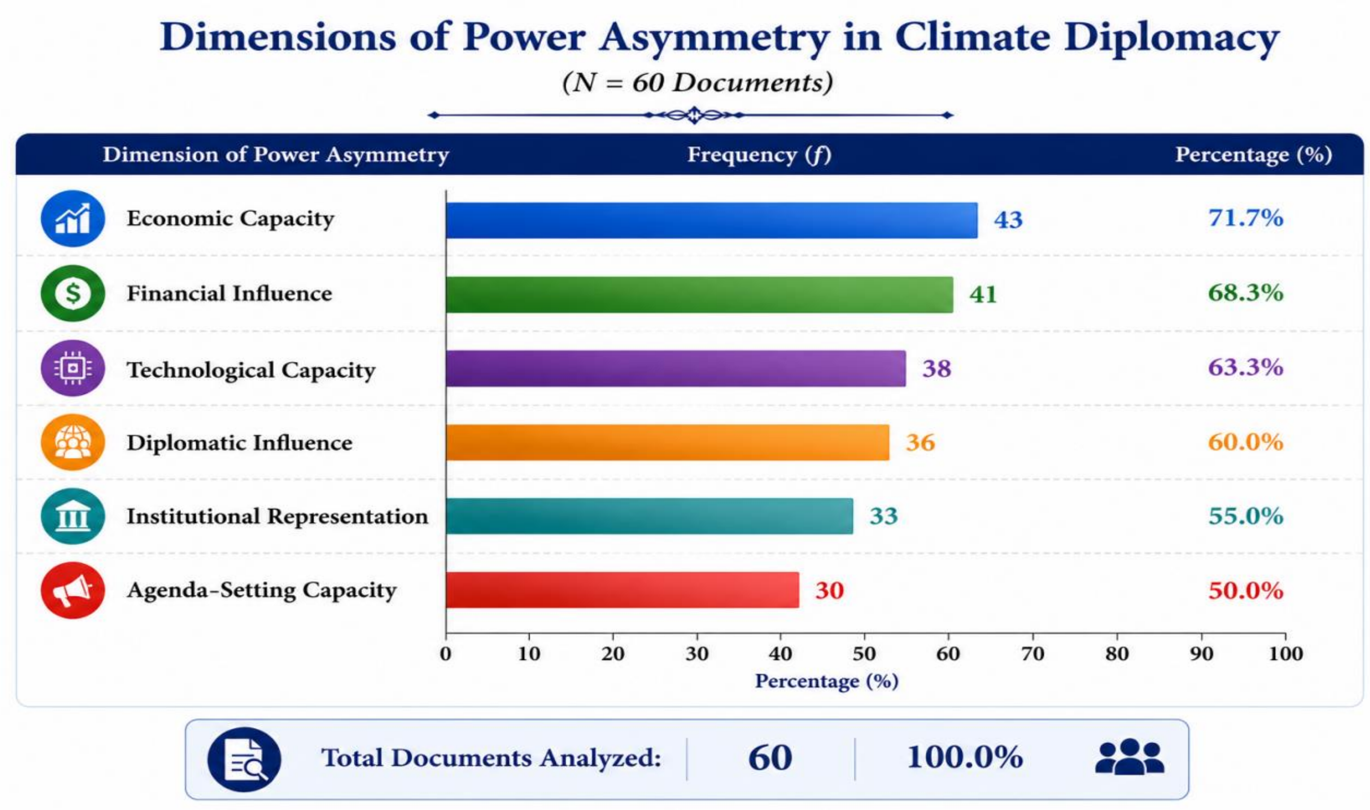
Power Asymmetries in Global Climate Governance

Table 3: *Dimensions of Power Asymmetry Identified in Climate Governance Documents*

Dimension of Power Asymmetry	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Economic Capacity	43	71.7
Financial Influence	41	68.3
Technological Capacity	38	63.3
Diplomatic Influence	36	60.0
Institutional Representation	33	55.0
Agenda-Setting Capacity	30	50.0

The most salient aspect of power imbalance was the economic capacity, in 43 (71.7%) documents. The Analysis revealed that economic resource differences had an impact on countries' capabilities to adopt ambitious climate policies and to be fully engaged in international climate initiatives. The financial influence occurred in 41 documents (68.3%), and the technological capacity occurred in 38 documents (63.3%). From these findings, it was concluded that financial and technological resources were significant sources of international climate strength. The results showed that climate governance was not only about negotiating limits on emissions, it was also about the contestations and negotiations related to the access to and ownership of financial capital, technological knowledge and innovations, and infrastructure. Diplomatic influence, institutional representation and agenda-setting capacity were also significant, with 36 (60.0%), 33 (55.0%) and 30 (50.0%) texts respectively containing them. The results revealed a material power imbalance and institutional power imbalance, which both influenced the prominence of interests in global climate governance.

Figure 3: *Dimensions of Power Asymmetry Identified in Climate Governance Documents*



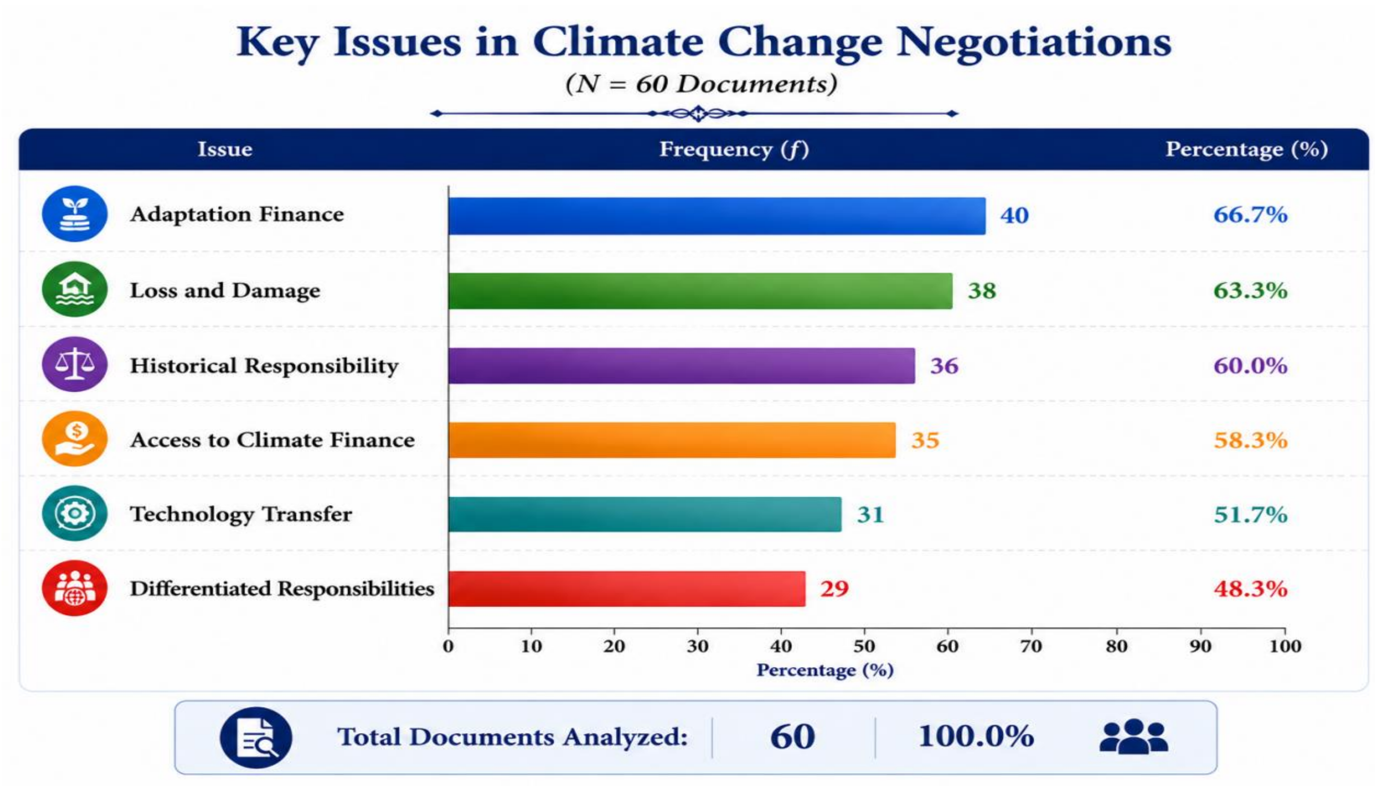
Climate Finance, Justice, and Unequal Responsibilities

Table 4: *Major Issues Associated with Climate Finance and Climate Justice*

Issue	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Adaptation Finance	40	66.7
Loss and Damage	38	63.3
Historical Responsibility	36	60.0
Access to Climate Finance	35	58.3
Technology Transfer	31	51.7
Differentiated Responsibilities	29	48.3

The most common issues identified in this category were adaptation finance, with 40 documents mentioning it (66.7%). This discovery revealed that financial support for adaptation was indeed a key concern, especially for vulnerable developing countries. The documents highlighted financial needs for climate resilience, protection of infrastructure, adaptation for agriculture, disaster preparedness and community initiatives. Loss and damage was referenced in 38 documents (63.3%) and historical responsibility mentioned in 36 documents (60.0%). The results suggested that debates about climate governance continued beyond future emissions reduction issues to issues of responsibility for actual impacts of climate change. Differentiated responsibilities, climate finance and technology transfer are mentioned in 29 (48.3%), 31 (51.7%) and 35 (58.3%) documents, respectively. The results revealed that financing is not sufficient to ensure fair response to climate change.

Figure 4: *Major Issues Associated with Climate Finance and Climate Justice*



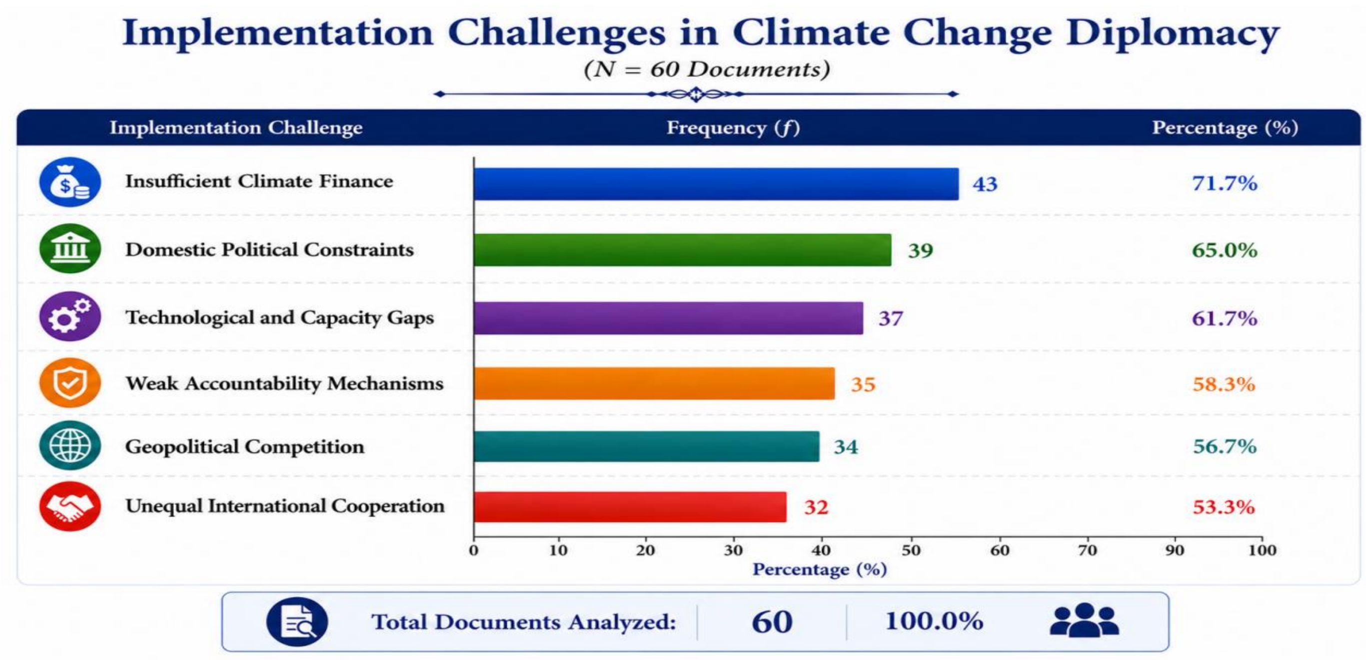
Implementation Gap and Global Climate Governance Outcomes

Table 5: *Major Factors Contributing to the Climate Implementation Gap*

Implementation Challenge	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Insufficient Climate Finance	43	71.7
Domestic Political Constraints	39	65.0
Technological and Capacity Gaps	37	61.7
Weak Accountability Mechanisms	35	58.3
Geopolitical Competition	34	56.7
Unequal International Cooperation	32	53.3

These findings showed that "inadequate climate finance" was the most common identified hindering factor for implementation and was mentioned in 43 documents (71.7%). This result supported the previous findings on financial asymmetry as well as direct linkage with the implementation of climate commitments due to resource constraints. Domestic political constraints were mentioned in 39 documents (65.0%) and technological/capacity gaps were mentioned in 37 documents (61.7%). The results points to the importance of domestic political and institutional factors on influencing commitments in the international arena. The findings showed that domestic institutions and resources had to be supportive of international climate commitments with a view to achieving tangible results. Weak accountability mechanisms were mentioned in 35 (58.3%) documents, geopolitical competition in 34 (56.7%) and unequal international cooperation in 32 (53.3%). These results produced an additional dimension of the implementation gap on the institutional level internationally.

Figure 5: *Major Factors Contributing to the Climate Implementation Gap*



Discussion

This revealed that global climate governance had the highest political flavour referring to global interests in foreign policy, as it is found in 78.3% of documents analysed. In this outcome, the states' actions to achieve climate targets were set within longer-term strategic frameworks, not more at the environmental level. The indications of a more integrated approach of climate diplomacy with the environmental policy and national perspective were observed in the dimensions of energy security, economic competitiveness, international influence and strategic autonomy. This has been in line with recent studies which indicated that climate diplomacy has been influenced by geopolitical rivalry and the shifts in the international power balance (Bremberg, 2024; Mishra, 2025). Geopolitical issues also started to influence the framing of energy security in several respects, as demonstrated in recent research on EU climate diplomacy (Bremberg et al., 2025), on energy resources and the international energy transition.

It also revealed that power imbalance was a salient characteristic of global climate governance, which taps economic capacity, financial leverage, technological capacity and diplomatic leverage as key elements. The finding provided a clue that a state's sovereignty or a determining state's sovereignty in the area of climate policy is not equal. Hafezi and Wood (2026) also identified economic asymmetry and geopolitical fragmentation as on-going challenges in the politics surrounding climate change, meaning the power imbalance affecting the global multilateral environmental politics hindered the effectiveness of climate action. Embeddedness of structural inequalities are also still relevant to climate governance, such as special interest groups capable of blocking change, direct costs for new authorities, and impacts of COVID-19 on structures. The present findings reinforced this argument by providing evidence that the capacity of states to enact climate policies was affected not only by their economic and financial strength but there was also evidence of the capacity of states to play an active role in international climate negotiations.

Indeed, the considerable importance of climate finance, adaptation finance, loss and damage and historical responsibility issues further reasserted that for global climate governance distributive and justice issues played a key role. The analysis revealed that climate finance was mentioned in 73.3% of all documents, adaptation finance in 66.7% of all documents and loss and damage in 63.3% of all documents. The results aligned with the recent literature which also highlighted that effectiveness of climate finance goes beyond the amount of funds mobilized, encompassing justice, distribution, access and control (Dafermos, 2025). A related theme that was a key element in Kerr and Hu (2025) was the size of the ‘climate finance gap’ of emerging markets and developing economies, with climate finance being indicated as an essential space in which to tackle the measure up to low carbon economy. They were also consistent with the arguments that the arena of "climate finance" is a large political battleground between the North and the South.

The study revealed important gaps between the policy developments and the existing international climate commitments, while several climate-related field constraints (such as climate finance provisioning, domestic politics, technological limitations, absence of accountability, and geopolitical competition) have emerged as factors that hinder the development of policies. This was confirmed by recent empirical research showing that there are tangible differences between nations'mitigation targets and NDC-level measures. This failure to meet up has been ongoing since the pole position and shows that mere formal commitments are inadequate in delivering effective action on climate. Climate finance for developing countries has also recently been explored, and it has shown the level of investment required to support the shift towards a low carbon economy, along with the continued obstacle of aggregation of sufficient sources of finance in the traditional financial system (Kerr & Hu, 2025).

The findings were more aligned with the primary argument for a change in climate commitments toward a change in the politics of creating a global climate system. There have been recent studies that have raised doubts about the potential of transformative and equitable climate action related to the institutional legacy of Climate Governance in terms of the institutional distribution of (collective) responsibility, institutional action and institutional representation. Hafezi and Wood (2026) noted that power imbalance and geopolitical fragmentation allow for less effective multilateral climate diplomacy and urges a re-thinking of existing climate governance. Based upon this, the conclusion of the present study is that these require improved representation and access to climate finance, inclusion of technology cooperation, increasing accountability and more participation by developing and climate vulnerable countries in a better climate governance.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that in the process of getting global climate governance right, it is not only environmental interests and commitments but also foreign policy interests, power dynamics, geopolitical interests and economic factors. It identified connections between state strategies in relation to climate commitments and energy security, economic competitiveness, international political influence, development agenda and strategic autonomy. Differences in access to climate funds, climate technology, ability to leverage and influence national/international climate agenda, were also linked to power differences, leading to differential capacities to contribute to national/international climate decision making. Some of the gaps identified also highlighted the lack of finance, domestic political factors, technology, accountability, geopolitical rivalry, and international cooperation. As of today, the developing countries tended to have a greater influence over climate justice and climate adaptation funding, loss and damage, historical responsibility, and the equitable participation, whereas the more powerful countries had a greater influence on institutional, financial, and technological aspects of the UNFCCC. In the realm of climate governance, all that a person can imagine is short of ambitious commitments: Effective and greater responsibilities for member economies (accountability measures); greater equity (financial arrangements); more substantial technology transfers and more inclusive decision making (more developed economies). Structural power inequality can be reduced and make a contribution to the better implementation of international climate commitments.

Conflict of Interest

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