

UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE: DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN GLOBAL CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Climate change is a defining global challenge of the 21st century with profound environmental, economic, and political implications. While international agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement represent a consensus on the urgency of coordinated action, implementation across States remains uneven and fraught with political contestation. This article investigates the political dynamics that underlie the differential responses of developed and developing countries to climate change. Using a qualitative comparative case study approach, the paper finds that disparities in institutional capacity, political economy structures, and historical responsibility continue to shape unequal climate outcomes and implementation capacities across countries. Through comparative analysis of case studies from the United States, Germany, Nigeria, and Bangladesh, the paper illustrates the global-local disjuncture in climate governance. It concludes with a call for a justice-oriented approach that aligns global ambition with local realities, acknowledging the structural inequalities embedded in climate negotiations.

Keywords: Climate governance; climate justice; global south–north relations; international climate policy; political economy of climate change

Introduction

Climate change remains one of the defining governance challenges of the twenty-first century, with recent assessments indicating widening adaptation gaps, increasing climate-related losses, and persistent implementation deficits despite growing international commitments (IPCC, 2023; Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2024).

Once the preserve of scientists and environmentalists, it is now central to global policy debates, shaping international relations, development planning, and national security strategies. Defined by long-term shifts in temperature and weather patterns, largely driven by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions

(IPCC, 2021), climate change disproportionately affects countries that contributed least to its causes.

The politics of climate change reflect a world of stark asymmetries. Developed nations of the Global North, responsible for the bulk of historical greenhouse gas emissions, continue to wield disproportionate influence in shaping the global climate agenda. In contrast, developing countries, particularly in the Global South, bear a disproportionate share of climate vulnerabilities despite contributing relatively little to the problem (see Roberts and Parks, 2007; Peilling, 2011). Recent scholarship on climate justice argues that these inequalities are

not merely environmental but are rooted in historical patterns of economic development, unequal resource consumption, and structural power imbalances within the international system (Hickel, 2020; Kashwan et al., 2020; Ciple, Roberts, & Khan, 2022). Consequently, climate governance has become a contested arena where questions of responsibility, compensation, adaptation, and development rights intersect with broader struggles over global justice.

International frameworks such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1992), the Kyoto Protocol (1997), and the Paris Agreement (2015) represent efforts to institutionalize global cooperation. The principle of *common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities* (CBDR-RC) acknowledges historical inequalities and calls for shared but unequal burdens (Bodansky, 2016). Yet, real-world implementation has been hindered by geopolitical power imbalances, inadequate climate finance, weak domestic institutions, and competing national priorities (Keohane & Victor, 2016; Nakhooda et al., 2014; IPCC, 2023; OECD, 2024; World Resources Institute, 2024).

This article explores the political economy of climate change through a comparative analysis of developed and developing countries. Drawing on international relations theories - realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism, and dependency theory it examines how structural inequalities, institutional weaknesses, and ideological contestations shape climate governance. Using Nigeria,

Bangladesh, Germany, and the United States, the paper interrogates the persistent gap between global ambitions and national implementation. It argues for a justice-based, inclusive framework that bridges this divide, prioritizing political will, institutional reform, and equitable international cooperation.

Research Questions

This article seeks to inform policy by addressing the following critical questions.

1. How do geopolitical power asymmetries influence global climate negotiations?
2. What institutional reforms are necessary to improve climate governance in developing countries?
3. How can international relations theories inform practical climate policy?
4. How can climate justice principles be effectively integrated into global and national climate governance frameworks?

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a multi-theoretical framework that combines insights from realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism, dependency theory, and political economy to explain the complex politics of climate change between developed and developing countries. Climate governance is shaped simultaneously by power relations, institutional arrangements, normative transformations, and economic interests, making a pluralistic theoretical approach particularly appropriate.

At the foundation of this analysis is realist theory, particularly the work of Hans Morgenthau (1948), who argued that

states operate in an anarchic international system in which national interest and power remain the primary determinants of behaviour. From a realist perspective, climate negotiations are not merely environmental discussions but arenas in which states seek to protect their economic competitiveness, energy security, and geopolitical influence. The reluctance of some developed countries to accept extensive climate finance obligations, as well as the resistance of fossil fuel-dependent economies to rapid decarbonization, reflects the continued importance of national interest calculations. Morgenthau's emphasis on power politics helps explain why international climate agreements often fall short of ambitious scientific recommendations despite widespread recognition of the climate crisis. While classical realism provides an important foundation for understanding state behaviour, contemporary scholarship has extended realist insights to the emerging field of climate security. Busby (2022) argues that climate change increasingly shapes national security calculations through its effects on resource competition, migration pressures, and geopolitical instability.

Similarly, Dellmuth et al. (2023) demonstrate that international organisations are increasingly framing climate change as a security challenge requiring coordinated governance responses. These developments reinforce the realist contention that states are unlikely to pursue ambitious climate action when such measures are perceived to

threaten economic competitiveness, energy security, or The study further draws on constructivist theory, particularly the work of Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) on international norm dynamics. Their concept of the "norm life cycle" provides a useful framework for understanding the evolution of climate governance. According to Finnemore and Sikkink, norms emerge through the efforts of norm entrepreneurs, spread through processes of international socialisation, and eventually become internalised as standards of appropriate behavior. Climate action has increasingly followed this trajectory. Ideas such as sustainable development, climate justice, carbon neutrality, and net-zero emissions have evolved from advocacy positions into widely accepted principles guiding national and international policy. International organisations, scientific bodies such as the IPCC, environmental advocacy networks, and civil society groups have acted as norm entrepreneurs, shaping expectations regarding responsible climate behaviour. This perspective helps explain why states often adopt climate commitments even when immediate material benefits are not apparent, as concerns for international legitimacy and reputation increasingly influence policy choices.

To account for enduring inequalities within the international climate regime, the study incorporates dependency theory and contemporary climate justice scholarship. Developing countries frequently argue that industrialised nations bear greater responsibility for climate change because of their historical emissions and accumulated wealth. Recent studies have reinforced this position by demonstrating

how historical carbon emissions have been unevenly distributed across countries and social groups (Hickel, 2020). Climate justice scholars further contend that equitable climate governance requires prioritising the needs of vulnerable populations and addressing structural inequalities embedded within the global political economy (Kashwan et al., 2020; Ciple et al., 2022). This perspective provides a useful lens for understanding contemporary debates surrounding climate finance, adaptation support, technology transfer, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC).

The framework is also informed by political economy approaches, which draw attention to the influence of domestic economic interests on climate policymaking. Fossil fuel industries, energy corporations, financial institutions, and other powerful actors often shape national climate agendas through lobbying, investment decisions, and political influence. These dynamics help explain variations in climate ambition across countries and the persistence of policy inertia despite growing scientific consensus regarding the urgency of climate action.

In addition, this study incorporates the insights of Jordan and Huitema (2014) on climate policy innovation. They argue that climate governance evolves through processes of policy invention, diffusion, experimentation, and evaluation. Their work highlights how successful climate policies are often developed in particular jurisdictions before being adapted and adopted elsewhere. This perspective is

particularly relevant for understanding the spread of renewable energy policies, emissions trading systems, carbon pricing mechanisms, and climate adaptation strategies across different countries and governance levels. It also sheds light on the growing importance of subnational climate initiatives, policy learning, and institutional experimentation in advancing climate action. For example, the diffusion of Germany's renewable energy policies, California's emissions regulations, and Bangladesh's adaptation practices demonstrates how innovative approaches can influence climate governance beyond national borders. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding climate politics. Realism explains the influence of power and national interest; liberal institutionalism highlights the importance of international cooperation; constructivism demonstrates how climate norms emerge and shape behavior; dependency theory exposes structural inequalities between developed and developing countries; political economy reveals the role of domestic interests and economic structures; and policy innovation theory illustrates how climate governance evolves through learning and diffusion. By combining these perspectives, the study offers a nuanced understanding of why climate governance remains uneven and contested despite growing international consensus on the need for urgent climate action.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case approach to examine the political dynamics shaping climate governance in

developed and developing countries. A comparative case study design is particularly appropriate because it enables an in-depth analysis of how different political, economic, and institutional contexts influence the formulation and implementation of climate policies. By comparing countries with varying levels of economic development, governance capacity, and climate vulnerability, the study seeks to identify both common patterns and context-specific factors that shape climate governance outcomes. To ensure currency and relevance, the review of secondary literature focused primarily on publications from 2015 to 2025. The lower boundary (2015) was selected because it coincides with the adoption of the Paris Agreement, which marked a significant turning point in global climate governance and generated a substantial body of contemporary scholarship on climate justice, climate finance, adaptation, and implementation challenges. Earlier foundational works were retained where necessary to explain theoretical concepts and historical developments.

Literature was sourced from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, and Wiley Online Library. Additional policy reports were obtained from the IPCC, UNFCCC, UNEP, OECD, World Bank, International Energy Agency (IEA), and World Resources Institute (WRI).

The review prioritised peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and institutional publications directly

addressing climate governance, climate justice, international climate negotiations, adaptation, mitigation, and climate finance.

The analysis draws on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official reports and policy documents from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Conference of the Parties (COP) communiqués, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and other international climate governance documents.

Secondary sources include peer reviewed journal articles books, policy briefs, reports from international organisations, and reputable media publications that address climate politics, governance, and international environmental cooperation.

Four countries were selected through purposive sampling. The United States and Germany are developed countries, and Nigeria and Bangladesh are developing countries. The selection was guided by three criteria. First, the countries represent different positions within the global political economy of climate change, ranging from major historical emitters and economic powers to highly climate-vulnerable developing states. Second, they exhibit varying levels of institutional capacity and governance effectiveness, enabling a comparison of implementation challenges and opportunities. Third, they reflect diverse climate policy experiences and developmental priorities, thereby providing a broad perspective on the interaction between domestic political structures and international climate commitments. The

United States and Germany were chosen because of their significant influence on global climate policy and differing approaches to the energy transition, while Nigeria and Bangladesh illustrate the challenges faced by developing countries in balancing climate action with socio-economic development imperatives. Data were analysed using thematic comparative analysis. Relevant documents were systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes related to climate governance, political interests, institutional capacity, climate finance, international cooperation, and climate justice. These themes were then compared across the four case studies to identify similarities, differences, and emerging patterns in climate policy implementation. The analysis was informed by the theoretical perspectives of realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism, dependency theory, and political economy, which provided an analytical framework for interpreting the findings.

Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations. First, reliance on documentary sources means that the analysis depends on the availability and quality of existing data and may not fully capture informal political processes or emerging policy developments. Second, the study focuses on four case studies and therefore does not claim statistical generalisability across all countries. Rather, it seeks analytical generalisability by generating insights that may be applicable to similar contexts. Third, the rapidly evolving nature of climate governance means that policy developments occurring after the period

covered by the study may alter some of the conclusions.

Nevertheless, the comparative approach provides valuable insights into the political and institutional factors that continue to shape climate governance across different national contexts.

Historical Context and Global Climate Governance

The institutionalization of global climate governance began in the late 20th century, largely in response to mounting scientific evidence on anthropogenic climate change. The creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 laid the groundwork for evidence-based global cooperation. This led to the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, which introduced the principle of *common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities* (CBDR-RC), reflecting historical disparities between countries (UNFCCC, 1992).

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol marked a significant shift by imposing binding emissions targets but only for developed nations. The exclusion of major developing economies like China and India generated geopolitical tensions and resulted in the United States' decision not to ratify the agreement (Bernstein & Hoffman, 2019). This imbalance continued into the 2009 Copenhagen Accord, which, despite high expectations, failed to deliver a binding global treaty.

The Paris Agreement of 2015 introduced a more inclusive, bottom-up approach, with *Nationally Determined Contributions*

(NDCs) that allow countries to define their own commitments. While the agreement promoted flexibility and universality, critics argue that its voluntary nature and absence of enforcement mechanisms limit its effectiveness (Bodansky, 2016). Many developing countries still face barriers such as limited institutional capacity, insufficient climate finance, and competition with urgent socio-economic development goals (Nakhooda et al., 2014; UNEP, 2020). Recent scholarship suggests that the Paris Agreement has also accelerated a transition toward more polycentric and transnational forms of climate governance involving cities, regions, corporations, civil society organisations, and international networks (Bulkeley et al., 2023). According to Aykut, Foyer, and Morena (2024), contemporary climate governance increasingly operates through complex interactions among state and non-state actors, reflecting a broader transformation of global environmental governance beyond traditional interstate negotiations.

Although developed countries initially failed to meet the US\$100 billion annual climate finance target by 2020, OECD reports indicate that the target was surpassed in 2022. Nevertheless, concerns persist regarding the adequacy, accessibility, and equitable distribution of climate finance, particularly for adaptation and loss-and-damage initiatives. These issues underscore the persistent disconnect between international climate diplomacy and local implementation.

Power Asymmetries and Negotiation Inequality

Developed nations particularly those in the G7 continue to exert outsized influence in climate negotiations due to their economic power, control over knowledge systems, and institutional leverage. The technical language of climate science, the dominance of English in negotiations, and complex procedural rules often disadvantage delegations from the Global South (Okereke & Dooley, 2010).

Climate finance mechanisms continue to reflect significant power asymmetries within the international climate regime. Although institutions such as the Green Climate Fund and multilateral development banks are formally multilateral, donor countries retain considerable influence over funding priorities and allocation processes. Contemporary analyses suggest that these arrangements frequently favour market-oriented approaches and private-sector investment models that may not align with the developmental needs of recipient countries (Newell & Paterson, 2010; Roberts & Parks, 2007; Ciple et al., 2022; OECD, 2024). As a result, developing countries often experience difficulties accessing climate finance and securing adequate resources for adaptation, resilience building, and loss-and-damage initiatives. One of the most contentious issues in global climate diplomacy has been the demand for compensation for loss and damage climate impacts that cannot be mitigated or adapted to. Vulnerable nations and advocacy coalitions such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) have long pushed for a dedicated facility to address irreversible climate harm. While

COP27 finally agreed to establish such a fund, its structure, governance, and resourcing remain unclear (UNFCCC, 2022). This delay reflects deeper geopolitical reluctance among developed countries to accept liability or commit to long-term transfers (Dubash & Ghosh, 2019).

Calls for climate justice anchored in historical responsibility, distributive equity, and development rights are gaining traction. These concepts challenge the technocratic framing of climate governance and demand a more democratic and inclusive global climate order (Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014; Okereke & Coventry, 2016).

Comparative Case Studies in Global Climate Politics

To illustrate the gap between global commitments and national realities, this section offers four country case studies reflecting diverse climate politics, capabilities, and constraints.

Nigeria: A Petrostate Under Climate Pressure

Nigeria exemplifies the developmental and political dilemmas facing many resource-dependent countries. As Africa's most populous nation and one of its top oil exporters, Nigeria is simultaneously vulnerable to climate risks and heavily reliant on fossil fuel revenues (Akinbami, 2011). Environmental threats include desertification, flooding, and coastal erosion, all of which compound poverty, insecurity, and weak infrastructure.

Although Nigeria has ratified international agreements and submitted Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs),

implementation has lagged due to limited capacity, fragmented institutions, and low political prioritization of climate issues (Ikejamba & Schirmer, 2022). The dominance of oil rents in Nigeria's political economy perpetuates elite resistance to renewable energy transition (Okereke & Coventry, 2016).

Yet, civil society activism is growing. Youth-led movements and climate NGOs have begun raising public awareness, although their influence remains limited in the face of entrenched interests. The Nigerian case demonstrates the explanatory power of dependency theory and political economy perspectives. Despite growing awareness of climate risks, dependence on hydrocarbon revenues constrains policy innovation and reinforces resistance to rapid energy transition. The case illustrates how domestic economic structures mediate the implementation of international climate commitment.

Bangladesh: Navigating Climate Fragility with Limited Means

Bangladesh is among the world's most climate-vulnerable nations despite contributing less than 0.5% of global emissions. Recurrent flooding, cyclones, and sea-level rise threaten millions of lives and livelihoods (Pelling, 2011). In response, Bangladesh has developed comprehensive national adaptation plans, including community-based early warning systems and climate-resilient infrastructure.

However, these efforts are constrained by a lack of long-term international financing and insufficient technological support. Despite rhetorical commitments from

donors, much of the climate finance pledged to Bangladesh remains delayed, conditional, or fragmented (Nakhooda et al., 2014).

The Bangladesh experience highlights the limitations of global climate justice mechanisms. While the country has demonstrated remarkable adaptation capacity, the continued inadequacy of climate finance reveals the persistent gap between international commitments and practical support for vulnerable states

Germany: A Climate Leader with Structural Contradictions

Germany is often hailed as a leader in climate diplomacy, thanks to its *Energiewende* (energy transition) policy that emphasises renewables and emissions reductions. Germany has made significant financial contributions to global climate funds and supported EU-wide emissions targets (Bernstein & Hoffman, 2019).

Germany completed its nuclear phase-out in 2023 but temporarily increased coal usage during the energy crisis triggered by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These developments illustrate the tensions between energy security and decarbonisation objectives. These inconsistencies also reflect domestic political and economic trade-offs that constrain even the most committed actors. Germany illustrates the tension identified by realism between environmental commitments and national interests. The temporary return to coal during the energy crisis demonstrates how energy security considerations can override climate ambitions even among leading climate actors.

United States: A Climate Superpower with Volatile Commitments

The United States has played a pivotal but often inconsistent role in global climate governance. The Obama administration was instrumental in securing the Paris Agreement, while the Trump administration's withdrawal from the accord highlighted the vulnerability of U.S. climate commitments to domestic political change. Although the Biden administration rejoined the Paris Agreement and elevated climate action as a central pillar of domestic and foreign policy, the durability of U.S. climate leadership remains uncertain due to persistent partisan divisions (Meadowcroft, 2009; Busby, 2022; Dellmuth et al., 2023).

A significant development in recent years has been the implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022, widely regarded as the most substantial climate investment package in U.S. history. The legislation allocates hundreds of billions of dollars toward clean energy deployment, electric vehicle production, carbon capture technologies, domestic manufacturing of renewable energy components, and energy-efficiency improvements. Early assessments indicate that the IRA has stimulated large-scale private-sector investments in renewable energy and green industrial development across multiple states, strengthening the country's capacity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while enhancing economic competitiveness (IEA, 2024; U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2024).

Climate governance in the United States is increasingly characterized by the growing influence of state-level climate initiatives.

States such as California, New York, Washington, and Massachusetts have adopted ambitious emissions reduction targets, renewable portfolio standards, and climate adaptation strategies that frequently exceed federal requirements. Regional collaborations, including carbon trading mechanisms and clean energy partnerships, have further demonstrated the capacity of subnational actors to drive climate action independently of federal policy shifts. These developments underscore the importance of multi-level governance in advancing climate objectives within a federal political system (World Resources Institute, 2024; IPCC, 2023). The growing role of states, cities, corporations, and civil society actors in U.S. climate policy reflects broader trends toward multi-level and transnational climate governance identified by Bulkeley et al. (2023). These developments demonstrate that climate governance increasingly extends beyond national governments and relies on complex networks of public and private actors operating across multiple scales.

Despite these advances, political polarisation continues to shape climate policy outcomes in the United States. Climate change remains a highly contested issue within partisan politics, with significant differences between major political parties regarding the scale, urgency, and economic implications of climate action. Electoral transitions frequently create uncertainty over the continuity of climate policies, affecting both domestic investment decisions and international perceptions of U.S. credibility. This polarization has contributed to policy

reversals, legal challenges, and divergent approaches across states, highlighting the extent to which domestic political dynamics influence the country's ability to provide stable and consistent climate leadership (Pew Research Center, 2024; UNEP, 2024).

The U.S. experience illustrates the complex relationship between federal leadership, subnational innovation, and partisan politics in climate governance. While recent investments and state-level initiatives signal renewed momentum toward decarbonization, the long-term effectiveness of U.S. climate policy will depend on the ability to build broader political consensus around the transition to a low-carbon economy. The U.S. case reflects the importance of domestic political institutions in shaping international climate behaviour. Federal-state dynamics and partisan polarisation help explain fluctuations in climate leadership despite substantial technological and financial capacity

Key Challenges in Bridging the Global–Local Climate Divide

Despite growing global consensus on the need for urgent climate action, a persistent gap remains between international ambition and domestic implementation, particularly in developing countries. This gap is underpinned by several structural and political challenges:

Institutional Weakness and Fragmentation

Many developing countries suffer from weak governance systems where climate responsibilities are distributed across multiple ministries and agencies, often with overlapping mandates and limited inter-

agency coordination (Jordan & Lenschow, 2010; Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2024; Kuyper & Linnér, 2023). This fragmentation impedes policy coherence, slows implementation, and limits the absorption of international climate finance. Furthermore, capacity deficits in data collection, enforcement, and monitoring undermine the credibility and effectiveness of national climate strategies (UNEP, 2020). Recent scholarship emphasises that effective climate governance depends not only on institutional coordination but also on democratic legitimacy, transparency, and accountability mechanisms. Bäckstrand and Kuyper (2024) argue that governance systems lacking meaningful stakeholder participation often struggle to maintain long-term political support for climate action, while Kuyper and Linnér (2023) highlight the importance of accountability structures in ensuring policy implementation.

Political Short-Termism and Electoral Incentives

In both developed and developing democracies, climate change is often subordinated to short-term political considerations. Elected leaders may prioritize job creation, infrastructure, or energy access over long-term sustainability, especially in countries where electoral cycles are closely tied to patronage and clientelism (Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014). This short-termism creates policy volatility and disincentivizes transformative investments in renewable energy and climate resilience.

Vested Interests and Fossil Fuel Economies

The entrenchment of fossil fuel interests presents a formidable barrier to decarbonisation. In countries such as Nigeria, petroleum revenues remain deeply embedded within state structures and political networks, creating powerful incentives to resist rapid energy transition. Contemporary political economy analyses demonstrate how climate governance outcomes are shaped by interactions among governments, corporations, and transnational actors operating across multiple governance levels (Newell & Preston, 2010; Newell, Pattberg, & Schroeder, 2022). These dynamics often contribute to policy inertia despite growing awareness of climate risks.

Climate Justice and Equity Dilemmas

Demands for climate justice particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa, small island states, and least developed countries highlight unresolved tensions in climate negotiations. While developed countries push for mitigation, developing countries emphasize adaptation, loss and damage, and development rights. These divergent priorities are often framed through the lens of historical responsibility and equity (Okereke & Coventry, 2016). Yet, reconciling them within a single global framework remains politically complex.

Pathways Forward: Toward Inclusive and Equitable Climate Governance

Overcoming the structural and political barriers to effective climate governance requires a multi-pronged strategy that addresses both international power

dynamics and domestic institutional constraints.

Policy Integration and Mainstreaming

Climate concerns must be embedded across all sectors of policymaking not confined to environmental ministries. Integrating climate goals into economic planning, education, agriculture, transport, and public health will ensure that climate policy becomes a national development priority (Jordan & Lenschow, 2010). Horizontal integration across ministries and vertical coordination with subnational governments are essential for policy coherence.

Institutional Capacity Building

Strengthening the capacity of national and local institutions is a precondition for effective climate action. This includes investing in technical infrastructure, training public servants, improving data systems, and ensuring coordination across government levels (UNEP, 2020). Local governments, in particular, must be empowered to lead adaptation and resilience initiatives.

Democratic Leadership and Political Will

Transformative climate governance requires committed leadership at all levels. Political actors presidents, legislators, governors must frame climate action as a matter of national interest, intergenerational justice, and international credibility. Public engagement, civic education, and the inclusion of youth movements and indigenous voices can create the political pressure needed to sustain long-term reforms (Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014).

Just Climate Finance and Structural Reform

Developed countries must meet their financial commitments not as charity, but as a matter of justice and global stability. Climate finance must be predictable, accessible, and aligned with recipient country priorities. Furthermore, international institutions should support structural reforms that enhance democratic governance, reduce corruption, and build resilience (Roberts & Parks, 2007; Ciplet et al., 2022 OECD, 2024). Recent climate justice scholarship emphasises that climate finance should be viewed not merely as development assistance but as part of a broader effort to address historical inequalities and unequal contributions to climate change. Equitable climate governance therefore requires reforms that enhance both distributive justice and procedural fairness within international climate institutions (Ciplet et al., 2022; Kashwan et al., 2020).

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to contemporary debates on climate governance by integrating realist, institutionalist, constructivist, dependency, and political economy perspectives into a unified framework for understanding North-South climate relations. Unlike studies that focus exclusively on international negotiations or domestic implementation, the article demonstrates how global power asymmetries, domestic institutional capacities, and competing developmental priorities interact to shape climate governance outcomes. The comparative analysis of the United States, Germany, Nigeria, and Bangladesh also provides new

insights into the persistent gap between international climate commitments and implementation realities across diverse political and economic contexts.

Conclusion: Reimagining Global Climate Governance through Justice and Inclusion

Climate change is not merely an environmental or scientific issue it is a deeply political challenge rooted in historical injustice, global inequality, and developmental asymmetries. While international frameworks such as the Paris Agreement provide the scaffolding for global cooperation, their success depends on the domestic political will, institutional strength, and socio-economic realities of each nation.

This article has shown that climate governance remains uneven and constrained by power disparities between developed and developing countries. Through case studies of Nigeria, Bangladesh, Germany, and the United States, we see how institutional capacity, political economy, and electoral dynamics shape climate policy outcomes.

To close the gap between global ambition and local implementation, climate governance must be reimagined through a justice-oriented lens. This requires shifting from technical and finance-centred solutions to political strategies that empower developing countries, ensure fairness in burden-sharing, and address the root causes of vulnerability and underdevelopment.

Re-politicising climate governance is not a threat to multilateralism it is a necessary step toward a more inclusive and effective global response. Climate change can no longer be addressed through narrow, state-centric negotiations or market-driven mechanisms alone. It requires structural transformation, inclusive participation, and shared accountability.

Only through sustained international solidarity, democratic innovation, and integrated policymaking can the world respond to climate change in a way that is both environmentally effective and socially just.

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