



Kautilya Fellows 2025-26

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Political Leadership and Climate Politics: A Comparative Analysis of India and the United States

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October 2026

INDIA FOUNDATION



Political Leadership and Climate Politics

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WHITE PAPER



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Executive Summary

This paper discusses why the political leaderships of India and the United States (US) are central to climate politics and policies in both countries, which face distinct yet related environmental challenges. It compares how differing political ideologies shape climate action, including India's focus on developmental equity and sustainable growth and the US's polarised strategies. The paper examines leadership approaches and decision-making in India within its constitutional framework of Union-state relations, as well as federal-state interactions in the US. It also assesses their effects on policy-making, enactment and enforcement. National policies, such as India's National Action Plan on Climate Change and the US Inflation Reduction Act, are studied. So are the two countries' roles in international forums, such as the Conference of the Parties (COP), and in bilateral climate diplomacy. The analysis reveals shared issues, such as financial limitations, reliance on fossil fuels and institutional constraints. It also compares developments in renewable energy, emissions and adaptation efforts. Finally, the paper states that political leadership is critical to align domestic agendas with the global agenda. Visionary leadership can accelerate climate resilience, whereas inaction can deepen exposure to increasing environmental risks.

01 Introduction

THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF COUNTRIES such as India and the United States (US) has become the most significant influence on their national and international responses to global climate issues as these problems continue to intensify. Both are among the largest democracies, as well as major contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. India is currently the third-largest emitter, with an increasing per capita contribution, while the US is the historical leader in cumulative emissions. Their climate politics, therefore, not only have an effect on domestic policy but also set a precedent for global cooperation (United Nations, 2026). The necessity of this leadership is underlined by common vulnerabilities, including extreme weather, biodiversity loss and economic instability. These require a careful balance between developmental priorities and sustainable practices. This paper reviews how governance ideologies, institutional structures and international interactions in these countries have evolved under their leaders. These include the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, and successive US administrations, from Donald Trump to Joe Biden, and again to Donald Trump in his second term, which began in 2025. Through these dynamics, the paper emphasises the interplay between domestic agendas and global imperatives. It also identifies opportunities for visionary leadership to build climate resilience amid increasing risks (Goniewicz et al., 2025).

The climate politics of India under Modi's governance is one such example, as national development priorities are merged with environmental ones, and developmental equity and sustainable growth are regarded as the primary concerns. India's climate policy rests on the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), which was launched in 2008. Ever since taking office in 2014, the Modi administration has carried it forward, with a focus on missions such as solar energy expansion and sustainable agriculture. This is an indication of a dedication to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). Under this principle, India seeks equitable sharing of responsibilities across all forums of international agreements. It holds that technology transfer and financial aid by developed countries should help India in its transition

without holding back economic growth (Yadav & Kirk, 2023). India is now a constructive actor with commitments such as the “Panchamrit” announced at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These include achieving net-zero by 2070 and huge renewable energy plans. India has made strong progress on these plans. In 2025, it crossed the target of 50 per cent non-fossil installed power capacity, five years ahead of the 2030 deadline. By March 2026, its renewable energy capacity stood at about 275 GW, including about 150 GW of solar and 56 GW of wind power (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2026). In 2025, record solar and wind additions also helped India reduce fossil-based power generation for the first time this century (Fulghum et al., 2026). At the same time, coal continues to play an important role in meeting India's growing energy needs and in supporting livelihoods in coal-producing regions. As of 2026, and in line with the current administration's priorities in this sector, India continues to engage in strategic hedging. It participates selectively in multilateral processes while seeking diversified sources of finance and markets for decarbonisation. This progressive attitude stands in contrast to the retreat of some major economies from their climate commitments, making India a prospective leader in the norms of equity in climate change (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, 2022).

The US, on the other hand, has seen a polarising, shifting climate strategy. It has been shaped by ideological differences between conservative deregulation — favouring fossil-fuel expansion, reduced regulatory oversight and scepticism of climate science — and liberal intervention — favouring emissions regulation, clean-energy subsidies and multilateral engagement (McCrigh & Dunlap, 2011; Caldwell et al., 2024). During the first term of Trump (2017-2021), policies preferred the expansion of fossil fuels, culminating in the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. During the Biden administration (2021-2025), the government shifted to much more ambitious policies. These included the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which spent billions of dollars on incentives to promote the use of clean energy, and re-entry into global agreements (Jennifer, 2025). National policy and state-level initiatives, such as the cap-and-trade regime in California, have interacted throughout this period. This federal-state dynamic has contributed to uneven progress in the face of judicial and congressional battles. By 2026, this polarisation had escalated during the second term of the Trump administration. Executive actions rescinded the regulatory policies of the Biden administration and dismantled the so-called endangerment finding on GHGs. The US also withdrew from key bodies addressing climate change, such as the UNFCCC and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). These initiatives favour national energy security and fossil fuel generation. They reflect the administration's portrayal of climate change as a “hoax” and of green energy as “inefficient”. As a result, the US has lost much of its leadership in global climate matters. Bilateral relations were affected by this retreat, including tensions between the US and India over energy security and Russian oil imports. The recent tariff agreements had indicated a reset, although it was yet to be realised (Gross & Beane, 2026).

Furthermore, both countries face similar challenges, including financial limitations and reliance on fossil fuels, but their approaches to resolving them differ. India's approach is equity-based and operates within its constitutional framework, under which responsibilities are distributed between the Union and the states. The approach of the US, by contrast, has been more fragmented and marked by sharper partisan swings.

These disparities are reflected in global forums such as the COP. India has maintained active, high-level participation as a proponent of adaptation and justice. US attendance, by contrast, has fluctuated and declined. Most notably, in November 2025, the Trump administration did not send an official government delegation to COP30 in Belém. This was the first time since the inaugural 1995 UNFCCC conference that the US went unrepresented (ABC News, 2025). International partnerships, including the US-India Clean Energy Partnership, offer opportunities to work together on renewable energy and technology. However, US isolationism under Trump could undermine these relationships (Kumar, 2025). Recent developments in renewable transitions emphasise the likelihood of mutual gains. These include the solar boom in India and the electric vehicle (EV) incentives of the IRA in the US, along with the reduction in emissions and the implementation of adaptation measures. The lack of such cooperation, however, increases risks worldwide. This review draws together these factors to suggest that political leadership is crucial to aligning national interests with planetary sustainability. It also offers suggestions on how motivated governance can help speed up transitions, and how ideological entrenchment can slow them down. As global climate risks increase, the paths of India and the US will significantly impact the global agenda. This calls for a reconsideration of equity, collaboration, and resilience (Enphase Energy, 2022).

02 Ideological Foundations of Climate Leadership

The ideological grounds of climate leadership in India and the US reveal startling differences, including the nations' priorities, past responsibilities, internal politics, and approaches to global climate change. India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has framed its climate policy on a developmental equity paradigm. This paradigm integrates national development ambitions with sustainable development. Equity here signifies the need to share burdens fairly across the international space, in line with the CBDR principle. This ideology views decarbonisation not as a limitation but as a continuation of economic modernisation, energy security, and industrial policy. It is exemplified by programmes such as “Atmanirbhar Bharat” (Self-Reliant India). These encourage local production of renewable energy while also tackling poverty eradication and rapid urbanisation (Antholis, 2014).

However, Modi's approach is a departure from India's earlier caution about ambitious mitigation commitments before 2014. An example is the “Panchamrit” commitments announced at COP26 in 2021. These comprise reaching 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030 and meeting half of India's energy requirements from renewable sources by 2030. They also include reducing the emissions intensity of gross domestic product (GDP) by 45 per cent from 2005 levels and cutting projected emissions by one billion tonnes. According to scholars such as Navroz K. Dubash in the book *India in a Warming World: Integrating Climate Change and Development* (2019), this paradigm combines climate action with more general development objectives. Climate change exposes India to effects such as extreme weather and rising sea levels. At the same time, India criticises the absence of adequate financial and technological assistance by developed countries (Yadav, 2022). As Dubash and associates point out, India has a two-pronged approach. It calls for equity and justice in international talks, while pursuing ambitious domestic outcomes to build resilience and economic prospects.

Nonetheless, critics observe gaps, including the lack of mid-term targets for 2035-2040 and limited civil society involvement, which could weaken accountability. The background data, however, support the growth despite the difficulties. By March 2026, the total installed capacity of renewable energy sources in India had reached about 275 GW. Non-fossil sources generated about 29 per cent of electricity in 2025-26, with solar and wind contributing about 15 per cent. Coal continues to meet much of the remaining demand, given its role in ensuring reliable and affordable power (PIB, 2026). In 2022, India's GHG emissions reached 3.81 GtCO₂e, or 8 per cent of the world's total. This was an increase of 135 per cent between 2000 and 2022, reflecting rapid growth. Yet, at 1.922 tCO₂e per capita, India's emissions are much lower than those of the US. India ranks 23rd (medium performer) on the 2026 Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), compared with 10th previously. Although India reached 50 per cent non-fossil capacity earlier than scheduled in 2025, the index points to slower renewable energy scaling and the absence of a national coal transition timeline (Burck et al., 2025). The ideology is a blend of national development priorities and sustainability that makes India a leader in equity-based norms. However, sustained financing of USD 25-30 billion annually for 500 GW by 2030 is imperative to reconcile ambition and implementation (International Energy Agency, 2023).

Conversely, the US has demonstrated strong ideological polarisation on climate change, with policy fluctuations influenced by partisan differences that have continued to widen over the past decades. This has been documented by Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap. Their standard 2011 work, *The Politicization of Climate Change and Polarization in the American Public's Views of Global Warming, 2001-2010*, examines Gallup polls. These reveal that, overall, people have become more divided. Conservatives have grown more sceptical of climate science, which to them appears to be a hoax or a threat of overregulation, while liberal elites urge immediate action (McCright & Dunlap, 2011; Caldwell et al., 2024). This anti-regulatory conservatism among the elite has led to unpredictable policies due to polarisation. During the first term of Donald Trump (2017-2021), deregulation and fossil fuel supremacy were promoted. This led to withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the promotion of "beautiful, clean coal". This was reversed under the administration of Joe Biden (2021-2025), which pursued ambitious and progressive agendas. It passed the IRA as a clean energy incentive and returned to the Paris Agreement to achieve net-zero by 2050 (Jennifer, 2025).

Nevertheless, by February 2026, Trump had begun rolling back further. His administration rescinded the 2009 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) endangerment finding on GHGs. It also exited the UNFCCC, the IPCC, and more than 60 other international organisations. In addition, it declared a national energy emergency to fast-track the extraction of fossil fuels and stop wind and solar subsidies. According to Dunlap et al. (2016), conservatism is negatively associated with pro-environmental views. This gap has solidified climate denialism among Republicans, with green policies being described as a "Green New Scam". Statistics show this volatility. US GHG emissions grew 2.4 per cent in 2025, at a faster rate than GDP growth. This was due to 3.8 per cent growth in the power sector, driven by a coal rebound and data centre demand. Emissions were still 18 per cent below 2005 levels, but previous decreases have begun to reverse (McGrath, 2026). Coal use is estimated to decrease by 1.4 per cent in 2026. However, long-term outlooks under current policies indicate that emissions will only decrease by 26-35 per cent by 2035, at a slow pace, given IRA changes and regulatory repeal. Renewable growth increased, with solar up

34 per cent in 2025, and zero-emitting sources now supply 42 per cent of the grid. Fossil fuels, however, still dominate electricity and transportation, the leading emitting sector.

The US has been pushed down eight ranks in the 2026 CCPI, to 65th place (very low performer). This highlights how ideological entrenchment undermines steady leadership (Burck et al., 2025).

In a relative sense, these ideologies form different agendas. The equity agenda of India focuses on adaptation, justice, and conditional commitment, which reflects the needs of developing countries. The US agenda emphasises market-driven innovation, with a conservative lean towards deregulation. This divergence can be traced in the debate over climate finance, where India seeks the support of developed economies such as the US. Institutional variations between the two countries also demonstrate the interaction between ideology and governance. India's constitutional framework distributes responsibilities between the Union and the states, enabling gradual but equity-conditioned development. In the US, federalism combined with partisan divides tends to encourage fragmentation. Mutual challenges, such as reliance on fossil fuels (74 per cent in India, 78 per cent in the US), underscore the need to look beyond polarisation in a visionary leadership approach. Dubash asserts that climate and development need to be brought together through inclusive politics. McCright and Dunlap caution that unaddressed divisions can lead to inaction amid increasing risks. Cross-ideology bridges are, therefore, needed to make the world more resilient (Srinivas, 2019).

03 National Policy Frameworks and Implementation Dynamics

In India, climate policy is anchored in the NAPCC, initiated in 2008 and given renewed impetus by Prime Minister Narendra Modi after 2014. It comprises eight core missions focused on areas such as solar energy, energy efficiency, sustainable habitat, and water management. This framework focuses on integration with national development objectives. Bodies such as the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change provide policy direction and coordination across ministries. In line with India's constitutional arrangements, the states play a key role in implementation. Many subjects central to climate action, such as agriculture and water, fall within the domain of the states, while electricity is a shared responsibility of the Union and the states. The states have, therefore, prepared their own State Action Plans on Climate Change, aligned with the NAPCC and with equity-based principles such as CBDR (PIB, 2024). In India, the dynamics of implementation are defined by high ambitions, including the Panchamrit targets announced at COP26 in 2021. These set a goal of 500 GW of non-fossil energy capacity by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2070. They are backed by initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and the National Green Hydrogen Mission. There has been significant improvement. By June 2026, India's renewable energy capacity had reached about 288 GW (Das, 2026b). Non-fossil sources supplied about 29 per cent of electricity generation in 2025-26 (PIB, 2026). There are still challenges in implementation. The sector requires approximately USD 25-30 billion per year in financing, and coal continues to account for a large share of power generation as India meets rising demand (PIB, 2022). The Modi government has supported a steady implementation process. Critics, however, point to limited civil society participation and mid-term accountability, as well as uneven implementation at the state level. This is especially the case in agrarian areas undergoing sustainable agriculture missions alongside economic reform. On the whole, the Indian practice

combines national policy direction with state-level implementation for scalable applications. This promotes resilience by fostering domestic innovation and deepening commitments to international finance and technology transfers.

However, the US operates under a more decentralised, ideologically unstable policy framework, shaped by federalism and partisan politics. This makes it difficult to implement and enforce policies at both the national and subnational levels. Major policies have been swinging in both directions. Under the Biden administration (2021-2025), the IRA of 2022 was a decisive investment of more than USD 369 billion in clean energy incentives, EV subsidies, and emissions reductions. It aimed to achieve a 40 per cent reduction below 2005 levels by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050. The administration also re-entered the Paris Agreement and took executive actions intensifying EPA regulations. These frameworks, however, have faced significant rollbacks under the Trump administration's second term. These include repealing IRA subsidies for renewables, rescinding the 2009 EPA endangerment finding on GHGs, and withdrawing from the UNFCCC and IPCC. The dynamics of implementation in the US are characterised by federal-state relationships. Progressive states (such as California) have developed independent policies, such as cap-and-trade and zero-emission vehicle requirements. This has established a patchwork of implementation, which is often opposed by conservative-led states and Congress (Huang et al., 2022). Such polarisation has resulted in only haphazard gains. By 2025, renewables and other zero-emission sources had risen to 42 per cent of the electricity grid, with solar generation growing 34 per cent. However, total GHG emissions in the same year had surged 2.4 per cent, partly due to rebounds in coal. A cut of only 26-35 per cent is projected by 2035 under existing policy. Implementation is also handicapped by congressional paralysis and executive overreach. For instance, the Trump administration declared a national energy emergency to speed up fossil fuel projects, to the disadvantage of long-term climate resilience. In spite of such failures, subnational efforts and market activities that drive innovation provide pockets of continuity. They show how the decentralised system in the US can simultaneously advance climate action and hinder it (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & United Nations Development Programme, 2025).

04 International Engagements and Bilateral Diplomacy

International interactions and bilateral diplomacy are important platforms where the climate politics of India and the US converge. They reveal both the prospects for collaboration and the entrenchment of differences rooted in leadership priorities and ideological shifts. India has continued to take an active role in various world conferences, such as the COPs of the UNFCCC. It has positioned itself as one of the champions of equity, climate justice, and the principle of CBDR and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) (Ratha & Barik, 2025). In November 2025, at COP30 in Belém, Brazil, India was led by Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav. It reiterated its commitment to fair climate action, including meeting non-fossil fuel capacity targets earlier than planned and reducing emissions intensity. It also noted that developed countries must meet their finance and technology transfer targets (PIB, 2025). India has been selective in its involvement in multilateral processes, promoting outcomes that advance adaptation and justice on behalf of developing countries. At the same time, it has driven major initiatives, such as the International Solar Alliance and Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment). As of February 2026, India continued

to demonstrate positive leadership in COP negotiations by balancing national development goals with global responsibilities. It had, however, faced global scrutiny over the timing of its revised Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), amid global demands for increased accountability (PIB, 2024). India resolved this within weeks of that scrutiny. On March 25, 2026, the Union Cabinet approved the country's revised NDC for 2031–2035. It raised the targets to 60 per cent non-fossil electricity capacity and a 47 per cent cut in emissions intensity from 2005 levels. It also set a carbon sink of 3.5–4 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, an upward revision of the 2022 pledge (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, 2026).

The US, with President Donald Trump in his second term, has, in stark contrast, been pursuing aggressive isolationism in global climate policy. It has withdrawn from important institutions in favour of its own national energy security and fossil-fuel interests. Following an executive order issued in January 2025, the US officially left the Paris Agreement for the second time in January 2026. In a broader action announced in January 2026, it also withdrew from the UNFCCC, the foundational climate treaty, and the IPCC. These were among more than 60 international organisations that the US deemed contrary to its interests. Such activities, including withdrawing from previous engagements and declaring climate-related approaches to be overreaching, have made the US an outlier. It has abandoned multilateral talks and weakened international efforts in emissions reductions, funding, and scientific evaluation. This withdrawal has weakened American leadership in meetings such as the COP. Its wavering attendance and opposition to binding targets contrast sharply with India's leadership in advocating a fair distribution of the burden (Aeberhard et al., 2026; Igini, 2026).

Bilateral climate change diplomacy between India and the US provides a landscape of persistence and new strains amid these larger changes. Frameworks such as the US-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership, launched in 2021, have enabled continued technical and business collaboration. The partnership encompasses the Strategic Clean Energy Partnership (SCEP), with pillars on renewables, energy efficiency, and new technologies, including green hydrogen. More recent high-level interactions have focused on energy security, greater trade in US hydrocarbons, civil nuclear cooperation, and the resilience of clean technology supply chains. These include discussions during Prime Minister Modi's visit to the US in February 2025 and subsequent energy dialogues. At the start of 2026, bilateral relations underwent a partial reset with an Interim Trade Agreement in February 2026. It included efforts to expand energy trade, with India buying US oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and technology products. This came amid a tariff dispute linked to India's oil imports, including from Russia (Mishra et al., 2025). That reset, however, proved short-lived. The interim deal's tariff cut (from 25 to 18 per cent) was undone when the US Supreme Court struck down the underlying International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) tariff framework on February 20, 2026 (WilmerHale, 2026). The White House responded the next day by imposing a new, temporary 10 per cent tariff on Indian goods under separate statutory authority (All India Radio, 2026). Nevertheless, Trump-era US isolationism has made further climate-specific cooperation difficult. Joint efforts on renewables and critical minerals are also endangered by Washington's withdrawal from multilateral climate finance and standards. In spite of these obstacles, subnational and commercial relationships, and shared interests in energy diversification and technology transfer, make way for continuity.

05 Challenges, Progress, and Future Trajectories

The climate journeys of both India and the US are characterised by setbacks. These arise from the continued reliance on fossil fuels, budgetary constraints, political considerations, and the need to sustain economic growth while cutting emissions. However, their development and future projections differ greatly because of their different leadership styles and institutional structures. India continues to rely substantially on coal, which remains the leading source of electricity despite capacity additions, as the country seeks to meet fast-growing demand affordably. Scaling up to 500 GW or more of non-fossil capacity by 2030 requires annual investments of USD 25-30 billion or more. It also involves addressing land issues, grid integration, inadequate storage, and a just transition in the agrarian and industrial sectors (Gupta & Ghosh, 2023).

India also seeks international assistance through technology transfer and climate finance in line with CBDR principles. Observers note scope for greater civil society participation and for interim goals for 2035-2040. Coal is expected to remain part of India's energy mix for some time to meet development needs, even as the country pursues net-zero by 2070. Achieving this may require an estimated USD 22.7 trillion in cumulative investment by mid-century. Nevertheless, the pace of growth is high. India is well ahead of the 2030 deadline, having reached about 51-52 per cent non-fossil installed capacity by the end of 2025. This was driven by record-breaking solar capacity, which crossed 150 GW by March 2026 (PIB, 2026), along with wind growth, rooftop solar growth, and the Green Hydrogen Mission (NITI Aayog, 2026). Wind capacity grew by a record of about 6 GW in 2025-26, reaching about 57.4 GW by June 2026 (NBM&CW, 2026). In 2025, the power sector showed its first decrease in emissions in decades, due to unprecedented clean energy development and slower demand growth. India is a medium performer (23rd) in the 2026 CCPI, having previously been ranked higher due to effective policy efforts through auctions, efficiency programmes and green finance initiatives. Projections indicate faster renewable growth and possible decoupling of emissions from growth with improvements in storage and grid infrastructure. Meeting 1.5°C pathways, however, will depend on multilateral funding materialising. This would strengthen India's position as a leader in fair, development-focused climate action (Das, 2026a).

Ideological polarisation and volatility in government policy pose acute challenges to the US. These were exacerbated during the second term of President Donald Trump through aggressive rollbacks. They included the EPA's rescission of the endangerment finding under the Clean Air Act and the repeal of clean energy subsidies under the IRA. They also included the rush to fossil fuel development on the grounds of a national energy emergency, and deregulation for "energy dominance". All of these undermine regulatory certainty and decarbonisation, and risk reversing recent gains. Fossil fuels continue to supply the majority of electricity and dominate transportation. Rising demand from data centres and electrification may also be met by coal rebounds in the absence of strong incentives (Groupe d'études géopolitiques, 2025).

Enforcement is also complicated by financial and political fragmentation across federal-state boundaries, judicial conflicts, congressional gridlock, and weakened leverage in international climate finance and standards. The gains made by previous administrations, including IRA-based incentives for clean energy and reductions in emissions through 2024, have been largely reversed. GHG emissions increased 2.4 per cent in 2025, as power-sector contributions from a

coal resurgence and building heating offset earlier declines. Renewables remained strong, with solar increasing greatly, and zero-emission sources, including nuclear, accounted for 42 per cent of the grid. However, forecasts under current policy show only 26-35 per cent cuts by 2035, which can be explained by the repeal of regulations and a reduction in subsidies (Radtke & Renn, 2024). In 2026, the US scored very low (65th) in the CCPI. This indicates weak leadership in the wake of withdrawals from the Paris Agreement (effective January 2026), the UNFCCC, the IPCC, and more than 60 organisations. The trend ahead points toward fragmented progress, with subnational action in states such as California offering continuity through cap-and-trade and EV regulations. However, federal retreat will likely stall or reverse progress at the national level. Given the US share of global emissions and technology, this could strain bilateral relationships with partners such as India (Burck et al., 2025).

06 Conclusion

The comparison of climate politics in India and the US highlights the enormous impact of political leadership on the national and global responses to the growing climate crisis. Both countries are among the largest democracies in the world, with the US as the traditional leader in cumulative emissions and India as the third-largest current emitter. Their policies are rooted in divergent ideological orientations, institutional models, and strategic priorities. India follows a developmental paradigm that combines national objectives with sustainable development. Under equity-oriented governance within its constitutional framework, India has already reached important milestones. It crossed the 50 per cent non-fossil installed capacity target well ahead of the 2030 deadline. Its renewable energy capacity reached about 288 GW by mid-2026, and non-fossil sources supplied about 29 per cent of electricity generation in 2025-26. This development has been backed by initiatives such as the NAPCC, the Panchamrit commitments, and the Green Hydrogen Mission. India is a medium performer (23rd) in the 2026 CCPI, and its approach focuses on adaptation, justice, and conditional commitments under CBDR. However, balancing long-term ambition with implementation remains a challenge. Coal continues to meet a large share of electricity demand as renewables scale up. Scaling up renewables requires financing of about USD 25-30 billion per year, and land and social issues affect project placement. Interim targets would also help link the net-zero goal for 2070 with the realities of implementation.

These leadership styles shape how each country addresses shared issues, such as fossil reliance, insufficient funds, and the need to balance growth with decarbonisation. India's system of governance facilitates steady, equity-driven progress and positive international cooperation. In contrast, the polarised federal system in the US allows only uneven results and a withdrawal into a national shell. Two-way diplomacy between the two countries is a complex terrain. Long-standing frameworks have enabled technical collaboration on renewables, critical minerals, and energy security. This has continued despite tensions caused by US isolationism, tariff policy, and India's diversified oil imports (including from Russia). In February 2026, an interim trade agreement reduced tariffs and promised more US energy buying. That tariff cut was overturned within weeks, when the US Supreme Court struck down the underlying IEEPA tariff framework. Such resets in the economic relationship may indirectly enable energy diversification. However, more substantial climate-specific cooperation may be compromised by ideological differences.

Finally, political leadership is revealed as the key to aligning domestic agendas with global needs for the planet's sustainability. Visionary, inclusive governance can build bridges across ideological divides, raise funds, innovate, and support equitable transitions. Such governance can spur faster renewable scaling, emissions reductions, adaptation interventions, and resilience-building, mitigating global risks such as extreme weather and economic instability. On the other hand, ideological entrenchment, deregulation, and the withdrawal of cooperative structures threaten to sustain fragmentation. They can also postpone necessary change and increase vulnerabilities in the face of mounting climate risks. India and the US have the disproportionate responsibility of being key emitters whose actions will set the global agenda. Proactive, consistent leadership can open synergistic avenues to the creation of a robust and low-carbon future. Failure or withdrawal, by contrast, would undermine a fair and successful climate response throughout the world. These democracies will face a test in the coming years: whether they go beyond short-term interests and adopt the forward-looking, collaborative stewardship required by the climate emergency.

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