

COP30

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I. Executive Summary

This policy brief argues that COP30 exposed a critical accountability gap in global climate governance: while ambitious adaptation and mitigation goals were reaffirmed, the absence of binding enforcement mechanisms which were exacerbated by U.S. federal withdrawal undermines implementation, particularly for vulnerable and youth populations. To address this gap, the brief evaluates three policy mechanisms: a standardized global climate reporting system, mandatory climate education, and legally binding climate finance commitments tied to GDP. It outlines COP30's main goals, such as strengthening adaptation finance and accelerating the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The brief also examines the attendance of world leaders, highlighting the notable absence of the U.S. government. Despite this absence, the brief analyzes how U.S. influence persisted through former U.S. negotiators and philanthropic leaders, state and local governments, and the country's economic and market power. COP30 demonstrates the need for stronger alignment between global policies and underscores the urgent needs of the youth and vulnerable communities. This paradox reveals a structural weakness in global climate governance: major emitters can shape outcomes without being bound by collective commitments.

II. History

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is an international climate meeting held each year by the United Nations" ("What is COP?" 2022). States participating in COP are legally recognized as "Parties" to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), obligating them to report emissions, negotiate targets, and coordinate implementation efforts (NOAA, 2022). Representatives from the countries "report on progress, set intermediate goals, make agreements to share scientific and

technological advances of global benefit, and negotiate policy" ("What is COP?" 2022). During COP30, the countries involved focused on six key issues:

- Preventing Runaway Global Warming: It is likely that the world will significantly overshoot the 1.5°C threshold initially set by the Paris Agreement in 2016. Consequently, the primary aim is to establish "how [countries] will limit that overshoot and develop deeper emissions cuts" (UN environment programme 2025). Previously, at COP28, countries agreed to "transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems"; COP30 wanted to create a roadmap to support this transition, but ultimately there was no international agreement created (Poynting 2025).
- Protecting Communities from Climate Impacts: According to UNEP's Adaptation Gap Report 2025, developing nations have access to a small fraction of the more than \$310 billion USD needed annually to adapt to the fallout from climate change (UN environment programme 2025). The Glasgow Climate Pact resulted from COP26, with attending nations pledging to "build resilience to climate change, to curb greenhouse gas emissions and to provide the necessary finance for both" (UNFCCC 2021); it was due to expire in 2025. An aim of COP30 was to create a new financial plan and framework to continue aiding communities in adapting to climate change.
- Making Good on a Trillion-Dollar Promise: Azerbaijan and Brazil, shortly before COP30, proposed a roadmap to continue providing the financial support outlined in the Glasgow Climate Pact. According to their plan, developed countries would lead the charge in "turning financial pledges into financial flows" (UN environment programme 2025) by drawing in private investment.

- Using Creative Solutions for the Climate Crisis: Recent launches by the UNEP and member-states include efforts to combat extreme heat, food waste, and deforestation. For instance, Brazil's recently launched Beat the Heat Implementation Drive, in collaboration with UNEP's Cool Coalition, focuses on local-level solutions to heat and the scaling of sustainable cooling solutions like urban green spaces. Launching programs like this in conjunction with the UNEP "chart[s] a path toward a sustainable and more resilient future" (UN environment programme 2025).
- Ensuring Fair and Inclusive Transitions: A focal point of COP30 was the Belém Action Mechanism for Just Transition, which described how "governments and the private center can put people at the centre of national and sectoral transitions" (UN environment programme 2025) relating to climate change, through methods such as job creation and vocational training, in addition to diversifying climate planning and investment strategies. COP30 successfully approved this proposal.
- Recapturing the Mojo of Paris 2015: The adoption of the Paris Agreement spurred hope for humanity in the face of climate change. Many called for COP30 to "reignite the spirit" (UN environment programme 2025) of COP21 to continue making climate commitments to prevent crossing the threshold of 2.3-2.5°C.

COP30 convened heads of state and senior climate negotiators from over 190 countries, including leaders from the EU, Brazil, and key multilateral institutions. Those who attended the event included UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and The Prince of Wales (Poynting 2025). "Delegations from more than 190 countries, including a large number from China,

attended the talks as well" (Poynting 2025). Those who did not attend included China's President Xi Jinping, and US President Donald Trump (Poynting 2025). Despite their absences, the gathering of many other prominent world leaders signals continued high-level engagement.

III. Policy Problem

2024 and 2025 saw record-high global temperatures, putting the world on track to overshoot the 1.5°C warming threshold within the next decade. Known as the "implementation COP," COP30 was intended to transition countries from rule-setting towards concrete actions.

Despite this, the United States was notably absent from COP30, the first time in modern COP history that it did not send an official delegation. This absence reflects a strategic retreat from multilateral climate governance under the Trump administration, signaling to both allies and developing states that U.S. domestic political cycles can override international commitments. Acting accordingly with his campaign slogan "drill, baby, drill," Trump announced plans to open around 1.27 billion acres of U.S. coastal waters to oil and gas drilling in November 2025. Additionally, his administration has rolled back environmental protections and canceled over \$13 billion in green energy project funding. COP30 aimed to accelerate the implementation of the Paris Agreement, yet in January 2025, Trump withdrew the U.S. from the agreement.

At the same time, U.S. influence did not disappear. Despite no official delegation, representatives from California and other states shaped discussions. This highlights a key policy challenge: while negotiators push for a fossil fuel phase-out, major emitters continue to undermine progress through shifts in domestic policy.

Additionally, COP30 aimed to address adaptation finance. A huge gap in funding for communities affected by climatic fallout exists. According to the UN Environment Programme, developing nations need over \$30 billion annually for adaptation, yet only had access to \$26 billion in 2024. Looking ahead, global climate finance needs to reach \$1.3 trillion per year by 2035 to meet adaptation needs. The projected \$1.3 trillion annual adaptation needed by 2035 dwarfs current commitments, revealing that the existing voluntary finance model is structurally incapable of closing the resilience gap for frontline states (UNEP, 2025). In the U.S., cuts to climate-preparedness grants and funding for climate science agencies such as NOAA and NASA weaken climate response. The dismissal of contributors to the National Climate Assessment, which measures how climate change affects the U.S., undermined critical data collection efforts. America's actions have widened the gap between the goals articulated at COP30 and the materialized policies of developed nations.

A. Stakeholders

COP30's focus on adaptation finance is directly tied to developing nations. Climate initiatives like the Beat the Heat Implementation Drive in Brazil are often heavily reliant on external funding from larger organizations like UNEP, which are financially backed by its member-states. A major question of climate funding within COP is how that money is used and where it goes to. Furthermore, developing nations tend to be disproportionately impacted by climate change; not only are their locations susceptible to the damage of it, but the lack of infrastructure and support, both domestically and internationally, leads to even greater effects felt by the people of developing nations.

In 2025, the energy industry was the third-largest industry of the world economy, valued at \$550 billion (Parker 2025). As such a large portion of the economy, the energy industry is a major contributor towards jobs and supporting world infrastructure; energy sources like coal and oil are extremely widespread, due to the accessibility of it and the existing reliance and infrastructure that makes the shift difficult. Due to its impact, pushing for cleaner energy sources will prove to be a challenge. Beyond the sustainability aspects, the energy industry is a pillar of the world economy and changing it will have massive impacts on the global population.

B. Youth Impact

A common refrain in environmentalism is setting up a world that can be inherited by future generations; this is the core essence of sustainability. In that sense, it is the role of negotiators and delegates to consider the youth as central stakeholders in global climate negotiations such as COP30, because the youth possess limited decision-making power. As climate change accelerates, young people will continue to experience extreme weather events, food and water insecurity, and displacement, while simultaneously being responsible to attempt to recover from those experiences in the future. Although the direct powers of the youth are limited, the youth have the power to influence delegations by using their voice through actions such as lobbying and reaching out to officials. By working to ensure accurate representation of young people in global climate negotiations, current leaders can establish a world that future generations can sustainably inherit.

IV. Policy Options

A. Climate Reporting System

To address the lack of a transparent and standardized reporting system, all countries are advised to submit annual climate progress reports, including statistics on consumption and environmental protection methods. Reports standards are established by national governments to create a standardized global climate reporting system, ensuring consistency across countries and increasing transparency. Reports include but are not limited to annual emissions, climate finance distributions, local restoration projects, and NAPs (National Adaptation Plans) progress tracker. This climate reporting system will also assist the identification of specific needs for vulnerable countries susceptible to climate change. Improving data consistency and transparency in turn allows for the development of clearer climate adaptation plans and improvement projects.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) can be charged with ensuring compliance with a global climate reporting system. To further enforce compliance, non-compliance can trigger restricted access to financing intended for climate change mitigation and measures. This method of ensuring compliance would be especially effective with developing countries, who often rely on outside funding to support climate change policy and action. However, this poses the question of the effect that this type of enforcement would have on developed countries who are not wholly reliant on outside funding for climate change measures. Reflecting on the good-faith framework of the Paris Agreement, in which compliance was ensured through regular reports on emissions and implementation efforts (UNFCCC 2016), it is possible that a secondary global climate reporting system like the one proposed here could be effective by promoting transparency over total compliance.

B. Environmental Education National Curriculum

Many countries struggle to implement climate adaptation and mitigation projects due to the public's lack of understanding of climate change. Therefore it is necessary to incorporate climate education into the national education program, covering topics such as basic knowledge on pollution, climate science, sustainability, UN sustainable development goals, and civic engagement. This equips students with basic knowledge of climate change to support the adaptation and implementation of climate projects. Promoting environmental education will increase public awareness of climate change, while fostering a sense of responsibility to the climate early on, encouraging commitment towards developing a sustainable future as a community.

In theory, the institutionalization of climate literacy will lead to reduced vulnerability to climate misinformation and strengthened government support for mitigation measures. However, education is a major social issue and disparity within the United States; students receive differing levels of education quality depending on their location and socioeconomic status. There is potential that, despite requiring climate literacy education, many students will continue to go without it due to the lack of resources or available educators to teach the subject. Ideally, by nationalizing environmental education, there would be a push to allocate funding to ensure that all children could become climate literate.

C. Legally Binding Climate Finance Commitments

To address the lack of voluntary climate finance pledges from developed countries, developed countries can adopt an agreement to contribute a certain percentage of their GDP to climate finance. This method of financing is effective on NATO and its Allies; at the 2025 NATO Summit, "Allies made a commitment to investing 5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annually...by 2035" (NATO 2025). This is a continuation of the existing methods of financing NATO's defense expenditures and has been proven to work.

Applying this system to climate finance pledges will likely prove successful. To start the implementation of this commitment, developed countries should agree to contribute 1% of their annual GDP towards climate pledges.

The money gained from this should be used to aid vulnerable countries directly impacted by climate change. This commitment should include clear timelines, production of standardized reports, and light financial penalties for violations of conduct. This transparent tracking system turns commitment to climate finance into an enforceable obligation rather than a likelihood or voluntary commitment.

V. Conclusion

COP30, held in Brazil, brought global attention to deepening climate inequalities, the urgency of adaptation finance, and the growing gap between climate ambition and implementation. Despite the absence of the U.S. federal government, American influence persisted through non-state actors like former U.S. lead negotiator Jonathan Pershing, philanthropic leaders, and state representatives. Their presence highlighted the fragmented yet ongoing role of the U.S. in international climate governance. COP30's focus on six key issues, including halting runaway warming, protecting vulnerable communities, and leveraging inclusive transitions, emphasized that existing policy frameworks are insufficient without stronger multilateral enforcement and accountability. While the conference showcased global solidarity, it also revealed clear contradictions, particularly in how developed countries continue to subsidize fossil fuels while pledging climate aid.

To strengthen future climate negotiations and uphold the principles of the Paris Agreement, COP30 reaffirmed the need for enforceable policy mechanisms. The introduction of legally binding climate finance targets, such as requiring developed countries to contribute a set percentage of GDP to adaptation efforts, would transform vague promises into measurable obligations. In tandem, a transparent climate reporting system would track national progress, identify at-risk regions, and close loopholes in climate accountability. Youth stakeholders, among the most vocal at COP30, emphasized the importance of justice, equity, and urgency. Moving forward, climate policy must integrate intergenerational equity and prioritize frontline communities. COP30 illustrates that ambition without enforcement is insufficient. Without binding finance obligations, transparent reporting, and domestic political alignment among major emitters, future COPs risk becoming symbolic rather than transformational.