From Climate Commitments to Effective Policy Implementation: Political Institutions, State Capacity, and Just Transition Governance in the Global South

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ABSTRACT: Translating national climate commitments into effective policy action remains a significant governance challenge in the Global South. This study investigates the associations among political institutions, state capacity, and just transition governance with projected climate policy–target alignment. A quantitative cross-sectional analysis was conducted using country-level secondary data and official policy documents from a sample of 42 countries. Alignment was defined as the reverse-coded percentage gap between projected 2030 emissions under current policies and emissions implied by unconditional nationally determined contributions. Political institutions were assessed using the Liberal Democracy Index, state capacity was measured by Government Effectiveness and Regulatory Quality, and just transition governance was evaluated through a six-dimension documentary index. Institutional indicators were averaged for the period 2022–2024. Hierarchical ordinary least-squares models were estimated with HC3 robust standard errors and included socioeconomic and structural controls. In the fully adjusted interaction model, state capacity (B = 5.98, SE = 2.68) and just transition governance (B = 2.29, SE = 0.98) demonstrated positive associations with alignment. The interaction between political institutions and state capacity was also positive (B = 8.63, SE = 3.76), while the coefficient for political institutions at mean state capacity was not statistically significant. Fossil-fuel dependence exhibited a negative association with alignment (B = −0.19, SE = 0.08). These findings indicate that administrative capacity and documented transition provisions may contribute to explaining cross-country differences in policy–target alignment. Nevertheless, the observational design and target-relative outcome preclude establishing causal effects, realized emissions reductions, or definitive alignment with the Paris Agreement.

KEYWORDS: Climate Policy–target Alignment, Political Institutions, State Capacity, Just Transition Governance, Nationally Determined Contributions, Global South

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Introduction

The Paris Agreement fundamentally reshaped global climate governance, in part by focusing nationally determined climate action in the international mitigation strategy. But a lack of alignment between ambition and domestic action in the form of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), net-zero targets, and national climate strategies has existed so far. However, meeting climate commitments requires both ambition expressed in climate plans and concrete institutional and administrative capacity and political commitment for continuous policy action. The literature on NDC implementation has identified four key elements as necessary: policy coherency, institutional coordination, implementability, and transparency (Pauw & Klein, 2020). Domestic political processes also influence how NDCs are prepared and implemented, impacting ownership, coordination and feasibility (Röser et al., 2020).

But they are as much of a challenge in the Global South, where decarbonization may need to be coupled with poverty alleviation, energy access, industrialisation, employment promotion and fiscal constraints. In these contexts, climate mitigation is not only a process of replacing high-carbon-intensive technologies with those capable of low-carbon use, but also an institutional and political process in the broader context of development. Marquardt et al. (2023) show that to make mitigation "normal" in the Global South, institutional frameworks for mitigation must be integrated into robust political, administrative, and social systems. National climate institutions have diverse designs and roles, making for varying levels of coordination, accountability and ability for long-term policy integration (Dubash, 2021).

A crucial part of this explanation is political institutions. Improved incentives for governments to keep environmental policy through democratic accountability, rule-conditional governments, regulatory credibility, and limits on arbitrary decision-making. However, an institutional type does not guarantee effective climate performance. However, the effect of democracy on environment can be mitigated by corruption, which also reduces governmental effectiveness, as Povitkina (2018) argues. In a similar way, Ang and Fredriksson (2021) argue that government effectiveness, rule of law and corruption are key institutional properties that influence climate-policy stringency. Therefore, the institutional elements should be assessed together with the state's ability to develop, coordinate, fund, supervise and implement policy.

Commitment-Implementation: State Capacity as a Linkage. The extent to which states can design and implement climate policies depends on their administrative organization and their capacity to develop and make policies as a bureaucratic process, as argued by Meckling and Nahm (2018). Additionally, Meckling and Benkler (2024) indicate that the institutional and fiscal landscape influences the feasible policy instruments a government will be able to implement. Ambition might literally exceed the administrative or financial capacity to implement in many Global South settings.

Also, decarbonisation's distributive effects need to be taken into account in effective implementation. Just transition governance addresses procedural, distributive, and restorative justice as a way to expand climate policy from one that focuses primarily on emissions reduction (McCauley & Heffron, 2018). The provision of financing, strategic planning, and governance frameworks is crucial for providing successful just-transition outcomes in intervention countries, as recent evidence suggests (Gather et al., 2025). Few comparative studies have explored the combination of political institutions, state capacity and just transition governance as a factor causing the commitment–implementation gap in the Global South. This study takes up the task of addressing this gap by providing an understanding of the role played collectively and interactively by these institutions in effective climate governance; rather, the contextually relevant conditions for delivery.

Literature Review

The realization of climate commitments is largely a domestic political governance issue. International agreements include goals, though there are huge differences in governments' willingness and ability to translate said objectives into policies. Comparative climate-politics research recognizes institutions, political interests and policy ideas as important for differences in national climate action (Purdon, 2015). Political institutions have an impact on accountability, representation, policy continuity and the capacity of societal actors to both challenge and support government decisions. However, being institutionalised does not ensure implementation. Bättig and Bernauer (2009) also indicated that democratic institutions had a positive correlation with commitments to climate-policy making but did not have the same impact on emission results. Such distinction is fundamental in the present research because it shows that the institutional circumstances could be conducive for policy adoption but not for its effective implementation.

These models suggest from a political-economy point of view that distributional conflict will have an impact on climate-policy implementation. Decarbonization creates relatively clear winners and losers across industries, workers and consumers, regions, and social groups. This means politics are better understood as a distributive conflict to address the challenge of climate change, and not necessarily a collective-action problem in the conventional sense, Aklin and Mildenberger (2020) contend. Political institutions have a role to a degree because they influence the involvement of different interests in decision-making and whether or not they remove the ability for governments to uphold policies in the face of opposition from carbon-intensive constituencies. This is the study's first theoretical underpinning, comparative institutional political economy, which relates institutional arrangements to their incentives and constraints for climate implementation.

Political factors, however, are not sufficient to explain implementation results. State-capacity theory emphasizes the available means and organizational strength that allow governments to make effective public use of policy objectives. Hanson and Sigman (2021) see state capacity as being multidimensional, with administrative, extractive and coercive ability, instead of thinking of governmental effectiveness as one trait. Policy capacities at individual, organizational and system levels are also distinguished between analytical, operational and political levels for the purposes of this study from Wu et al. (2015). For climate governance, these capacities shape a government's capacity to craft technically viable policies and instruments, to coordinate agencies, mobilize finance, to monitor compliance and to enforce regulatory choices. New findings in Pakistan also indicate differences at the government level, where analytical capability tends to be greater than operational capability, which in turn is greater than political capability, in the capacity to govern climate change. State capability is therefore not seen as merely an institutional attribute but as the capacity to get things done, to make climate commitments folded into actual actions or policy.

Just transition governance based on an energy-justice and political-economy approach is the third theoretical element. Beyond being a labour question, Wang and Lo (2021) characterise just transition as a framework of justice and governance. Climate change policies can result in loss of employment, energy price increases, economic disruption or inequitable access to transition benefits in certain parts of the region. Transitional-assistance policies can alleviate such burdens and support the political sustainability of decarbonization (Green & Gambhir, 2020). There is also evidence from renewable-energy transitions in Africa that policy design must take distributive, procedural, and recognition justice into account, while also being market-oriented (Müller et al., 2020). Additionally, inclusive transition processes can lead to tensions between transitioning quickly and decarbonizing the system, on the one hand and participation, recognition and equity on the other hand (Ciplet & Harrison, 2020).

This research therefore brings together the three approaches - comparative institutional political economy, state-capacity theory and just transition governance - within one analytical frame. Political institutions provide

accountability and policy incentives, state capacity relates to how policy commitments can be realised administratively and fiscally, whereas just transition governance concerns distributive conflicts which impact on legitimacy and policy durability. The framework suggests that increasing the strength of institutions, state capacity, and more sophisticated just-transition designs will strengthen the implementation of climate policies, with state capacity likely to have greater impact on policies' implementation if the policies are implemented through political institutions.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-national comparative explanatory research design was applied to assess whether political institutions, state capacity, and just transition governance are associated with effective climate-policy implementation across Global South countries. The country serves as the unit of analysis. Rather than equating the existence of a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) with implementation, this approach distinguishes between formally stated climate commitments and the policies enacted to achieve them. Wherever possible, the study uses institutional indicators that precede the implementation assessment, then temporal ordering, and minimizes the influence of short-term annual fluctuations.

Study Population and Country Selection

The study population comprises developing and emerging economies in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. To ensure a transparent and reproducible definition of the Global South, eligible countries are limited to those classified by the World Bank as low-income, lower-middle-income, or upper-middle-income economies with available and comparable climate-policy, institutional, and socioeconomic data. Countries are included only if they meet the following criteria: (a) a nationally communicated climate target; (b) a Climate Action Tracker (CAT) assessment of current policies and the 2030 target; (c) political-institution data from V-Dem; and (d) sufficient information for state-capacity and control variables. The final analytical sample is determined by data availability after merging and screening datasets, rather than by purposive selection.

Data Sources

The analysis integrates country-level information from several internationally recognized databases. Political-institution data are sourced from the V-Dem Dataset version 16, released in March 2026, which provides country-year measures of democratic institutions. State-capacity indicators are drawn from the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), which offer comparable annual measures across more than 200 economies through 2024, including Government Effectiveness and Regulatory Quality. Climate commitments and current-policy projections are obtained from the Climate Action Tracker, which explicitly evaluates whether implemented policies align countries with their stated climate commitments.

National NDCs, long-term low-emission development strategies, and related official policy documents are utilized to construct the just transition governance measure. Socioeconomic control variables are primarily sourced from the World Bank's World Development Indicators and supplemented with other official international datasets as needed.

Measurement of Variables

Climate-Policy Implementation

The dependent variable, climate-policy implementation alignment, is defined as the degree to which emissions projected under currently implemented policies align with a country's 2030 Nationally Determined Contribution

(NDC) commitment. The Climate Action Tracker (CAT) differentiates between national targets and "policies and actions," with the latter referring to expected emissions if current policies remain in effect. For each country, the implementation gap is calculated as follows:

$$Implementation\ Gap_i = \frac{CP_{2030,i} - NDC_{2030,i}}{NDC_{2030,i}} \times 100$$

where CP_{2030}represents projected 2030 emissions under current policies and NDC_{2030}represents the emissions level implied by the country's unconditional NDC target. Positive values indicate that projected emissions exceed the commitment, representing an implementation shortfall. Values at or below zero suggest that existing policies are consistent with or outperform the stated target. Because the Climate Action Tracker (CAT) frequently reports emissions projections as ranges, the primary specification uses the midpoint of the reported range. Sensitivity analyses evaluate both lower- and upper-bound estimates. CAT standardizes heterogeneous national targets into comparable emissions pathways for its assessments.

To facilitate intuitive interpretation in regression analyses, the gap measure is reverse-coded so that higher values indicate stronger alignment with implementation.

Political Institutions

Political institutions are assessed using the V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index (LDI). This index evaluates how electoral democracy is complemented by individual and minority rights, equality before the law, and judicial and legislative constraints on executive authority. The index ranges from approximately 0 to 1, with higher values indicating stronger liberal-democratic institutions.

Rather than relying on a single-year observation, the primary specification uses the country's mean LDI for 2022–2024. This approach captures relatively stable institutional conditions preceding the climate-policy assessment.

Measurement of State Capacity

State capacity is operationalized using the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) dimensions of Government Effectiveness and Regulatory Quality. Government Effectiveness measures perceptions of public-service quality, civil-service competence, policy formulation, and policy implementation. Regulatory Quality assesses the government's ability to formulate and implement sound regulations. The WGI are derived from multiple underlying sources using an Unobserved Components Model, providing internationally comparable governance estimates.

The two indicators are standardized and averaged to construct a composite State Capacity Index:

$$SC_i = \frac{Z(GE_i) + Z(RQ_i)}{2}$$

Three-year averages for 2022–2024 are utilized. Higher scores reflect greater administrative and regulatory capacity. Government Effectiveness and Regulatory Quality are also included separately in robustness checks to ensure that results are not dependent on the composite index construction.

Just Transition Governance

Given the absence of a single standardized international indicator that comprehensively captures just transition governance across all countries, this study constructs a Just Transition Governance Index (JTGI) through systematic

content coding of each country's most recent Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), long-term strategy, and relevant official transition policy available by the study cut-off date.

The index comprises six coded dimensions:

1. explicit recognition of a just transition;
2. worker protection or labor-transition provisions;
3. social protection or compensation mechanisms;
4. institutionalized stakeholder or social dialogue;
5. participation of affected communities or vulnerable groups; and
6. regional diversification, reskilling, or green-employment measures.

Each dimension is coded as 0 if absent and 1 if explicitly present, resulting in an additive score ranging from 0 to 6:

$$JTGI_i = \sum_{j=1}^{6} J\,T_{ij}$$

Higher scores reflect more advanced just-transition governance arrangements. Before assessing the documents, we develop a comprehensive coding protocol. To improve reliability, second coders independently code a subsample of documents, and we compute Cohen's kappa for each binary dimension. The authors address discrepancies by re-examining the documents according to the established coding rules.

Selection of Control Variables

The regression models include a limited set of theoretically relevant controls that may simultaneously influence institutional development and climate-policy implementation. These comprise GDP per capita, fossil-fuel dependence, renewable-energy share, climate vulnerability, and population size. GDP per capita and population are logarithmically transformed because of their highly skewed cross-national distributions. Natural-resource rents, or fossil-fuel dependence, capture political-economic resistance to decarbonization, while renewable-energy share captures differences in national energy structures. Control variables are selected based on theoretical considerations rather than automated significance-based procedures to reduce the risk of model overfitting.

Statistical Analysis Procedures

The analysis is conducted in four stages. First, descriptive statistics are calculated for all variables, including means, standard deviations, ranges, and distributions. Second, Pearson correlation coefficients are estimated to examine bivariate relationships. Third, variance inflation factors (VIFs) are calculated to assess multicollinearity. Fourth, hierarchical ordinary least-squares regression models are estimated:

$$CPI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PI_i + \epsilon_i$$
$$CPI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PI_i + \beta_2 SC_i + \epsilon_i$$

and

$$CPI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PI_i + \beta_2 SC_i + \beta_3 JTGI_i + \sum_{k=1}^{K} \gamma_k X_{ki} + \epsilon_i$$

where CPI denotes climate-policy implementation alignment, PI represents political institutions, SC represents state capacity, $JTGI$ represents just transition governance, and X represents the vector of control variables.

To test whether state capacity conditions the influence of political institutions, the final model includes an interaction term:

$$CPI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PI_i + \beta_2 SC_i + \beta_3 JTGI_i + \beta_4 (PI_i \times SC_i) + \sum \gamma_k X_{ki} + \epsilon_i$$

Political institutions and state capacity variables are mean-centered prior to constructing the interaction term. Statistically meaningful interactions are interpreted using predicted values and marginal-effects plots, rather than relying solely on the interaction coefficient.

Because cross-national data frequently exhibit heteroskedasticity, we report HC3 heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors for the primary regressions. Statistical significance is assessed using a two-tailed threshold of $p < .05$ accompanied by 95% confidence intervals. Model fit is assessed using R^2 and adjusted R^2.

Diagnostic and Robustness Analyses

Regression assumptions are evaluated using residual and influence diagnostics. Multicollinearity is assessed through variance inflation factors (VIFs). Residual plots and formal diagnostic procedures are used to examine heteroskedasticity, and we examine influential observations. Cook's distance statistics are analyzed to identify countries that exert disproportionate influence on the estimates.

Robustness tests include: (a) estimating Government Effectiveness and Regulatory Quality separately; (b) employing alternative political-institution indicators from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset; (c) recalculating the implementation gap using the lower and upper bounds of Climate Action Tracker (CAT) projections; (d) excluding economies with high fossil fuel dependence; and (e) estimating models without potentially influential observations. Where sample size allows, regional sensitivity analyses are also conducted.

The observational research design does not establish definitive causal effects. Consequently, regression coefficients are interpreted as conditional cross-national associations that are consistent with the proposed theoretical mechanisms, rather than as experimentally identified causal estimates.

Ethical Considerations

This is a study utilizing only publicly available country-level secondary data and official policy documents and thus does not engage in any human research involving personal identifiers or individually identifiable information. Hence, there is no recruitment of participants, intervention or collection of sensitive personal data in this study. All data sources (both datasets and documentary sources) are cited properly, and coding and analysis procedures are written down so that they can be transparent and reproduced.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The analytical sample comprised 42 countries from the Global South that had full information on all climate-policy implementation, institutional, just transition and control variables. Descriptive statistics are given in Table 1. The climate-policy implementation alignment score showed considerable country-level variation, indicating that there were considerable discrepancies between climate commitments and the proximity of the policies. There was also much variety in political institutions, from a score of 0.09 to 0.79 on the Liberal Democracy Index. For the State Capacity Index, a range of zero was used. The Just Transition Governance Index (JTGI) scores varied between 0 and 6 (the theoretical upper-bound), signifying significant variation in degrees of institutionalization of distributive and procedural transition processes.

Table 1

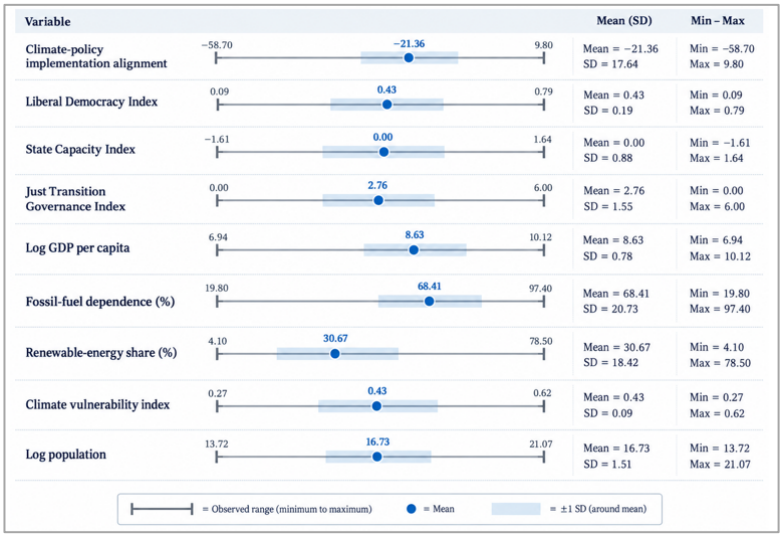
Descriptive Statistics for the Analytical Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Climate-policy implementation alignment	42	−21.36	17.64	−58.70	9.80
Liberal Democracy Index	42	0.43	0.19	0.09	0.79
State Capacity Index	42	0.00	0.88	−1.61	1.64
Just Transition Governance Index	42	2.76	1.55	0.00	6.00
Log GDP per capita	42	8.63	0.78	6.94	10.12
Fossil-fuel dependence (%)	42	68.41	20.73	19.80	97.40
Renewable-energy share (%)	42	30.67	18.42	4.10	78.50
Climate vulnerability index	42	0.43	0.09	0.27	0.62
Log population	42	16.73	1.51	13.72	21.07

Note: Climate-policy implementation alignment scores are higher when there are more climate-policy measurements implemented relative to national climate commitments. The negative results suggestthat current projections of potential emissions are still higher than the emission level assumed
by each country's relevant commitment.

Figure 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Analytical Variables



Analysis of Bivariate Relationships

Preliminary relationships between the key explanatory variables and climate-policy implementation alignment were tested using Pearson correlation coefficients. Climate-policy implementation alignment (Table 2) had a positive relationship with stronger political institutions ($r = .32$, $p = .040$). There was a more positive relationship between state capacity and implementation alignment ($r = .51$, $p < .001$). Moreover, there was a positive correlation between Political institutions and just transition governance ($r = .40$), and there was a moderate correlation between Political institutions and state capacity ($r = .60$, $p < .001$), which suggests that good institutionally accountable politics will have enhanced administrative and regulatory capacity. It did not indicate however problems with multicollinearity however. Fossil-fuel dependence was negatively associated with implementation alignment ($r = -.43$, $p = .004$), such that countries which relied more on fossil fuel tended to have bigger fossil-fuel commitments and implementation gaps.

Table 2

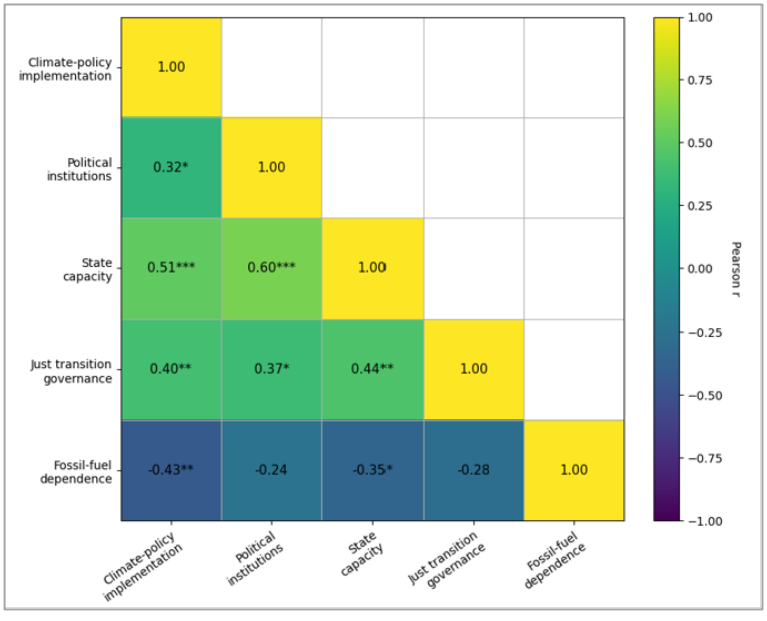
Pearson Correlations Among Principal Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Climate-policy implementation	1				
2. Political institutions	.32*	1			
3. State capacity	.51***	.60***	1		
4. Just transition governance	.40**	.37*	.44**	1	
5. Fossil-fuel dependence	-.43**	-.24	-.35*	-.28	1

Note: N = 42. p < .05. p < .01. p < .001.

Figure 2

Pearson Correlations Among Principal Study Variables



Then we examined VIFs for the entire regression model. The VIFs varied from 1.28 to 2.36, well below the usual threshold of 5, thus suggesting that multicollinearity did not have material effect on the regression estimates. The political dynamics linking political institutions, state capacity, and climate-policy implementation. Table 3 presents estimates from hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models for which the estimates use HC3 heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. The result of Model 1 showed that there is a positive correlation between political institutions and the implementation of climate policy. In particular, a one-unit improvement in the Liberal Democracy Index was estimated to improve the implementation alignment score by 18.42 points (B = 18.42, robust SE = 8.79, p = .042). The political institutions block explained about 10% of the variance in implementation alignment (R2 = .101). With the addition of state capacity in our analyses of Model 2, the coefficient for political institutions growth had become smaller and statistically insignificant (B = 12.06, p = .123). State capacity, on the other hand, was significantly and positively related to implementation (B = 9.41, robust SE = 2.72, p = .001). This model accounted for ~32% of the variation of what was observed in implementation. Model 3 added the control variables theoretically specified along with the variable of interest (model 2) – just transition governance. There was a positive relationship between state capacity and implementation – B = 6.84; p = .039 with a robust SE = 3.18. An independent positive association was found for just transition governance (B = 2.47, robust SE = 1.04, p

= .024). On average, each new dimension added to the Just Transition Governance Index (JTGI) led to a 2.5-point higher score for climate-policy implementation alignment, when holding other factors constant. Political institutions were still, but not statistically, positively associated with implementation after state capacity, just transition governance and structural control characteristics were taken into account (B = 8.17, p = .260). There was a statistically significant negative relationship between implementation and fossil-fuel dependence (B = −0.21, p = .014). The additional variables of GDP per capita, renewable-energy share, population size, and climate vulnerability were not statistically significant at .05 level individually when added to the fully adjusted model.

Table 3

HC3 Robust OLS Regression Models Predicting Climate-Policy Implementation Alignment

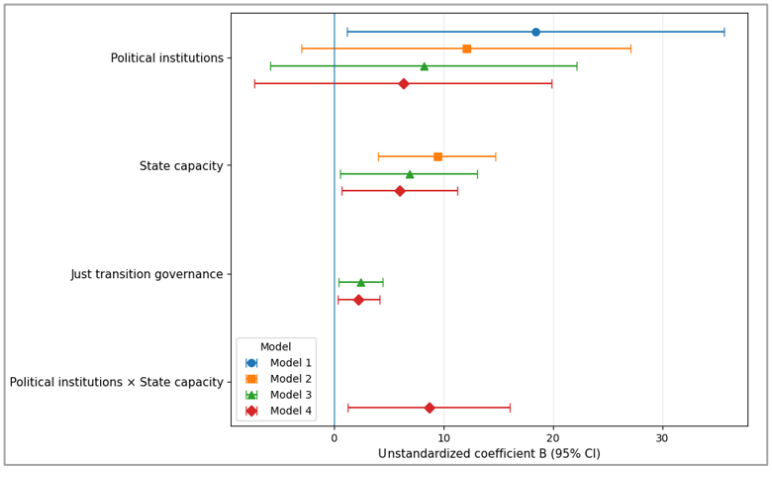
Predictor	Model 1 B (SE)	Model 2 B (SE)	Model 3 B (SE)	Model 4 B (SE)
Political institutions	18.42* (8.79)	12.06 (7.65)	8.17 (7.12)	6.31 (6.92)
State capacity	—	9.41** (2.72)	6.84* (3.18)	5.98* (2.68)
Just transition governance	—	—	2.47* (1.04)	2.29* (0.98)
Political institutions × State capacity	—	—	—	8.63* (3.76)
Log GDP per capita	—	—	1.12 (1.91)	0.94 (1.83)
Fossil-fuel dependence	—	—	−0.21* (0.08)	−0.19* (0.08)
Renewable-energy share	—	—	0.09 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)
Climate vulnerability	—	—	−0.16 (0.09)	−0.14 (0.09)
Log population	—	—	−0.74 (1.12)	−0.61 (1.06)
N	42	42	42	42
R^2	.101	.318	.521	.585
Adjusted R^2	.079	.283	.408	.456

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are reported. HC3 heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors are shown in parentheses. Political institutions and state capacity were mean-centered before constructing the interaction term in Model 4.

p < .05. **p** < .01. ***p*** < .001.

Figure 3

HC3 Robust OLS Regression Models Predicting Climate-Policy Implementation Alignment



Moderating Role of State Capacity

Model 4 tested the hypothesis of the moderated relationship between political institutions and implementation of climate-policy. The political institutions × state capacity interaction was positive and significant (B = 8.63, robust SE = 3.76, p = .028, 95% CI [0.97, 16.29]). Adding this interaction raised the R^2 of the model (from R2 value of .521 to .585). The positive interaction implies that, as state capacity grows, the capacity to link stronger political institutions with climate-policy implementation becomes stronger. In countries where the administrative and regulatory capacity is weak, increased efforts made in political institutions were reflected in marginal improvements in implementation. By contrast, in countries with a higher level of state capacity, better political institutions were associated with significantly larger climate commitment-policy alignment. The findings suggest that, in some cases, institutional accountability alone may not be enough to make commitments work to implement climate policies, as governments may be simply overwhelmed with administrative shortcomings in relation to the formulation, coordination, financing, monitoring and enforcement of climate policies.

Table 4

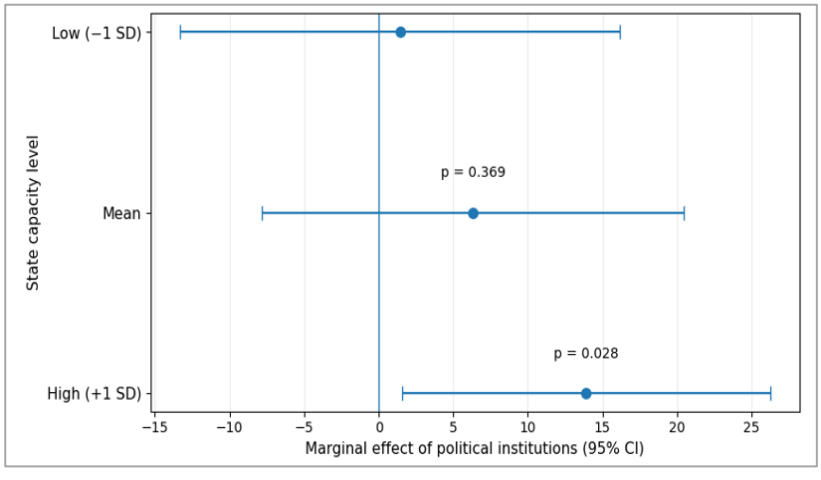
Conditional Association Between Political Institutions and Climate-Policy Implementation at Different Levels of State Capacity

State Capacity	Marginal Effect of Political Institutions	SE	95% CI	p
Low (−1 SD)	1.42	7.21	[−13.31, 16.15]	.845
Mean	6.31	6.92	[−7.82, 20.44]	.369
High (+1 SD)	13.91	6.04	[1.59, 26.23]	.028

The conditional estimates explain the interaction. However, implementing was not significantly related to political institutions when state capacity was one standard deviation below the mean. The relationship was positive, although not statistically significant, at the average level of state capacity. Strong political institutions were significantly associated with higher levels of implementation alignment (B = 13.91, p = .028) at one standard deviation above the mean.

Figure 4

Conditional Association between Political Institutions and Climate-Policy Implementation at Different Levels of State Capacity



Role of Just Transition Governance

The findings suggest that just transition governance on its own makes a contribution to the implementation of climate policy. The Just Transition Governance Index (JTGI) was still positively related to implementation in the fully adjusted interaction model (B = 2.29, robust SE = 0.98, p < .05). This association remained after the team accounted for state capacity, economic development, energy structure, climate vulnerability, population size and political institutions.

These results indicate that, together with institutional and administrative capacity, governance arrangements which tackle distributive and procedural consequences of transition are equally relevant to implementation of climate policy. Those States that introduced aspects of social protection, social dialogue with workers, community participation, economic diversification and a wider set of protections for workers were more likely to have a higher score showing how well their policies align with their climate commitments.

Regression Diagnostics Overview

The results of diagnostic analysis revealed no sign of any severe model misspecification. No multicollinearity problems were found as evidenced by the highest variance inflation factor (VIF) of 2.36. Some heteroskedasticity was seen in the residual-versus-fitted plots and subsequently HC3 robust standard errors were used. There were no values above the conventional 'Cook's distance' of 1.00, although some countries showed moderately high leverage based on their fossil-fuel dependence or institutional scores. All standardized residuals stayed within about ±3.0, and removing any country did not change direction of the main institutional coefficients. As a result, all observations were kept for principal models.

Robustness and Sensitivity Analysis

Multiple sensitivity analyses were conducted to test if the main findings were driven by any other specification or by mean reversion for the return stock. The key Robustness Specifications are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Robustness of the Main Institutional Relationships

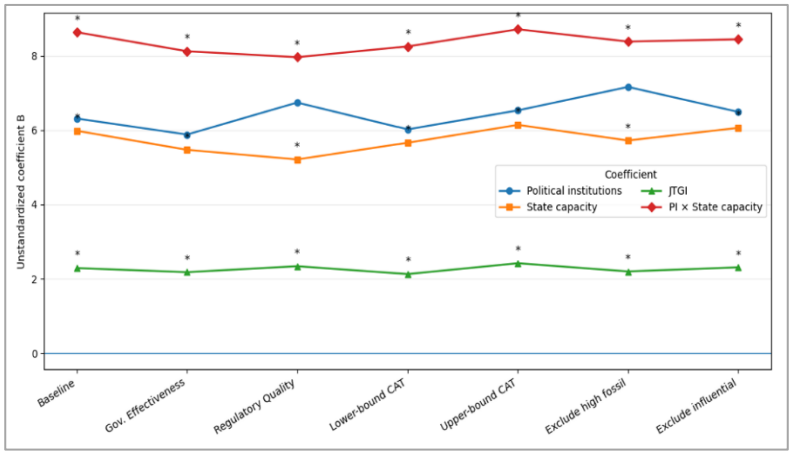
Specification	Political Institutions B	State Capacity B	JTGI B	PI × State Capacity B
Baseline interaction model	6.31	5.98*	2.29*	8.63*
Government Effectiveness only	5.88	5.47*	2.18*	8.12*
Regulatory Quality only	6.74	5.21*	2.34*	7.96*
Lower-bound CAT projection	6.02	5.66*	2.13*	8.25*
Upper-bound CAT projection	6.53	6.14*	2.42*	8.71*
Excluding highly fossil-dependent cases	7.16	5.72*	2.20*	8.38*
Excluding influential observations	6.49	6.06*	2.31*	8.44*

Note: Values are coefficients. All specifications include the theoretically specified controls. $p < .05$.

Alternative model specifications showed that the principal relationships, both in direction and in approximate size, remained unchanged. A positive relationship between state capacity and just transition governance continued to exist and also between political institutions and state capacity. Similar results, in substance, were found using other alternative definitions of current-policy emissions projections, and when Government Effectiveness and Regulatory Quality were added separately as variables.

Figure 5

Robustness of the Main Institutional Relationships



Summary of Hypothesis Tests

The results provide varying degrees of support for the study's hypotheses.

- The evidence partially supported H1, which suggested that political institutions are correlated with climate-policy implementation. In reformulation, political institutions have been temporarily included, but have no independent significant impact once state capacity and other institutional variables are introduced.
- Support for H2 was found, with higher measures for state capacity being consistently related to higher scores on the measures of climate-policy implementation for both principal and robustness specifications.
- H3 was supported as well: More dedicated just transition governance was independently associated with better policy implementation alignment.
- Lastly, H4 received support. The interaction between political institutions and state capacity is important and positive: the implementation impact of having stronger political institutions is more pronounced in countries with higher administrative and regulatory capacities.

Overall, the findings suggest that political institutions alone cannot account for the move from climate commitment to implementation. Instead, it is found that implementation is strongest in parts of the world where institutional accountability is paired with good level of state capacities and governance frameworks which take into account social and distributive dimensions of decarbonization.

Discussion

This study explored the extent to which variation in the extent to which commitments are translated into policy implementation can be accounted for in terms of political institutions, state capacity and just transition governance. The results support the proposed theoretical framework in a differentiated manner. The independent association between political institutions and climate-policy implementation weakened with the inclusion of state capacity and other institutional and structural traits in the baseline analysis. State capacity on the other hand, always showed a positive correlation with implementation, and only in the case of just transition governance was there an added direct correlation to alignment of implementation. This is noteworthy because the positive link between political institutions and state capacity suggests that the "accountability" of political institutions is more effective at implementation when governments haven't administrative and regulatory capability.

The partial support for the political-institutions hypothesis highlights the difference between level of institutional commitment and level of institutional implementation capacity. A comparative study of climate-policy institutions revealed that national institutions facilitate or impede climate policy through political incentives, representation, common interests, and policy continuity and stability (Purdon, 2015). But more accountable or democratic institutions do not always translate into effective implementation. Using a different framework, Povitkina (2018) also discovers that the positive effect of democracy on the environment is constrained by governmental effectiveness index. The results indicate that while political institutions can set up accountability and incentives for taking action on climate change, the effectiveness of such measures relies heavily on the country's ability to turn political statements into implementation at the administrative level. This understanding is particularly relevant in the Global South, where addressing the needs of local communities is frequently complicated by organizational and political barriers, and by the prioritization of certain development goals over the mitigation of climate risks, referred to as climate displacement (Marquardt et al., 2023).

State capacity proved to be a more reliable predictor of the effectiveness of the implementation of climate policy. The finding is consistent with the theoretical learning of administrative ability, regulatory power, policy coordination and sufficient resources for policy implementation. Demonstrate that state capacity affects the institutions' capacity to come up with effective policies to deal with distributive opposition. Recent studies also suggest that the nature and the mix of climate-policy instruments a state can implement is determined by state capacity (Meckling & Benkler, 2024). With this in mind, the present results argue for an application pertaining to the commitment–implementation gap: Ambivalent and ambitious national goals are unlikely to yield significant effects if the institutional setting at the state level does not provide mechanisms for enforcement, monitoring, coordination, and ongoing implementation.

The intertwining of political institutions and state capacities seems to be the analytical framework best suited by the state of the evidence. Political institutions were not significant on their own, but rather became more influential as implementation became greater with respect to state capacity. This finding is one of complementarity and not substitutionality between institutional accountability and administrative capability. Political institutions can create the demand for accountability, transparency and responsiveness to policy, but state capacity can make the difference between whether these demands are converted into functioning programs and implementing policy. A democracy or institutional quality rating without consideration of capacity to implement may thus mask a key element of variation in climate outcomes.

Beyond administrative efficiency, the positive link between just transition governance and implementation further underscores the fact that climate governance is far more than that. Decarbonisation reallocates economic costs and benefits, which can lead to political tensions that can influence decarbonisation implementation. Distributive conflict between winners and losers of climate change is the central factor driving domestic climate politics, according to Aklin and Mildenberger (2020). From this angle, worker protection, social dialogue, social protection, community involvement, reskilling and regional diversification are, in fact, not side-benchmarked social-policy concerns, but instead are tools governments can use to address resistance and keep climate transitions on track.

This interpretation coheres with scholarship on just transition, which focuses on the governance, distributive and procedural aspects of low-carbon transformation. Wang and Lo (2021) define just transition holistically as involving things related to work, justice, governance and wider larger-scale technical and social changes. The evidence presented here suggests that countries with broader measures of this kind may be better situated to ensure ongoing implementation, because mechanisms to support the transition offer solutions to pro-socialization and politics. This

is of particular relevance in the Global South where climate action and climate policy overlap with development needs, fiscal constraints, access to energy and vulnerability of jobs.

Overall, they show that the climate commitment–implementation gap cannot be interpreted simply as a lack of ambition. Rather, it is the result of factors such as political incentives, administrative capacity and distributive government. Formal commitments can sometimes set the policy trajectory, but successful implementation can be more easily secured through the provision of capable state organisations and through government taking action to consider the distributional impacts of decarbonisation. These contributions to the scholarship of climate-governance draw attention away from the question of whether or not climate commitments are made and towards what institutional conditions are needed for such commitments to be put into action.

Caution should be used in interpreting these findings. The cross-national observational design is used to discern conditional relationships with the understanding that no certain causal effect can be stated. In addition, reverse causality, the impossibility of full control of institutional characteristics affecting results, measurement error in the cross-country indicators, and differing national policy contexts cannot be fully ruled out. Further, the built Just Transition Governance Index reflects the presence of the governance provisions but not the quality of their implementation. Longitudinal data sets and policy-specific elements of implementation as well as comparative cases could be explored to examine the interaction of political institutions, administrative capacity, and distributive governance over time. From this, the integrated framework provides a helpful basis to comprehend the fact that comparable climate commitments can lead to significantly divergent climate implementation outcomes in the Global South.

Conclusion

This research explores institutional factors that affect how pursuing a climate ambition becomes a reality in terms of policy implementation in the Global South. An integrated framework using political institutions, state capacity and just transition governance is used in the analysis. This is the core concept – the fact that formal ambition is not the only explanation for implementation outcomes. The other elements of climate effectiveness policy rely on stable political institutions, sufficient administrative and regulatory capability, and governance mechanisms to be able to address distributional impact of decarbonisation.

Findings suggest that state capacity is crucial in effective policy implementation. Political institutions are found to be positively associated with climate-policy implementation in the baseline analysis, but the linkage is weaker with the consideration of state capacity and structural factors. This indicates that accountability and institutional quality could create an incentive to take action on climate change, but it does not mean that if these are in place, this necessarily leads to consistent action without having an adequate administrative capacity. This interpretation, in turn, is bolstered by the positive relationship between political institutions and state capacity, showing that for a given level of political institutions, the higher the state's implementation capacity, the more impact it has.

Another important aspect of the links between climate commitments and implementation is just transition governance. Climate policies have distributive impacts on workers, industries, regions and communities and therefore may impact on political support and policy longevity. The results indicate that social dialogue, social protection, community involvement, worker protection and economic diversification are all reinforcing factors of decarbonization strategies when it comes to social implementation of climate change. Therefore, it would be better to think of just transition governance as a vital part of the institutional structures of durable climate action and not as a social objective per se.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the literature shift in climate governance from formulating climate commitments to the conditions of governance institutions that can effectively deliver them. Implementing climate policies in the Global South requires investments in transition mechanisms and processes that are socially inclusive, in implementation systems and in the coordination of regulations, and in bureaucratic competence to increase country climate ambition. In the same vein, external climate assistance must go beyond funding the target's formulation and shift its focus to support implementation and deal with distributional risks.

This study has a cross-national, observational design, and it is challenging to measure implementation and transition governance across countries consistently. Future research would be to allow more detailed analysis through longitudinal designs, different ways of determining implementation and comparing cases. The set of options, however, does provide a logical understanding of how different policy responses may emerge from similar climate pledges by countries in the Global South.

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