

Looking Out, Looking In

The Shifting Discourse on Climate Change in the Indian Print Media

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The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its special report on *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, in October 2018, presenting dire predictions on the time available for countries to act to prevent runaway climate change (IPCC 2018: 1–26). The findings of the report, quite unexpectedly, appeared on the front page of four Indian English dailies within the first two days of its release. This was apart from 12 other news articles during the same period.

Climate change reportage is now recognized as a small but staple fixture in the Indian print media, occasionally prone to spikes in coverage—much like the 1.5°C report. In the 10 years that the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) has been collating and disseminating its climate news briefs, at least three to five stories pertaining to climate change are quarried every day from newspapers screened online. From all anecdotal accounts, days with no published articles on climate change have become increasingly uncommon. The trend

denotes a gradual recognition of the topic as a domestic imperative among governments, scientists, businesses, and other stakeholders. The nature of the coverage in the last decade has also shifted. This chapter investigates these developments.

The chapter analyses how climate change has been reported by the English print media in India between 2010 and 2017. The period of analysis is notable because of key political, scientific, and policy-based outcomes that occurred during this period, namely, the Conference of the Parties (COP) in Paris in 2015; the release of IPCC's *Fifth Assessment Report* between 2013 and 2014; the Trump administration in the United States (US) announcing drastic changes in domestic and international climate policies in 2017; and significantly, the Indian government's endeavours (under both ruling parties) at steering national and sub-national policies and actions over eight years.

The chapter traces how the discourse has evolved around these events, from the perspective of the dominant themes covered, the narratives highlighted, and the stakeholders driving the debate. The aim of the chapter is to both qualitatively and quantitatively capture the shifting institutional landscape of climate change through the lens of the Indian print media.

As the title of the chapter suggests, the analysis reveals a shift in the underlying frequency and substance of the articles in the current study, from a position of 'looking out'—in framing climate action from the perspective of international developments—to an equal focus towards 'looking in' at domestic priorities and efforts as a means to define and shape climate action in India.

The print media is an important source for tracking India's climate debate. India has a thriving newspaper industry: in 2017, over 385 million Indians read a newspaper or periodical at some point in a month—a 40 per cent increase since 2014 (Media Research Users Council 2017). While most of the readership is driven by the vernacular press—9 of the top 10 papers are in Hindi or a regional language (Sarma 2017)—English-language newspapers still garner a bulk of the print media advertising revenue and continue to have a sizable sway in shaping national policy and opinion (Rathore 2012). So, while climate change may be a relatively small portion of the overall coverage in the English-language press, it is an important barometer of the relevance of the topic in India's larger political, economic, and development thought.

The chapter first describes the methodology employed in selecting and analysing news stories, and then provides a brief literature review of climate change in the Indian media. Then, the key findings are summarized, organized around dominant themes, and analysed across these themes, such as climate scepticism, policies and politics, sub-national versus national coverage, mitigation versus adaptation coverage, and climate equity.

Methodology

The chapter is based on a media discourse analysis of climate news coverage (O’Keeffe 2011). A sample of 1,645 articles was selected from a database of over 16,000 climate articles compiled by the CPR between 2010 and 2017, from a daily online search of 15 mainstream, broadsheet English-language newspapers in India (see Box 18.1). The text of each article was analysed and coded based

Box 18.1 Key Methodological Considerations for the Media Discourse Analysis

Source of articles: CPR’s database of articles obtained daily through a multiple keyword search on Google news and on individual news sites of 15 English-language newspapers in India.

Newspapers examined: *The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Indian Express, The Hindu, Mint, The Economic Times, Financial Express, The Hindu Business Line, Business Standard, Daily News & Analysis (DNA), The Asian Age, Deccan Herald, Deccan Chronicle, The New Indian Express, The Telegraph.*

Period selected: 2010–7.

Types of articles included in the analysis: News reports, editorials, opinion editorials (op-eds), and articles sourced from wire news agencies.

Sample selection for the analysis: All articles (from the CPR database) published on the 2nd, 9th, 16th, and 23rd of each month between 2010 and 2017. If no articles were found on the aforementioned dates, then the author proceeded to the next date.

Sample size: 1,645 articles.

Source: Author.

on a selection of themes. These themes drew on work done in earlier climate change and media papers (Billet 2010; Jogesh 2012; Mittal 2012; Painter and Ashe 2012), and also included new elements based on the current policy and institutional context of climate change in India (such as the division of adaptation and mitigation interventions or the frequency of sub-national policy actions). Finally, all the climate articles (in the CPR database) were plotted chronologically to highlight the frequency of the total coverage over time.

Literature Review

The analysis of media and climate change is now a dedicated area of scholarship across many countries. Studies on climate change in the Indian media are relatively few, but have increased in number since 2009 (Thaker et al. 2017). Specifically, a number of recent studies have included India as a case study in comparative analyses of media approaches in a cross-section of countries (Painter and Ashe 2012).

An early, highly cited paper by Billet (2010) analyses the coverage of climate news in four Indian papers between 2002 and 2007 and notes that the Indian print media frames climate change along the axis of risk and responsibility. The paper argues that developing countries like India feel most at risk but pin the responsibility for action on industrialized economies. Jogesh (2012) analysed nine newspapers between 2009 and 2010 and concluded that in the run-up to the COP in Copenhagen and after, the discourse on climate change had relatively broadened compared to the period analysed in the Billet paper. Jogesh implied that while news articles predominantly looked to the Global North for action on climate change, the conversation had since expanded to also include a narrative on emerging economies like India taking on supported action (conditional upon the availability of finance and technology). Similarly, Thaker (2017: 1) carried out a meta-analysis of climate change communication in India and noted that the discourse on climate change had shifted from ‘externalizing the problem ... to a more recent co-benefits approach to address the twin challenges of climate change and economic development.’

Several of the articles highlight the near-absence of voices advocating climate scepticism in the Indian media (Billet 2010; Jogesh 2012; Mittal 2012). Painter and Ashe (2012) compared news coverage in

six countries during the height of the ‘Climategate’¹ scandal in 2009 and found that India had the lowest percentage of sceptical voices compared to the US and the United Kingdom (UK).

Climate Change in the Indian Media: Key Findings

News Metrics

Frequency of articles over time

A summary graph of monthly counts of articles between September 2009 and December 2017, presented in Figure 18.1, indicates that climate change is now continuously present in the Indian media—the graph seldom drops below 50 articles a month. However, it also indicates that there are definite peaks and dips tied to key climate events.

The COP 15 in Copenhagen in December 2009 was unprecedented in terms of the extent of awareness and publicity it generated around climate change globally. Articles during this period overshadow the rest of the coverage, capturing not only events and interventions by the climate community but also a host of traditionally non-climate commentators, such as technocrats, trade economists, and celebrities. The second-highest spike in the graph, expectedly, appears during the COP in Paris in 2015 when the landmark Paris Agreement was agreed upon. There are a number of other peaks spread across the years, although they are perceptibly lower in frequency. For instance, in 2012, the European Union (EU) levied carbon taxes on the international aviation industry as part of its Emissions Trading Scheme. The move drew heavy criticism from virtually all non-EU nations, including India, and received sustained coverage in the Indian print media. In 2014, there was a spurt in stories during the COP in Lima, focusing on the contours of each nation’s Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) in the run-up to the Paris Agreement. The year 2017 is another distinct period as the US announced its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, creating a significant buzz during the COP in Bonn. A

¹ In November 2009, sensitive emails were leaked from the University of East Anglia’s (UEA) Climate Research Unit server, resulting in a spurt of news questioning the credibility of research on climate science.

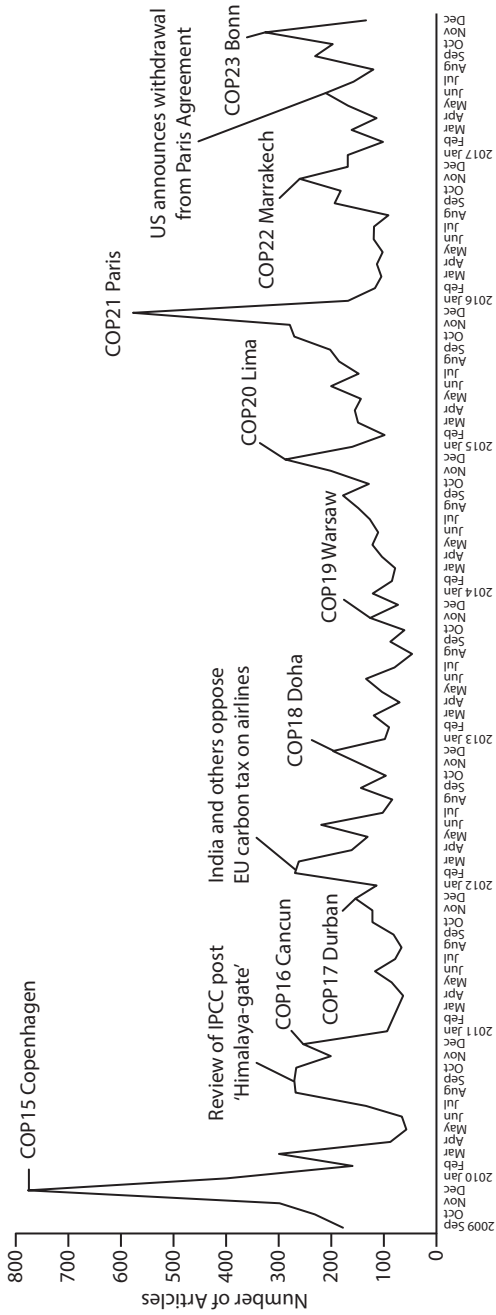


Figure 18.1 Frequency of All Articles in the Database between September 2010 and December 2017

Source: Author.

number of articles in 2014, 2015, and 2017 also focus on India's policies, especially its aggressive solar push domestically, its second carbon intensity target, and India's efforts internationally at setting up the International Solar Alliance.

Notably, if articles from the three months in 2009 are separated from the graph, the analysis registers a gradual increase in stories between 2010 and 2017. In many ways, the COP in 2009 was unprecedented in the quantum of interest it generated.

News initiating bodies

How climate news is generated—from the perspective of the experts, institutions, and events that drive the coverage—is a useful indicator of the key actors who influence the nature and direction of the climate change discourse.

The Indian government is one of the key drivers of news coverage in the current sample, representing a fourth of all news initiating bodies (see Figure 18.2). The sample includes not only the generically cited

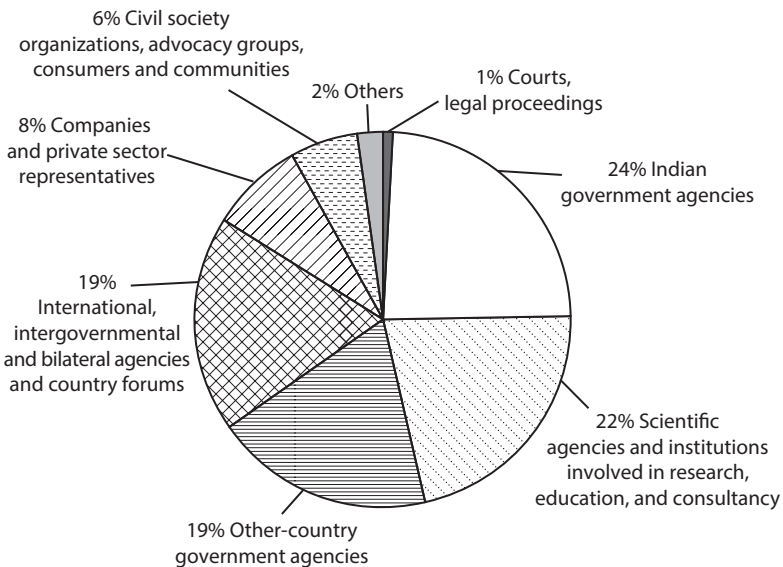


Figure 18.2 Types of News Initiating Bodies in the Sample

Source: Author.

'India', as in 'India Calls for a Deal for Pre-2020 Efforts to Tackle Climate Change' (Goswami 2015), but also state departments, urban local bodies, national and sub-national politicians, and public sector agencies like the Indian Railways. Scientific agencies and institutions involved in research, education, and consultancy come a very close second. This is a broad category including Indian and international scientists in government-funded agencies, such as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and India Meteorological Department, as well as experts in policy and research institutes.

International, intergovernmental and bilateral agencies and country groups, such as the United Nations (UN), IPCC, World Bank, and International Energy Agency (IEA), form the next most frequent category. Many of the stories driven by COP events (as well as outcomes of other forums, such as G20, Brazil, South Africa, India, and China [BASIC], and IPCC) come under this group. Not surprisingly, a bulk of the climate discourse is still driven by government agencies, scientific bodies, and international events—institutions easily accessed by (and available to) the mainstream media. Civil society organizations, advocacy groups, consumers, and vulnerable communities together form a minuscule 6 per cent of the total coverage.

Interestingly, one category that comes up post-2013 is the group pertaining to courts and legal proceedings. For instance, articles in 2013 reported on the first migrant from the island of Kiribati challenging his deportation from New Zealand in court calling himself a climate refugee (*Hindustan Times* 2013). In India, most of the reports refer to two court cases brought to the National Green Tribunal questioning the government on the progress of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs) (*Business Standard* 2015; Perappadan 2016). While this is the smallest category in the sample, it is indicative of the nascent role that domestic and international courts are beginning to play in arbitrating on climate change.

Dominant Themes of News Articles

Climate change is a cross-cutting issue and five dominant themes emerge through an inductive analysis of the articles. These together

constitute the overarching focus areas of climate news coverage in India, namely, policies, politics, climate science and impacts, business, and a broader category encompassing stories on society, advocacy, and culture. To distinguish between local and global drivers, these themes have been further categorized into Indian and internationally driven stories (see Figure 18.3).

Stories on climate policies dominate the news coverage, with articles on politics as well as science and impacts following close behind. While the variation in frequency between the first three categories is relatively small (and likely prone to shifts in a sample-led analysis), there are four key trends of note. First, news coverage is not predominantly driven by the politics of climate change—of which global negotiations are a large part. There is equal emphasis on domestic policies and interventions. Second, the split between Indian and internationally led stories across politics and policies is almost even. This trend is a departure from articles examined before and after the COP in Copenhagen in 2009, where internationally driven stories were significantly more in number than stories on Indian politics and policies (Jogesh 2012). Third, there is a corresponding focus on climate science and impacts in the news coverage. A diverse range of

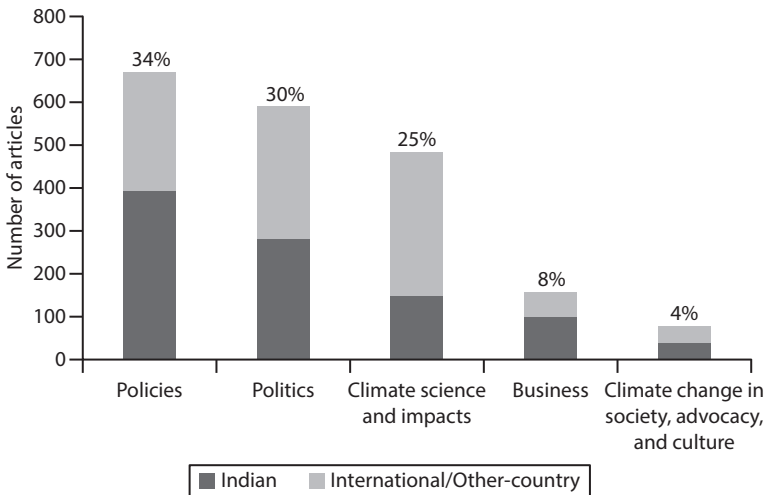


Figure 18.3 Dominant Themes in News Sample between 2010 and 2017

Source: Author.

climate impacts—geophysical, ecological, socio-economic, and even cultural—appear in the news, backed by research and science. For instance, a piece in *Business Standard* (2014) notes: ‘global warming could significantly increase the price of a pint of beer—and even change the taste too.’ The discourse is in line with an earlier paper which notes that the Indian press projects climate change as a ‘socio-environmental issue, rather than reducing it to a distant scientific process’ (Billet 2010: 7).

There is also a small but growing trend of climate impact stories that are simply observed and anecdotal in nature. Extreme weather events, such as the floods in Chennai in 2015, floods in Mumbai in 2017, and Hurricane Harvey in the US, all prompted questions on the potential linkages of such events to climate change in the news.

Stories on climate change in business are far fewer in number and include interventions of individual companies (like the Tata Group, Tamil Nadu Cements, and Vodafone India), as well as global markets and industry-based news, such as the business uncertainty over UN’s Clean Development Mechanism post-2013 or the US coal companies’ reaction to Trump’s intention to exit the Paris Agreement.

Finally, while articles on climate change in society, advocacy, and culture form the smallest percentage of the overall news sample, they signal a broadening of the climate change conversation, albeit in a small way, from being the mainstay of science and policy to also becoming a subject of interest in sports, literature, art, and advocacy through entertainment. For example, an article in 2016 is about actor Leonardo DiCaprio’s views on Pope Francis’ stance on climate change (*DNA* 2016).

The analysis overall points at a gradual but strategic shift, from treating climate change solely as a global collective action problem—to be resolved through negotiations and apportioning of carbon budget between countries—to an equal focus on addressing climate change through local action. While the former continues to be a dominant approach (climate summits and negotiations are still a big draw for governments in terms of international diplomacy and signalling), domestic climate policies and interventions have gained in momentum and scale over the last decade. There is also a parallel recognition of the seriousness of climate impacts in both industrialized and developing countries.

Cross-Thematic Analysis

Climate scepticism

The foreword to IPCC's 2014 synthesis report states that: 'The IPCC is now 95 percent certain that humans are the main cause of current global warming' (IPCC 2014a: v). Yet, climate scepticism is prevalent in the media of industrialized economies, such as the US, UK, and Australia (Painter and Ashe 2012). A number of studies on climate change have reported on the media's tendency to create 'false equivalence', where climate scientists are routinely pitted against climate deniers for the sake of a balanced story (Grimes 2016). In contrast, climate scepticism is conspicuous by its absence in the Indian press. In fact, a number of studies on climate change have pointed at the negligible presence of climate scepticism in the Indian media (Billet 2010; Jogesh 2012; Painter and Ashe 2012).

Confirming this trend, only 0.5 per cent of the articles in the current sample present sceptical views² and 2.6 per cent of the articles (close to five times the number) explicitly discredit climate scepticism (see Figure 18.4). Among the small group of articles presenting sceptical views, 2010 and 2017 were the two years when the proportion of overtly sceptical articles were at their highest. A number of climate-linked controversies³ were reported by the Indian and international print media in 2010, and these fuelled the sceptical views that appeared in the news. For instance, a 2010 article refers to the former director of the University of East Anglia's (UEA) Climatic Research Unit stating, 'Jones also conceded the possibility that the world was warmer in medieval times than now—suggesting global warming may not be a man-made phenomenon' (*Hindustan Times* 2010).

Articles in 2017 almost entirely focused on the views of US President Donald Trump, as well as his nominees and appointees to key offices, and their history of taking an openly sceptical stance on

² Articles that merely referred to someone as a climate sceptic and did not elaborate upon their views were not counted in the sample, for instance, 'Donald Trump picks climate change sceptic Scott Pruitt to helm EPA'.

³ As mentioned earlier, in November 2009, controversial emails were leaked from UEA's Climate Research Unit server; and in January 2010, errors in the IPCC *Fourth Assessment Report* on the rate of retreat of Himalayan glaciers were discovered and publicized.

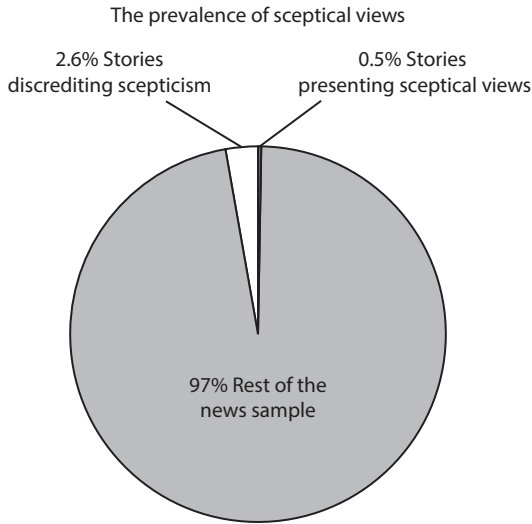


Figure 18.4 Articles in the News Sample that Refer to Climate Scepticism
 Source: Author.

climate change. Most of the stories in 2017 discredited their stance (either through the overall editorial slant of the piece or through other quotes), but a few stories did not; and these formed the small group of articles with sceptical views in 2017. For instance, a 2017 article noted, ‘Kathleen Hartnett White testified before a Senate committee weighing her confirmation as chair of the Council on Environmental Quality at the White House. White, who is from Texas, reiterated her view that carbon dioxide is a “plant nutrient,” not a pollutant’ (*Financial Express* 2017).

The near-absence of sceptical voices in the Indian print media may be due to the lack of an organized conversation advocating climate scepticism in India. While there are anecdotal accounts of individual sceptics among local universities, advocacy groups, and businesses, their stories get far less play in the press. When there is a larger news development, such as IPCC’s error on the rate of glacier melt in the Himalayas, these local sceptical voices (and those of recognized sceptics abroad) are featured. For instance, following the IPCC glacier error, a columnist in the *Financial Express*, who otherwise writes on the investment sector, wrote a sceptical piece stressing, ‘The Earth

started warming long before cars and power stations were invented. There's little correlation with CO₂ levels' (Kewalramani 2010).

Policies and politics

Stories on polices and politics form a substantive portion of news in the current sample, notably encompassing over 60 per cent of the total coverage. The following section therefore is a more granular analysis of politics and policy-based stories in the Indian print media. This dominant theme is further categorized into five sub-themes: policies in India and internationally; politics around the negotiations in India and globally; and internal politics on climate change in India.

Stories on Indian policies constitute the highest proportion of all articles both in absolute terms and as a percentage of all politics and policy-based stories in the news sample (see Figure 18.5). This

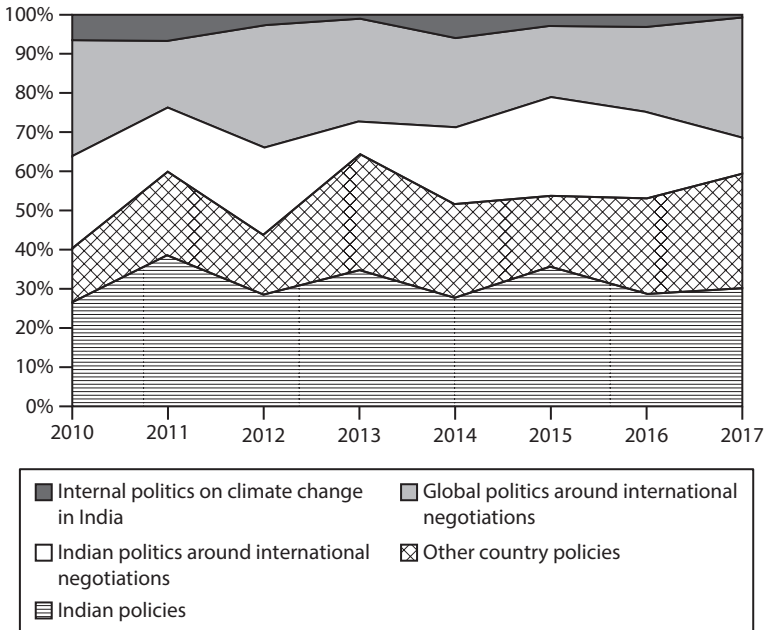


Figure 18.5 Year-Wise Analysis of Articles on Indian and International Policies and Politics

Source: Author.

trend mirrors key developments in the Indian climate policy landscape over the past decade. For instance, in 2009, the Government of India released the NAPCC and thereafter, states were asked to prepare climate action plans (MoEF 2008, 2009). What followed was a spate of (sustained, although selective) activity at the national and sub-national level, encompassing research, plan development, policy regulation, and donor-driven pilot programmes. In parallel, low-carbon, climate-resilience, and disaster management efforts were carried out by government and non-government agencies. Many of these initiatives are reflected in the news sample.

‘Global politics around negotiations and international climate action’ forms the next highest category in proportion to other stories under this overarching theme. Year-wise, there are three distinct spikes in the percentage of news coverage on global politics—in 2010, 2012, and 2017. In 2010, much newsprint was dedicated to how countries would take the ‘disappointing’ Copenhagen Accord forward (*Economic Times* 2010). In 2012, a bulk of the focus was on the EU’s largely unpopular carbon tax on the international aviation industry. For instance, a 2012 article notes, ‘With European Union (EU) facing global flak over the imposition of a green tax on all aircraft flying in its skies, world airlines’ body IATA has warned European airlines of “retaliatory action” by non-EU nations if a global solution was not arrived at soon’ (*Financial Express* 2012). Finally, 2017 was the year when countries anxiously debated the implications of the US’ exit from the Paris Agreement.

In a seemingly counter-intuitive trend, stories on global politics decline in proportion in 2015, the year of the Paris Agreement. This is because the degree of reportage in the run-up to the Paris COP is better reflected in the category ‘Indian politics around international negotiations and climate action’. This bridge category captures stories on India’s role in international negotiations as well as India’s communication with other countries and country forums on their respective submissions. For instance, an op-ed piece by former special envoy on climate change, Shyam Saran, in *Hindustan Times* was headlined, ‘Red Lines on a Green Field: What India Should Do at Climate Talks’ (Saran 2015).

News stories under ‘global and other-country policies’ do not follow any definitive trend, dependent as they are on peaks and dips in policy developments and proposals across other nations. However,

2017 was a notable year because the coverage was almost entirely focused on institutional shifts in climate, energy, and environmental decision making in the US under the Trump administration.

Internal politics on climate change in India forms the smallest proportion of all articles under the overarching theme. It is an intermediate category inductively selected to reflect domestic political commentary—often public divisiveness—of India’s negotiating strategy and submissions. This category is reflective of differing views within the country (among political parties, advocacy groups, even some reporters) on India’s ‘red lines’ in terms of its give and take at the negotiations (Saran 2015). This was a larger category in 2009 when there were openly differing positions between the members of India’s negotiating team at Copenhagen (Jogesh 2012). For instance, a 2009 article notes, ‘Jairam Ramesh, Minister of State (independent charge), Environment and Forests, on Monday came under severe criticism for a recent proposal that, the Opposition said, amounted to a total shift in India’s stand on climate change at the coming meeting at Copenhagen’ (*Hindu* 2010). While such instances of open criticism on India’s climate politics have notably dipped in the current sample, they seem to manifest (albeit in small numbers) during key COP years. For instance, a column in the *Mint* in 2015 notes: ‘The finance ministry is once again the locus ... of another, potentially seriously embarrassing, leak: a private memorandum from chief economic adviser Arvind Subramanian ... arguing the case for a major overhaul in India’s negotiating position in the lead-up to the global climate policy summit set for Paris later this year’ (Dehejia 2015)

There is an overall rise in the frequency of politics and policy-based articles between 2010 and 2017. However, 2013 was an exception, and the dip in politics and policy coverage was offset in the overall sample by a corresponding increase in reports on climate science and impacts. Many newspapers wrote on the findings of IPCC’s *Fifth Assessment Report*, particularly Working Group I on the physical science basis, released in 2013.

National and sub-national action

Stories focused on domestic policies, as noted in the previous section, constitute a diverse array of initiatives and suggestions for action at the national, state, and city level. National-level policies form the

highest share of stories in this category, with state and city-based stories split equally (see Figure 18.6). A small percentage of national and sub-national articles also refer specifically to the NAPCC (or specific national missions under it), as well as SAPCCs.

Most of the stories that mention the NAPCC refer to the National Solar Mission; not surprisingly, since it has been one of the most fleshed-out missions (along with the mission on enhanced energy efficiency) in terms of policy regulation. These articles capture impacts on solar investments, energy prices, trade modalities, and general growth in the renewable industry in India. For instance, a 2011 article in the *Economic Times* is titled, ‘Govt Sanctions Rs. 486 Crore Fund to Help Solar Power Producers’, referring to the first phase of the National Solar Mission (Desai 2011).

In the last eight years, every state and union territory has developed a state climate plan or SAPCC, but as Figure 18.6 indicates, the documentation of the process in mainstream media has been relatively scant. There are likely two reasons for this: first, the awareness of state-level climate action in the mainstream media has been relatively low. Past studies on SAPCCs have indicated the limited

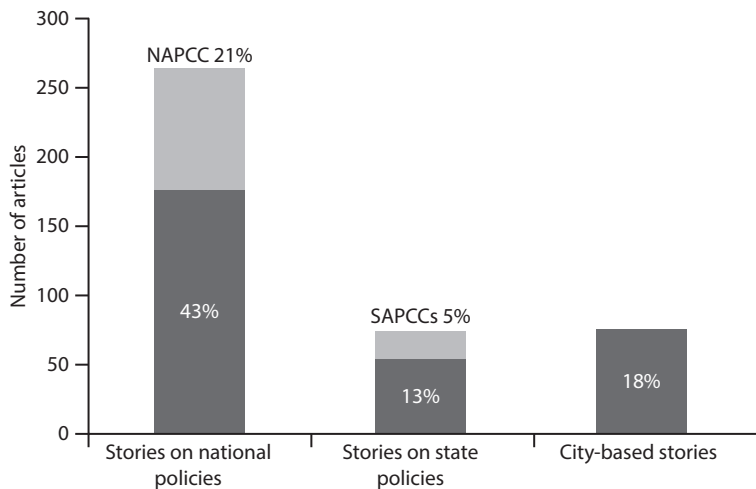


Figure 18.6 Stories in the Sample Referring to National and Sub-national Policies in India

Source: Author.

attention that plans garnered outside the circle of core national and sub-national stakeholders that were involved in the process (Dubash and Jogesh 2014). Second, these stories likely received better coverage in the local vernacular press. This study is limited by its focus on the English-language print media.

Mitigation and adaptation of climate action

There is widespread agreement in the global community that climate change needs to be tackled through both mitigation and adaptation action; interventions need to ideally balance a combination of activities designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and also manage risks from extreme and slow onset climate events (ClimaEast 2018). This recognition has been relatively recent in terms of its formalization in international climate talks and as a result, climate pledges continue to focus disproportionately on mitigation actions (IPCC 2014b: 1–30).

Domestically, too, there has been a greater emphasis—by way of political attention and regulation—on energy efficiency and renewable energy policies. News stories in the sample seem to reflect this difference. In fact, half of all articles in the sample, and a significant 74 per cent of all articles referring specifically to mitigation or adaptation focus on current domestic and international efforts towards mitigation action, or suggest the need for it (see Figure 18.7).

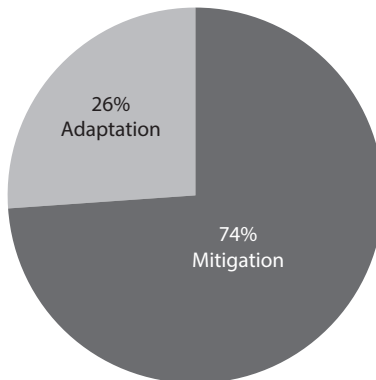


Figure 18.7 Articles on Mitigation and Adaptation in the News Sample
Source: Author.

Stories capturing adaptation efforts or suggestions focused on enabling adaptation are far fewer in number. Adaptation-linked articles increased in proportion post-2013, signalling a nascent but growing recognition of the seriousness of managing current and future climate risks. This is in line with some of the adaptation articles which highlight climate impacts and also offer solutions to manage it. There is also a spurt in stories in 2014 referring to both mitigation and adaptation, linked to a growing narrative that countries' INDCs include both adaptation and mitigation components as part of the Paris Agreement.

Climate equity justice and burden sharing

Climate change has historically been a deeply divisive issue, particularly when it comes to questions of equity, responsibility, and burden sharing (see Chapter 6 in this volume). This section focuses on narratives linked to these issues. News articles in the sample have been coded inductively to arrive at five key frames that encapsulate underlying assumptions in the proposals and pledges put forward by different countries and economic blocs (see Figure 18.8).

The most dominant and pervasive frame in this category (a cumulative 34 per cent) is the need for industrialized economies to facilitate finance and technology transfer as part of their climate efforts. This frame subsumes narratives such as asking industrialized economies for more finance, focusing on the modalities of technology transfer, how funding mechanisms (like the Green Climate fund) are evolving, and whether available funds are adequate. The offer of voluntary action, conditional upon financial and technological support, is one area where developing countries (independent of their group affiliation in the negotiations) agree upon. For instance, a piece in 2013 notes, 'The BASIC Group ... has reiterated the need for a roadmap to raise funds for green climate and urged the developed countries to contribute their share to the funding of US\$30 billion that they have already agreed' (*Business Standard* 2013b).

The next dominant frame (a cumulative 29 per cent) revolves around the idea that since industrialized economies are historically responsible, negotiations and pledges must follow the principles enshrined in the United Nations Framework Convention on

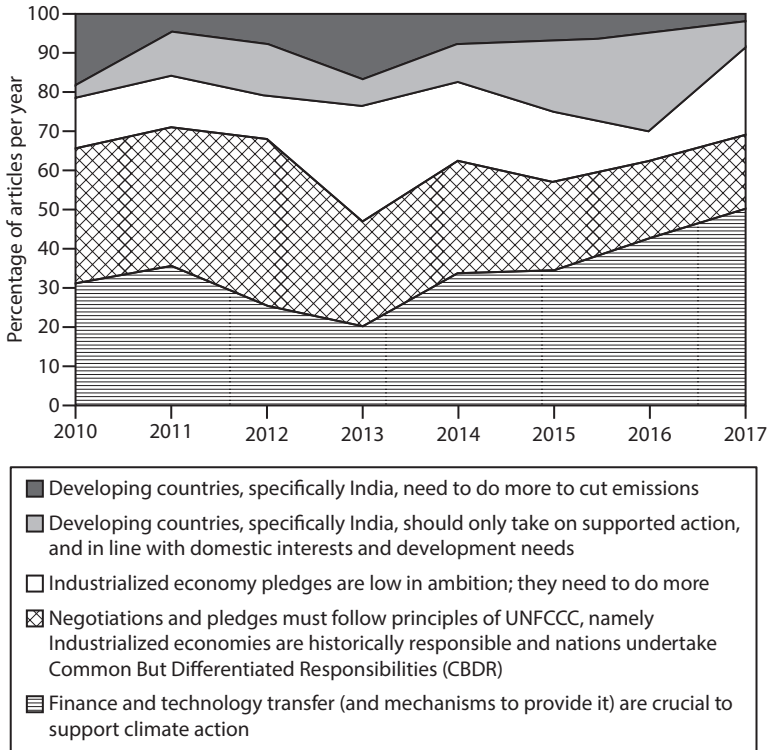


Figure 18.8 Positions on Climate Equity and Burden Sharing in the News Sample

Source: Author.

Climate Change (UNFCCC), specifically on common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). This sub-category also includes calls for the extension of Kyoto Protocol and the need to maintain the ‘firewall’ between Annex and non-Annex 1 countries. There is a steady decline in this frame post 2012. With countries converging around the idea of INDCs, the explicit differentiation between developing and industrialized economies seems to have blurred (much to the chagrin of some Indian stakeholders and commentators). For instance, a 2014 piece in the *Business Standard* explains:

The old rich want the differentiation between the past polluters and the current and future ones to go. ... At the 2013 conference

of parties in Warsaw it was agreed that ‘all’ countries would submit their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) by early 2015. In other words, now there is no agreement that specifies the targets for each country based on their past contributions. (Narain 2014)

The few stories that used this frame in 2014 and 2015 were focused on stressing that CBDR be retained in the Paris Agreement.

The third dominant frame (a cumulative 17 per cent) is that industrialized economy pledges are low in ambition and they need to do more. The theme is aligned to positions that industrialized nations are historically responsible and are required to provide financial and technical support. While most of the articles allude to industrialized countries as a whole, some stories refer specifically to countries within the EU, and often the US. A bulk of the articles in 2017, for instance, point at America’s decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, and how the move undermines the collective ambition of industrialized economies. An op-ed in *Hindustan Times* notes, ‘As the US didn’t want to take full responsibility and do its part to solve the climate problem, it pushed for an agreement that was a “common minimum denominator”. ... Still the US walked away from the agreement terming it as “unfair”’ (Bhushan 2017).

The smallest proportion of articles in the category include the frame that developing countries, specifically India, need to do more to cut emissions. Close to a third of these stories appeared in 2010.⁴ This trend declines in proportion as the years progress, and is matched by a corresponding rise in stories that state that emerging economies, specifically India, can do more but in line with domestic interests and development needs.

This narrative of emerging economies taking on supported action, in line with domestic development and economic interests, is a relatively recent one; it sits alongside long-standing frames (captured in earlier articles) requiring industrialized economies to take a greater

⁴ In the run-up to the COP in Cancun, many articles focused on India being ‘under pressure’ by industrialized economies (and other BASIC members) to take on legally binding emission cuts (*Business Standard* 2013a).

lead in burden sharing as they are historically responsible (Billet 2010; Jogesh 2012).

Analysing news articles on climate change over time is like plotting a map of key climate events; the coverage together provides a snapshot of the climate story, capturing policies, institutions, actors, and events (both principal and supporting) that have shaped the climate narrative thus far.

To document the shifting discourse on climate change in India, the current study focuses on climate change reportage in the English print media between 2010 and 2017. The study finds a gradual evolution in the discourse on climate change in three areas. First, there is a greater focus on domestic policies and interventions, driven by a spate of domestic action over the last decade. Second, dominant actors no longer press on a purely top-down solution; news and views have, more recently, converged around the idea of domestic self-determination, mirroring the approach encapsulated in the Paris Agreement. Third, while the conversation on fixing responsibility for ambitious action on industrialized economies is still strong, there is now a parallel discourse advocating action by developing nations, in line with their local development priorities. This view is partially influenced by a greater recognition of the risk posed by climate impacts.

In the changing frames in equity and burden sharing, the near-equal division of policies and politics in the sample, and the predominance of an India-led discourse, there seems to be—as noted in the beginning of the chapter—a shift in focus towards ‘looking in’, rather than ‘looking out’, in arriving at a shared consensus on climate change.

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