

COP30 in Belém: A new horizon for climate leadership

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Professor Richard Beardsworth looks ahead to COP30 in Belém, considering whether this could represent a new era for climate leadership with Brazil positioned to lead, at least in partnership with other major actors

As the world approaches [COP30 in Belém](#), scheduled for November 2025, the stage is potentially set for a defining moment in global climate diplomacy. The context is complex. On the one hand, there is the vacuum left by the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. On the other, there is an ever-escalating need for reshaped and reinvigorated global climate leadership – capable of confronting the unprecedented scale of the climate crisis with meaningful action. It is in this context that COP30 may present a new horizon for leadership in the fight against climate change, with Brazil positioned to lead, at least in partnership with other major actors.

The absence of U.S. leadership

The absence of U.S. leadership leaves a gap in the global response to climate change. This gap demands that [new configurations of leadership](#) emerge to foster climate ambition necessary to stay within the limits set by the Paris Agreement, even as the likelihood of overshooting these targets increasingly determines [strategic thinking around climate technologies](#).

The retreat of the US – as the world's second largest emitter after China – has made it clear that a coalition of other nations must step forward to take on this responsibility. In this context, [Brazil sees an opportunity](#) – not merely as a host nation, but as a potential global climate leader, especially if it can act in partnership with the European Union on one hand, and China, along with other BRICS countries, on the other.

Brazil's position on climate action

Yet, the path to this leadership is not straightforward. The political and geopolitical realities that shape [Brazil's position on climate action](#) are complex and often contradictory. On the one hand, the country's political and diplomatic elite holds cosmopolitan goals, expressing a commitment to international climate leadership. On the other hand, domestic politics remain deeply entrenched in populist rhetoric, which continues to challenge the country's ability to take decisive action on climate. This duality is especially evident in [Brazil's contemporary approach to the Amazon](#) – on the one hand, an exemplary push for reforestation and protection of a vital global resource; on the other, a simultaneous opening-up of the Amazon and the Brazilian Equatorial Margin to fossil fuel exploration.

In a broader geopolitical context, the prospects for climate multilateralism remain very uncertain. With the language of common commitment toward limiting global warming to 1.5°C conspicuously absent, the politics surrounding climate change has become turbulent. Efforts to implement the Paris Agreement in a meaningful way have faltered.

For Brazil to lead on climate at COP30, it must first find a way to navigate these geopolitical rifts. In many ways, this COP could confirm a gradual but important change in global climate leadership – away from the Northern powers and toward the South. This would represent a significant realignment in the international politics of climate change.

The primary challenge for Brazil, however, is not merely to assume leadership but to deliver on the promises that come with it. As COP30 looms, the Brazilian Presidency will need to shepherd the global community toward NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions) for the period 2030-2035 aligned with the conclusions of the [Global Stocktake](#) in 2023.

These NDCs must still offer the possibility of a pathway to limiting global warming to between 1.5°C and 2°C. Such a formidable challenge requires the Brazilian Presidency to bring the [‘energy package’](#) finalised at COP28 back onto the table, emphasising the critical issue of scheduling a fossil fuel phase-out. Achieving this will require, in turn, a fair and differentiated approach, allowing for just transitions, especially in poorer countries that remain heavily dependent on fossil fuels (for income and/or energy use).

In addition to the overarching challenges of mitigation and energy transition, COP30 will be shaped by Brazil’s own local and regional concerns, particularly in relation to the Amazon. Deforestation and reforestation, the transformation of land use, and the protection of indigenous communities are issues of paramount importance. While the progress made on these fronts at COP30 will be significant, the legacy of the Brazilian Presidency will likely be defined more by its ability to drive forward the global energy transition and secure climate finance for vulnerable nations than by any local environmental victories, however important these are.

The Brazilian Presidency has framed COP30 within the concept of “[Mutirão](#)” – a term that refers to collective action, or a sense of all working together for a common cause, much like bees in a hive. This concept speaks directly to the [broader ambition for COP30](#): while Brazil may step up to global climate leadership, it is also reminding the world that climate progress can only occur if everybody commits to leading themselves in their own spaces, in their own ways.

In this sense, Brazil’s leadership is not about claiming the mantle for itself but about fostering an environment in which communities and individuals can come together to face the challenge collectively. At this dangerous moment in international relations, the concept of “Mutirão” speaks eloquently of the need for both shared responsibility and

collective determination to confront the climate crisis at every level. Will this framing concept gain traction, or will it become another 'empty phrase' in the linguistic treasure house of global climate action?

Challenges: The road to COP30 in Belém

In conclusion, the road to COP30 in Belém is fraught with challenges, but it is also full of potential in a world shaped by power struggles and geopolitical tensions. If Brazil can navigate the contradictions inherent in its own domestic politics and lead by example, COP30 may indeed come to represent a new chapter in global climate diplomacy.

Whether it will mark a genuine shift in the geography of global climate leadership remains to be seen. However, if the Presidency does bring together a coalition that can further deliver on the critical issues of the energy transition, climate finance, and just transitions for the most vulnerable, it will be remembered for forging a new horizon for climate leadership that, in positive ways, reflects the shifting dynamics of the global order.

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