

Unequal Skies, Shared Destiny:

Bridging the Political and Financial Rift in Global Climate Governance

From Charity to Justice: Building a Coordinated and Equitable Climate Future

Junfu Lu

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University
International Relations
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Junfu.Lu24@student.xjtlu.edu.cn



RESEARCH PUZZLE

Why do those who have contributed the most to climate change suffer the least, while those who contributed the least suffer the most?

Global climate governance faces a deep structural contradiction: the geography of emissions is disconnected from the geography of climate harm and financial capacity. This imbalance — termed the **“Financial Rift”** — undermines climate justice and the effectiveness of global cooperation.

KEY TAKEAWAY



A matter of justice, not just funding.



Fragmented institutions undermine collective action.



Power in narratives shapes power in outcomes.



From voluntary charity to structural justice and accountability.



1. INTRODUCTION & MOTIVATION

- Despite frameworks like the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, global climate governance has failed to align historical responsibility with present-day vulnerability.
- Developed countries, responsible for the majority of cumulative emissions, face relatively less climate risk and possess greater adaptive capacity.
- Developing countries, with minimal contribution to emissions, experience the harshest impacts but lack adequate financial and technological resources.

THE FINANCIAL RIFT

HIGH EMISSIONS — high income (core) **HIGH VULNERABILITY** — low income (periphery)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historical responsibility Greater resources & technology Stronger voice in global rule-making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal contribution to emissions Severe climate impacts Limited resources Weaker voice |
|---|--|

“A structural divide between the geography of emissions generation and the geography of climate harm.”

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three key concepts help explain why the financial rift persists.



DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Evaluations whether climate burdens and responsibilities are allocated fairly according to contribution, capacity, and need.



FRAGMENTATION TRAP

Overlapping institutions, competing agendas, and unilateral policies lead to incoherence, duplicate efforts, and weakened collective action.



DISCOURSE POWER

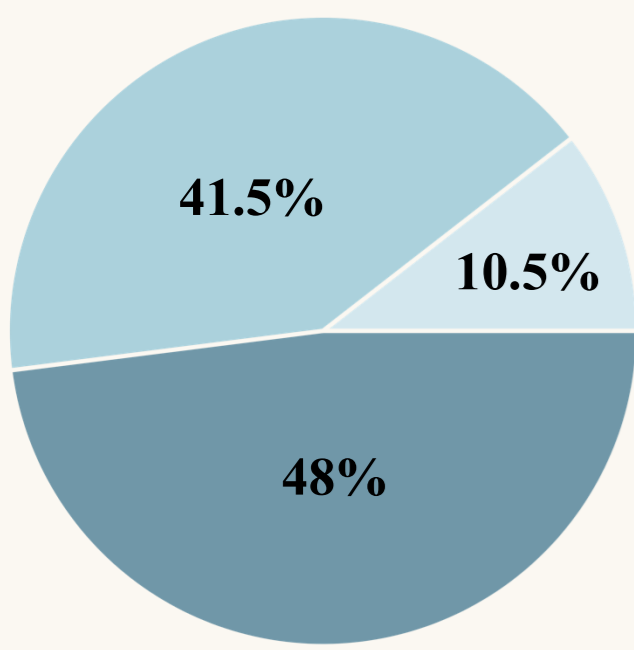
Unequal ability of states to shape global rules and narratives results in the marginalization of developing countries' voices and priorities.

Together, these dynamics create a governance system that is not only underfunded, but also structurally unequal in representation, resources, and rule-making power.

3. DATA & EMPIRICAL CONTEXT: UNEQUAL CONTRIBUTIONS, UNEQUAL LOSSES

A. Global Emissions Are Highly Concentrated

Emissions by global emitter group and shares in the world total, 2019



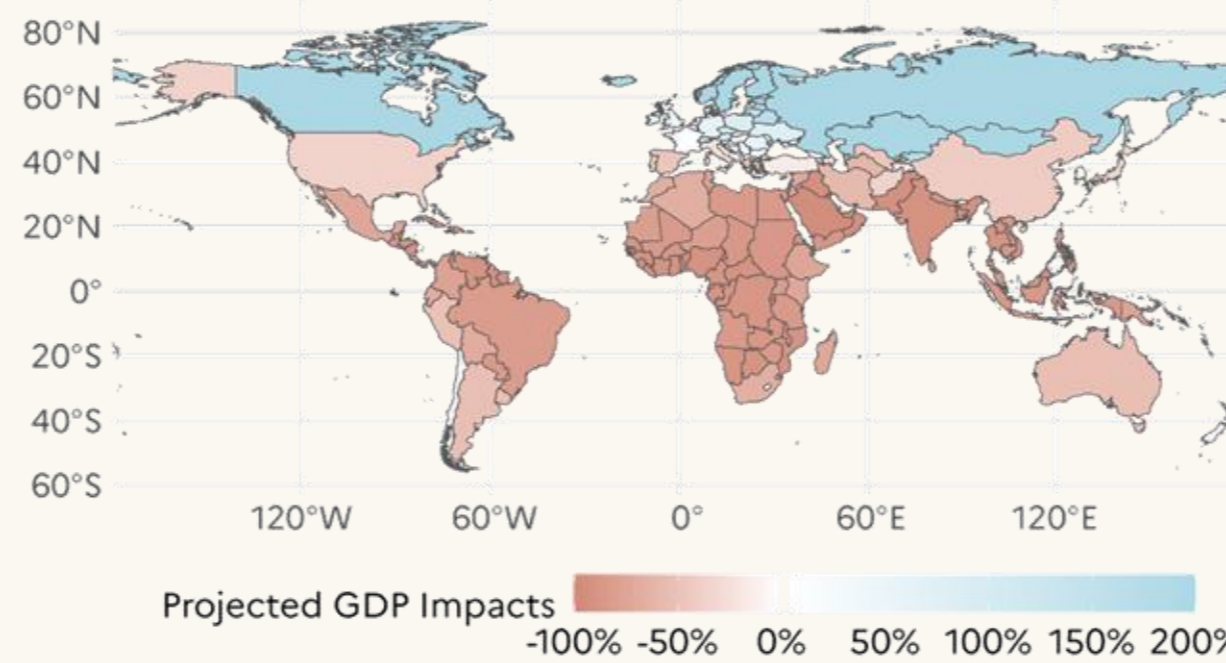
- Top 10% emitters (High income) | 48%
- Middle 40% emitters (Middle income) | 41.5%
- Bottom 50% emitters (Low income) | 10.5%

The top 10% of emitters are responsible for 48% of global emissions, while the bottom 50% contribute only for 10.5%.

Source: Chancel, L. (2021), World Inequality Lab 2022

B. Climate Impacts Hit the Most Vulnerable

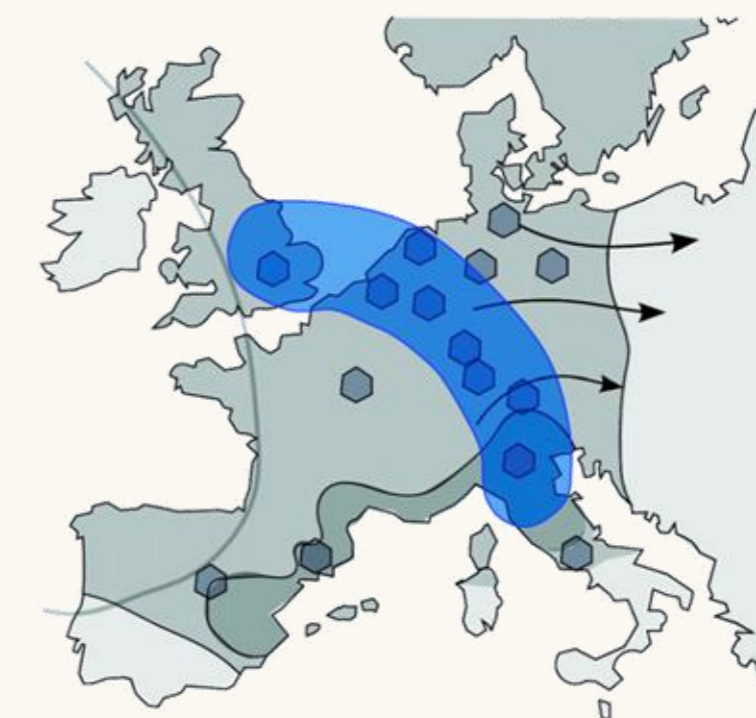
Change in GDP per capita by 2100 attributable to climate change



Low-income countries in tropical and subtropical regions face severe GDP losses, while wealthy temperate nations remain insulated or may even gain modestly.

Source: Burke, M., et al. (2015), Nature, 527, 235-239

B. The “Blue Banana”: Concentration of Wealth, Innovation, and Productive Capacity



Economic power is spatially concentrated in this corridor, which has historically generated high emissions while externalizing environmental costs onto the periphery.

Source: Adapted from Krugman, P. (1991), Geography and Trade

4. EMPIRICAL EVALUATION & DISCUSSION: WHY THE RIFT PERSISTS

Root Causes



Institutional Fragmentation

Multiple overlapping institutions and competing agendas (e.g., trade vs. climate) lead to policy incoherence and “climate gridlock”.



Major Power Instability

Inconsistent commitments by major emitters, especially the United States, undermine trust and weaken multilateral cooperation.



Discourse Power Imbalance

Developing countries have limited influence on the framing of climate rules, finance allocation, and technology governance.

Consequences

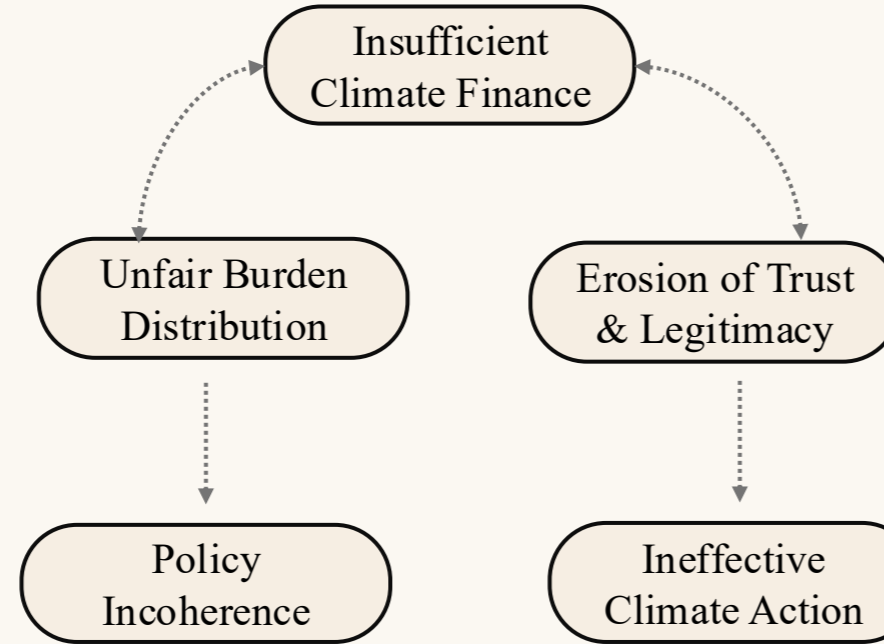
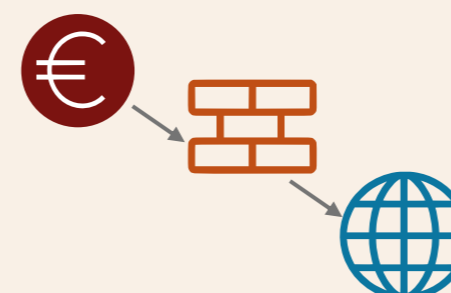


Illustration: Unilateralism vs. Collective Action

Unilateral Measures

e.g., Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)



- Perceived as green protectionism
- Trade tensions
- Splits the Global South
- Weakens collective ambition

Collective Action

Coordinated policies & shared responsibility



- Builds trust and solidarity
- Mobilizes finance and technology
- Enhances effectiveness
- Advances climate justice

5. EMPIRICAL EVALUATION & DISCUSSION: WHY THE RIFT PERSISTS

A shift from voluntary pledges to a justice-based institutional order.



The goal: align responsibility with capacity, center justice and ensure accountability.



1. Fair Climate Financing Mechanism

- Mandatory contributions based on emissions and capacity
- Stable and predictable funding for adaptation and loss & damage
- Move from charity to binding responsibility



3. Monitoring & Arbitration for Accountability

- Independent monitoring of commitments
- Arbitration mechanism to resolve disputes
- Enhance transparency, compliance, and trust



2. South-South Cooperation & Technology Transfer

- Strengthen solidarity among developing countries
- Share green technology and best practices
- Build local capacity and resilience

Cross-Cutting Principles



Equity & Justice



Common but Differentiated Responsibilities



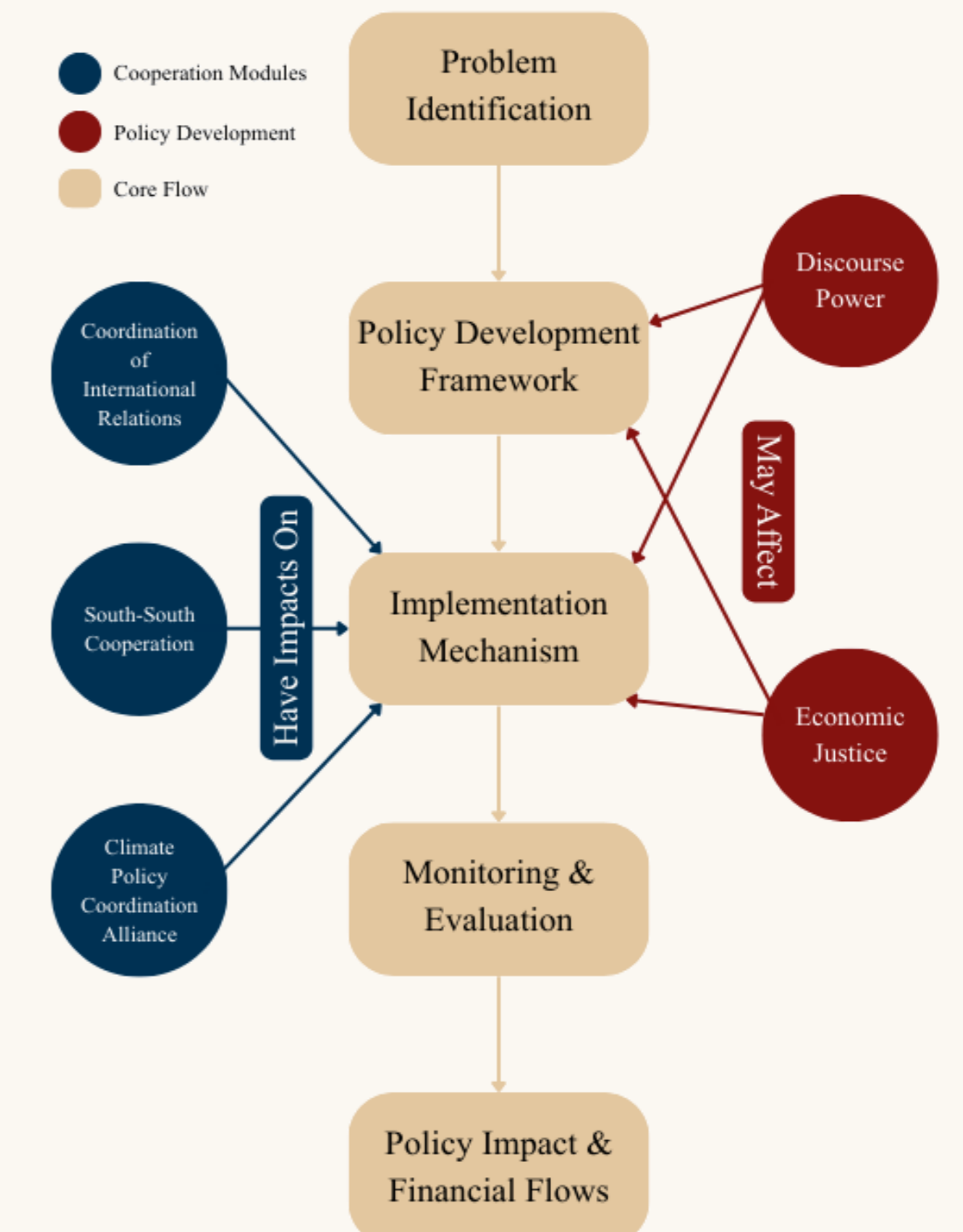
Transparency & Accountability



Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

5. CONCLUSION

The financial rift is not merely a funding gap — it is a structural injustice embedded in global emissions, finance, and political representation.



Climate justice is not charity — it is the foundation of a sustainable and legitimate global order.

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