

India's Green Status Dilemma

A Practice Approach

Axel Nordenstam



India's Green Status Dilemma

A Practice Approach

Axel Nordenstam

Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Friday 24 April 2026 at 13.00 in G-Salen, Arrheniuslaboratorierna, Svante Arrhenius väg 20C.

Abstract

India's political leadership has expressed green ambitions for several years, yet officials continue to face difficulties implementing these ambitions in practice. This dissertation examines how India's green ambitions shape the everyday practices of the Indian Foreign Service. It challenges a common tendency in International Relations scholarship to treat status primarily as a motive for foreign policy behavior. Instead, it shifts the analytical focus from political leaders to the ways in which officials manage status considerations in bureaucratic and diplomatic practice.

The dissertation asks two questions: How do dilemmas inherent in India's green ambitions manifest themselves in the everyday practices and social interactions of the Indian Foreign Service? And how do these manifestations shape the ways in which the Indian Foreign Service represents and advances India's climate foreign policy at home and abroad? To address these questions, the dissertation develops a practice-oriented analytical framework that reconceptualizes status dilemmas as social processes and applies practice tracing to examine how they unfold in diplomatic practice. The framework centers on a "status dilemma triangle" consisting of three interrelated tensions: recognition tensions, normativity tensions, and epistemic tensions.

Methodologically, the dissertation employs practice tracing to analyze how diplomats interpret and manage these tensions in everyday diplomatic practice. Based on fieldwork primarily in New Delhi, the empirical analysis draws on elite interviews, press releases, and various documents. Empirically, the dissertation examines the operational challenges and day-to-day diplomatic work through which Indian officials navigate green ambitions in international settings. It focuses on three arenas of contemporary climate diplomacy: India's participation in the UN climate negotiations (including COP27 and COP28), India's G20 presidency, and India–EU climate relations in the run-up to the 16th India-EU summit, particularly disputes surrounding the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and sustainability clauses in trade negotiations.

The findings demonstrate how India's green ambitions generate complex status dilemmas for officials navigating competing expectations and pressures. The dissertation identifies diplomatic strategies through which officials manage such dilemmas, offering insights relevant to research on climate diplomacy, diplomatic practice, foreign policy analysis, Indian foreign policy, and status in International Relations.

Keywords: *climate diplomacy, diplomatic practice, foreign policy analysis, Indian foreign policy, status dilemma, status in International Relations.*

Stockholm 2026

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-253157>

ISBN 978-91-8107-532-8

ISBN 978-91-8107-533-5

ISSN 2003-1343

Department of Economic History and International Relations



Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm

INDIA'S GREEN STATUS DILEMMA

Axel Nordenstam



India's Green Status Dilemma

A Practice Approach

Axel Nordenstam

©Axel Nordenstam, Stockholm University 2026

ISBN print 978-91-8107-532-8

ISBN PDF 978-91-8107-533-5

ISSN 2003-1343

Cover art: Namitha Sadanand

Portrait: Max V. Karlsson

Printed in Sweden by Universitetservice US-AB, Stockholm 2026

Dedicated to kind people
around the world

Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Preface.....	ix
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Puzzle and research questions.....	1
1.2. Status dilemmas in International Relations.....	4
1.3. The promise of a practice approach to status dilemmas	7
1.4. Contributions.....	9
1.5. Research design.....	13
1.6. Organization of the study.....	16
2. State-of-the-art	19
2.1. Introduction	19
2.2. Ways of interpreting foreign policy ambitions	19
2.3. India's foreign relations	24
2.4. Indian foreign policy practice	28
2.5. India in global climate politics: Narrowers and wideners	36
2.6. Concluding remarks	41
3. Theory: A practice approach to status dilemmas	43
3.1. Introduction	43
3.2. Status dilemma dynamics	45
3.3. Disentangling status dilemmas: An analytical triangle.....	53
3.4. The status dilemma triangle in practice: Operationalization	64
3.5. Concluding remarks	74
4. Research design	75
4.1. Introduction	75
4.2. Methods of data collection	76
4.3. Abductive analysis of practice	93
4.4. Ethical considerations.....	96
5. Background: India's green ambitions	99
5.1. Introduction	99
5.2. A brief history.....	100
5.3. Internal reactions to India's green ambitions	107
5.4. India's new institutional capacity.....	115

5.5.	Conclusion	122
6.	India's green ambitions in climate negotiations	125
6.1.	Introduction	125
6.2.	India's participation in climate negotiations	127
6.3.	Epistemic tensions	137
6.4.	Normativity tensions	152
6.5.	Recognition tensions	159
6.6.	Conclusion	171
7.	The green assertion during India's G20 presidency	175
7.1.	Introduction	175
7.2.	Background: Getting India ready for the world	178
7.3.	Epistemic tensions	182
7.4.	Normativity tensions	189
7.5.	Recognition tensions	198
7.6.	Conclusion	212
8.	Green ambitions before the 16 th India-EU Summit	215
8.1.	Introduction	215
8.2.	Background: From inertia to a bureaucratic grid	217
8.3.	Epistemic tensions	220
8.4.	Normativity tensions	228
8.5.	Recognition tensions	238
8.6.	Conclusion	246
9.	Conclusion	249
9.1.	Key findings	251
9.2.	Status dilemma management	253
9.3.	Strategies of status dilemma management	255
9.4.	Implications	259
9.5.	Limitations and future research	265
	Bibliography	270
	Appendix	295
	List of interviewees	295
	Interview protocol	297
	Sammanfattning på svenska	302

Lists of figures and tables

Figure 1. An analytical triangle to advance the study of status dilemmas.	54
Figure 2. India's delegation size in climate negotiations, 1991-2023.....	103
Figure 3. Treaties and agreements on environment, signed by India.....	105
Figure 4. Participation by India's Ministries, COP27 and COP28.....	129
Figure 5. Ministry participation by select actors, COP27 and COP28.....	131
Figure 6. The process of status dilemma management in global climate politics....	255
Table 1. Overview of status dilemmas.....	52
Table 2. Typologies of practices in status dilemma dynamics.....	67
Table 3. Guiding analytical questions.....	73
Table 4. Mapping of climate-related MoUs by India's Ministries.....	106
Table 5. UPSC Exam questions for Indian Foreign Service, 2020-2024.....	139
Table 6. Working Group Meetings leading up to the Green Development Pact.....	196
Table 7. Think tank events in the run-up to the 16th India-EU summit.....	228
Table 8. List of interviewees.....	295

Acknowledgements

My PhD journey was far more than a solitary intellectual exercise spent in libraries – though trust me, plenty of that happened too. I read academic literature in various libraries, cafes, parks, and office spaces during this intellectual journey that lasted four and a half years. As a social person who learns from conversations, I continuously kept up motivation with debates and thought-provoking conversations with several people that deserve written gratitude.

Mark Rhinard has been my first supervisor since my first year. He encouraged me to produce policy-relevant research with scientific quality, was always available for conversations and reviews of draft sections and chapters and even let me use his office at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI). Niklas Bremberg joined as second supervisor half-way through the process. His expertise in diplomatic studies and climate diplomacy was invaluable throughout the long writing period of this dissertation. Their comments on draft chapters convinced me to spend more time writing than I ever thought was required. Thank you both for being pragmatic, available, and constructive during my PhD journey.

Henrik Chetan Aspengren has been a mentor ever since we co-authored a policy study on the EU's former India Strategy in 2019. Regardless of location, Henrik was just a phone call away for a chat about anything from professional development and research considerations to living in India and new ideas. Thank you for your support.

I would also like to express gratitude to officials, Indian and foreign, who made time to meet me and trusted me with their stories. I do not disclose their names, but I remain grateful to them for making time in their hectic schedules for me. This research project would not have been possible without their patience and willingness to share behind-the-scenes moments with me. The analysis should not be attributed to any of the respondents.

The dissertation is the result of lengthy discussions on previous drafts in various stages that benefited from comments by many scholars. Johan Brosché reviewed my first-year PM and encouraged me to devote time to research that interests me. Naghmeh Nasiritousi constructively discussed my 50% paper, to the point that I rewrote the entire draft. In my final higher seminar, Paul Beaumont came from Oslo to Stockholm to review my first full draft and helped me sharpen my thinking. After this seminar, Magnus Petersson read the full, final version of this dissertation.

The Department of Economic History and International Relations of Stockholm University housed PhD peers, colleagues, and friends. Lisa Dellmuth and Karl Gustafsson continuously supported me during my doctoral studies and reminded me about the breadth of the IR discipline. I learnt much about great power politics and how to think about book writing in sessions with Stephen G. Brooks, a Guest Professor in the department. I was also fortunate to be an Associate with the Asia Programme at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) while completing my PhD. For collegial and enjoyable chats in Stockholm, I'd like to thank: Shefali Roy, Zigne Edström, Klara Melin, Lydia Wachs, Eva Katzer, Tanushree Rao, Evelina Jonsson, Pontus Blüme, Li Andersson, Gustav Ingman, Therese Christoffersson, Anthony Smythe, Daniel Stridh, Olov Lund, Stephanie Winkler, Paul Levin, Calle Håkansson, Nicola Nymalm, Johannes Geith, August Danielsson, Nicholas Olczak, Yeonju Jung, Gunilla Reischl, Magnus Lundström, Maria Hellman, Maria Wendt, Emma Rosengren, Karina Shyrokykh, Åsa Rognes Malmström, László Szerencsés, Rafael Andersson Lipcsey, Michelle Ryttersgaard Gano, Erik Mollestam, Carl Fürst, Hans Rosenberg, Johannes Hartvigson, and others.

New Delhi was quite different from Stockholm. I would like to thank Arunabha Ghosh and Shuva Raha for welcoming me as Visiting Fellow with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) between September

2023 and March 2024. It was my first time working with only Indian colleagues and was a period of time I cherish. At CEEW, I would like to thank the members of the International Cooperation – the Foresight Team – for welcoming me as a colleague, answering my questions, and helping me find informed people for my data collection. Thank you, Aishwarya Hansen Joshi, Ayesha Dash, Kakoli Roy, Kinshu Dang, Nandini Harihar, Sanvid Tuljapurkar, and Tulika Gupta. In addition, I am grateful to CEEW employees from other units: Aman Malik, Gunjan Jhunjhunwala, Ganesh Dileep, Jhalak Aggarwal, Sumit Prasad, Bhuvan Ravindran, Karthik Ganesan, and Rishabh Varma.

I am also appreciative of other academics and experts who made time for conversations in person and online: Rohan Mukherjee, Dhanasree Jayaram, Nicolas Blarel, Constantino Xavier, Tobias Scholz, Steven Ward, RR Rashmi, Ajay Mathur, Prayank Jain, Saahil Waslekar, Vidita Priyadarshini, Renu Mann, Manisha Reuter, Jagannath Panda, and Sonja Thilges. I would like to give special thanks to my friend Tobias Scholz for countless discussions ever since we both applied for our PhD positions.

Two summer methods schools arranged by the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) sharpened my qualitative methods skills. Thank you, Anne-Marie Walter and Kristin Anabel Eggeling! Moreover, a summer school at Ramon Llull University arranged by the ECPR Standing Group on International Relations had a remarkable impact on my project. In Barcelona, Sarah Leonard discussed my overambitious thesis plan. Amitav Acharya inspired me and the other participants on the course with his reflections about globalizing the discipline. Whilst completing the thesis, I kept in mind Acharya's advice about how to conduct research that contributes to a more global discipline. In Barcelona, he encouraged us to first spend a substantial amount of time with concepts, and to relate concepts and ideas to events, then only after this to start to theorize. In addition, I would like to thank Angain-

dranhumar Gnanasagaran, Pablo Moral, Praveen Kumar Yadav, Chester Yacub, Lewis Jones, and Gabriel Rached, for a memorable summer school experience.

Participating in international conferences was a true pleasure, since it offered me a chance to find my place in the global academic community. During these conferences, I was reminded about the transferability of knowledge and found myself increasingly enjoying the breadth of IR as a discipline. I presented draft research papers at the Annual Conventions of the International Studies Association (ISA) in Montréal (in 2023) and in San Francisco (in 2024), as well as the Annual Convention of the European International Studies Association (EISA) in Lille (in 2024). Many thanks to Paul Avey, Miriam Prys-Hansen, and Katja Freistein for discussing my conference papers and helping me improve my work.

I also presented at research seminars hosted by research institutes. When I needed help the most, researchers at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) reviewed my draft theory chapter in Stockholm. Their honest feedback truly improved the chapter and informed the substantial revisions I made. Thank you, (again), Mark Rhinard, for giving me a chance to learn from the UI research environment. Miriam Prys-Hansen kindly arranged a seminar at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), in Hamburg, where I presented an almost complete theory chapter. Once again, Miriam offered helpful comments on my project as I approached the submission deadline and needed encouraging words. It was a pleasure to engage with the GIGA research group on regional and global orders.

Every year, I had the pleasure of interacting with other experts who reminded me why I devoted so much time to Indian climate diplomacy. My gratitude goes to the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), the Center for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP, formerly Brookings India), the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW), the German Institute

of International Affairs and Security Studies (SWP), and the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

Moreover, I would like to thank the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) for inviting me to India during the first year of my doctoral studies. They made it possible for me to participate in eight days of discussions in New Delhi, Agra, and Ahmedabad with young professionals from eight countries. Thank you, Tharma Pillai, for our lengthy conversations about India's role in the world. I still remember your conception of India as a "sleeping super-power"!

The production of this thesis was financially supported by Stockholm University and several foundations. The funding aspect is crucial, because without it I would not have been able to pursue this research project. The following foundations provided support and grants that enabled conference participation, data collection trips, and research dissemination: the Rhodin's Minne Foundation, the Kinander Foundation, the Lambergs Foundation, the Karl Staaff Foundation, the Helge Ax:son Johnsons Foundation, the Åforsk Foundation, the Lars Hierta Minne Foundation, and the International Studies Association. Thank you for enabling my knowledge production efforts.

The sketch of the India Habitat Centre on the cover was beautifully drawn by Namitha Sadanand in Delhi. In Stockholm, Max V. Karlsson took the photograph of me just a few days before the dissertation was sent to the printer. Nick Olczak efficiently proofread the final manuscript. Thank you for your help.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family who supported me during my PhD journey. Thank you for being kind.

Preface

The India Habitat Centre, one of New Delhi’s premier international conference centers, opened in 1993 after the Indian government initiated economic liberalization. At that time, India attempted to attract more international attention to New Delhi and revised its foreign policy outlook following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Three decades later, in February 2024, I was at the Center when I encountered a former Indian climate negotiator near the American diner located there. After sharing a laugh over a joke I no longer recall, the retired official smiled at me as I explained my research about India’s role in global climate politics. The official acknowledged that finding people willing to talk could be challenging and encouraged me to observe meetings and proceedings, noting that Indian civil servants are often skeptical of interviews with foreign researchers. I encountered this wariness throughout my research for this thesis.

Perhaps even more illuminating was a conversation with a retired Indian Ambassador who explained that remnants from pre-independence times still affect contemporary diplomacy – and my own research. The Ambassador told me: “In India, you as a white man, must deal with the white man’s burden. Fortunately, coming from the Nordics, you don’t come with a historical past like the British. But in the public’s eyes, you’re still white. Indians still don’t know the difference between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ white man. The British took so much time away from us and stopped us from developing a domestic industrial labor market.”¹

These encounters offer glimpses into the research environment in which this monograph was produced. Some might find such an environment challenging, but as I demonstrate throughout the manuscript, many people generously offered their time and insights, without which this study would not have been

¹ Author’s interview with I#22.

possible. I hope they will find this monograph interesting and be able to recognize their own experiences reflected in my independent analysis.

Over the course of this research project, India became the world's most populous country and the world's fourth-largest economy. Narendra Modi was reelected in 2024, though with a weaker mandate than he had gained in his previous election victories in 2014 and 2019. Modi's party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had to form a coalition government to remain in power. International leaders and ministers continued visiting New Delhi despite the absence of the reforms that had been the winning argument for Modi's landslide victory in the 2014 elections. India hosted the G20 presidency for the first time in its history. Indian officials had to navigate a challenging balancing act: enhancing relations with European partners while not publicly condemning President Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Modi announced India's willingness to host COP33, the annual climate conference assembling parties who are signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), due to be held in 2028. These glimpses illustrate the dynamic context in which this research project unfolded.

This monograph examines India's green ambitions in a changing world. The text constitutes my interpretation of contemporary climate diplomacy based on my own observations inside negotiation rooms, my semi-structured elite interviews, and my active engagement with contemporary India over several years. Some of the empirical insights presented in this monograph have been known to insiders, but they have never been systematically assessed by any scholar. This study constitutes a new interpretation of these empirics, produced by carrying out abductive analysis. The arguments provided in this study help us understand the difficulties in engaging in climate cooperation even when climate change constitutes a collective, global problem that requires global cooperation.

Naturally, there is much more that could be said and debated than what is captured in this thesis – not least the perspectives of ordinary people who face

heat waves and air pollution annually. Over the five months I spent in India for this research project, I had numerous informal conversations with people in Ahmedabad, Agra, Goa, Lucknow, New Delhi, and Mumbai. Their stories shaped my understanding of contemporary India, even though they do not feature prominently in this monograph. Their stories deserve a book of their own. I hope this monograph will spark some new conversations about India's green ambitions, both at home and abroad.

1. Introduction

1.1. Puzzle and research questions

After decades in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), Shivshankar Menon reflected that diplomats “make choices in the contemporary fog that envelops events.”² Few arenas better illustrate this fog than India’s turn toward climate leadership. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that “India must take the lead in countering climate change,”³ he recast a long-standing foreign policy narrative – from one positioning India as a defender of developing country interests to one which made it an aspirant green leader. Modi anchored this shift in a familiar historical narrative, claiming that “protecting the environment is part of India’s cultural heritage.” Framed this way, the new climate ambition did more than signal a policy adjustment; it repositioned India’s role in global politics. This move placed Indian diplomats at the center of a delicate balancing act. They were now expected to project green leadership internationally while still remaining attentive to both domestic development priorities and also to ambitions tied to regional influence and broader great-power status. In practice, the green turn sharpened a set of overlapping tensions that officials had to navigate simultaneously as they translated Modi’s instruction

² Menon, Shivshankar, 2016. *Choices: Inside the Making of India’s Foreign Policy*. Gurgaon: Penguin, 1.

³ Press Information Bureau, 2015. Government of India, Prime Minister’s Office. PM to Heads of Indian Missions, 7 February 2015; On Indian environmental consciousness, see e.g., Guha, Ramachandra, 2024. *Speaking with Nature: The Origins of Indian Environmentalism*. Yale: Yale University Press; Narlikar, Aruna, Mattoo, Amitabh, Narlikar, Amrita, 2023. “Chapter 10. On Compassion and Ecologism: The Story of the Noble Parrot and the Tree” in *Strategic Choices, Ethical Dilemmas: Stories from the Mahabharat*. Gurugram: Penguin Random House India, 119-132.

into diplomatic action – balancing civilizational claims rooted in a postcolonial context with economic needs at home and expectations from international partners.

The purpose of this thesis is to understand how Indian officials navigate green ambitions in practice. India's pursuit of leadership unfolds in an international environment that often pulls in opposite directions. When Indian officials were tasked to pursue green ambitions by their political leadership, they found themselves in a reality shaped by historical experiences from previous negotiations. It was a reality shaped by past experiences such as the climate negotiations in Copenhagen 2009, where a non-western negotiating group decided the outcome. The history of global climate politics is full of major conflicts, disagreements, and disappointing moments.⁴ However, Modi's green leadership instructions were not given to the Indian climate negotiators. Instead, they were given to 100 senior diplomats working at Indian embassies abroad. With these new instructions, Indian diplomats were tasked with advancing yet another ambition on top of ensuring India's economic development. Meanwhile, their foreign counterparts were left to interpret what this meant for India's evolving path toward leading-power status.

The puzzle addressed in this study lies in how Indian diplomats reconcile the competing expectations generated by India's new green ambitions. On the one hand, these diplomats are tasked with projecting leadership on climate action. On the other hand, they must uphold India's long-standing claims as a developing, postcolonial state with pressing domestic needs. It is perplexing for IR researchers how instead of pursuing one of these aims, and sacrificing the other, India makes an ongoing attempt to reconcile the two. To address this puzzle, the study asks two pressing research questions: How do the dilemmas inherent to India's green ambitions manifest themselves in the everyday practices and social interactions of the Indian Foreign Service? How do these

⁴ Paterson, Matthew, 1996. *Global Warming and Global Politics*. London: Routledge, 73-76.

manifestations shape the ways in which the Indian Foreign Service represents and advances India's climate foreign policy at home and abroad?

This dissertation argues that India's pursuit of green leadership generates what can be conceptualized as a *status dilemma* for its diplomats. A status dilemma reflects tensions between pursuing varying goals and achieving recognition across domestic and international audiences. This kind of dilemma is not resolved in high-level summits. Instead, it is managed daily in the "engine room" of international affairs,⁵ through the practices of the officials who interpret, adapt, and contest political instructions in the social life of diplomacy. For this thesis, the dilemma that India and its diplomats face can be termed a *green status dilemma*. The thesis argues that we can best understand this green status dilemma by focusing on the practices performed by members of the foreign service bureaucracy, instead of by studying the activities of political leaders in high-level summits. Understanding how a green status dilemma impacts practice is important because it reveals the deeper drivers of diplomatic behavior in India. It is in these everyday practices that officials assess risks, anticipate reactions, and adjust how far status claims can be pushed without backlash. Using a status lens to conceptualize India's green leadership ambitions also enables us to understand to what degree these new ambitions constitute a particular type of status-seeking.

By shifting attention from leaders to officials, this thesis brings the literature on status politics into dialogue with the practice turn in International Relations (IR). It enriches the practice turn with a study of climate diplomacy, illustrating how practice approaches can provide new insights about cases beyond the transatlantic region. Empirically, the thesis provides a micro-level account of India's climate diplomacy, showing how green ambitions are ne-

⁵ On diplomacy as the "engine room" of international politics, see Cohen. R. 1998. Putting diplomatic studies on the map. *Diplomatic Studies Program Newsletter*, Center for the Study of Diplomacy.

gotiated, resisted, and accepted within the foreign service. This chapter introduces the thesis in four subsequent parts. Section 1.2. reviews the emerging literature on status dilemmas in IR. Section 1.3. argues that a practice-based analytical framework can be used for examining status dilemmas and carrying out empirical research into how these appear in real-world cases. Section 1.4. outlines the theoretical and empirical contributions made by this thesis. Section 1.5. presents a summary of the research design that was employed. Then the remainder of the chapter gives an overview of the organization of this monograph.

1.2. Status dilemmas in International Relations

This thesis draws upon, and extends, a specific vein of the status dilemma scholarship. The term *status dilemma* entered International Relations (IR) through studies of how states manage uncertainty about their place in international hierarchies. The concept was introduced by Wohlforth, who used it to describe a dyadic dilemma between leaders engaged in uncertain signaling.⁶ He suggested this was particularly seen in the context of military competition between powers unsure of each other's rank. Building on Wohlforth's work, scholars have applied this concept to studies of US-China relations, China-India relations, and trilateral India-US-China relations.⁷ Fung later demonstrated that states can also face dilemmas about how they are recognized by multiple different audiences at the same time.⁸ She reconceptualized status

⁶ Wohlforth, William, 2014. "Status Dilemmas and Interstate Conflict" in *Status in world politics* edited by Paul, T.V., Welch Larson, Deborah and Wohlforth, William C. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 115-140.

⁷ Wang, William Ziyuan, 2019. Destined for Misperception? Status Dilemma and the Early Origin of US-China Antagonism. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 24, 49–65; Xiaoyu Pu, 2022. The Status Dilemma in World Politics: An Anatomy of the China-India Asymmetrical Rivalry, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 15, Issue 3, Autumn 2022, 227–245; Paul, T.V. and Erik Underwood, 2019. Theorizing India-US-China strategic triangle. *India Review*, 18 (4), 348-367.

⁸ Fung, Courtney, 2019. *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling status*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 7.

dilemmas, showing how state representatives consider their ties to peer groups during uncertain moments. This thesis builds on Fung's insights, shifting attention from leaders and dyadic interactions to the bureaucratic arenas in which status dilemmas are experienced, interpreted, and managed. It examines how recognition effects and status tensions play out through the everyday work of the state.

A status dilemma arises when actors must balance competing role expectations and institutional goals across different arenas – within an organization, across a domestic government, amongst international partners – such that advancing one position risks undermining another. For diplomats, these dilemmas manifest through recurring tensions over what this recognition, normativity, and epistemic authority. The dilemmas occur as diplomats navigate their dual roles as civil servants working with domestic colleagues and as representatives engaging international counterparts. By focusing on diplomats, this perspective shifts attention from periodic confrontations between high-level state leaders to the everyday routines through which officials manage tensions inside bureaucracies and diplomatic settings. This perspective helps deepen our understanding of the broader behaviors and practices that are used to navigate status dilemmas. For example, it provides an account of what happens in New Delhi as different ministries prepare for summits, of how those tensions play out between officials during coordination, and of how they finally surface at international meetings. This thesis therefore adopts a revised definition of status dilemmas that considers these as something faced not only by state leaders, but also by the diplomats under them. This revised definition of status dilemmas allows for tracing how these tensions travel from office desks to negotiation venues.

The analytical framework developed in the later chapters proposes that status dilemmas are best examined through three different, but interlinked, types of tensions. First, there are *recognition tensions* where actors seek or withhold acceptance of status claims. Second, there are *normativity tensions* where

competing ideas of what is appropriate or legitimate collide. Third, there are *epistemic tensions* where expertise and control over knowledge are contested. These tensions are interconnected because claims to status often require both normative legitimation and epistemic credibility and because all three types of tensions depend on recognition from relevant audiences. By examining how these tensions intersect in diplomatic practice, this study reveals how status dilemmas are enacted and negotiated through the social dynamics of diplomacy.

Focusing on status dilemmas offers three analytical advantages for understanding India's green ambitions. First, it reveals the social relations and power dynamics that shape how environmental goals are pursued in practice. Second, it captures how officials, in their daily work, experience and navigate contradictions, such as the need to promote climate leadership while protecting development interests. Third, by centering on the choices and constraints facing individual diplomats, it demonstrates how the people working inside the bureaucracy matter for outcomes, not only the political directives they receive. Because these dilemmas unfold through everyday routines, such as answering social media messages, attending meetings with colleagues, and following the news, they can only be understood by studying how officials perform their work across multiple venues. The next section introduces a practice approach that traces the social dynamics through which status dilemmas take shape in the engine room of diplomacy.

1.3. The promise of a practice approach to status dilemmas

This thesis demonstrates that the social life of diplomacy is rich with dilemmas that shape how international relations play out.⁹ To understand how a particular type of dilemma – status dilemmas – is shaping international affairs, we need an analytical approach that takes us into the machinery of diplomacy. Diplomacy and foreign policymaking are by no means a one-person show, despite the rich scholarship about statesmanship. The IR subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis emphasizes the multitude of actors, factors, and considerations involved in international relations between states. The emphasis in Foreign Policy Analysis on actors at various levels, including but not limited to formal leaders, helps scholars to understand the range of forces influencing foreign policy. As Hudson puts it, this allows research to examine the “intersection between forces external to and internal to the nation-state that bears on the choice at hand.”¹⁰ Indeed, we can no longer understand status dilemmas as a dynamic only occurring between state leaders. Instead, we need to uncover the actions that form the social life of diplomacy, performed by civil servants in mundane settings.

These assumptions align closely with the practice literature in IR. This literature provides analytical leverage for examining how status dilemmas are produced and managed through routine action rather than elite intent alone. The practice literature foregrounds human agency in micro-level dynamics.

⁹ E.g., Snidal, Duncan, 1985. Coordination versus prisoners' dilemma: Implications for international cooperation and regimes. *American Political Science Review*, 79(4), 923-942; Watson, Adam, 1992. “Chapter 6: Diplomacy” in *Dilemmas of World Politics: International issues in a changing world* edited by John Baylis and N.J. Rengger. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 164; Tang, S., 2009. The security dilemma: A conceptual analysis. *Security studies*, 18(3), 587-623; Milani, Carlos R. S., Pinheiro, Leticia and De Lima, Maria Regina Soares, 2017. Brazil's foreign policy and the ‘graduation dilemma’. *International Affairs*, 93(3), 585-605.

¹⁰ Hudson, Valerie, 2013. “Chapter 1: Foreign Policy Analysis Beyond North America”, in *Foreign Policy Analysis Beyond North America*, edited by Klaus Brummer and Valerie M. Hudson. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1.

There is no single *practice theory* and instead the literature in this area encompasses a variety of practice approaches. Practice scholars in diplomatic studies often treat Neumann's 2002 article as the inception of the so-called "practice turn,"¹¹ but scholars in the transatlantic space have reflected on micro-level dynamics for decades. In the 1970s, the American anthropologist Geertz argued for research to provide thick descriptions of social practices to reveal different elements of culture.¹² On the other side of the Atlantic, sociologists like Bourdieu and de Certeau developed concepts and scholarship about the procedures shaping power relations.¹³ Poststructuralists such as Foucault championed linguistics and viewed social interactions as "discursive practices". For the British sociologist Giddens, practices referred to "ongoing series of practical activities" informing routines individuals adhere to in their social life.¹⁴ The German classical sociologist Weber is also important in this context. His work enlightened readers about how the engagement of bureaucrats in social interactions was informed by their social class and position in the status order.¹⁵

These foundational works as part of IR's practice turn generally argue that social relations are subject to hierarchical ordering processes that occur among the involved actors. These ordering processes entail repeated practices that are performed by human beings and reflect values and meanings. Practices can take different forms, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. However, in general, they reflect *performative* considerations at the micro-level that are carried out during both certain and uncertain moments. Through these practices, hierarchical orders are reproduced. This reproduction occurs not only in interactions

¹¹ Neumann, Iver B., 2002. Returning practice to the linguistic turn: The case of diplomacy. *Millennium*, 31(3), 627-651.

¹² Geertz, Clifford, 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essay*. New York: Basic Books.

¹³ Bourdieu, Pierre, 1992. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity; De Certeau, Michel, 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹⁴ Giddens, Anthony, 1984. *The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration*. Polity Press.

¹⁵ Weber, Max, 1978. *Economy and Society*.

between individuals, but also in how relationships are understood and internalized.

This dissertation builds a synthetic approach to understanding practices related to green status dilemmas. It combines insights from different strands of the practice literature in IR. It draws on Pouliot's scholarship about "international pecking orders" among diplomats in multilateral diplomacy, bringing this together with the Communities of Practice (CoP) research agenda.¹⁶ This dissertation uses insights from the practice literature about dynamics related to hierarchy and adaptation, to provide a new practice-orientated approach to studying status dilemmas. This new approach is applied to studying the dilemmas prompted by India's green foreign policy ambitions. This enhances not only our understanding of India's foreign policy behavior, but also our broader understanding of the demands faced by officials who are dealing with complex political ambitions in contemporary status competitions.

1.4. Contributions

This dissertation builds a practice-based framework to reveal how India's pursuit of green leadership produces distinctive tensions inside its bureaucracy and diplomacy. It makes four contributions to the discipline of International Relations.

First, the thesis demonstrates how status considerations can be examined by studying the social dynamics within everyday policymaking processes. This approach entails a shift away from the traditional empirical focus taken by status scholars. Rather than following the tendency to study outcomes of status-seeking by political leaders, the empirical research in this thesis centers on the processes through which other actors manage status considerations.

¹⁶ See e.g., Adler, Emanuel, Bremsberg, Niklas., Sondarjee, Maïté, 2024. Communities of Practice in World Politics: Advancing a Research Agenda, *Global Studies Quarterly*, Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2024.

This makes the status scholarship less leadership-focused and able to provide greater analytical attention to lower-level interactions and the policymaking process itself. The approach to understanding status politics taken in this thesis aligns status scholarship more closely with the IR subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis, in so far as it helps to “open up the black box” of foreign policy.¹⁷ By applying a process lens, this thesis showcases how status considerations affect ways of doing and saying within the diplomatic world. Through this interpretivist, process-oriented approach, this thesis reveals how the inner workings of diplomacy – within the bureaucracy – both shape and are shaped by status considerations.

Second, the thesis contributes to the broader literature on status in IR by developing an analytical framework for understanding the management of status dilemmas. Building on the conceptualizations of status dilemmas provided by Fung and Wohlforth, this thesis develops a refined understanding of status dilemmas.¹⁸ It employs a process-oriented lens to examine the social dynamics present in the management of frequently occurring status dilemmas. This move broadens the scope of status research from outcome-oriented assessments to examination of the practices that constitute status politics on a day-to-day basis. To uncover these dynamics, the analytical framework identifies three forms of tensions as empirical proxies: recognition tensions, normativity tensions, and epistemic tensions. Taken together, these tensions illuminate not only how status dilemmas arise, but also how they are handled, softened, or postponed in diplomatic practice. This integrated approach offers a more granular understanding of status politics and provides analytical tools for examining similar dynamics in other bureaucratic settings.

The study thus contributes to the emerging literature on status in IR. Over the past decade, scholars have developed status concepts that capture a variety

¹⁷ Hudson, Valerie, 2014. *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

¹⁸ Fung, 2019, 7; Wohlforth 2014.

of phenomena related to foreign policy behavior. They have revived the claim made by the classical realist IR scholar Morgenthau, who argued that status constitutes an “indispensable element of a rational foreign policy” and that it is “as intrinsic an element of the relations between nations as the desire for prestige is of relations between individuals.”¹⁹ The status literature is undergoing an exploratory phase manifested in the development of new concepts. Theorists debate “status concerns,” “status dilemmas,” “status orders,” “status competition,” “status loss,” “status backfire,” “status signaling,” “status symbols,” and “status accommodation.”²⁰ While a new body of research is emerging, skeptics maintain that status considerations are an “illusion” because feelings of pride, power, and reputation are being misunderstood or mislabeled as status.²¹ This disagreement invites those working on status in IR to carry out continued theoretical development concerning the concept and the related notion of status dilemmas.

¹⁹ Morgenthau, Hans, 1960. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 73,75.

²⁰ MacDonald, P.K. and Parent, J.M., 2021. The status of status in world politics. *World Politics*, 73(2), 358-391; Powers, R. and Renshon, J., 2023. International status concerns and domestic support for political leaders. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(3), 732-747; Wohlforth, W.C., 2014. Status dilemmas and inter-state conflict. *Status in World Politics* edited by TV Paul, Deborah Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 115-140; Fung, Courtney J., 2019. *China and intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling status*. Oxford University Press; Røren, Pål, 2023. The belligerent bear: Russia, status orders, and war. *International Security*, 47(4), 7-49; Wohlforth, W.C., 2009. Unipolarity, status competition, and great power war. *World politics*, 61(1), 28-57; Naylor, Tristen, 2018. *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilized Nations to the G20* (1st ed.). Routledge; Ward, S., 2022. Decline and disintegration: National status loss and domestic conflict in post-disaster Spain. *International Security*, 46(4), 91-129; Pu, X. and Schweller, R.L., 2014. Status signaling, multiple audiences, and China’s blue-water naval ambition. *Status in world politics*, 141-62; Danielson, A. and Hedling, E., 2022. Visual diplomacy in virtual summitry: Status signalling during the coronavirus crisis. *Review of International Studies*, 48(2), 243-261; Naylor, T., 2025. The production and performance of status: Behind the scenes of an international summit. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 60(1), 97-119; Freistein, Katja and Thomas Müller, 2025. Capitalizing on virtue: Global climate politics and the life cycle of status symbols. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 60(1), 120-144; Ward, Steven, 2020. Status, stratified rights, and accommodation in international relations. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 5(1), 160-178.

²¹ Mercer, Jonathan, 2017. The Illusion of International Prestige. *International Security*, 41(4), 133.

Third, this thesis contributes by advancing a new understanding of India's contemporary climate diplomacy which is based on original, empirical research. By tracing India's green ambitions in the social environment of diplomacy, it reveals the challenges states face when pursuing such ambitions within global climate politics more broadly. The thesis presents three case studies of Indian climate diplomacy, where each is examined through the analytical lens of status dilemmas. In each case, this analysis illuminates how the navigation of status dilemmas features in contemporary diplomatic events. The analysis demonstrates three main tensions which Indian diplomats must navigate. There is the navigation of tensions between leadership ambitions on the global stage and India's informal membership in the developing countries bloc. Then there is the navigation of tensions between India's desire to lead on climate and domestic interests that oppose measures necessary for widely accepted leadership. In addition, there is the navigation of tensions between domestic political constraints and opportunity costs in the international system. Consequently, the thesis suggests that Indian diplomats struggle mightily and even could be described as *heroic managers* in their efforts to achieve multiple goals and juggle competing demands.

Fourth, the thesis contributes by theorizing the implications of its empirical findings for how status dilemmas are managed in climate diplomacy. While previous studies have identified a repertoire of strategies used by Indian diplomats in climate negotiations, this study shows that these strategies are less about securing recognition as a high-status actor and more about coping with the competing pressures that green ambitions generate. By tracing how officials navigate tensions regarding recognition, epistemic authority, and normativity across multiple settings, the study distils a set of *strategies of status dilemma management* that Indian diplomats employ. These are practical ways in which diplomats contain, redirect, or reconcile conflicting expectations. These strategies offer transferable insights for understanding how other bureaucracies handle status-laden demands in similarly fluid policy domains.

1.5. Research design

This study's research design follows directly from its central purpose: to understand how Indian officials navigate green ambitions in practice. To capture navigation dynamics in practice, the study combines theory-building and empirical exploration in an abductive research approach that alternates between concepts and evidence. While the research process had an inductive element, it became an abductive research journey where the analysis moved back and forth between theory and empirics.²² The findings constitute the result of this abductive process when used to focus on the practices of Indian diplomats.

The study draws on Pouliot's interpretivist practice-tracing approach.²³ It prioritizes the collection of empirical material on contemporary cases close to the events themselves. This design makes it possible to observe practices as they unfold in real time, capturing how officials navigate social interactions under conditions of uncertainty. Rather than testing predefined theoretical constructs, the analysis follows Pouliot's guidance by demonstrating the heuristic value of practice concepts.

Empirically, the study examines three case studies chosen because of their potential to reveal status dynamics in action. In each case, Indian officials confronted green ambitions expressed by the political leadership and worked to operationalize them in practice. This meant that in these cases it could be expected that there would be tensions shaping everyday diplomacy at the administrative level. However, before the analysis was carried out it was not known in what ways these tensions would impact diplomacy, or the broader ramifications of the green ambitions. The three case studies systematically utilize the analytical framework that is developed in Chapter 3, showcasing its usefulness for the examination of status dilemmas at the practice level.

²² On abductive analysis, see Timmermans, Stefan and Iddo Tavory, 2012. Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological theory*, 30(3), 167-186.

²³ Pouliot, Vincent, 2014. "Chapter 9: Practice tracing" in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* edited by Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, 237-259.

The first empirical study examines India's green ambitions during two climate conferences within the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC), namely the COP27 and COP28. These annual Conferences of the Parties (COP) climate conferences gather a multitude of stakeholders every year for formal and informal negotiations. This case study shows the tensions in which Indian officials sought to deal with their green ambitions, with these tensions apparent in practices not only during the conferences, but also before and after them.

During COP28, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that he would like to host COP33 in India in 2028. In doing so, he showed Indian willingness to bear a material price for hosting climate talks and a non-material price through greater international scrutiny. This case illustrates how India's green ambitions generated tensions before, during, and after the COPs, requiring diplomats to constantly recalibrate India's stance between ambition, caution, and coalition maintenance.

The second empirical case study examines India's presidency of the Group of 20 (G20), during which Indian officials also dealt with green ambitions and the dilemmas which arise because of these. The G20 presidency was chosen since the G20 constitutes a status group rich in status asymmetries.²⁴ The G20 meetings encompass negotiations about climate, energy, and multiple other global issues.²⁵ In contrast to the climate negotiation conferences focused on in the first case study, where Indian officials travel abroad to participate in multilateral negotiations, during India's G20 presidency foreign counterparts traveled to India to partake in multilateral negotiations. This study illuminates a major green status dilemma facing Indian officials during this historic presidency.

²⁴ Naylor, Tristen, 2022. Social closure and the reproduction of stratified international order. *International Relations*, 36(1), 23-39.

²⁵ For a brief review of climate diplomacy in the G20, see Raha, Shuva, Jain, Prayank, Dang, Kinshu, Nordenstam, Axel, 2023. Jobs, Growth, and Sustainability: The Case for a G20 Task Force on Integrated Climate Actions. T20 Policy Brief, *Observer Research Foundation*.

The third case study examines the effect of India's green ambitions on bilateral diplomacy with the European Union. It studies how these ambitions impacted diplomacy in the run-up to an India-EU summit. Since India had agreed to host the summit, it was covering the material costs and also faced greater external attention relating to India's reputation in Europe. In this case, officials experienced demanding discussions about environmental protection in the trade deal negotiations. This case study reveals the difficult task faced by India of seeking acceptance for green ambitions while also maintaining its developing country status.

The case studies build on a diverse set of empirics, including: 36 semi-structured elite interviews, photos, press releases from meetings issued by India's Ministry of External Affairs, books and reports written by experts and retired officials, participant observations, participant lists, social media posts, and news items. I conducted fieldwork in Egypt at COP27, in November 2022, and in New Delhi, from September 2023 until March 2024. In India, I was a Visiting Fellow with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), a private research institute in the capital. Besides the elite interviews, I also learned a great deal from numerous informal conversations with people with insight into Indian diplomacy. These informal conversations were interactions with gatekeepers, those individuals who provide further access to others. This is a frequent academic practice for scholars seeking access to elites and bureaucracies.²⁶ I had these informal conversations during lunches, receptions, or ordinary coffee breaks. The use of a combination of different forms of data is often the preferred option for scholars studying Indian foreign policy, since Indian officials historically have been reluctant to talk to foreign

²⁶ Marland, Alex and Anna Lennox Esselment, 2019. Negotiating with gatekeepers to get interviews with politicians: qualitative research recruitment in a digital media environment, *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 19 (6), 685-702. Sindre, Gyde M., 2021. "Chapter 19: Gatekeepers" in *The Companion to Peace and Conflict Fieldwork* edited by R. Mac Ginty et al. (eds.), 237-248.

researchers and access to diplomats in real-time can be demanding.²⁷ Combining methods of data collection is also a common research strategy among practice scholars.²⁸

These research design choices enable the study to show, in a grounded and systematic way, how India's green ambitions generate tensions within the everyday work of its diplomats and officials. By combining iterative concept development with rich, practice-oriented data, the research design allows the analysis to identify and trace the recognition, epistemic, and normative tensions that constitute status dilemmas in real time. Together, this approach positions Indian diplomats as key actors in the *engine room* where status ambitions are negotiated and provides the empirical foundation for theorizing about the strategies for managing status dilemmas which they employ.

1.6. Organization of the study

This dissertation consists of nine chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides a literature overview that positions this study in existing scholarship. This chapter discusses foreign policy ambitions and Indian foreign policy, and it locates the empirical focus of this study in the academic camp of wideners of Indian climate diplomacy. Chapter 3 develops an original analytical framework for the study of status dilemmas. This chapter argues that we can study status dilemmas in practice by closely examining three types of tensions: epistemic tensions, normativity tensions, and recognition tensions. The chapter concludes by outlining the analytical steps that can be used to apply this framework. Thus, the theory chapter develops a practice-based analytical approach to status dilemmas by linking the increasingly popular status literature with the practice literature. Chapter 4 presents considerations regarding

²⁷ Pant and Paliwal 2019.

²⁸ See e.g., Bremberg, Niklas, 2023. The OSCE and climate security: diplomatic practice in a changing geopolitical context. *International Affairs*, 99 (3), 1149-1165.

the research design, methodology, and methods of data collection for this study. Like much practice scholarship, the chapter devotes considerable attention to the positionality of the researcher and to reflexivity. The chapter discusses how the analysis was produced in an abductive way. Following these four chapters, the study proceeds with four empirical chapters.

Chapter 5 is a background chapter that gives historical context about India's participation in climate negotiations and describes how India's green ambitions have evolved over time. This chapter discusses insiders' reactions to India's green ambitions as well as the development of new institutional capacity within the Indian Foreign Service (IFS). Chapter 6 examines how India's green ambitions induce tensions for Indian officials in contemporary climate negotiations. The analysis illustrates the operational and conceptual challenges faced by Indian officials dealing with climate negotiations. Chapter 7 provides a behind-the-scenes analysis of one of Modi's prestige projects: India's first G20 presidency. The chapter reveals that New Delhi pursued a green assertion during the presidency that produced tensions for the IFS. The analysis illustrates how Indian officials navigated severe status dilemma dynamics in practice as they pushed for their own green ambitions in the G20 setting. Chapter 8 examines India's reactions to European green ambitions in the run-up to an India-EU summit, revealing how a milder form of status dilemma dynamics play out. The chapter illustrates how Indian diplomats were faced with the contestation and accommodation of India's green ambitions.

The conclusion, Chapter 9, theorizes the strategies that civil servants can use to manage status dilemmas in global climate politics. Drawing on lessons from the Indian case, this chapter produces insights about contemporary climate diplomacy relevant to other bureaucracies worldwide. It discusses implications for the IFS and for India's partners around the world. The chapter reflects on the limitations of the study and suggests directions for future research.

2. State-of-the-art

2.1. Introduction

This literature review chapter positions the study within relevant academic debates. Naturally, the literature review is subject to limitations in scope, balancing intellectual depth with readability. The chapter therefore focuses on foreign policy ambitions, Indian foreign policy, and Indian climate diplomacy. The first part of the chapter discusses the distinction between power-seeking and status-seeking in the context of foreign policy ambitions. This establishes that foreign policy ambitions can encompass and reveal a diverse range of behaviors and political orientations. The chapter then provides an overview of how existing literature has studied Indian foreign policy. In doing so, it argues that there is a knowledge deficit concerning the practices of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS). The chapter examines different strands in the literature on Indian foreign policy. It distinguishes between two intellectual camps within the study of Indian climate foreign policy – the *narrowers* and the *wideners*. It positions this thesis within the intellectual camp of the *wideners*.

2.2. Ways of interpreting foreign policy ambitions

Undoubtedly, there are multiple ways of understanding ambitions in the international system. These can inform our understanding of the social dynamics

occurring between diplomats and state representatives both within, and between, different countries. This section draws on realist and constructivist perspectives on power and status. It shows how a non-traditional lens, focused on status-seeking, offers theoretical foundations for a deeper understanding of status dynamics. The discussion is structured around two different lenses for the study of ambition in foreign policy. First, is a power-seeking lens which looks at the milieu of ambitions as an anarchic milieu in which material factors reside in structural competition. Second, is a status-seeking lens that considers the milieu of ambitions as a hierarchical milieu in which social and material elements relate to each other. Adopting a power-seeking lens implies studying the ability of actors to change the behavior of other actors. Meanwhile, adopting a status-seeking lens involves examining the politics of acceptance of different types of behavior. The most striking difference between power and status is that status depends on recognition by another actor. An actor can invest in material power, or in its ability to navigate power dynamics, and effectively pursue its ambitions. However, without recognition by other actors involved in the same milieu, the actor will still lack status. This thesis argues that adopting a status-seeking lens is the most productive way to build new insights about green ambitions in social dynamics.

The use of a power-seeking lens to study foreign policy ambitions has a long intellectual history, dating back to the foundational texts on power. Any student of international affairs knows that power is anything but a minor issue in the discipline.²⁹ Power features prominently in Hobbesian and Machiavelian political philosophy, while non-Western intellectual giants, such as the Chinese thinker Sun Tzu and the Indian philosopher Kautilya, were also very concerned about it. Similarly, the founding fathers of realist IR saw explanatory strength in power approaches. Morgenthau devoted his seminal work to the struggle for power and became a leading scholar of great power politics.

²⁹ For a guide to the study of power in IR, see e.g. Baldwin, David A., 2016. *Power and International Relations: A Conceptual Approach*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Power features prominently in Carr's reflections about power and morality during the interwar period. These seminal books have stimulated intellectuals in the discipline for decades.

In the study of IR, a mainstream understanding builds on a core assumption of the power-seeking lens, namely that states with ambitions enter into conflicts because they seek power. Historical studies about conflicts supported this assumption, producing evidence that states with different ambitions are prone to enter conflicts.³⁰ International ambitions, however, do not simply emerge, but rather originate from political debates and illusions that the leadership develops at the domestic level.³¹ Over time, power-seeking scholarship has become more open to contextual explanations and to the idea that a state's foreign policy ambitions rely on temporal and situational prerequisites. An example of this is found in the work of Fordham, who argues that "establishing overseas colonies was once a goal of many states but has now been almost entirely abandoned" because the number of colonies overseas was not a sign of power ambitions.³² However, recent examples of territorial ambitions – such as the Russian President Putin's invasion of Ukraine and US President Trump's bid for Greenland – suggest that Fordham's claim may be premature. These events indicate that territorial expansion remains a marker of status-seeking behavior even if traditional colonization has declined. Although the power-seeking lens on ambitions has gradually accepted more nuanced explanations, it still offers a materialistic, structural, and fairly thin view of international affairs. A power-seeking lens implies a focus on indicators such as the size of an economy, army, and population, instead of embracing indicators about how these factors play out in relationships.

³⁰ Levy, Jack, 1983. *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky; see also the classic piece by Kennedy, Paul, 1988/2017. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. London: William Collins.

³¹ Snyder, Jack., 1991. *Myths of empire: Domestic politics and international ambition*. Cornell University Press.

³² Fordham, Benjamin O., 2011. Who wants to be a major power? Explaining the expansion of foreign policy ambition, *Journal of Peace Research*, 602.

A bridge between the power-seeking lens and the status-seeking lens is offered by the constructivists Barnett and Duvall who underscored social relations in the study of power. They view power as “the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate.”³³ Their conception of power as an element shaping a social game about actors’ futures in hierarchical power relations points to the relationship between power-seeking and status-seeking.

The work using a status-seeking lens to study foreign policy ambitions has evolved over time. It has moved from traditionalist scholars, such as Levy and Gilpin, who work on great power status, to non-traditionalist scholars, such as Welch Larson and Ward, who treat status as a social phenomenon. Traditionalists examine status distribution in absolute terms, whereas non-traditionalists examine status distribution in relative terms.³⁴ A starting point among traditionalists is that status-seeking is relational and that we can identify these relations by looking at actors’ material resources. The traditionalist view on status-seeking and foreign policy ambitions stems from research on power transition theory and realist IR. Traditionalists draw on an observation by the power politics scholar Morgenthau. Morgenthau remarked that status [prestige] is “as intrinsic an element of the relations between nations as the desire for status [prestige] is of relations between individuals.”³⁵ Another influential IR scholar, Gilpin, has also had an impact on traditionalist views of status-seeking. He advanced a reputational view that status [prestige] “is the reputation for power” serving as “the everyday currency of international relations, much as authority is the central ordering feature of domestic society.”³⁶

³³ Barnett and Duvall, 2005, 42.

³⁴ See e.g., Renshon’s (2017, 35-44) discussion about status as a relative source, rather than an absolute element that states “have” or “not have”. On relative status, see also Welch Larson, Deborah and Shevchenko, Alexei, 2010. Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy. *International Security*, 34(4), 63–95.

³⁵ Morgenthau, 1960, 73.

³⁶ Gilpin, 1981, 31.

Traditionalists tend to emphasize military capacity when analyzing foreign policy ambitions. Meanwhile, non-traditionalists have turned the status-seeking lens into a more interdisciplinary agenda, drawing on sociological thought, social identity theories, and even the English School of International Relations. Some non-traditionalists draw on these literatures, whereas others base their theoretical frameworks on social constructivism. Non-traditionalists have examined the behavior of rising powers in international institutions and studied how established powers can deal with rising powers seeking status.³⁷

In essence, the status-seeking lens shows how a state's ambitions are about raising its status in the international system, in a way that is similar to how individuals seek to strengthen their status in society. Thus, a status-seeking lens offers an alternative understanding. This is in sharp contrast to a power-seeking lens that is frequently grounded in arguments about the national interest, speaking about this as if it were a predefined interest steering decisions about ambitions. In most cases, these ambitions are almost always accompanied by tensions, frictions, and contestations that spur responses. Consequently, a status-seeking lens on foreign policy ambitions provides an analytical foundation for the understanding of status dynamics offered in this thesis.

A status-seeking lens enables us to make sense of tensions about ambitions. Most of the existing literature sees the outcome of status-seeking to primarily be conflictual rather than accommodation.³⁸ In sum, the non-traditionalist view on status-seeking, which concentrates on the social dynamics involved, provides a promising conceptual foundation to understand the inherent dilemmas in climate foreign policy. Although these non-traditional perspectives have set the stage for analysis of the social side of status, IR research is still

³⁷ Paul, T.V. ed., 2016; Ward 2017; Mukherjee 2022; Murray 2019.

³⁸ Paul, T. V., and Mahesh Shankar, 2014. Status accommodation through institutional means: India's rise and the global order. *Status in world politics*, 176, 165-91; Renshon, Jonathan, 2017. *Fighting for status: Hierarchy and conflict in world politics*. Princeton University Press; Ward, Steven, 2020. Status, stratified rights, and accommodation in international relations. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 5(1), 160-178.

lacking studies that focus more closely on the social dynamics that are connected to the pursuit of status.

2.3. India's foreign relations

There has been a growing amount of research and intellectual attention given to India's foreign relations. Scholars and experts residing inside and outside of Indian territory have studied many aspects of India's external relations with its neighborhood, the US, Europe, Russia, China, Asian and African countries, and Latin America.³⁹ The scholarship about contemporary Indian foreign policy identifies patterns of imperialism, realism, isolationism, and even messianic idealism as shaping forces.⁴⁰ To some, India's diverse international relations are very different from those of its neighbor Pakistan. In its international relations, Pakistan has developed a foreign policy aimed at India, the US, China, and a few countries in the Middle East instead of pursuing a broader reach.⁴¹ Others view India's global reach as linked with multilateralism and its engagements within the United Nations system.⁴² Academic scholarship on India's international relations documents a wide variety of relationships and diplomatic efforts and offers material, ideational, and relational analysis of these.⁴³

³⁹ See e.g., Scott, David, (ed.), 2011, *Handbook of India's International Relations*, Routledge; Malone, David, C. Raja Mohan, Srinath Raghavan (eds.) 2015, *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, Oxford University Press; Pant, Harsh (ed.) 2019, *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis*, Cambridge University Press; Gieg, Philipp (ed.) et al., 2021, *EU-India Relations: The Strategic Partnership in the Light of the European Union Global Strategy*, Springer.

⁴⁰ Pande, Aparna, 2017. *From Chanakya to Modi: The Evolution of India's Foreign Policy*. Noida: HarperCollins, 14.

⁴¹ Cohen, Stephen Philip, 2001. *India Emerging Power*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 72.

⁴² Michael, Arndt, 2019. "India and Multilateralism: Concepts, New Trajectories and Theorizing" in *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis* edited by Harsh Pant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 149-172.

⁴³ Unsurprisingly, monographs about India's foreign policy sometimes take these three perspectives too. E.g. Pande, Aparna, 2017. *From Chanakya to Modi: The Evolution of India's Foreign Policy*, HarperCollins Publishers.

The academic literature can be divided into two different views about the history of India's foreign relations. Depending on which argument they adopt, studies then provide different accounts of India's foreign policy choices, strategies, and outcomes. To be clear, the different views of India's history are not due to the fact that there is an extensive literature about the country's diplomatic history and foreign affairs. On the contrary, according to Thakur "diplomatic history is one of the most neglected areas of scholarship in studies on Indian foreign policy."⁴⁴ He goes on to say that "this has led to an overemphasis on the agency of Nehru and underappreciation of the significant role some of India's diplomats played at international forums in the early years."

However, the dominant position in the literature is that India's foreign relations emerged after independence in 1947. Scholars subscribing to this position highlight the influence of the first Prime Minister, Nehru, on the country's foreign policy and the ideational elements of this policy.⁴⁵ Internationalist in nature, the classical Nehruvian school of Indian foreign policy stresses that the country should avoid taking sides in the competition between the two great powers present in the international system after World War II – the US and the Soviet Union. In addition to avoiding siding with either great power, Nehruvian thinking views the world through a postcolonial lens, with a particular aversion to the British Empire and with an emphasis on global solidarity with non-aligned countries. Classical Nehruvianism initially stressed a peace-oriented approach informed by Mahatma Gandhi's preference for non-violence.⁴⁶ However, the Nehruvian school was significantly challenged by the 1962 Sino-Indian War. After this, a new school emerged which has been

⁴⁴ Thakur, Vineet, 2018, "'Panditji Knows Best': Bureaucratic Culture and the Making of the Ministry of External Affairs", in *Postscripts on Independence: Foreign Policy Ideas, Identity, and Institutions in India and South Africa*, edited by Vineet Thakur et al., footnote 1, 197.

⁴⁵ E.g. Cohen 2001, 37.

⁴⁶ Kaur, Navtej, 2008. Nehru as a Prophet of World Peace, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 203-222.

labelled “Militant Nehruvianism.”⁴⁷ As Cohen observed, to members of this militant school, “the world was composed of threats, not opportunities.”⁴⁸

The geopolitical turn in Nehruvian thought reflects another view on history. The emphasis on spheres of influence in the form of a *mandala* model brought the ancient Indian philosopher Kautilya’s thinking back to the forefront. As such, this reflects a second position about when India’s foreign relations really began. This second position argues that India’s role in the world can be traced back much further in history, beyond Nehru’s establishment of an independent India, and beyond the independence movement against the British Empire. Scholars subscribing to this perspective tend to derive explanations from ancient Indian philosophy.⁴⁹ A prominent example of scholars seeking historical explanations beyond Nehru is Hall’s *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy* (2019). In this book, the Australian scholar traces India’s contemporary foreign policy direction back to Hindu nationalist ideology. While the notion of civilizational states reflects the ultra-long view of history, scholars disagree about its ramifications. To some, the making of a civilizational state is related to the making of a Hindu nationalist India.⁵⁰ To others, the transformational process involved in projecting India as a civilizational state abroad serves to position India more dominantly in the global hierarchy.⁵¹ Thus, in such longer views of India history, its foreign policy direction is understood as being postcolonial but also civilizational. In these accounts, the foreign policy which India has pursued in recent years reflects its transformation from a former colony towards a civilizational state with a global footprint.

⁴⁷ Cohen 2001, 41.

⁴⁸ Cohen 2001, 42.

⁴⁹ Narlikar, Amrita and Aruna Narlikar, 2014. *Bargaining with a Rising India: Lessons from the Mahabharata*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Hall, Ian, 2019. *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

⁵⁰ Hall, Ian, 2017. Narendra Modi and India’s normative power, *International Affairs*, Vol. 93 (1), 123.

⁵¹ Sullivan de Estrada, Kate, 2023. What is a vishwaguru? Indian civilizational pedagogy as a transformative global imperative, *International Affairs*, Vol. 99 (2), 454.

A central strand of scholarship examines India's role in the world from a material perspective. This realist scholarship often highlights military capabilities. Many studies, for example, emphasize events such as the Sino-Indian War in 1962, which is seen to have revealed Nehru's lack of military deterrence.⁵² To many, military capability and nuclear weapon capacity enable India to rise to the top tier of countries worldwide.⁵³ Through the expansion of material resources, including military power and the size of its economy, India is expected to rise. Such optimistic thinking has resulted in scholarship depicting India as an "emerging superpower,"⁵⁴ a "rising power,"⁵⁵ and a "great power."⁵⁶ While material perspectives on India's role in the world do not automatically greet India's rise with complete optimism, many of them treat India's rise as inevitable. As the prolific public intellectual Mohan expressed twenty years ago, after "disappointing itself for decades, India is now on the verge of becoming a great power."⁵⁷

In light of this, it is no surprise that another strand of research emphasizes how ideational elements such as norms, ideas, and identities shape India's foreign relations.⁵⁸ In contrast to the material perspectives, these discuss how India's soft power strategies in the 1990s and early 2000s enabled improved relationships with other states in its neighborhood.⁵⁹ Throughout the years,

⁵² Pant 2019, 18.

⁵³ Nayar, B. R. and T.V. Paul, 2003. *India in the World Order: Searching for Major-Power Status*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Karnad, Bharat, 2015. *Why India is not a Great Power (yet)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Ganguly, Sumit 2015. *Oxford India Short Introductions: Indian Foreign Policy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁴ Cohen 2001; Paul and Nayar 2003; Malone 2011.

⁵⁵ Khilnani, Sunil, 2005. "India as a Bridging Power" in India as a New Global Leader edited by Prasenjit K. Basu, Brahma Chellaney, Parag Khanna, Sunil Khilnani, *Foreign Policy Centre*, 1-15; Sridharan, Eswaran. 2015. "Rising or Constrained Power?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy* edited by David M. Malone, R. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 708.

⁵⁶ Pradesi, Manjeet, 2015. Is India a Great Power? Understanding Great Power Status in Contemporary International Relations, *Asian Security*, 1-30.

⁵⁷ Mohan, Raja, 2006. India and the Balance of Power, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85 (4), 17.

⁵⁸ E.g. Chatterjee Miller 2013; Pant and Super 2019; Hall 2019.

⁵⁹ Wagner, Christian, 2005. "From Hard Power to Soft Power? Ideas, Interaction, Institutions, and Images in India's South Asia Policy", Working Paper 26, Heidelberg, Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics.

however, scholars have considered soft power as part of India's global reach beyond its neighbors.⁶⁰ Nehruvian ideas about solidarity with postcolonial countries and the non-alignment movement capture this ideational perspective. Unsurprisingly, literature considering identities and norms is less certain that India's rise towards greatness is inevitable but instead argues that it is neither predetermined nor linear.⁶¹

Relational perspectives constitute a third strand in the literature. The term relational is sometimes used to refer to relationships between India and its partners and enemies. However, the relational scholarship of India's foreign policy instead captures processes, diplomatic interactions and negotiations, and inter-state policymaking. In the Indian setting, relational studies challenge the idea that the Indian Prime Minister is the ultimate shaper and the key player in India's foreign policy.⁶² Understanding the views of people in the "strategic core" of India's foreign policy also incorporates relational thinking about India's position in the world.⁶³ Recognizing the stakeholders surrounding the decision-makers has also motivated former foreign diplomats posted in New Delhi to share their insights.⁶⁴

2.4. Indian foreign policy practice

One of the foundations for the study of Indian climate foreign policy in practice conducted in this thesis is the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) literature focused on India's external relations. Reviewing the scholarship on Indian foreign policy, Pant and Paliwal note that there is a lack of studies of the policy-

⁶⁰ Chauhan 2014; Kugiel 2017.

⁶¹ Basrur, Rajesh and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 2017. *Rising India: Status and Power*. Abingdon: Routledge, 113.

⁶² Pant, Harsh V. and Avinish Paliwal, 2019. "Foreign Policy Analysis and Indian Foreign Policy" in Pant 2019, 107.

⁶³ Narang, Vipin and Paul Staniland, 2012. Institutions and Worldviews in Indian Foreign Security Policy, *India Review*, 11:2, 76-94.

⁶⁴ Malone 2011, 5-10.

making processes in which individuals operate.⁶⁵ They turn to traditional FPA, seeing this as an intellectual remedy rather than an embrace of the mundane, specifically a focus on the everyday practices. Their thought-provoking chapter offers guidance that can help address a broader limitation found in literature studying Indian foreign policy, which tends to be heavy on empirics and thin on theory.⁶⁶ Surprisingly, however, the chapter misses the practice turn in IR and the way that practice theory encourages empirical research at the ground level of diplomacy. The authors fruitfully engage with conventional FPA as it has been developed by Hudson. However, they exclude research about daily diplomatic activities. A reason might be methodological, given they observe that “fieldwork in India is not always easy [so that] scholars must be encouraged to undertake field trips and policymakers be made aware of the value of deeper engagement with academics.”⁶⁷ Against this backdrop, Pant and Paliwal invite scholars to embrace FPA in the study of Indian foreign policy-processes. Indeed, a recent study about contemporary Indian foreign policy practice underscored how Indian decision-makers and officials signal their strategy through implicature, as a way of social hedging in the Indo-Pacific region.⁶⁸ This kind of emerging scholarship helps open doors for a new practice-informed study of Indian climate diplomacy.

Scholars increasingly challenge the notion that the Indian Prime Minister is the ultimate shaper of India’s foreign policy.⁶⁹ Rather, India’s foreign policy is the result of the involvement of three actors: the Prime Minister’s Office,

⁶⁵ Pant, Harsh V. and Avinash Paliwal, 2019. “Chapter 6. Foreign Policy Analysis and Indian Foreign Policy” in *New Directions in India’s Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis* edited by Harsh Pant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 106-124.

⁶⁶ Ganguly, Sumit and Manjeet S. Pradesi, 2015. “Chapter 4. Foreign Policy Analysis in India” in *Foreign Policy Analysis Beyond North America* edited by Klaus Brummer, and Valerie M. Hudson, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 57-76.

⁶⁷ Pant and Paliwal, 2019, 120.

⁶⁸ Khan, Raphaëlle and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 2024. Signalling through implicature: How India signals in the Indo-Pacific. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 27(1), 46.

⁶⁹ Pant, Harsh and Avinash Paliwal, 2019. “Foreign Policy Analysis and Indian Foreign Policy” in Pant 2019, 107.

the National Security Council, and the Ministry of External Affairs.⁷⁰ Some scholars even suggest that the making of Indian foreign policy constitutes the result of thinking by the Indian “strategic core” group.⁷¹ Interestingly, researchers have described how the Indian elite establishment “desperately wants global recognition for India as a major power and all the prestige and authority associated with it. Yet, they continue to be reticent about the acquisition and use of power in foreign affairs.”⁷² There is therefore a strategic community in India, just like in the US. Yet, unlike the US, which publishes grand strategic documents regularly, Indian diplomacy does not publish such strategies in a way that these can be studied by the strategic community and scholars. Rather, India’s policy positions on various foreign policy issues are expressed in speeches and implicature rather than overarching strategic documents.⁷³

A special issue in the journal *India Review* provides new insights into the policy-processes surrounding Indian foreign policy.⁷⁴ This special issue responds to Blarel and Paliwal’s encouragement to “open the black box” of Indian foreign policy, instead of keeping it closed as scholars traditionally have done. The issue offers a set of case studies on personalities operating inside structures. While it provides insights into the “bureaucratic apparatus shaping India’s foreign policy outlook,” none of the contributions responds to the practice turn in IR.⁷⁵

There are a small number of studies in the literature on Indian foreign policy that embrace human interactions, somewhat aligned with the emerging attention to practices in IR. After retiring as a career diplomat, Rana produced

⁷⁰ See e.g., Cohen 2001; Chatterjee Miller 2013.

⁷¹ Narang and Staniland, 2012.

⁷² Pant 2011, 19.

⁷³ Chatterjee Miller 2013; Khan, Raphaëlle and Kate Sullivan de Estrada 2024, Signalling through implicature: How India signals in the Indo-Pacific. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 27(1), 46.

⁷⁴ Blarel, Nicolas and Avinash Paliwal, 2019. Opening the black box – The making of India’s foreign policy, *India Review*, 18:5, 457-470.

⁷⁵ Blarel and Paliwal, 2019, 485.

one of the first books about the inner workings of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA, i.e., the Indian Foreign Office), with a survey of 40 experts, close analysis of documents, and the insights he has acquired through his career.⁷⁶ He stresses the impact that the thoughts and decisions of individuals can have on multilateral diplomacy:

The day-to-day work on UN issues at MEA witnesses an imbalance between the much slimmer manpower at Headquarters, and the field. It reaches the point where there is often no one to digest the stream of committee reports and documentation emerging from the Missions in New York and Geneva. Nor do the Missions receive instructions that go much beyond the general contours of established policy, leaving it to those handling the actual meetings to work out details, and to act as they see it.⁷⁷

Similarly, Levallant describes how the agency of individual diplomats is “probably greater in India than in bigger foreign ministries” because the IFS is understaffed but still functions as an exclusive status group in the Indian bureaucracy.⁷⁸ Her insights were based on elite interviews conducted in 2013, more than a decade after Rana’s book was published.

Datta-Ray carried out research conducted inside the MEA, with access endorsed by the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, which resulted in a book about the inner functioning of Indian diplomacy through the lens of ancient Indian philosophy. He provides an insightful history of Indian diplomacy and notes how diplomacy “remains centralized...in the PMO to this day.”⁷⁹ After conducting this research, he noted that “IR is unable to actually research

⁷⁶ Rana, Kishan S., 2000. *Inside Diplomacy*. Manas Publications: New Delhi.

⁷⁷ Rana, 2000, 210-211.

⁷⁸ Levallant, Méliisa, 2017. “The Contribution of Neo-Institutionalism to the Analysis of India’s Diplomacy in the Making” in *Theorizing Indian Foreign Policy*, edited by Mischa Hansel, Raphaëlle Khan, and Méliisa Levallant. New York: Routledge, 168.

⁷⁹ Datta-Ray, Deep K., 2015. *The Making of Indian Diplomacy: A Critique of Eurocentrism*. Hurst. 217.

Indian diplomatic society because it is closed.”⁸⁰ However, he still encourages researchers to consult memoirs and leaked diplomatic cables through Wikileaks in their practice-oriented research.⁸¹ A few years after Datta-Ray’s fieldwork inside the Indian foreign service, Huju conducted over 80 in-depth interviews with retired and serving Indian diplomats in New Delhi, constituting an empirical base for a new sociological take on Indian diplomacy.⁸² These studies provide insights about the making of Indian diplomacy, but offer few clues about how civil servants deal with India’s green ambitions in international climate diplomacy.

A decade ago, Chatterjee Miller contended that “New Delhi is not likely to take the lead on climate change” because of a “discomfort with the idea that great power brings great power responsibility.”⁸³ Based on interviews conducted in New Delhi in the early 2010s, Chatterjee Miller’s exceptionally insightful article emphasized several constraining factors. These include the way that individual senior officials cherry-pick strategic direction rather than receiving top-down guidance, there is an absence of internal documents on grand strategy, and there is limited contact with foreign counterparts in which New Delhi’s self-image could emerge. They also include a “fear that the notion of the country’s rise is a Western construct.”⁸⁴ Although Chatterjee Miller did not present this research as practice-scholarship, the article informs us about the instinctive behavior of Indian officials. It is therefore very similar to the practice turn in diplomatic studies. However, it is unclear to what extent

⁸⁰ Datta-Ray, Deep K., 2013. “4. The Analysis of the Practice of Indian Diplomacy”, in *Political Science: Volume 4: India Engages the World*, edited by Navnita Chadha Behera and Achin Vanaik, 252.

⁸¹ Datta-Ray, Deep K., 2013.

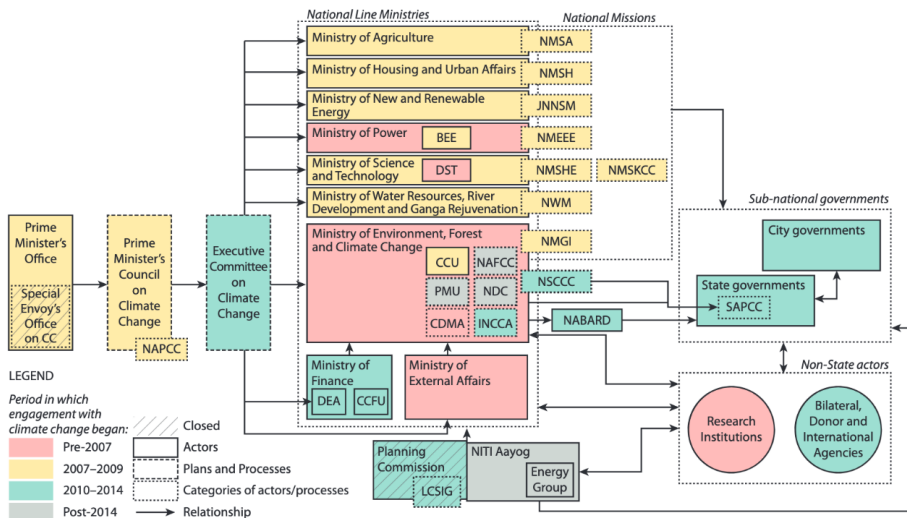
⁸² Huju, Kira, 2023. *Cosmopolitan elites: Indian diplomats and the social hierarchies of global order*. Oxford University Press. See also Huju, Kira. 2022. Saffronizing diplomacy: the Indian Foreign Service under Hindu nationalist rule. *International Affairs*, 98(2), 423-441.

⁸³ Chatterjee Miller, Manjari, 2013. “India’s Feeble Foreign Policy: A Would-Be Great Power Resists Its Own Rise”, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2013, Vol. 92, No. 3, 19.

⁸⁴ Chatterjee Miller, 2013, 14.

the characteristics which Chatterjee Miller observed amongst Indian officials have changed in the past ten years.

Even though foreign policy practices are performed in processes, the processes of India's climate foreign policy have received little attention from scholars. Examination of the actors involved in the policy-making processes in New Delhi suggests a multitude of actors performing various practices. Dubash's overview, see Figure below, indicates that there are competing perspectives in India about Indian green ambitions.⁸⁵



Source: Dubash, Navroz K. and Shibani Ghosh, 2019. "Chapter 19: National Climate Policies and Institutions" in *India in a Warming World: Integrating Climate Change and Development* edited by Navroz K. Dubash. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 339.

Researchers have also shed light on the understaffed Indian Foreign Service, the minimal coordination in civil-military relations, and the politicization of

⁸⁵ Dubash, Navroz K. and Shibani Ghosh, 2019. "Chapter 19: National Climate Policies and Institutions" in *India in a Warming World: Integrating Climate Change and Development* edited by Navroz K. Dubash, 339. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also Nordenstam, Axel, 2020. "Unpacking EU-India Clean Energy Relations: Actors, Advocacy Coalitions, and Policy-learning". MA thesis [unpublished], 68 pages, for a Master of Arts in Contemporary European Studies: Politics, Policy and Society, University of Bath.

Indian diplomacy during the Modi era.⁸⁶ They have detailed the functioning of different branches inside the Indian public administration.⁸⁷ We also know about the almost endless paper production and corruption inside state governments.⁸⁸ Paul provides a historical account of India's rise, arguing that the spread of corruption has constrained India's rise.⁸⁹ He describes an often observed difference between India and China: "It is often stated that while the Indian bureaucracy is corrupt, the problem is that they do not deliver even after accepting bribes. The Chinese bureaucracy is also corrupt, but they often deliver."⁹⁰ Outside of academia, the organization Human Rights Watch has documented the narrowing space for voices of dissent in India. It describes how this affected the Indian branch of Greenpeace, an environmental NGO potentially influencing India's decisions about climate policy, which had its registration revoked in late 2015 following a classified assessment by the Indian internal security intelligence services.⁹¹ These kinds of studies show how Indian climate diplomacy is shaped by various actors. There is therefore some literature suggesting that Indian climate foreign policy is the result of broader social processes occurring within the country.

In a nutshell, there is no consensus among scholars about what India's green ambitions imply for Indian diplomacy. Hall understands these green ambitions as an effort to present India "as exciting, engaged with the world, equipped with wisdom that might help humankind move beyond clashes of

⁸⁶ Bajpai, Kanti and Byron Chong, 2019. India's Foreign Policy Capacity, Policy Design and Practice, 2:2, 137-162, DOI: 10.1080/25741292.2019.1615164; Mukherjee, Anit, 2020. *The absent dialogue: Politicians, bureaucrats, and the military in India*. Oxford University Press, USA; Hujju, Kira, 2023. *Cosmopolitan elites: Indian diplomats and the social hierarchies of global order*. Oxford University Press.

⁸⁷ Fleischman, Forrest, 2016. Understanding India's forest bureaucracy: a review. *Regional Environmental Change*, 16(Suppl 1), 153-165.

⁸⁸ Mathur, Nayanika, 2016. *Paper tiger: Law, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State in Himalayan India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁸⁹ Paul, T.V. 2024, 168.

⁹⁰ Paul, T.V. 2024, 168.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch, 2016. Country chapter: India. Available: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/india>; Talukdar, R. 2018. Reigniting a debate on coal: Case study on the Indian Government's crackdown on Greenpeace. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 10(1), 47-62.

values and beliefs, and environmentally conscious, as well as economically vibrant.”⁹² In contrast, Paul is more skeptical and argues that “India, despite high ambitions for international status, shows a lethargic attitude on urban pollution and the ill-effects of climate change.”⁹³ Others, such as Mukherjee, argue that Indian officials are pursuing “proactive climate multilateralism.”⁹⁴ Yet another group view Modi’s environmental agenda as embedded in a wider ideological project of creating a Hindu state.⁹⁵ In this context, Sengupta comes to the conclusion that Indian diplomacy is involved in face-saving activities representing “the net result of the balancing out of a number of different factors and considerations.”⁹⁶ Others have noted how the Indian army responds to climate change through symbolic, strategic, precautionary, and transformative action.⁹⁷ However, we still lack a deep understand of India’s green ambitions in diplomatic settings.

Although these accounts all emphasize the existence of Indian foreign policy practice, they tell us very little about how India’s green ambitions affect the actions which officials engage in when they are in diplomatic settings. The academic community has missed the effect of India’s green ambitions on the foreign service.

⁹² Hall, Ian, 2019. *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy*. Bristol UP, 93.

⁹³ Paul, T.V., 2024. *The Unfinished Quest: India’s Search for Major Power Status from Nehru to Modi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 179.

⁹⁴ Mukherjee, Rohan, 2024. A Hindu Nationalist Foreign Policy: Under Modi, India is Becoming More Assertive. *Foreign Affairs*, April 4, 2024.

⁹⁵ Moore, Sam, and Alex Roberts, 2022. *The Rise of Ecofascism: Climate Change and the Far Right*, Polity Press, 61-64.

⁹⁶ Sengupta, Sandeep, 2020. “Deciphering India’s Foreign Policy on Climate Change: Role of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas” in *India Rising: A Multilayered Analysis of Ideas, Interests, and Institutions* edited by Johannes Plagemann, Sandra Destradi, and Amrita Narlikar. Oxford University Press. 190.

⁹⁷ Jayaram, Dhanasree, 2020. ‘Climatizing’ military strategy? A case study of the Indian armed forces. *International Politics*, Vol. 58, 619-639.

2.5. India in global climate politics: Narrowers and wideners

In contrast to the literature on Indian foreign policy, which is rich in realist perspectives, scholarship on Indian climate diplomacy is predominantly constructivist. This literature can be divided into a *narrow* camp and a *wider* camp. The *narrowers* have historically focused on climate negotiations and described India as a “veto player,”⁹⁸ a “stakeholder,”⁹⁹ and a “heroic victim.”¹⁰⁰ For these narrowers, multilateral climate negotiations are the central object of analysis. They especially focus on negotiations taking place at the Conferences of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP) summits.¹⁰¹ Looking at India’s historical behavior in the UNFCCC, the narrowers interpret its long-running defense of the norms of equity and of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capacities (CBDR-RC) as part of its attempt to defend the institutional framework of the UNFCCC.¹⁰² The narrowers understand India to prioritize domestic needs.¹⁰³ Some scholars have even noted that, up until 2007, a common view inside the Indian government was that climate change constituted a “diplomatic problem.”¹⁰⁴ They describe how this perspective makes climate change a subject to be handled by a select group of

⁹⁸ Narlikar, Amrita, 2011. “Is India a Responsible Great Power?”, *Third World Quarterly*, 32:9, 1607–1621.

⁹⁹ Hurrell, Andrew and Sandeep Sengupta. 2012. “Emerging powers, North-South relations, and global climate politics”, *International Affairs*, 88:3, 463-484.

¹⁰⁰ Plagemann, Johannes and Miriam Prys-Hansen, 2018. “‘Responsibility’, change, and rising powers’ role conceptions: comparing Indian foreign policy roles in global climate change negotiations and maritime security”, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Volume 20, (2020) 275–305.

¹⁰¹ In addition to previous literature, see also Chatterjee Miller, Manjari and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 2018. “Continuity and change in Indian grand strategy: The cases of nuclear non-proliferation and climate change,” *India Review*, 17:1, 43-48.

¹⁰² Hurrell and Sengupta 2012, 469.

¹⁰³ Dubash 2009; Rajamani, Lavanya, 2009. India and Climate Change: What India Wants, Needs, and Needs to Do, *India Review*, 8:3, 340-374. See also: Atteridge, Aaron, Manish Kumar Shrivastava, Neha Pahuja, and Himani Upadhyay, 2012. “Climate Policy in India: What Shapes International, National and State Policy?”, *Ambio*, 41:68, 68-77.

¹⁰⁴ Dubash, Navroz K., and Neha B. Joseph, 2016. Evolution of Institutions for Climate Policy in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(3), 46.

experienced officials from the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of External Affairs. They also add that some of these officials have been involved from the very beginning, remembering the early days of climate talks in the 1980s.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, the latter has seen India acting in ways that increased rather than hindered the scope of the negotiations.

A prime example of the narrow view on India's practice of climate diplomacy is offered by Saran and Jones. They examined discourses featured in debates and speeches, carrying out conventional media analysis. In their informative book, they present six identities as indicative of practices India adopts: the rural, the energy security, the industrial, the entrepreneurial, the developing nation, and the emerging nation identities.¹⁰⁶ They describe how, during COP15 in Copenhagen, almost 80% of all media articles referred to India's emerging or developing nation identity.¹⁰⁷ They also state that the entrepreneurial, industrial, and rural identities feature regularly in the Indian press. Hence, Saran and Jones write that Indian climate negotiators convey a "narrative of multiple identities". In their words, "the multiplicity of [India's] responses can be explained if the nation were to be reimagined through the narrative of multiple identities."¹⁰⁸ The studies by the narrowers have provided an extensive knowledge base on India's activities in climate negotiations.

The *wideners* are also interested in identity and practice. These wideners make a different argument about India's identity in climate cooperation. This is that New Delhi's "climate persona" has become more comfortable with climate diplomacy across diplomatic platforms, beyond traditional climate negotiations.¹⁰⁹ Xavier and Nachiappan contend that India's "climate persona"

¹⁰⁵ Nachiappan, Karthik, 2019. *Does India Negotiate?* New Delhi: Oxford UP. 58-59.

¹⁰⁶ Saran, Samir and Aled Jones, 2017. *India's Climate Change Identity*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 41.

¹⁰⁷ Saran and Jones 2017, 48.

¹⁰⁸ Saran and Jones 2017, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Nachiappan, Karthik, 2023. India's Sprawling Climate Diplomacy, ISAS Brief, No. 1016 – 8 May 2023, 1.

has matured since it signed the Paris Agreement. India has a transformed identity, with Indian diplomacy accepting and circulating initiatives and proposals rather than making defensive rejections.¹¹⁰ Through this research collaboration with Xavier, Nachiappan has therefore become a widener. Sharing this interest in India's identities, Prys-Hansen developed the idea of "climate imaginaries", or "visions of climate future."¹¹¹ She then studied a large set of speeches by Indian leaders and members of the elite. Interestingly, Prys-Hansen illustrates how climate imaginaries feature in speeches by both the Modi administration and the Singh administration. Viewing these future-oriented speaking points as "an inherent part of Indian philosophy of life," Prys-Hansen emphasizes how climate matters for India's identity and strategy.¹¹²

However, scholarship also underlines that the recurring, forward-looking formulations made by India are not simply continuity but rather a way for Indian officials to navigate "development dilemmas" in global climate politics.¹¹³ Pathak and Parris develop this argument by noting how Indian negotiators critique the rich, often Western, modes of development, whilst at the same time stating that India "desires to be a moral power in global politics."¹¹⁴ Pathak and Parris emphasize how India's postcolonial identity is a prime reason for its behavior in global climate politics. This is in contrast to Prys-Hansen and Saran and Jones who do not use the term "postcolonial" in their analysis. A more skeptical intervention is provided by Mukherjee, who observes that Indian officials pursue "free-riding strategies" and describes how India has not wholeheartedly contributed to the expenditures of climate action while benefitting from multilateral arrangements.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Xavier, Constantino and Karthik Nachiappan, 2023. "Introduction" in *Tracks to Transition: India's Global Climate Strategy*, *Center for Social and Economic Progress*, 2.

¹¹¹ Prys-Hansen, Miriam, 2022. "Futures in the Making: An Analysis of Indian Climate Policy Articulations" in *Global India: The pursuit of status and influence* edited by Chris Ogden, London: Routledge, 174.

¹¹² Prys-Hansen 2022, 187.

¹¹³ Pathak and Parris, 2021.

¹¹⁴ Pathak and Parris, 2021, 1.

¹¹⁵ Mukherjee, Rohan, 2022. *Ascending Order: Rising Powers and the Politics of Status in International Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 296.

Despite the fact that the global climate regime complex is fluid and increasingly unstructured, the wideners thus far have centered their analysis on climate negotiations. Although the wideners take a more holistic view of Indian climate diplomacy than the old-school narrowers, they still center their understanding on the UNFCCC climate negotiations. Yet, there are early signs of a new wave among the wideners. In this developing strand of research, scholars address the increasingly complex global climate regime through functionalist reasoning about the effects of climate diplomacy on India's position in the world. In separate studies, the researchers Jayaram and Jha have pushed the research frontier forwards. They have respectively produced relational and functionalist research projects about the climate diplomacy of emerging powers and about the International Solar Alliance, an international organization hosted by India.¹¹⁶ Jayaram contends that Indian climate diplomacy constitutes a form of status-seeking, but does so without offering any theory of relational politics inside the international climate order.¹¹⁷ She writes that “the global climate order is built upon the UNFCCC and various other historical narratives/frameworks that are derived out of these debates between developed and developing countries.”¹¹⁸ In the view of another scholar, the UNFCCC constitutes an “open but procedurally unfair institution” under the climate change mitigation regime in the international climate order.¹¹⁹ Within the UNFCCC, rising powers do not necessarily struggle to become great powers but rather attempt to rank as symbolically equal with the great powers.¹²⁰ In light of Mukherjee's reasoning about symbolic equality, Jayaram's argument that India seeks the recognition of being an environmental power

¹¹⁶ Jayaram, Dhanasree, 2021. *Climate Diplomacy and Emerging Economies: India as a Case Study*. Routledge; Jha, Vyoma, 2023. *The Making of the International Solar Alliance: India's Moment in the Sun*. Oxford University Press.

¹¹⁷ Jayaram 2021.

¹¹⁸ Jayaram 2021, 125.

¹¹⁹ Mukherjee 2022, 274–275.

¹²⁰ Mukherjee 2022, 274–275.

through multilateral, unilateral, and bilateral climate diplomacy is intriguing.¹²¹

Similar to Jayaram's relational take, Jha notes that during the Modi era there has been an increasing "strategic use of climate change to assert greater power on the global stage."¹²² While Jayaram offers a social explanation for the growing activities by India in this domain, Jha offers a materialistic. She views economic diplomacy and alliance-building as driving forces rather than the abstract goal of higher status that India has pursued since independence. In light of Jayaram and Jha's status and power-seeking arguments, Falkner and Buzan's edited volume on green great power politics offers valuable insights.¹²³ Echoing previous research about rising powers' quest for status in climate negotiations,¹²⁴ Falkner and Buzan contend that countries receive the social status as responsible powers the moment when other countries recognize them as responsible powers in environmental politics. Therefore, "great power status is a social phenomenon that depends on other actors according a country recognition as a responsible power" and not something that emerged from hailing oneself.¹²⁵ In their analysis, India is included as one of several environmental powers, alongside the EU, the US, China, Brazil, and Russia. The tension between Jayaram's argument about India's status-seeking in the international climate order on the one hand, and Falkner and Buzan's thought-provoking reasoning about green great powers invites future research.

¹²¹ Jayaram 2021.

¹²² Jha, Vyoma, 2022. "India and Climate Change: Old Traditions, New Strategies", *India Quarterly*, Vol 78, 280.

¹²³ Falkner, Robert and Buzan, Barry eds., 2022. *Great powers, climate change, and global environmental responsibilities*. Oxford University Press.

¹²⁴ Hurrell and Sengupta, 2012.

¹²⁵ Falkner and Buzan 2022, 27.

2.6. Concluding remarks

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to this study. The first part discussed how ambitions can be interpreted from a status-seeking perspective, and how this differs from a power-seeking perspective. This is a distinction essential to the social dynamics that are central to this study. The status literature touched upon here is discussed in greater depth in the theory chapter, which builds a practice approach to status dilemmas. After this discussion of different kinds of ambitions which states have, the remaining parts of the chapter examined the literature on the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian climate diplomacy.

The chapter has identified a deficit in the understanding of the IFS –namely that there is barely any social analysis of the IFS’s practices. With a few exceptions – most prominently Huju’s scholarship – the majority of the literature on Indian foreign policy underappreciates the role of individual officials. Given this deficit, the possibilities for social constructivist research on the practice of Indian climate foreign policy have been marginal. This might not be problematic for scholars interested in material factors or identity research, but it constitutes a significant obstacle for practice scholars interested in the social life of diplomacy. We know about the technocratic governance of Indian climate policy and its associated identity concerns, but continue to know very little about the role of the IFS in practice – or, more specifically, the everyday manifestations of climate diplomacy by the IFS (i.e., climate foreign policy).

At the same time, indications from Jha’s and Jayaram’s scholarship on India’s role in global affairs suggest that there is a social life shaping Indian climate diplomacy. Yet, to date, there is scant academic literature on how this social life unfolds in diplomatic settings. This is partly a data problem, as very few scholars have had the opportunity to interview Indian and foreign officials about contemporary climate diplomacy. The elite interviews carried out by

Huju and Jha point to the feasibility of a qualitative study drawing on interviews and a broad empirical base. This creates the opening through which this thesis can contribute to study of Indian climate diplomacy.

3. Theory: A practice approach to status dilemmas

3.1. Introduction

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework that will help account for how officials navigate status dilemmas in practice. It argues that status dilemmas are not merely abstract strategic problems confronting political leaders, but lived, situational tensions managed daily by civil servants. In this study, a status dilemma arises when actors must balance competing role expectations and institutional goals across different arenas. These different arenas can be within an organization, across a domestic government, or among international partners. The dilemma occurs because advancing one position risks undermining another.

In the realm of climate diplomacy, status dilemmas are particularly acute. Efforts to project green leadership frequently collide with other ambitions, including economic development, energy security, and military credibility. As Freedman notes, the costly and technologically demanding nature of the net-zero transition makes symbols of decarbonization especially salient within status orders that remain oriented toward traditional measures of material power.¹²⁶ In climate diplomacy, states can take actions which symbolize their desired status to the rest of the international community. These symbolic actions constitute status symbols that circulate across the multiple venues where

¹²⁶ Freedman, Joshua, 2025. Can status competition save the world? Grafting, green energy, and the climate crisis. *International Organization*, 79(3), 4.

climate diplomacy plays out.¹²⁷ Climate action thus becomes a potent, but risky, terrain for status positioning.

This chapter conceptualizes status dilemmas as phenomena which occur as part of the carrying out of diplomatic practices, where these practices are relational, because they involve recognition between individuals in social groups. Status is treated here as a socially granted position, sustained – or contested – through everyday interactions. From this perspective, status dilemmas emerge not only from uncertainty about others’ intentions, but also from the need to perform appropriately across multiple audiences with divergent expectations. These status dilemmas are especially visible inside bureaucracies. In a bureaucracy, officials must simultaneously translate political ambitions into action while anticipating reactions, managing reputational risks, and avoiding status backlash. Status-seeking by political leaders can have unintended costs, causing severe form of status backlash, which scholars theorize as status backfire.¹²⁸ This thesis analyzes how these situated status dilemmas, within a bureaucracy, unfold in practice. In order to do so, it is necessary to develop a theoretical framework that centers on observable tensions in bureaucratic work.

This chapter develops a practice-based theoretical framework grounded in the practice turn in IR. This framework shifts the analytical focus from ab-

¹²⁷ Freistein, Katja and Thomas Müller, 2024. Capitalising on virtue: Global climate politics and the life cycle of status symbols. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 60(1), 120-144. (Original work published 2025)

¹²⁸ Beaumont, Paul, Lucas de Oliveira Paes, and Christina Maglia, 2024. Prestige and punishment: Status symbols and the danger of white elephants. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 60(1), 166-192. (Original work published 2025)

stract structures or individual motives to the situated activities and competencies of actors.¹²⁹ It draws on insights from international practice theory and the communities of practice literature to move beyond discourse- or motive-centered approaches and focus on what officials do in concrete situations. Specifically, the core contribution is the development of the *status dilemma triangle*. This triangle identifies three interlinked forms of tension that shape status dilemmas in practice: recognition tensions, normativity tensions, and epistemic tensions. *Recognition tensions* concern struggles over acceptance and standing vis-à-vis relevant audiences. *Normativity tensions* arise from competing ideas about what constitutes appropriate or legitimate conduct. *Epistemic tensions* reflect contests over expertise, authority, and knowledge claims. Taken together, these tensions provide analytical tools for identifying and interpreting status dilemmas as they unfold in the social life of diplomacy.

The chapter proceeds in three steps. First, the chapter outlines the dynamics of status dilemmas and clarifies their relational character. Second, it introduces the *status dilemma triangle* as an analytical tool for studying practice-based tensions. Finally, it operationalizes recognition, normativity, and epistemic tensions to guide the empirical analysis in the subsequent chapters.

3.2. Status dilemma dynamics

Early studies discussing status dilemmas focused on new ways to understand patterns of conflict and cooperation among states, emphasizing the intricacies

¹²⁹ Pouliot, Vincent, 2016b. *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Noteworthy recent status-practice scholarship encompasses Nair, Deepak, 2019. Saving face in diplomacy: A political sociology of face-to-face interactions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 25(3), 672-697; Røren, Pål, 2019. Status seeking in the friendly Nordic neighborhood. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 54(4), 562-579; Banerjee, K., & MacKay, J., 2020. Communities of practice, impression management, and great power status: Military observers in the Russo-Japanese War. *European Journal of International Security*, 5(3), 274-293; Danielson, August and Elsa Hedling, 2022. Visual diplomacy in virtual summitry: Status signalling during the coronavirus crisis. *Review of International Studies*, 48 (2), 243-261.

of status dynamics.¹³⁰ Wohlforth provided one of the first understandings of status dilemmas. Here, the status dilemma concerns bilateral relations between two states. This traditional understanding of status dilemmas builds on the following definition: “a status dilemma occurs when two states would be satisfied with their status if they had perfect information about each other’s beliefs. But in the absence of such certainty, a state’s leadership may conclude that its status is under challenge even when it is not.”¹³¹ This understanding closely resembles the security dilemma concept in IR, where lack of information leads states to overestimate security threats from others. Building on Wohlforth’s scholarship, Wang asserts that signaling is inherent in status dilemmas since “the status dilemma suggests an inability of two states to grasp the status claims signaled from the other side.”¹³² Wang argues the status dilemma lens captures moments when “leaders of two interacting states tend not to frame a status claim in zero-sum terms, but each side still fails to act in ways that confirm the status expected by the other side.”¹³³ As such, Wang’s understanding of status dilemmas uncovers politics of misperceptions from a status rather than security point of view.

Pu offers a modified conception of status dilemmas.¹³⁴ He argues that the status dilemma “entails overestimation of the competitive nature of the status relationship and underestimation of the potential compatibility of the status goal.” This means that the status dilemma becomes a manifestation of how “two states with largely compatible status aspirations are driven into a vicious circle of conflict due to uncertainty about and misperception of status signals.” These conceptions once again remind us of the logic of the security dilemma,

¹³⁰ Wohlforth 2014; Wang 2019; Fung 2019; Pu 2022.

¹³¹ Wohlforth 2014, 118-119.

¹³² Wang 2019, 49.

¹³³ Wang 2019, 53.

¹³⁴ Xiaoyu Pu, 2022. The Status Dilemma in World Politics: An Anatomy of the China–India Asymmetrical Rivalry, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 15, Issue 3, 227–245.

like Wohlforth's understanding of the status dilemma. However, the dilemmas that occur in social dynamics require more analytical sophistication.

Despite these theoretical contributions, the examination of status dilemmas remains analytically complex. When Wohlforth introduced the status dilemma concept into the IR literature, he concluded that although there is ample evidence of status dilemma dynamics, it is difficult to distinguish between the dynamics and pure status dilemmas.¹³⁵ Wohlforth's early formulation of status dilemmas implied an emphasis on bilateral relations, as well as on resources such as the size of the delegation attending a negotiation, the size of an army, or the capacity of a naval fleet. This material lens remains accepted among contemporary status scholars,¹³⁶ although some increasingly critique its emphasis on numeric indicators in attempts to capture dynamics in their social form.¹³⁷ Owing to the many other potential mechanisms shaping competition, Wohlforth encouraged future research about status dilemmas.

This was a call answered by Fung, who grounded her conception of status dilemmas in socialization theory. Fung understands status dilemmas to involve "the dilemma of how [rising powers] secure status recognition from all their groups." This understanding emphasizes the relational challenge facing status-seekers in social settings, since they cannot achieve higher status without recognition.¹³⁸ This approach is particularly valuable because "while not all status competitions are zero-sum games, misperceptions and miscommunications of status signals could add additional tension to great power politics."¹³⁹ To understand these dynamics, three elements are essential for this study of India's green ambitions and a refined understanding of status dilemmas. These concern the bureaucratic nature of status navigation, the embedded position of individual actors, and the omnipresent fear of status backfire.

¹³⁵ Wohlforth 2016, 138-139.

¹³⁶ Duque, Marina G., 2018. Recognizing international status: A relational approach. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(3), 577-592.

¹³⁷ Ward 2017; Røren 2023.

¹³⁸ Fung 2019, 7.

¹³⁹ Pu 2022, 244.

First, navigating status dilemmas is a learned skill that reflects tactical human behavior. However, because of its demanding nature, this management is typically pursued by officials working inside bureaucracies. New ambitions produce social positioning dilemmas that bureaucracies manage in their profession. As a social group, bureaucracies have a long history of maintaining and challenging intersubjective rankings. Bureaucracies build institutional capacity to navigate political ambitions and status competition among various actors. In states' engine rooms of foreign policy – inside ministries of foreign affairs – units dealing with rankings emerged after the Second World War. The American State Department introduced a special unit in 1947 in Washington D.C., while London established a policy unit in the British Foreign Office in 1949.¹⁴⁰ New Delhi, in turn, established a history division that produced policy-related research during the same period, introducing a policy planning committee in the 1960s.¹⁴¹ These policy planning units remain operational today, illustrating the administrative capacity devoted to navigating dilemmas.

Studies using rational choice approaches, and those looking at ethical dilemmas, have addressed the navigation of dilemmas. Although rational choice analyses are useful for assessing material factors, this type of analysis overestimates the time available for decision-making. The pace of diplomacy puts officials into demanding situations where they must make decisions guided by considerations beyond the material gains that cost-benefit analyses capture well. Continuously choosing between foreign policy options with suboptimal outcomes in demanding situations constitutes a perennial practice in diplomacy.¹⁴² Although ethical dilemma literature forcefully brings morality and

¹⁴⁰ Brady, L. P., 1977. Planning for Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis. *International Journal*, 32(4), 829-848; Kettle, L. 2020. The Role of Policy Planning Staff in British Foreign Policy: Historical Lessons and Contemporary Insights. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 31 (3), 487-508.

¹⁴¹ Misra, K. P., 2010. Foreign Policy Planning Efforts in India. *Strategic Analysis*, 34(4), 652-666.

¹⁴² Watson, Adam, 1992. "Chapter 6: Diplomacy" in *Dilemmas of World Politics: International issues in a changing world* edited by John Baylis and N.J. Rengger. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 164.

morals into assessments, a long-standing problem with this literature is that it has neglected problems at the systemic level, such as diplomacy.¹⁴³ While the ethical dilemma literature has grown, social and relational positioning in response to dilemmas involves role-based rather than moral considerations. Therefore, we must pay closer attention to the relationship between dilemmas and the competition over different social positions. Such competition captures the status competition between different positions in social hierarchies.

Status dilemmas constitute an administrative challenge with both material and non-material costs. The material costs of mismanagement include an increased need to invest in new expensive status symbols, which can range from investment in new conference venues, hosting of sport events such as the Olympics, acquiring military equipment, or funding substantial research programs.¹⁴⁴ The non-material costs of mismanagement can also be significant, particularly given an omnipresent risk of status backfire in the world of status competition. Status backfire – the backlash to status-seeking actions in the international system, even when the status-seeking behavior was initially successful – constitutes an “inherent” risk.¹⁴⁵ Political leaders are concerned with the risks of status loss, which can bring domestic opposition and decrease their legitimacy. Meanwhile, bureaucracies under them are more concerned about the risks of status backlash. Beaumont, Paes, and Maglia see this risk as a risk of stigma associated with public critique of the pursuit of status recognition.¹⁴⁶ As this discussion suggests, status backfire constitutes a major risk in the management of status dilemmas.

¹⁴³ Baylis, John and N.J. Rengger, 1992. “Chapter 1: Introduction” in *Dilemmas in World Politics: International issues in a changing world* edited by John Baylis and N. J. Rengger. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Gilady, Lilach, 2018. *The price of prestige: Conspicuous consumption in international relations*. University of Chicago Press.

¹⁴⁵ Beaumont, Oliveira de Paes, and Maglia, 2024.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Second, beyond these organizational costs, the individuals navigating status dilemmas are embedded in social structures. Fung argues that status dilemmas shape micro-level interactions between diplomats. She describes how diplomats “can also exploit status vulnerability – whether these be status triggers or grouping contentious votes together so as to exploit a state’s existing isolation from its peer groups.”¹⁴⁷ In her conception of status dilemmas, Fung thus shifts to a different level of analysis from the leadership level that is focused on by Wohlforth and Wang. According to Fung, individual officials face status dilemmas when they are simultaneously seeking recognition by high-ranked great powers while being unwilling to abandon their lower status with another group of countries.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, status dilemma dynamics embody tensions that individual officials navigate in their profession. The approach developed in this chapter builds on Fung’s shift from analyzing status dilemmas at the leadership level (as in Wohlforth’s work) to examining the dilemmas facing individual officials.

Third, and closely related to this micro-level analysis, one dynamic shaping interactions among individuals in diplomatic situations is the fear of status backfire. In the literature, status loss constitutes a risk for the political leader whereas the risk of status backfire affects the administrative level. As Renshon argues, when elites face the risk of status loss, concerns about their status can trigger unexpected responses and outcomes.¹⁴⁹ The fear of status loss relates to the mechanism of entrapment that leaders may face when domestic audiences respond to their grand strategic ambitions abroad.¹⁵⁰ To borrow Renshon’s words, “actors in a low-power mindset might be particularly vulnerable to status threats” but “because power is relative, not all leaders in all

¹⁴⁷ Fung 2019, 144.

¹⁴⁸ Fung 2019, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Renshon 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Ward 2017, 31-33.

situations will be in a high-power mindset that would buffer them against status threats.”¹⁵¹ Ward argues that individual diplomats, too, may fear status loss and can create status threats.¹⁵² These insights on status loss at the leadership level inform our understanding of how similar dynamics produce status backfire at the bureaucratic level. At the micro-level, the social interactions forming status dynamics involves a range of elites that goes beyond the formal officials involved in a diplomatic delegation.¹⁵³ Therefore, leaders and individual officials not only fear status loss but also manage the associated risks of status backfire in the social dynamics of managing status dilemmas. Such status backfire can occur even after the initial status backlash has been managed.¹⁵⁴

There are therefore multilayered status dynamics involving both leaders and lower-level officials. This makes the limited attention the status literature has thus far paid to bureaucratic actors and lower-level officials in foreign policy particularly problematic. The literature still struggles to understand status dilemma dynamics beyond the highest levels of political leadership. This focus on leaders means the literature barely captures the status dynamics surrounding different types of ambitions that play out at the bureaucratic level. Another problem with the literature is its insufficient attention to the full range of costs associated with status-seeking in the international milieu. A traditional understanding links the international milieu to the opportunity to mobilize domestic support, viewing foreign trips by political leaders as status-seeking activities.¹⁵⁵ With such logic, the costs of status-seeking at the leadership level are only linked to the domestic audience.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Renshon 2015, 686.

¹⁵² Ward’s writing about upending the international order, see Ward 2017, 47,51.

¹⁵³ Renshon 2015; Schulz 2017; Fung 2019.

¹⁵⁴ Beaumont et al. 2025.

¹⁵⁵ Very similar to Putnam, Robert D., 1988. Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games. *International Organization*, 42(3), 427–460.

¹⁵⁶ Like the audience cost-literature, e.g. Tomz, Michael, 2007. Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach, *International Organization*, 61 (4), 821–840.

Recent scholarship has begun to address these limitations of the existing literature on status. Røren’s scholarship demonstrates that officials within bureaucracies encounter these struggles daily.¹⁵⁷ He quotes a former Norwegian advisor: “My view is that what you do is done to become seen and recognized. The focus is not on what you achieve, but rather that the stuff you do is recognized.”¹⁵⁸ This quotation indicates how the tensions inside status dilemma dynamics affect the actions of individuals. This means that, in conceptualizing status dilemma dynamics, our analytical attention should be directed to different activities at levels of analysis lower than the political leadership level.

Table 1. Overview of status dilemmas

	The status dilemma	Status dilemmas	Social life of status dilemmas
<i>Interaction relationship</i>	Dyadic	Multiple	Multiple
<i>Empirical domain</i>	International security	International security	Climate diplomacy
<i>Unit of analysis</i>	Political leader	Officials	Officials
<i>Type of positioning</i>	Positioning with military capabilities	Social positioning vis-à-vis different groups	Social positioning reflecting competing role expectations and institutional goals
<i>Theoretical attention</i>	Material capabilities	Status recognition	Recognition, normativity, and epistemic tensions
<i>Scholar</i>	Wohlforth 2015	Fung 2019	Nordenstam 2026

¹⁵⁷ Røren, Pål, 2019. Status seeking in the friendly Nordic neighborhood. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 54(4), 562-579.

¹⁵⁸ Røren 2019, 572.

3.3. Disentangling status dilemmas: An analytical triangle

This section develops an analytical framework for identifying and interpreting status dilemmas at the practice level. Because status dilemmas are not directly observable phenomenon, but emerge through the social interactions of officials, we require analytical tools that can capture the tensions inherent in these interactions.

The work of Adler, where practices constitute the “raw material” of social dynamics, provides a compelling rationale for centering analysis on what actors do:

Practices not only organize the world – they are also the raw material that make it up. When states face each other for myriad reasons, their interaction is affected, indeed constituted, not only by the cost-benefit analyses leaders make, the ideas and knowledge people carry in their heads, and the discourse they use to communicate. Rather, what states do in relation to other states – the moves they make, the signals they give, and the language they speak – is constituted by the practices they share.¹⁵⁹

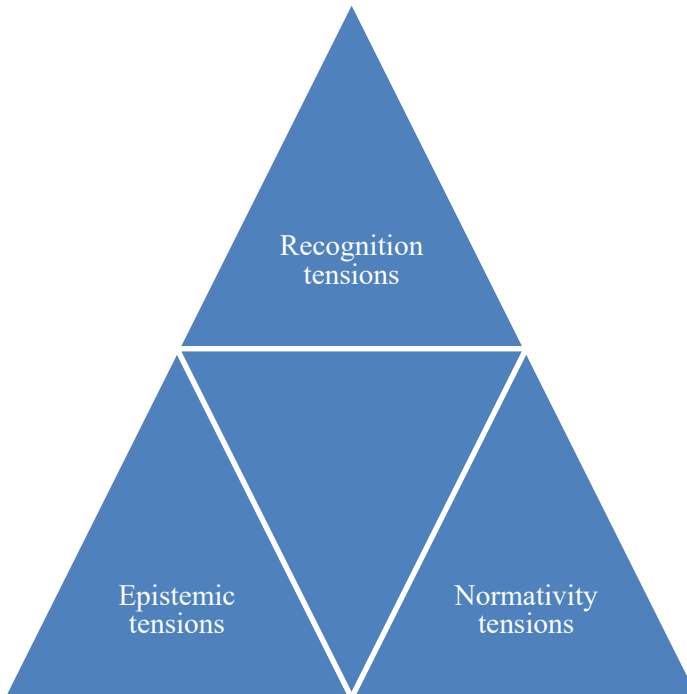
A practice approach to status dilemmas thus enables rich descriptions of the “raw material” of world politics. We can identify status dilemmas in demanding situations where individuals navigate tensions arising from different status ambitions. Status competition unfolds through social relations in diplomatic settings. This makes the institutional and relational context essential for understanding how status dilemmas manifest in practice.

This thesis aims to understand status dilemma dynamics emerging in practices at the administrative level. To do this, it proposes the concept of a *status*

¹⁵⁹ Adler, Emanuel, 2013, “Constructivism in International Relations” in *SAGE Reference Handbook of International Relations*, 126.

dilemma triangle. This is advanced as an analytical tool for revealing three interrelated forms of tension that constitute status dilemmas: recognition tensions, normativity tensions, and epistemic tensions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. An analytical triangle to advance the study of status dilemmas.



Source: Author's compilation.

3.3.1. Recognition tensions

Recognition tensions refer to the struggles actors engage in to gain, and to convey, recognition for foreign policy ambitions. With the omnipresent risk of status backlash, these recognition tensions constitute a core element of status dilemma dynamics. This first element of the status dilemma triangle comes from Pouliot's scholarship on pecking orders. His work on the "inner workings of multilateral diplomacy" offers the most developed account of status-seeking as a social dynamic from a practice perspective. For the purposes of this thesis, status and standing are treated as intertwined concepts. Pouliot focuses on "standing" – which he defines as "one's position in a social ranking"

– while this aligns closely with the view amongst non-traditional status scholars that status is a perceived position in a social hierarchy.¹⁶⁰ Pouliot’s insights point to the recognition tensions that constitute a core component of status dilemma dynamics.

Pouliot’s practice approach centers on how the standing of individuals in multilateral diplomacy is based on their ways of doing things.¹⁶¹ Drawing on the sociologist Bourdieu, Pouliot explains: “Studying the pecking order is another way of getting at Bourdieu’s key insight that not all resources and practices have the same currency in a given field.”¹⁶² He references Bourdieu in understanding “standing as a form of capital of accumulated work.”¹⁶³ This emphasizes how the execution of activities is a primary consequence of the balance of standing in pecking orders. Pouliot’s framework provides clues about tensions that individual diplomats navigate in negotiations. This thesis understands these tensions as elements in the “dilemma of order” and the “dilemma of performance.” At the core of these dilemmas lies the uncertainty of recognition between individuals involved in social interactions.

Dilemmas of order emerge when individuals navigate hierarchical positioning within international pecking orders. These dilemmas of order take place in “the social theater of world politics” within hierarchical international pecking orders.¹⁶⁴ Individual officials involved in multilateral diplomacy embody a standing that reflects their country’s position.¹⁶⁵ Consequently, “a diplomat representing a country with superior standing will generally be allowed some opportunities for deviating practices that lower peers will not.”¹⁶⁶ Although individual diplomats are strongly affected by the hierarchical politics surrounding such imbalances of standing between countries, they have the

¹⁶⁰ Pouliot, Vincent, 2016b. *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 17; See e.g., Ward 2017.

¹⁶¹ Pouliot 2016b, chapter 2.

¹⁶² Pouliot 2016b, 210.

¹⁶³ Pouliot 2016b, 218.

¹⁶⁴ Pouliot 2016b, Introduction.

¹⁶⁵ Pouliot 2016b, 76.

¹⁶⁶ Pouliot 2016b, 77.

agency to shape these hierarchical power relations through competent behavior and social skills. Pouliot writes that “the competent diplomat strives to turn the country’s externally defined attributes into diplomatic capital,” and that these attributes reflect the “country’s globally constructed reputation.”¹⁶⁷ At one point, Pouliot clarifies that “practices express standing through a rich and complex social code.”¹⁶⁸ However, he also maintains that the markers of standing are highly contextual. He writes that these markers of standing are issue-specific and are dependent on actors’ configurations and organization.¹⁶⁹ Thus, although individual officials can navigate dilemmas of order in these hierarchical international orders, they find themselves facing performative dilemmas.

Moreover, individual officials face dilemmas of performance that center on the possibility of utilizing competence to climb the pecking order. Competence is central to Pouliot’s understanding of social dynamics. He treats competent performance as a virtue. Diplomats must showcase their competence regularly in a “never-ending process.” This is because recognized standing, which is derived from competence, “is a highly contingent process [which] requires work to sustain.”¹⁷⁰ Pouliot suggests that:

Standing must be acquired from within, by playing along the rules. The sense of place is a sense of possibility, which also implies a sense of limits. Transcending one’s standing is easier said than done: It requires a rare subversive competence that plays social rules against themselves. Overturning an international hierarchy that way is a very tall order.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Pouliot 2016b, 84.

¹⁶⁸ Pouliot 2016b, 55.

¹⁶⁹ Pouliot 2016b, 79.

¹⁷⁰ Pouliot 2016b, 64.

¹⁷¹ Pouliot 2016b, 271.

This is in contrast to institutional status theory, which argues that countries attempt to gain status through writing new rules.¹⁷² Pouliot's approach is problematic because it means he misses behavior by diplomats who contest or even reject the rules of doing things.

In Pouliot's understanding, status [standing] is highly relational and dependent on recognition by peers who accept performances as competent. He argues that "in order to gain standing, one must not only beat opponents at the line, but also secure recognition from the same interlocutors who are competing for recognition. One cannot climb the pecking order echelons unless fellow practitioners acknowledge practical mastery."¹⁷³ Pouliot argues that practical mastery differs from improvisation skills. He provides little explanation, however, of the conditions under which officials repeatedly accept incompetence. For some diplomats, accepting incompetence can be strategic, while it can be absurd to others. Despite being grounded in something other than competence, the repeated behavior of accepting incompetence constitutes a practice that induces performative dilemmas.

Together, these dilemmas generate significant risks for individuals navigating social dynamics in diplomacy. These associated risks can be grim, costly, and painful for both the officials working abroad and for those based in capitals. Although Pouliot does not write about status backlash explicitly, he is well aware of the dangers of status-seeking: "The ever-present possibility of social sanction, which implies a loss of standing, is testimony to the everyday politics of practice for the multilateral diplomat."¹⁷⁴ Due to this inherent risk, which constitutes a source of status dilemma dynamics, some foreign ministries worldwide are willing to sacrifice standing. In multilateral diplomacy, Pouliot notes:

¹⁷² Mukherjee 2022, 58.

¹⁷³ Pouliot, Vincent, 2016a. Hierarchy in practice: Multilateral diplomacy and the governance of international security, *European Journal of International Security*, 1(1), 14.

¹⁷⁴ Pouliot 2016b, 61.

For one thing, on many occasions capitals vie not to make the largest contributions possible but to shift the burden onto others. They may have very good reasons to do so, of course, ranging from domestic opposition to fiscal limitations. But in terms of pecking order dynamics, this dynamic is rather counterintuitive, as it would seem to suggest that member states are willing to sacrifice multilateral standing in order to save resources.¹⁷⁵

Hence, Pouliot's study of practices suggests the opposite logic from the status-seeking literature that views extraordinary expenditures as efforts to purchase status.¹⁷⁶

The stakes of these dilemmas are substantial: officials can gain and lose status with severe consequences in pecking order dynamics. "The pecking order can be a brutal reality for those at the bottom,"¹⁷⁷ since officials with high status can circumvent those with low status by mastering the rules of the game. Pouliot demonstrates that the conduct of bilateral diplomacy, in the shadows of the multilateral negotiations, can put individual diplomats in their place. This is especially when presidents or ministers are involved – that is, when the negotiation has evolved from being at the administrative level, to instead take place at the political level. Yet, the primary way for individual officials to seek status is not to get the political level involved but to demonstrate competence.

These associated risks in navigating status dilemma dynamics are significant. They mean we can expect variation among diplomats working for the same country but reporting home to different ministries in the capital. Some diplomats report back to the Foreign Ministry, while others report to the Economic Ministry or the Environment Ministry. There are also various types of diplomats: generalists and specialists. The specialists often hold technical ex-

¹⁷⁵ Pouliot 2016b, 196.

¹⁷⁶ Gilady, Lilach, 2018. *The price of prestige: Conspicuous consumption in international relations*. University of Chicago Press.

¹⁷⁷ Pouliot 2016b, 138.

pertise relevant to, for instance, international trade or environmental degradation. While a foreign service may contain specialists, most foreign services tend to comprise generalists who can represent the ministry across multiple continents and multilateral settings. Thus, the specialists usually lack diplomatic training and experience compared to the generalists, since their home ministries appoint them. Such variation differs among missions based on their institutional capacity but may also vary between multilateral and bilateral diplomacy. Pouliot underplays this variation in his account of officials navigating social dynamics.

In sum, individuals involved in diplomacy face demanding situations in which their ability to navigate these dynamics is affected by recognition struggles. In practice, these recognition struggles require the navigation of different recognition tensions regarding performance and order.

3.3.2. Normativity tensions

The second element of the status dilemma triangle captures normativity tensions. This element draws on the Communities of Practice (CoP) research agenda concerning norm contestation and Bourdieu's ideas about normative orders. Normativity has been defined as "evaluating criteria experienced in practice and used for the contextualized moral judgement of public performances."¹⁷⁸ Gadinger and Niemann contend that the "enactment of normativity unfolds during specific moments of controversy." This points to exceptional events as times when normativity is seen, while also opening a research space for normativity studies in practice.¹⁷⁹ Yet, there is little reason to believe that normativity tensions merely emerge during controversial moments. After all, Gadinger and Niemann argue that "normativity is deemed to lie in these practices of domination and stratification."¹⁸⁰ This is the reason why "norma-

¹⁷⁸ Gadinger and Niemann, 2024, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Gadinger and Niemann, 2024, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Gadinger and Niemann, 2024, 6.

tivity has an ordering capacity.” It “stabilizes social orders by confirming certain standards of moral judgement or initiates social change via contestation over its ambiguous nature.”¹⁸¹ Similarly, normativity allows scholars to approach “the relationship between conflict and order – one driven by practices, as intermediaries of change bound to social context.”¹⁸² Thus, normativity tensions capture ordering processes in social relations.

Among the practice approaches in IR, those drawing on Bourdieu are open to normativity. However, these engage much less with normative configurations than other practice approaches.¹⁸³ Regarding the CoP literature, Sondarjee brings our attention to different tensions inside and between communities of practice. Sondarjee refers to these tensions as four types of contestations, in a way that resonates with my understanding of the tensions shaping status dilemma dynamics. She sees these conflictual social dynamics as inherent in processes embodying practices: “Practice contestation is not a one-way process, nor does it relate to distinct moments in the history of a community.”¹⁸⁴ Rather, Sondarjee contends that communities of practice feature daily tensions, which is captured by her concept of “epistemic power” – the “day-to-day power to influence epistemes.”¹⁸⁵ There are four types of contestation practices that reveal such tensions: (a) internal disruption; (b) internal resistance; (c) external pressure; and (d) external resistance. Building on the norm contestation literature, Sondarjee describes how “practices are always normative in that the recognition of competence refers to intersubjective consensus on how to act appropriately, what actions are correct or incorrect, appropriate or inappropriate, right or wrong. In that sense, cognitive knowledge and normative knowledge are indissociable in practice.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Gadinger and Niemann, 2024, 8.

¹⁸² Gadinger and Niemann, 2024, 2.

¹⁸³ Gadinger and Niemann, 2024, 7.

¹⁸⁴ Sondarjee, 2024, 10.

¹⁸⁵ Sondarjee, 2024, 4.

¹⁸⁶ Sondarjee, 2024, 3.

Sondarjee's reasoning reminds us of the idea of "nomos", which the sociologists Berger and Bourdieu conceptualized many decades ago. Berger maintained that nomos induced and constrained individuals' ability to act in different social settings. It creates tensions between an individual's preferred vision and the experienced world on an everyday basis in different processes.¹⁸⁷ In turn, Bourdieu incorporated nomos into his structural field theory, defining it as "the underlying normative order structuring a field of interactions".¹⁸⁸ Thus, from a Bourdieuan perspective, the "ordering of practices" underscores a normative order that we can identify by looking at normative tensions.¹⁸⁹ From such a structural point of view, individuals adapt their behavior to the normative foundations of the field as they become acquainted with a new field. Thus, nomos constrains individual action within processes. As the legal scholar Cover put it, "a nomos is a present world constituted by a system of tension between reality and vision."¹⁹⁰ It can therefore be argued that bringing the concept of nomos into a practice approach to status tensions allows for a deeper understanding of normative contestation. By incorporating the idea of nomos, we can gain an even richer description of the normative tensions shaping social status dilemma dynamics.

The understanding of normativity tensions offered in this thesis may also remind readers of Bourdieu's idea of habitus. This concept is one which the practice scholar Loh has further developed recently. Loh's concept of institutional habitus enables scholarship about "how institutional scripts, dispositions, and history impel diplomats to adopt, internalize, and perform assertive

¹⁸⁷ Berger, Peter L., 1969. *The sacred canopy: elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Garden City: Doubleday.

¹⁸⁸ Epstein, Charlotte, 2012. "Norms: Bourdieu's nomos, or the structural power of norms" in *Bourdieu in International Relations*, Routledge, 165.

¹⁸⁹ Epstein, 2012.

¹⁹⁰ Cover, Robert M., 1982. The Supreme Court, 1982 Term – Forward: Nomos and Narrative, *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 97, 9.

diplomatic practices.”¹⁹¹ The concept of institutional habitus captures “an institution’s relatively durable worldview and disposition.”¹⁹² In light of the notion of institutional habitus capturing dispositions, and the Bourdieuan openness to normativity, we should embrace normativity tensions in our examinations of social relations.

These normativity tensions concern how normativity operates and adjusts in social contexts. The social life of normativity captures “an arrangement of ongoing, interacting practices establishing action-specific regulations, value orientation, and avenues of contestation.”¹⁹³ These normative configurations shape normativity tensions in practice.¹⁹⁴ In sum, the concept of normativity tensions that occur in the social life of diplomacy allows for analysis about dispositions, normative configurations, and social ordering.

3.3.3. Epistemic tensions

The third element of the status dilemma triangle relates to knowledge. The intellectual foundation for this element is established by the Communities of Practice approach (CoP). This approach was initially brought into the IR discipline by Adler in the mid-2000s.¹⁹⁵ CoP originates from educational studies, social anthropology, and management studies. It focuses attention on learning activities and background knowledge within communities at the micro-level.¹⁹⁶ Because of this, it has also received some critique for “silencing questions of power and hierarchies.”¹⁹⁷ Although this critique may have helped scholars to distinguish different practice approaches from each other, it is misleading and requires correction. A major advantage of a CoP lens is that it is less static than Bourdieuan practice approaches, allowing for the study of

¹⁹¹ Loh 2024, 13.

¹⁹² Loh 2024, 98.

¹⁹³ Frankel Pratt, 2020, 61.

¹⁹⁴ Frankel Pratt 2020.

¹⁹⁵ Wenger 1998; Adler 2005, 2008.

¹⁹⁶ Bueger and Gadinger 2018, 31.

¹⁹⁷ Bueger and Gadinger 2018, 31.

struggles within processes rather than the struggles over positions.¹⁹⁸ In one of the early works taking a CoP approach, Bicchi even noted that it is premature to discard potential power struggles within hierarchies since communities of practice can embody struggles.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, Barnett explicitly reminded us that “no community is absent hierarchy and inequality,” adding that instead these groupings encompass situations where “battles are waged over resources, status, and identity” amidst processes of learning that community members are involved in.²⁰⁰

Through its emphasis on processes, the CoP lens provides greater agency to the role of individuals than static field theory, which instead emphasizes hierarchical positions. The CoP approach allows us to better understand the social processes of the status dilemma. As Adler, Bremberg and Sondarjee emphasize, “While CoPs are far from antagonistic in the way that Bourdieu conceptualized fields, they are still the locus of power disputes, albeit more horizontally.”²⁰¹ Although the group politics of procedural background knowledge (or the “know-how”) dominates the CoP research agenda, such procedural politics are not immune to tensions and conflicts. The CoP agenda has spent almost two decades studying micro-level behavior in communities involved in international politics. However, it has now reached a point where it is calling for more global scholarship about the interactions that form social life in world affairs.

From a CoP perspective, the status dilemma triangle embeds tensions over knowledge and agency inside and between different communities of practice. As such, social dynamics constitute a social ordering process that is full of interactions. The research agenda is open to scholarship about hierarchical relations and global ordering, enabling systemic analysis with micro-level data

¹⁹⁸ Adler, Bremberg, Sondarjee 2024.

¹⁹⁹ Bicchi 2008, footnote 6.

²⁰⁰ Barnett 2018, 320.

²⁰¹ Adler, Bremberg, Sondarjee 2024, 9.

points.²⁰² CoP adds value to the study since, “a CoP perspective’s analytical lenses allow scholars to identify and track how a practice evolves in the face of challenges and uncertainty through the appreciation of the time, place, and sociocognitive dimension of its members’ work.”²⁰³ Thus, the CoP tradition provides depth to the third element of these status dilemma dynamics: epistemic tensions.

Against this backdrop, this chapter has established status dilemmas as a social process that is shaped by three tensions. The social processes manifest as the interplay among these three forms of tensions. Based on the status dilemma triangle, this thesis contends that the social processes which emerge as a result of status dilemmas can be understood if we study: (a) recognition tensions, (b) normativity tensions, and (c) epistemic tensions. We should not fully discard the possibility that there will be other types of tensions affecting social status dilemma dynamics. However, by studying these three types of tensions, we gain a deep understanding of an increasingly important social dynamic in world affairs. The next part of the chapter presents the operationalization of these three tensions. This outlines a way to understand status dilemmas in the social life of diplomacy.

3.4. The status dilemma triangle in practice: Operationalization

Having developed the status dilemma triangle as an analytical framework, this section turns to the question of how it can be used empirically. The purpose here is to translate the conceptual elements developed above into a practical tool for analyzing the social life of diplomacy and how status dilemmas are revealed in practice. In other words, this section specifies how recognition,

²⁰² Bueger, Hofius, Edwards 2024.

²⁰³ Bicchi, Federica, 2022. Communities of practice and what they can do for International Relations. *Review of International Studies*, 48 (1), 40.

normativity, and epistemic tensions can be identified and examined in concrete situations where officials navigate competing status expectations. As discussed earlier in this chapter, status dilemmas are defined in this study as a situation in which actors must balance competing role expectations and institutional goals across different arenas – within an organization, within a domestic government, among international partners – such that advancing one position risks undermining another. This conception treats status dilemmas as situational, rather than structural. Status dilemmas arise in specific moments of interaction rather than existing as permanent conditions. Because status is socially granted, status claims are interpreted through the knowledge and expectations of those who receive them.²⁰⁴ When what might be called *status-granters* lack expertise or contextual understanding of a status-seeker’s ambitions, the risk of misinterpretation increases, often generating new struggles over recognition. These struggles are not confined to political leaders. They are also encountered by individual officials, who must interpret and enact ambitions under conditions of uncertainty as part of their everyday professional work.

3.4.1. A practice foundation

Practice approaches in International Relations (IR) constitute an increasingly popular agenda bridging traditional diplomatic studies with Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). At a meta-level, these practice approaches revive social constructivism within the field. FPA and practice approaches share study objects such as bureaucratic politics and decision-making processes. Yet, unlike FPA, practice approaches embrace the micro-level of international politics, giving a voice to the often-unseen human beings forging international connections. In contrast to traditional FPA, which examines degrees of change in foreign policymaking – often emphasizing leaders’ behavior²⁰⁵ – a practice approach

²⁰⁴ Wang 2019, 53.

²⁰⁵ Beach, Derek and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, 2012. *Analyzing foreign policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

in diplomacy reminds us that “the focus of diplomacy is maintenance, not change.”²⁰⁶ Thus, a practice approach helps us understand the endurance of practices that rest on different modes of reflection and “change in practice through practice.”²⁰⁷ A practice foundation for understanding the navigation of status dilemmas brings the analytical focus to the social life at the micro-level.

Rather than being an idiosyncratic activity, practice scholars tend to view practices as repeated activities. A popular definition of practices is offered by Bicchi and Bremberg, who refer to practices as a “socially meaningful pattern of action.”²⁰⁸ In this, they distinguish themselves from Adler and Pouliot, who view practices as activities informed by more or less “competent performances.”²⁰⁹ Adler and Pouliot take international practices to constitute activities performed by a range of practitioners forming a Community of Practice. Similarly, diplomatic practices highlight mundane ways of doing things and everyday routines.²¹⁰ These analytical approaches shed light on repeated daily activities, such as mundane emails between professionals, coordination meetings, diplomatic receptions, speech writing, or coffee breaks. This focus matters because activity is constant. As Socrates said, “there is never nothing going on,” – a point that the research community was once reminded of by Wedeen.²¹¹

The present study follows most practice approaches by suggesting that individuals dealing with tensions in the Indian foreign service engage in at least

²⁰⁶ Neumann, Iver B., 2012. *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry*. Cornell University Press, 16.

²⁰⁷ Hopf, Ted, 2018. Change in international practices, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 24(3), 687-711.

²⁰⁸ Bicchi, Federica and Niklas Bremberg, 2016. European diplomatic practices: contemporary challenges and innovative approaches. *European Security*, 25(4), 394.

²⁰⁹ Adler and Pouliot 2011, 6.

²¹⁰ For a brief intellectual history of practices, see chapter 1: introduction in this thesis.

²¹¹ Wedeen, Lisa, 2010. Reflections on ethnographic work in political science. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13(1), 255-272.

four different types of practices in diplomacy. First, there are everyday mundane practices, such as luncheons, dinners, receptions, emails, memos, and reports.²¹² Second, there is the production of different documents, encompassing speeches, statements, non-papers, and tweets.²¹³ Third, there are negotiations involving meetings, text formulations, and joint statements.²¹⁴ Fourth, there are public diplomacy efforts in the material world through seminars or conferences, and in the digital world through tweets.²¹⁵ Drawing on practice approaches in diplomacy, we can see that these four types form a typology of practices in diplomatic interactions, see Table 2.

Table 2. Typologies of practices in status dilemma dynamics

Everyday mundane practices	Production of external documents	Negotiations	Public diplomacy
Emails Phone calls Memos Internal reports Luncheons Dinners Receptions	Speeches Statements Tweets Non-papers	Meetings Text formulations Joint statements Agreements	Seminars Conferences Social media
<i>Source: Author's compilation based on literature.</i>			

These practices can occur in front of a public or private audience or become part of social relations between individuals. Although the substance of these practices in terms of content may vary across time, the importance of these practices lies in their role in the production of social life in diplomacy.²¹⁶ Thus, scholarship about the social life of diplomacy implies a systematic “ordering,

²¹² Neumann, Iver B., 2002. Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy. *Millenium*, 31 (3), 627-651.

²¹³ Neumann 2002; Bueger 2014; Wiseman 2015; Hedling and Bremberg 2021.

²¹⁴ Adler and Pouliot 2011.

²¹⁵ Adler 1998; Kaufmann 1968; Hedling and Bremberg 2021.

²¹⁶ Bremberg, Niklas, 2016. “Making Sense of the EU’s Response to the Arab Uprisings: Foreign Policy Practice at Times of Crisis.” *European Security* 25 (4), 425.

dissecting, and organizing” exercise for the analyst interested in social dynamics.²¹⁷ The social life of diplomacy may seem messy, old-fashioned, or simply ad hoc, but the point is that this social life is constructed through human behavior in different interactions via social practices. Scholars interested in the social life of diplomacy rightfully focus on the emergence and maintenance of social interactions in practice, but we must also examine different forms of tensions.

This practice approach to understanding the elements of social life can be used to capture meaningful behavior by individual officials involved in social dynamics. The typology of different practices emphasizes ways that an agent can use these practices in diplomacy. These repeated activities constitute behavior that individuals justify in different ways as they navigate the types of tensions outlined earlier in the chapter. In multilateral diplomacy, an agent may navigate tensions through speaking, dressing, and tweeting in different ways, thereby contributing to the production of social life. With these conceptual clarifications in mind, it is time to outline the analytical steps taken when applying this framework.

3.4.2. Analytical steps

Building on the theoretical framework outlined, this final section of the chapter explains how to transform these theoretical concepts into an empirical inquiry. In the practice approach to status dilemmas developed in this thesis, the central unit of analysis is the set of practices performed by officials. In this study, these officials are Indian officials and foreign officials interacting with Indian counterparts. Such a unit of analysis is familiar to practice scholars but not necessarily common among status scholars who often examine leaders. This new analytical approach promises to reveal new insights about the status dilemmas that officials navigate in their profession. Through this analytical approach, we can gain a richer understanding of the myriad empirical tensions

²¹⁷ Pouliot 2014, 250.

that play out in social status dilemma dynamics. We can learn about the tensions in India's attempt to present itself as a green leading power. We can also uncover how these tensions arise as the bureaucracy interacts with the political leadership. That is, we can uncover how Indian diplomacy deals with status dilemmas in climate diplomacy. This original practice approach therefore reveals the trials and tribulations of officials dealing with green ambitions.

A significant advantage of any practice approach is the new, in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon that scholars produce. This is in contrast to the findings of a categorical deductive analysis. Some scholars claim that practice scholarship constitutes a “methodological orientation supported by a new vocabulary” rather than a new theoretical approach.²¹⁸ In contrast, others consider practice approaches a path towards deeper theoretical insights about social phenomena.²¹⁹ A practice approach to status dilemmas can yield new theoretical insights about status-seeking theory. On this point, this thesis sits closer to Pouliot, who introduced practice-tracing as a systematic approach to empirical research. To borrow Pouliot's words:

[There is a] methodological middle ground where patterns of meaningful action may be abstracted away from local contexts in the form of social mechanisms that can travel across cases... The added value of practice tracing, in terms of allowing for dialogue between process tracing and interpretivism, lies in simultaneously upholding singular causality and analytical generality.²²⁰

Other practice scholars have also explored how to translate theoretical concepts into empirical research from a practice perspective. For clarity, this thesis adopts an approach that seeks to capture the social dynamics of status di-

²¹⁸ Nicolini, Davide, 2017. Practice theory as a package of theory, method and vocabulary: Affordances and limitations. *Methodological reflections on practice-oriented theories*, 25.

²¹⁹ Adler et al. 2024.

²²⁰ Pouliot, Vincent, 2014. Practice tracing. *Process tracing: From metaphor to analytic tool*, 238.

lemmas through various ways of collecting and analyzing data. In international practice theory, scholars adopt various starting points for their projects, ranging from understanding social spaces, networks, and objects, to understanding of controversies, artifacts, and physical sites that host different practices.²²¹ This approach to status dilemma dynamics proposes two analytical steps and drawing on diverse data sources. It follows the Communities of Practice research agenda, which argues that participant observations in isolation are insufficient to reveal ways of managing tensions.²²² To produce empirical insights into the elements that compose the status dilemma dynamics outlined in this chapter – recognition, normativity, and epistemic tensions – the approach proposes two main analytical tasks.

The first analytical step involves opening the black box of a process and creating a timeline of events. This task can be time-consuming when conducted retrospectively but is easier to pursue in real time or within a short period after the process of interest. The assumption is that these events were crafted by individuals who produce events in their profession. These events might include such activities as formal diplomatic visits or informal diplomatic exchanges in panels. The approach at this stage is similar to process-tracing, where identifying building blocks constitutes a typical analytical step.²²³ However, there is a key difference between this thinking and that of process-tracing. While process-tracing captures causal mechanisms and the relationship between input and outcome, this approach involves a mapping exercise to identify these building blocks without the intention of finding

²²¹ Bueger and Gadinger, 2018, 142-143.

²²² Adler et al. 2024.

²²³ Process-tracing constitutes an increasingly popular methodology, ranging from deductive theory-testing and research to interpretivist theory-developing research. See e.g., Bennett and Checkel, 2015; Norman, Ludvig, 2015. Interpretive process tracing and causal explanations. *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research*, 13(2), 4-9. Beach, Derek. 2022, November 22. Process Tracing Methods in the Social Sciences. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.

causal relationships.²²⁴ My approach is thus more closely aligned with interpretivist process-tracing than with positivist process-tracing. In this first step, the researcher establishes a timeline centered on the empirical area of interest. In this study, the timeline captures climate diplomacy in India's external relations, where I continuously updated the timeline with new empirical data.

The second analytical step involves systematically examining different types of activities. This is an analytical exercise originally termed *practice-tracing* by practice scholars, which has developed into *praxiography*. Practice-tracing is similar to following processes, but scholars instead follow meaningful activities performed by individuals.²²⁵ I align with international practice theory in viewing practice-tracing as part of praxiography.²²⁶ As Pouliot notes, "as ethnographic or inductive as one may go, studying practices implies ordering, dissecting, and organizing them in a way that ultimately constructs them as units of analysis within an analytical narrative."²²⁷ It can be difficult to determine which practices qualify for the analytical story that emerges from the data. Therefore, this analytical task is pursued through focusing on practices performed in a domain. This requires a demanding analytical balancing act by the researcher. They need to focus on practices in a domain, while maintaining an inductive openness to new empirical insights. It is important to recognize that while related to ethnography practice-oriented research differs from it significantly.²²⁸ As Gadinger and Bueger note, "if ethnography is usually concerned with people's way of life, praxiography is interested in understanding practices and their configurations."²²⁹ Thus, this analytical step seeks to depict practices within the chosen cases and gradually

²²⁴ Beach, Derek, 2016. "It's All about Mechanisms – What Process-Tracing Case Studies Should Be Tracing." *New Political Economy* 21 (5), 463-72.

²²⁵ Pouliot, Vincent, 2014. Practice tracing. *Process tracing: From metaphor to analytic tool*, 237-59.

²²⁶ Bueger 2014.

²²⁷ Pouliot 2014, 250.

²²⁸ Adler, Emanuel et al., 2024. Communities of Practice in World Politics: Advancing a Research Agenda. *Global Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 4 (1), January 2024, 7.

²²⁹ Bueger and Gadinger 2018, 132.

interpret the meaning of these practices. The interpretation of the practices is enabled by asking analytical questions (see Table 3 below). To be clear, interpreting the meaning of the practices does not equal interpreting the motives behind them. It has higher analytical value to identify repeated patterns of action that individuals involved in processes execute and treat as meaningful, than it does to interpret the motives behind these practices.

By following these two analytical steps, a researcher of status dilemma dynamics can interpret the severity of the status dilemma dynamics. If there are no tensions identified in the empirics, it should be concluded that status dilemma dynamics are *absent*. If there are tensions identified across all three types of tensions, we can either conclude that there are *mild* or *severe* status dilemma dynamics. The researcher should not count the number of tensions to distinguish whether officials are dealing with mild or severe status dilemma dynamics. Rather, the researcher should examine the effect of the tensions on individuals' actions since social tensions take different forms and can manifest themselves in different scenarios. If individuals change their actions repeatedly, the researcher has likely identified severe status dilemma dynamics.

Table 3. Guiding analytical questions

	Questions	Empirics for all categories
<i>Epistemic tensions</i>	<p>How do Indian officials learn their professions?</p> <p>What lessons do Indian officials draw from past experiences?</p> <p>What do Indian officials say about their instructions?</p>	<p>Interview answers</p> <p>Written and oral reflections by Indian officials, e.g., in books, commentaries, panel interventions</p> <p>Participant observations</p> <p>Social media posts</p>
<i>Normativity tensions</i>	<p>What do Indian officials say about their preferred style and ways of doing their jobs?</p> <p>How do Indian officials motivate their practices?</p> <p>To what extent do Indian officials defend and/or promote different goals?</p>	
<i>Recognition tensions</i>	<p>What do foreign officials say about India?</p> <p>Is there a difference between what foreign officials say in private and in public?</p> <p>To what extent do foreign officials accept India's green ambitions?</p>	
<p><i>Source: Author's compilation based on discussion in chapter.</i></p>		

3.5. Concluding remarks

This chapter has introduced a new practice approach to the study of status dilemmas. Drawing on practice approaches in IR, it has argued that status dilemma dynamics capture tensions that can be examined empirically. The new approach contributes a theoretical concept, an analytical triangle consisting of three forms of tension at the administrative level. These tensions shape the everyday, lived experiences of officials in diplomacy. Consequently, the analytical focus of this approach centers on the bureaucracy instead of the political leadership. As such, this practice approach to status dilemmas distinguishes itself from the original conception of *the status dilemma*, which was introduced to the IR discipline a decade ago.²³⁰

To be clear, this practice approach to status dilemmas does not promise to reveal confidential motives or top-down strategy implementation. The findings produced by the approach and the analytical steps through which it is operationalized are also not “the indisputable truth.” Instead, they are an interpreted account of a process at the micro-level that reveals broader insights into the challenges facing officials in their profession. Since the approach focuses on tensions rather than on understanding variation among individuals, it excludes an examination of the quality of interactions between “brokers,” “guardians,” and “space travelers.”²³¹ In this study, the emphasis lies on Indian officials managing tensions as they transform their diplomatic footprint on the world stage. As this thesis will show, managing tensions constitutes a demanding task in practice. In the next chapter, I will discuss methods, methodological considerations, and the diversity of data points for this study, before revealing the tensions that Indian officials manage as they assert India’s green ambitions in a new era of status competition.

²³⁰ Wohlforth 2014.

²³¹ Bueger, Hofius, Edwards, 2024, 7.

4. Research design

4.1. Introduction

This study draws on Vincent Pouliot's interpretivist practice tracing and Christian Bueger's praxiography as methodological foundations for studies about the social life of diplomacy.²³² Building on the practice agenda, this chapter presents methods for gathering, and then systematically assessing, data about Indian foreign climate policy in practice. To explore how India's green ambitions generate tensions at the administrative level in diplomatic settings, this chapter presents the methodological considerations for this study. The chapter is organized into three parts that detail how data was collected, organized, and processed. The first part presents the methods of data collection, the second part describes the analytical approach, and the third part discusses ethical considerations that were taken into account throughout the research process.

Finding sources on Indian foreign policy is often considered challenging, making interviews particularly helpful.²³³ However, there are also other ways to collect data for rigorous analysis. Through repeated in situ observations and multiple methods of data gathering, researchers can understand the mundane and everyday activities that form the social life of diplomacy.²³⁴ Immersing oneself as close to practitioners as possible constitutes a core technique for the

²³² Pouliot, Vincent, 2014; Bueger, Christian, 2014. Pathways to practice: praxiography and international politics. *European political science review*, 6(3), 383-406.

²³³ Pant, Harsh V. and Avinash Paliwal, 2019. "Foreign Policy Analysis and Indian Foreign Policy" in *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis* (ed. H.V. Pant). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 112.

²³⁴ Neumann 2007.

emerging research tradition encompassing “international practice theory,” “practice-tracing,” and “praxiography.” Immersion into different sites resembles “multi-sited ethnography,” a method developed by anthropologist George Marcus. However, praxiography differs from this in that its analytical focus centers on practice rather than cultural norms.²³⁵ Beyond deep engagement with officials, and the writing of autoethnographies through in-depth interviews, researchers can also use official documents and additional interviews to reveal the social conduct of diplomacy.²³⁶ Through multiple methods of data collection, this chapter demonstrates how analysis can be carried out to find out about the different tensions in the social processes forming the status dilemmas facing Indian officials.

4.2. Methods of data collection

The study of practice constitutes a time-consuming exercise that is best conducted through a combination of different methods. Praxiographers and practice-tracers use various methods to study different kinds of practices. Practice can be learned and taught but also observed and discussed. There is a growing body of practice scholarship on the social life of diplomacy informed by conversations, observations, and training sessions in which scholars interact with serving or retired officials or people with a deep knowledge about the diplomatic profession and subject under study.²³⁷ Through such deep engagement with practice, scholars can learn about the social life of diplomacy without serving as diplomats themselves. By tracing diplomatic practices pertaining to

²³⁵ Marcus, George E. 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 95–117; Bueger 2019. Praxiography, In P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug, & R.A. Williams (Eds.), *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*.

²³⁶ Nair, Deepak, 2021. “Hanging out” while studying “up”: doing ethnographic fieldwork in international relations. *International Studies Review*, 23(4), 1300-1327; Huju 2023; Bremberg, Niklas and Anna Michalski 2024. The European Union Climate Diplomacy: Evolving Practices in a Changing Geopolitical Context. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 19(3), 506-535.

²³⁷ Pouliot 2016b; Bueger 2014.

concrete cases in real time, it becomes possible to reveal tensions. This study is not the result of multiple observations of the “here and now” as would be performed in a classic political ethnography research tradition.²³⁸ Instead, I conducted interviews about concrete cases of diplomatic events as close in time as possible to when these events took place. I also collected multiple forms of artifacts related to the events, such as videos, tote bags, op-eds, and tweets. Like Pouliot, who examined periods when “pecking order dynamics were more likely to be debated and, consequently, empirically traceable,” I selected cases that occurred during my research period.²³⁹

The method of participant observation is highly popular among practice scholars. I considered this method as well. At an early stage of the research project, I considered preparing a request to join the Indian bureaucracy for a year. This would have meant taking an approach similar to that of Datta-Ray in his research within the Indian Ministry of External Affairs during the Manmohan Singh era, and also akin to Ross’s direct observations of Jacques Delors’s team in the European Commission thirty years ago.²⁴⁰ However, praxiography takes a skeptical approach to direct observations of practice “as we speak,” arguing that sayings and doings are extremely difficult to observe firsthand.²⁴¹ Instead, praxiographers pursue different strategies of data collection, including the study of “manuals and handbooks – ego-documents – such as letters and autobiographies –, or artifacts which record practice – such as videos, paintings, or architecture.”²⁴² The method of interviewing individuals who have performed, experienced, or observed practice over a period of time is widely accepted among practice scholars.²⁴³ Instead of conducting a specific type of interview, namely the “interview to the double”-technique developed

²³⁸ On political ethnography, see Schatz, Edward (ed.), 2013. *Political ethnography: What immersion contributes to the study of power*. University of Chicago Press.

²³⁹ Pouliot 2016b, 280.

²⁴⁰ Deep Datta-Ray’s research was published in a book format, see Datta-Ray 2015; Ross, G., 1994. *Jacques Delors and European Integration*. Polity Press: Cambridge.

²⁴¹ Bueger 2014, 389–400.

²⁴² Bueger 2014, 389.

²⁴³ Bueger 2014, 400.

by Nicolini, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with an interview protocol.²⁴⁴ In line with Pouliot’s methodological advice on practice-tracing, I conducted semi-structured interviews on concrete cases. This was because this interview style removes the drama from the interview situation. Since elites are often skeptical about speaking with researchers, I opted for a common style of actual interviews that respondents would likely be familiar and comfortable with.

In the future, scholars conducting further research could turn to the archives documenting India’s participation in climate negotiations. This approach has been demonstrated by Sengupta and Nachiappan, who did historical research on India’s involvement in climate negotiations.²⁴⁵ Such diplomatic history scholarship would deepen the findings of my study by drawing on declassified cables, diaries, and official documents stored in archives. Such studies would be valuable to provide a fuller picture of the tensions that India’s green ambitions induce at the administrative level. However, since the archives are currently closed, scholars must rely on other methods to learn more about Indian climate diplomacy. In the remaining part of this chapter, I present these alternative approaches.

²⁴⁴ Nicolini, Davide, 2009. “Articulating practice through the interview to the double”, *Management Learning* 40(2), 195–212; Bueger 2014, 400.

²⁴⁵ Nachiappan, Karthik, 2019. Agenda-setting from behind: India and the framework convention on climate change. *India Review*, 18(5), 552–567; Sengupta, 2020.

4.2.1. From accidental to intended access strategy

Like other practice researchers, I had a personal network and professional experience before my PhD research began.²⁴⁶ My professional background informed me of the feasibility of a PhD on Indian diplomacy. During a 1.5-year position at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, I produced policy-oriented research, and in response to international events, I frequently asked myself: “What will Delhi do now?” During this time, I also arranged a high-level dialogue between the Swedish Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lövin and the Indian Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar. I gained insight into the bureaucratic attention and preparations required for ministerial interactions. After this experience, I maintained a presence in the small European think tank community dealing with relations with India. Thanks to digital connectivity, I could remain in touch with my network of friends and academic contacts in ways that would have been difficult before the internet era. Through Twitter and subsequently X, I shared observations that I found relevant for my understanding of contemporary foreign affairs, thereby gaining and maintaining visibility. Thus, the contours of my access strategy emerged before I decided to write a PhD dissertation on India’s green ambitions in contemporary diplomacy.

After my first year of the PhD program, I decided to focus my research on Indian climate diplomacy and subsequently developed an access strategy while still refining the central focus of my study. With my background and experience conducting virtual research for my MA thesis on EU-India clean energy relations, I aimed to be as close as possible to Indian officials and develop as much familiarity with them as I could. In light of academic advice about building rapport, I networked online through Twitter and LinkedIn as well as in person at events.²⁴⁷ In Stockholm, I attended the Strategic Forum India and the EU-Indo Pacific Track 1.5 Dialogues, co-hosted by the Swedish

²⁴⁶ Loh 2024; Neumann 2012.

²⁴⁷ See e.g., Empson 2018 about using Twitter as an access strategy.

Institute of International Affairs. I regularly attended events sponsored by the Indian Embassy in Stockholm, such as Independence Day celebrations, where I always greeted Indian diplomats stationed in Sweden, fostering a mutual sense of respect. This approach resembles Ortner's data collection technique in which researchers identify events where hard-to-reach individuals present themselves to the public.²⁴⁸ While Ortner sought access to Hollywood professionals, I sought access to diplomatic professionals.

With a Stockholm University accreditation for COP27, which was held in November 2022 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, I continued my efforts to build familiarity with Indian officials and advisors. The research trip to COP27 constituted a key moment in my access strategy, as I traveled to COP27 with a pre-planned agenda, empty notebooks, and eagerness to network. In Egypt, I visited the India Pavilion daily and was able to build relationships with Indian diplomats, elites, and advisors. On the first day, Indian officials looked surprised to see me at their pavilion. After a few days, we began chatting and greeting each other in the COP27 corridors. After attending the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT) Summit on the sidelines of COP27 – a closed-door session, co-chaired by India and Sweden, with ministers, officials, and a handful of experts in the room – my relationship with Delhi-based officials improved further. The research trip to Egypt provided me with numerous business cards, contact details, and initial relationships with people who would allocate time for interviews during my fieldwork in New Delhi.

Furthermore, before the main data collection period in New Delhi, I consulted the academic literature and scholars with fieldwork experience in India. As reports about academic freedom restrictions and foreign researchers' difficulties obtaining research visas reached me, I was even more convinced of the need for a local affiliation. A local affiliation also promised to expand my

²⁴⁸ Ortner, Sherry, 2010. "Access: Reflections on Studying Up in Hollywood." *Ethnography* 11 (2), 211–33.

local network. After a few phone calls and email exchanges, I secured a Visiting Fellowship in New Delhi with the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW), led by Dr. Arunabha Ghosh, who had served as advisor to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. I had met Dr. Ghosh in person at the UN Environment Stockholm+50 and COP27 in Egypt. During the enriching fieldwork, I learned that “CEEW has positioned itself very close to the government,” as an insider put it frankly.²⁴⁹

Instead of making several quick trips back and forth, I conducted two extended stays in New Delhi: September–December 2023 and mid-January to mid-March 2024, with a Christmas break back in Sweden. At the host research institute, I was able to sharpen my research design and interview questions, as well as identify people who could speak with me. At CEEW, I had rich conversations at the coffee machine and in the lunchroom, and my time there served as an informal learning space. Gradually, the research environment evolved from being a space where I learned about New Delhi and contemporary India to a space where I would also learn about India’s climate diplomacy.

In many ways, the research trip to Egypt and the subsequent five months of field research in New Delhi reminded me of Souleles’ reflections about studying elites who can be hesitant about interacting with researchers. Souleles encountered numerous rejections in his random phone calls and emails to private equity investors but was welcomed at conferences. “Everyone wears suits or similar business attire and is more or less eager to meet other people – conference networking is as welcoming as cold calling is not,” Souleles concluded in his study.²⁵⁰ I also found conference networking extremely useful, especially when I did not receive any reply to my email requests.

²⁴⁹ Author’s interview with I#25.

²⁵⁰ Souleles 2018, 59.

4.2.2. Mindful and perceived positionality

The privileges of being a fully funded PhD candidate with a Swedish passport in Delhi could be discussed extensively. Throughout my PhD years, I have been mindful of my positionality, a factor that sometimes surprised me in its perceived form. During my visiting fellowship in New Delhi, I once came to an empty office during a public holiday, unaware that it was a holiday. My local colleagues had expected that I was aware of the public holiday and had not thought to remind me about it. One could ask whether an insider would not have been invited to a national holiday celebration. If so, this incident suggested that I had not yet reached the status of an insider. Later, as I was invited to weekly sports activities, I had reached a new type of *insiderness*. In the practice literature, such inclusion in informal social groups is sometimes viewed as social acceptance of the researcher's positionality as an insider.²⁵¹

However, in my case, I did not feel like an insider because I remained a non-Indian national with minimal chances of gaining access to direct observations inside New Delhi's ministries.²⁵² While I had been inside the representation office at the India Pavilion at COP27, and inside the Indian Embassy in Stockholm, I never felt like an Indian professional, although I considered myself an India expert. Therefore, the term *perceived positionality* has stronger analytical value in my study than the idea of becoming an insider.

As a white male European working in a postcolonial space, I had to be constantly aware of the colonial past. It is noteworthy that I was once told how, for Europeans, the "colonial hangover" can make discussions with Indians difficult. A European official told me: "Maybe you as a Swede can talk to Indians about this [technology transfer], but the colonial history constitutes an

²⁵¹ Nair (2021, 1320) illustrates this type of insiderness, describing how he played basketball with respondents.

²⁵² To the author's knowledge, only Deep K. Datta-Ray has been granted access to be embedded in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs upon personal approval by the former PM Manmohan Singh, see Deep K. Datta-Ray, 2015. *The Making of Indian Diplomacy: A Critique of Eurocentrism*, Hurst Publishers: London, 3-5.

obstacle for our relationships with India.”²⁵³ Foreign officials emphasized the colonial legacy. A retired Indian Ambassador even told me that I could not ignore the “white man’s burden.”²⁵⁴ While my positionality as a Swede created what was perhaps a scholarly advantage, history cannot be ignored when reflecting on my own positionality in the knowledge production process.

During fieldwork, I realized that my access strategy of getting as close as possible had created an external positionality for me. This external positionality had emerged from others recognizing me as a knowledgeable person active in the knowledge production process. This perceived positionality was evident in different ways: MA students from various universities would ask for an expert interview for their theses, think tanks would invite me to panels, and media would ask for expert commentary.

The combination of my mindful positionality and the perceived positionality also affected my access to interviewees and officials. During my fieldwork, I learned that I, as a foreign PhD student, had better access to Indian officials and elites than Indian PhD students whom I knew from academic settings. In many people’s eyes, Stockholm University constitutes a good university, facilitating my interactions in the elite environment of New Delhi. These positionalities and factors allowed me to find officials who would speak with me. In contrast to researchers studying European officials in Brussels, who can regularly meet with these officials,²⁵⁵ I had to invest considerable time in building rapport with Delhi-based officials.

4.2.3. Presence in Delhi: air quality, privileges, inequalities

Conducting fieldwork in a megacity like Delhi provided a lifelong memory. Delhi is a vibrant city that is full of inequalities, but now much cleaner than before due to the G20 summit which India hosted in early September 2023. I could almost smell the newly painted decorations alongside the roads of Delhi,

²⁵³ Author’s interview with I#4.

²⁵⁴ Author’s interview with I#22.

²⁵⁵ See e.g., Adler-Nissen 2014; Bremberg et al 2022.

part of the preparations for this summit. This reminded me of my trip to Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, where I had witnessed workers painting the streets ahead of the arrival of political leaders for COP27 a year earlier. Moreover, in Delhi my white, male privilege was evident in the fact that I did not fear sexual harassment when traveling between meetings and social settings. While I always felt secure, female friends and contacts expressed hesitation about activities such as traveling alone in a cab in the evening.

Throughout the months in Delhi, I adapted my behavior in light of the cultural differences between the Indian capital and Stockholm. I navigated Delhi traffic daily and cherished rainfalls since they brought blue skies and hours of fresh air. One day at the CEEW office, my colleagues and I witnessed swinging lamps due to an earthquake originating in Nepal. Gradually, however, I developed mixed feelings about spending time in Delhi in the fall due to the extensive air pollution. As a researcher interested in international climate politics, I had wanted to experience the hazardous air that covers Delhi annually in November. This decision resulted in an unusually high consumption of painkillers. On a day when AQI levels ranged between 285 and 472, a colleague told me: “We have to live with headaches and take paracetamol.”²⁵⁶ Air quality became a topic that people asked me about during lunch and dinner and that I continuously reflected on in my travel diary. Like local friends and colleagues, I also became ill for several days due to the air pollution. Besides headaches, I suffered from severe vomiting and was highly dependent on my kind roommate for several days. After this experience, people told me that I *understood* what life was like in Delhi, almost as if I had gained respect through my decision to stay in India during these months. After the five months I spent in Delhi, I developed more sympathy for Indians demanding their right to clean air.

²⁵⁶ Author’s field diary, 23 November 2023.

Being a foreigner, affiliated with a well-known research institute, enabled meetings. However, I continuously had to navigate different dilemmas pertaining to inequalities. In Delhi traffic, I saw the gap between those children living on the streets and myself sitting behind a locked car door. After some months, local friends informed me that organized criminal groups sometimes exercise control over these begging children. A similar structural inequality struck me as I met university students and young professionals interested in the world but with limited travel experience abroad. In these instances, I often encouraged people to come to Europe for exchange studies or to apply for MA scholarships in Europe. At the same time, I reflected on my privilege of having been able to experience professional mobility and tourism in multiple countries. I also had to navigate dilemmas of inequality outside office spaces. At dinners and lunch meetings, many Indian friends and colleagues offered to pay as a kind gesture. As I wanted to convey my gratitude while showing respect, I politely thanked my hosts the first time we met and insisted on paying the second time.

Although some people encouraged me to wear traditional Indian clothing at public events or receptions, I refrained from following this advice for fear of cultural appropriation. A CEEW Diwali party and a goodbye party for my local friends marked exceptions when I wore a traditional sleeveless jacket, once called a Nehru jacket and nowadays renamed a Modi jacket.

4.2.4. In situ and virtual participant observations

Unlike Neumann or Lequesne,²⁵⁷ I am not an established scholar with networks that enable direct observations inside Indian ministries. Nonetheless, I drafted a request to the Indian Foreign Minister regarding direct observations.²⁵⁸ After all, such requests have been approved by other countries, and former Prime Minister (PM) Manmohan Singh personally endorsed PhD student Datta-Ray's access to direct observations. Upon advice from scholars, however, I decided not to submit the request, fearing that a probable rejection would harm my plan of interviewing Indian officials. Had I had Indian citizenship, I might have been able to work in the Ministry of External Affairs G20 Secretariat as a consultant and thereby learn about daily activities through direct observation and actual work. Instead of an extensive stay inside one of the Indian ministries, I conducted participant observations at two major conferences: the 9th Raisina Dialogue and the 23rd World Sustainable Development Summit. For the analysis, I triangulated these observations with interviews, news items, and official documents.

Like many participants, I arrived by car. Unlike most participants at Raisina, my driver was an Uber driver rather than a member of an embassy staff. During WSDS, I sat close to the stage on the right side, so I could observe the diplomats seated in the front row and occasionally gain visibility through the conference cameraman's attention to my presence. Instead of sitting in the back row as some people do, I preferred to be seen and be closer to the actual interactions happening before me. The Raisina conference had a longer participant list than WSDS, with more foreign ministers and delegations.

²⁵⁷ Neumann 2012; Lequesne, C. 2019. *Studying Diplomatic Practices Through The Lens Of Direct Observation*. [Research Report] SAGE Publications.

²⁵⁸ In India, the Foreign Minister's formal title is External Affairs Minister (EAM). In this thesis, I use Foreign Minister in place of EAM to make the text more accessible to international readers.

While WSDS was held in the India Habitat Centre, the Raisina Dialogue was held at the lavish five-star Taj Palace Hotel with a conference venue below the ground floor, accessible through elevators from the lobby or through the back entrance. During Raisina, most sessions are recorded and available on YouTube afterward, so I decided to spend as much time on my feet as possible. Moving around the elevators, I shook hands and chatted with other participants outside the main conference hall. Periodically, I would sit down and write some notes for myself, sometimes while sitting in the main conference hall. After a couple of hours at Raisina, I noticed a standing group of people in the back of the conference venue. Instead of sitting down next to someone, with a limited view, I decided to spend the next day standing at the back of the venue, next to the doors, with a view of the 1,000 chairs. Standing at the back provided a different overview of the conference participants and enabled me to connect with people who could help me with my research. While standing there, I primarily took notes on my phone since it felt less awkward than using a manual notebook.

The notes I took during these conferences do not qualify as structured ethnographic field notes, according to Pachirat, who advises researchers to separate descriptions, reflexivity, and analysis.²⁵⁹ Instead, the messy handwritten notes in my notebook and on my phone constituted the first step of my note-taking exercise. Despite the long conference days, which often lasted between 10 and 14 hours, each evening I would quickly write a diary note about my impressions from the conference before falling asleep. After each conference, I wrote a memory note to myself about my impressions and saved business cards. These documents were each 4-5 pages long, not more extensive due to time constraints imposed by upcoming interviews and meetings in Delhi. In addition, I sometimes sketched the conference settings with my pen and took photos.

²⁵⁹ Pachirat, Timothy, 2018. *Among Wolves: Ethnography and the Immersive Study of Power*. New York: Routledge, 124.

Furthermore, I conducted virtual participant observations by spending hours on YouTube watching recordings of Indian officials speaking at different events.²⁶⁰ Through the data collection method of *conference-watching* on YouTube, I could observe practices regarding India's green ambitions in diplomacy even while physically far away from the conference venue.

4.2.5. Interviewing in Delhi

After a summer school on interview techniques, arranged by the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), I drafted an interview protocol for semi-structured interviews (see Appendix). The interview protocol included a warm-up question, questions about concrete cases, questions about the interviewee's everyday activities, and some prompts. In designing this interview protocol, I drew on Pouliot's advice about how to carry out practice-tracing interviews. He suggests that the questions should focus on concrete cases, asking the respondents to elaborate on these, rather than being open, free-flowing questions. The interview protocol was designed to conduct semi-structured interviews about three concrete cases.²⁶¹ Drawing on Leech's advice about how to make respondents feel at ease, when carrying out research I would generally ask for a chat for my PhD research rather than an interview.²⁶² The interview protocol and data management plan were included in my application to the national Swedish ethics review board, which approved my application without any comments. As a sampling technique, I used snowball sampling to find people who matched predefined sampling criteria: the person should have insight into the actions the Indian administration has taken in any of my three

²⁶⁰ On virtual fieldwork, see e.g., Eggeling, K.A., 2023. Embracing the 'inverted commas', or How COVID-19 can show us new directions for ethnographic 'fieldwork'. *Qualitative Research*, 23(5), 1342-1358; Saxena, C., 2023. Letting failure be: COVID-19, PhD fieldwork and to not (want to) learn from failures. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 44(2), 322-338.

²⁶¹ Pouliot, Vincent, 2015. "Chapter 9: Practice tracing" in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 237-259.

²⁶² Leech, B., L, 2002. Asking Questions: Techniques for Semi structured Interviews. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Dec 2002, 35 (4), 665-668.

cases (as a civil servant, expert, advisor, or retired official with networks); they should be an adult; and they should be willing to participate in my study.²⁶³ This meant that I did not interview any ordinary people on the streets of Delhi about my cases. Since the people I interviewed could be considered elites working in the capital, I skipped hiring a translator and did not see any need to conduct quality controls of the transcripts through translation.²⁶⁴ The sampling technique involved meeting with people at conferences or for lunch, so that they could introduce me to relevant Indian and foreign officials.

Instead of the extended field visit I carried out, I could possibly have made shorter research trips during and after India's G20 Presidency. This would have enabled me to follow Indian civil servants in real time. However, funding several flights between Stockholm and India is not a minor endeavor and also comes with additional environmental impacts. Instead, my main data collection took place between January and March 2024. In total, I conducted 36 semi-structured interviews (see Appendix), including pilot interviews.

It was rare for Indian officials to agree to meet me based on a single email. In most cases, there was an intermediary who put me in touch with someone who was comfortable speaking to a foreigner. Despite their hectic schedules, Indian officials made time for conversations, with mid-level and high-level officials speaking more freely than low-level officials. On rare occasions, I took meetings with gatekeepers off-the-record to find interviewees who could speak on-the-record, but I tried to minimize conversations which I was not allowed to use in my research.²⁶⁵ Indian experts and advisors replied quickly,

²⁶³ On snowballing as sampling technique, see e.g., Noy, C. 2008. Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of social research methodology*, 11(4), 327-344. See also: Irgil, E., Kreft, A. K., Lee, M., Willis, C. N., and Zvobgo, K. 2021. Field Research: A Graduate Student's Guide. *International Studies Review*, 23(4), 1495-1517.

²⁶⁴ Filep, B. 2009. Interview and translation strategies: coping with multilingual settings and data. *Social Geography*, 4 (1), 59-70.

²⁶⁵ Marland, Alex and Anna Lennox Esselment, 2019. Negotiating with gatekeepers to get interviews with politicians: qualitative research recruitment in a digital media environment, *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 19 (6), 685-702. Sindre, Gyde M. 2021. "Chapter 19: Gatekeepers" in *The Companion to Peace and Conflict Fieldwork* edited by R. Mac Ginty et al. (eds.), 237-248

as did some members of the diplomatic community. Members of the diplomatic community were available for chats and to give me suggestions about public information, but barely any of them wanted me to mention their name or country. This was likely caution ahead of the national elections that took place soon after I left India.

I met interviewees in different spaces across Delhi. Although I preferred to meet people in neutral spaces, such as cafes or restaurants, I always asked where the interviewee would like to meet. This flexibility took me to offices inside the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), including the classic MEA premises at South Block next to the Prime Minister's Office. I also saw the interiors of the Ministry of Environment²⁶⁶, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, and the in-house think tank NITI Aayog. Some people preferred to meet me outside their offices, which took me to hotel lobbies, residences, shopping malls, and cafes across the city.

After the interviews, I wrote verbatim transcripts of the conversations within a couple of hours or in the morning afterward. During the interviews, I took notes by hand. On several occasions, I wrote memory notes from dinner conversations until past midnight. In addition to what people said, I wrote about my own impressions of the interview and non-verbal communication during the interview, including facial expressions, and observations of the interview milieu. This way, I attempted to gain insights from sitting in waiting rooms, and from walking across the ministry corridors, things that I did every time I met someone inside their offices. All interviewees gave their consent which I documented when allowed to recording them, or otherwise by noting this. Since most people preferred to speak to me without an active recording device, I asked for consent to write down the conversation. Sixteen people

²⁶⁶ For readability, this study uses "Ministry of Environment" in the manuscript. The full title of the ministry during the Modi era is the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC).

agreed to provide their verbal consent in a recorded file on my iPhone. However, some of the interviewees preferred not to have their voices recorded while still providing verbal consent. In these instances, I noted their verbal consent in my notebook with a pen. I informed every respondent about my research interest, explaining to them that I was studying foreign policy tensions and their expression in everyday activities. Every respondent agreed that I could use their answers in my research.

Throughout the interview period, I adapted to local communication styles. Emails became WhatsApp messages; “Dear [name]” became “Dear Sir/Madam/Ms.” Messages on WhatsApp or personal encounters at public events were game changers since officials often admitted that they had not seen my email(s) to their official email addresses. In mid-February 2024, I began adapting my language about Indian officials to use the words they use to describe themselves as members of different *services*. Officials never described themselves as bureaucrats, in contrast to experts describing officials as bureaucrats in conversations with me. The officials are members of different services.

Regardless of the service, low-level officials often insisted I should talk to their bosses instead of them. Occasionally, younger low-level officials told me that they had to ask their boss if they could talk to me, even though I had initiated contact in Delhi. Just as members of the diplomatic community were careful with attribution, Indian officials preferred to stay unnamed. Both foreign officials and domestic officials made statements which suggested that there are limitations to what they can tell researchers. For instance, one person remarked, “I won’t say anything critical,” while someone else told me straightforwardly: “There is protocol.”²⁶⁷

To what extent did I tap into a culture of silence? Rather than a culture of silence, their attitudes reflect the intrinsic limitations on their freedom of

²⁶⁷ Author’s interview with I#6, I#26.

speech as part of their profession. In fact, it would be strange if there were no protocol because these officials, who represent the state, might have access to confidential, non-public information. However, the conduct of diplomacy in contemporary India might be considered a particularly demanding thing to study. This is because, as one person said to me, Indians are “happy to talk about [so-called flaws] in private but very sensitive to discussing our own flaws in public. We are extraordinarily sensitive to it.”²⁶⁸ Limitations on the ability of officials to speak freely can therefore be expected in diplomatic studies and in the study of Indian diplomacy.

As I entered ministries for meetings, I often registered at the reception to receive a blue paper slip specifying my name, nationality, and the host, and usually also bearing a photo of myself. Occasionally, the host listed on the paper was not the same person who had agreed to meet me. I never asked the people who met me about these slips since I feared that would cause them unease. However, I believe that people might put another person’s name – or their boss’s name – on the paper as an act of protection for themselves. According to the ink on these paper slips, registered guests were supposed to return them after the meetings. Yet, when I tried to return the slips, the entrance personnel sometimes said that I could keep them. There were also instances when I entered ministries for rearranged meetings without receiving a paper slip at the entrance. There seems to be a degree of flexibility in this administrative practice.

Walking through the ministry corridors, I often saw the Indian flag hanging on walls, banners from India’s G20 presidency, and the Mission LiFE logo. Surprisingly, I also saw an anti-corruption poster on the wall in the reception area of the Ministry of Environment. These signs and visual artifacts on the walls of the ministries provided me with additional insights into the tensions shaping, and shaped by, India’s green ambitions at the administrative level.

²⁶⁸ Author’s interview with I#22.

4.3. Abductive analysis of practice

The analysis stage of this study constituted a combination of inductive and deductive analysis. Such a combination is common among scholars and increasingly popular among social scientists, who seek new answers to social phenomena through what is labelled as abductive analysis.²⁶⁹ Abductive analysis embraces the iterative process between empirics and theory. It puts the researcher into a constant *seek-and-find mode* in the analysis because there is constantly another round of interpretation. In a review article, van Hulst and Visser suggest four principles for abductive analysis. These principles are collected from fifteen years where this mode of analysis has seen increasing popularity in public administration scholarship. Van Hulst and Visser stress that abductive scholarship tends to “(i) embrace surprises, tensions, and doubts; (ii) use knowledge creatively to theorize; (iii) craft through methodological bricolage; and (iv) iterate through the research process.”²⁷⁰ Although they based these principles on abductive analysis in the discipline of public administration, their principles resonate with practice-oriented research about the social life of diplomacy. We can build on their principles in the study of tensions underpinning status dilemma dynamics.

When gathering empirical data in each case study, I therefore maintained an inductive openness to different materials related to practitioners’ actions. In carrying out analysis, I switched into a more deductive mode. I returned to my analytical framework, whose categorization of tensions allows me to reveal status dilemmas in the empirical material. Instead of letting the empirics speak to me *entirely* freely, I applied my analytical categories in a deductive form of analysis. I then collected more empirical data based on initial findings. This abductive analysis of practice enabled me to generalize insights about

²⁶⁹ Tavory, I., and Timmermans, S. 2014. *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative research*. University of Chicago Press.

²⁷⁰ Van Hulst, M. and E. Lianne Visser, 2024. Abductive analysis in qualitative research. *Public Administrative Review*, Vol.85, Issue 2, 568.

Indian climate foreign policy into a case about the difficulties that green ambitions bring to bureaucracies.

To systematically examine the practices performed by officials in their navigation of different tensions, I compiled a chronological timeline with my observations. This chronology improved my understanding of the process by which officials navigate different forms of tensions. Over time, patterns started to emerge in the chronology regarding how Indian officials dealt with tensions in their climate foreign policy. To ensure that I collected a similar amount of data for each case, I constructed a data collection grid. This data collection grid helped me in the analysis stage because it gave me an overview of the relevant data for each case. My data included numerous observations about officials' involvement in India's climate foreign policy. Knowing that officials often interact with the outside world while their ministers appear in public, I kept a particular focus on the Foreign Minister and Climate Minister's social media accounts, where I would learn about their public speaking engagements and interactions with stakeholders. I collected press releases, news items, photos, participant lists, tweets, newsletters, think tank reports, and interviewed individuals.

The verbatim interview transcripts were analyzed several months after they were produced. In this way, I created a distance from the interview moment and ensured that my case studies were not skewed by a single interview. I bought a license for the software MAXQDA, using this for coding the transcripts, identifying tensions in the interview transcripts, and speeding up the analysis. In coding the transcripts, I kept on asking questions about the material.²⁷¹ To ensure that the analysis in the three case studies was conducted in a similar way, I used the same coding approach for all transcripts.

The next step of the analysis involved multiple months of writing, editing, and rewriting. Through writing many drafts, I integrated the writing process

²⁷¹ See Table 2 in this thesis, chapter 3.

into the abductive analysis of practice. In each empirical case study, I searched for sub-sections in the material and in the timeline. This form of analysis was informed by the “within-case analysis” tradition, which is compatible with abductive analysis. By pinpointing different forms of tensions in the analysis, the larger picture slowly emerged. Through the rewriting of the sections and chapters, the analysis revealed multiple tensions. In this writing stage, I constantly asked myself: What does this tension reveal? What does this way of navigating different forms of tensions tell us about Indian officials’ diplomatic conduct?

To embrace surprises in line with abductive analysis,²⁷² I also paid attention to respondents’ recommendations and advice to me. This meant noting when they said things such as: “Axel, you must understand that...” or “Axel, you should read...” By listening carefully to these responses, I gained further insight into their navigation of tensions. For instance, one official recommended that I study how climate has been handled in previous G20 presidencies. This implied that the official could read a file on previous experiences when navigating tensions.²⁷³ Another official stressed that I should search for the term “equity” in the New Delhi G20 declaration, suggesting that the term was deliberately toned down by the involved officials.²⁷⁴ Yet another official recommended that I read the N.K. Singh and Larry Summers report about SDGs and climate, saying that “it resonated with our thinking.”²⁷⁵ Drawing too many insights from this kind of advice might risk reproducing reality as respondents want to portray it, something which happens frequently when researchers rely on elite interviews.²⁷⁶ However, listening carefully to this kind of advice could also provide deeper insights into officials’ understanding of the social life of diplomacy.

²⁷² Van Hulst, M. and E. Lianne Visser 2024.

²⁷³ Author’s interview with I#13.

²⁷⁴ Author’s interview with I#27.

²⁷⁵ Author’s interview with I#33.

²⁷⁶ Berry, J. M., 2002. Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 35 (4), 679-682.

4.4. Ethical considerations

Research ethics in their different forms must be taken seriously. This study was informed by numerous ethical considerations, agreeing with Fujii's argument that political research must deal with procedural ethics and ethics in practice. Procedural ethics involves a researcher's checklist and formal application to an ethics board. In Sweden (at the time of writing), the ethics board is a national agency instead of a university-wide body reviewing ethics applications. In my case, the application entailed summaries of the research design, a short research plan, a draft interview protocol, a procedure for getting consent, a procedure for approaching respondents, and descriptions of data management. Filling out this kind of form may be considered sufficient for reaching a certain standard of procedural ethics. However, the practical side of ethics involves several dilemmas which can emerge throughout the research process. Fujii describes how, during the research process and as they think about their responsibilities as holders of information, researchers must deal with "dilemmas of power," "dilemmas of proximity," and "dilemmas of publication."²⁷⁷ These dilemmas relate to the researchers' positionality, treatment of data collection, and information management. As such, the practical side of research ethics requires the researcher to be mindful from the beginning of the research phase until after it is concluded.

While carrying out this study, I thought about ethical considerations in their procedural and practical forms. I continued to do so even after the approval of the formal ethical review application. In addition to the practical aspects of ethical research that I presented earlier in this chapter, Fujii's reflections about the dilemmas of proximity and power resonated with my approach to interviews. Instead of aiming for a high number of interviews, I invested ample

²⁷⁷ Fujii, L.A., 2012. Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 45 (4), 717-723.

time in ensuring that I had a clear interview protocol and research design before conducting my main data collection. Through such a cautious approach to the actual interviews, I navigated the dilemma of proximity while continuing my efforts to get access to informed respondents. In the writing stage of the analysis, I decreased my contact with interlocutors and people who could open doors to the powerful officials for me. Through this intentional distance from officials, I tried to ensure that I would not self-censor any analytical insights.

An aspect that relates to procedural ethics is the researcher's attitude toward producing knowledge. The idea of *ethnographic sensitivities* overlaps well with the self-reflexivity and awareness of existing power dynamics in the research phase that qualitative research increasingly requires. The unspoken principles of ethnographic research – that this should encompass no harm, and should show respect, and awareness to historical events – bring added value to qualitative research projects. Embracing ethnographic sensitivities is important for any practice scholar, despite the fact that practice scholarship differs from ethnography. Indeed, ethnographic sensitivities are relevant in studies of Indian diplomacy and bureaucracy since India remains a postcolonial space marked by societal hierarchies.²⁷⁸ European scholars should be aware of India's hierarchical societal structure where networks originating from professional and family connections may have a different significance from that which they have in European countries. European scholars can benefit from learning the history of the postcolonial space, allowing them to show respect towards indigenous knowledge and the human beings with whom they interact during the research process. European scholars must also be aware of domestic and foreign actors' interests in understanding power structures, because these may put the researcher in certain situations. European scholars may also want to be aware of research visa regulations discouraging studies depicted as

²⁷⁸ See e.g., Hujū, K., 2023. *Cosmopolitan elites: Indian diplomats and the social hierarchies of global order*. Oxford University Press.

ethnography. Scholars may benefit from treating India seriously. By stating the need to take India seriously, I mean that researchers should cultivate a recurring and long-term investment in understanding the country, instead of doing a one-month research stay and then continuing research about another country. With a long-term investment comes the opportunity to practice a mindful attitude and gradually become a native in someone else's eyes. Adopting the research attitude of taking India seriously may be a significant ethnographic sensitivity in Indian foreign policy analysis.

Pursuing doctoral studies amid lengthy collegial discussions about using and misusing Artificial Intelligence (AI) also made me curious about research software alternatives. Although software promises to save precious time, it must be approached with different forms of ethical considerations in mind. To transcribe public panel discussions and video interviews accessed online, I used the AI-powered tool Otter.ai for a fee. To improve my writing, I purchased a subscription to Grammarly. While considering the option of Language Tool instead of Grammarly, I opted for Grammarly since its AI had a better reputation. Although Grammarly is an American company, it has adapted to European data privacy regulations in the form of GDPR, which made me stick with Grammarly. Mindful of personal data, I avoided using AI when producing interview transcripts or memory notes from informal conversations.

5. Background: India's green ambitions

5.1. Introduction

The national elections in 2024 saw Modi once again elected as Indian Prime Minister. The cabinet he led included a minister who was responsible for integrating the Ministry of External Affairs with the Ministry of Environment. The appointment reflected the aspiration of Modi, and the Foreign Minister Jaishankar, to turn India into a leading green power that shapes global climate politics. Earlier, Modi had told civil servants “To think and plan long term for the next 25 years and play a vital role for the growth of the country.”²⁷⁹ He had told them to “focus on trade and commerce, technology, innovation, environmental issues, cultural diplomacy.” In October 2023, the Indian government had even decided to hire 200 additional diplomats until 2028.²⁸⁰ In light of these decisions, the bureaucracy in New Delhi faced a dilemma in its efforts to shape global climate politics. Should India avoid changes and stick to its current institutional approach to climate diplomacy? Or should the Indian Foreign Ministry revise its management of climate diplomacy considering the new decision and the political leadership's wish to shape global climate politics? Which strategies should these new officials employ to gain a higher status for India in global status competition?

²⁷⁹ DD India, 2023. “Indian Diplomacy: A Career in the Foreign Service,” YouTube, 23:43.

²⁸⁰ ET Online, 2023. “India approves major foreign service restructuring after 19 years, to add 200+ IFS officers,” *Economic Times*.

This background chapter describes how there has been a gradual integration of green ambitions into India's climate foreign policy. The first part of the chapter provides a brief history of India's climate diplomacy. The second part then discusses contemporary reactions to India's green ambitions. The chapter reveals different attitudes that have been shown in practice when individuals are responding to the new green ambitions. It provides a backdrop to the case studies about status dilemma dynamics dealt with by Indian officials which are presented in the subsequent chapters.

5.2. A brief history

This part of the chapter describes historical moments when Indian diplomacy has interacted with foreign counterparts. We can begin with traditional climate diplomacy inside the UN. One of the first events here was the speech at the UN Environment conference in Stockholm 1972 by India's first female PM Indira Gandhi. Following this, climate change gained global attention and in 1992 the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was introduced with India's participation. Under this convention, states agreed to hold annual Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings.

Since the first annual COP in 1995, India has always been represented in the negotiations. Instead of a constant delegation size, New Delhi has adjusted the number of officials it sends to the meetings throughout the years. The size of the Indian delegation to the annual COP conferences remained below 20 until 2002, when India hosted COP8 in New Delhi. At this meeting, the then Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee welcomed delegates to a "land of rich cultural and natural heritage."²⁸¹ He asserted that "India is deeply committed to the goals of sustainable development" and added that "we have one of the most

²⁸¹ Ministry of External Affairs, 2002. "Speech of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the High-Level Segment of the Eighth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change," 30 October 2002.

active renewable energy programs in the world.” However, the conference to a large extent dealt with the global divide around the Kyoto Protocol, which had been adopted in 1997 but which was never ratified by the US. This meant that Vajpayee’s stance on taking responsibility positioned India in the negotiations, rather than positioning India as an upcoming renewable energy player. The Indian leader stressed that the emissions per capita of developing countries represented “a small fraction of those in industrialized countries.” He therefore highlighted the differences between Global North and Global South in a manner similar to that in Indira Gandhi’s 1972 speech. So, when India hosted the COP it largely continued to adopt the same position it had in previous meetings.

The pro-market liberalization politician Manmohan Singh came into power in 2004. He introduced India’s National Environment Policy in 2006. This included the “prioritization of the right to development.”²⁸² After two years, Prime Minister Singh moved his environment minister, Raja, to the Ministry of Communication and Technology and took charge of the environment portfolio himself. In charge of the Ministry of Environment, the Prime Minister had the institutional control needed to launch India’s first climate strategy. Singh produced the 2008 National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) which listed eight national missions for India. This put climate change high on the political agenda.

After being reelected in May 2009, Singh asked Jairam Ramesh to serve as his Environment Minister and appointed a Special Envoy on Climate Change. Instead of appointing an environment expert or an official from the Ministry of Environment, Singh’s Special Envoy on Climate Change was Shyam Saran. Saran was a retired career diplomat who had served as Foreign Secretary (highest ranked diplomat in the foreign service) in the first Singh administra-

²⁸² Rajamani, Lavanya, 2009. India and climate change: what India wants, needs, and needs to do. *India Review*, 8(3), 342.

tion. Although the Office of the Special Envoy was understaffed and the mandate vague,²⁸³ this appointment meant that a career diplomat was to actively engage in international climate diplomacy.

Ahead of COP15 which would be held in Copenhagen in 2009, Saran traveled to Washington D.C. for meetings. He gave a speech titled *India's Climate Change Initiatives: Strategies for a Greener Future* in front of American officials and experts. This speech described India's new NAPCC as "India's strategy for ecologically sustainable development." Saran concluded that a "key element of this strategy is to bring about a strategic shift in the country's production and consumption processes currently based on fossil fuels, to renewable sources of energy."²⁸⁴ While the diplomatic institutional capacity India devoted to international climate politics remained low, elements of India's green foreign policy ambitions were starting to unfold.

Consequently, the increasingly active Indian government opted to send more people to climate negotiations. As Figure 2 shows, COP15 in 2009 was a peak in terms of India's delegation size. Despite its previous protracted opposition in climate negotiations to voluntary commitments, at COP15 in Copenhagen the Indian government accepted these for the first time. It committed to curbing its per capita emissions to the average level of industrialized countries. The former Environment Minister Ramesh even warned Prime Minister Singh that India's traditional power-seeking approach in climate negotiations "takes away from India's aspirations for permanent membership of the Security Council."²⁸⁵ India's diplomatic approach to climate change underwent a moment of change. But it was a short-lived moment, since the career

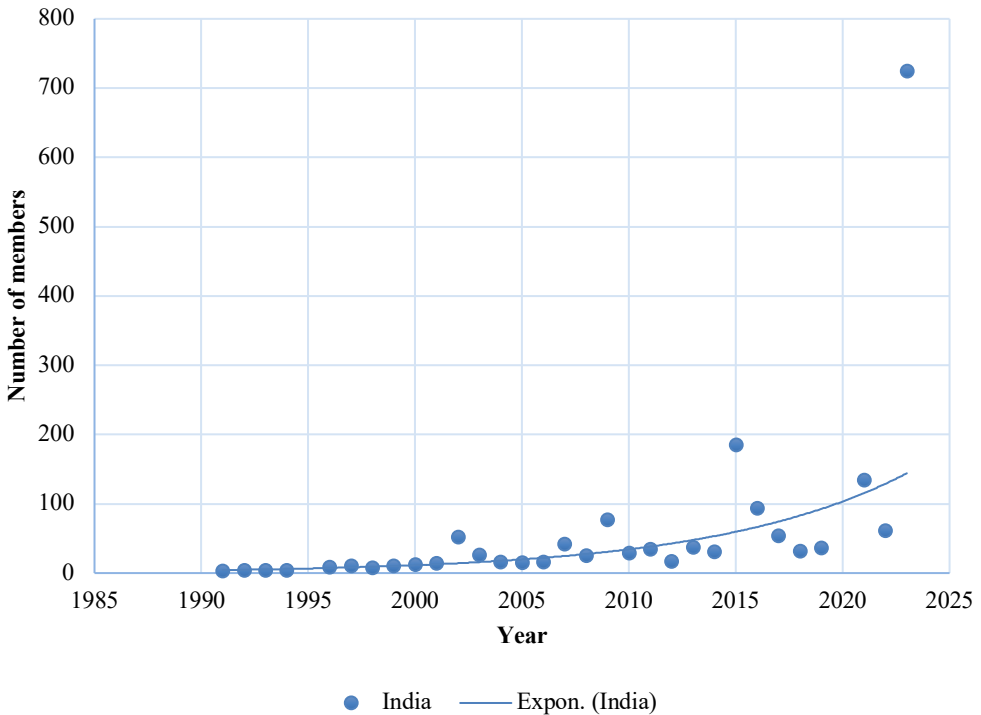
²⁸³ Dubash, Navroz K., and Neha B. Joseph, 2016. Evolution of institutions for climate policy in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51.3, 47.

²⁸⁴ Embassy of India, USA, 2009. "Address by Mr. Shyam Saran Special Envoy of the Prime Minister for Climate Change at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC on India's Climate Change Initiatives: Strategies for a Greener Future," 24 March 2009. Carnegie.

²⁸⁵ Sethi, Nitin, 2009. "Jairam for major shift at climate talks," 19 October 2009. *Times of India*.

diplomat Saran resigned as Special Envoy after only a year of operation in that capacity.

Figure 2. India's delegation size in climate negotiations, 1991-2023.



Source: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat, Lists of participation, available online. Compilation by author.

Two years later, at COP17 in Durban, Indian officials were unsuccessful advocates of the equity principle that India had cherished throughout the decades. To the Indian Environment Minister Jayanthi’s dismay, the final document from COP17 excluded equity as a principle.²⁸⁶ A person in New Delhi recalled India’s unsuccessful climate diplomacy on equity in Durban, saying this marked “the death of equity or maybe I should not say death but the pause.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Hurrell and Sengupta 2012, 472.

²⁸⁷ Author’s interview with I#27.

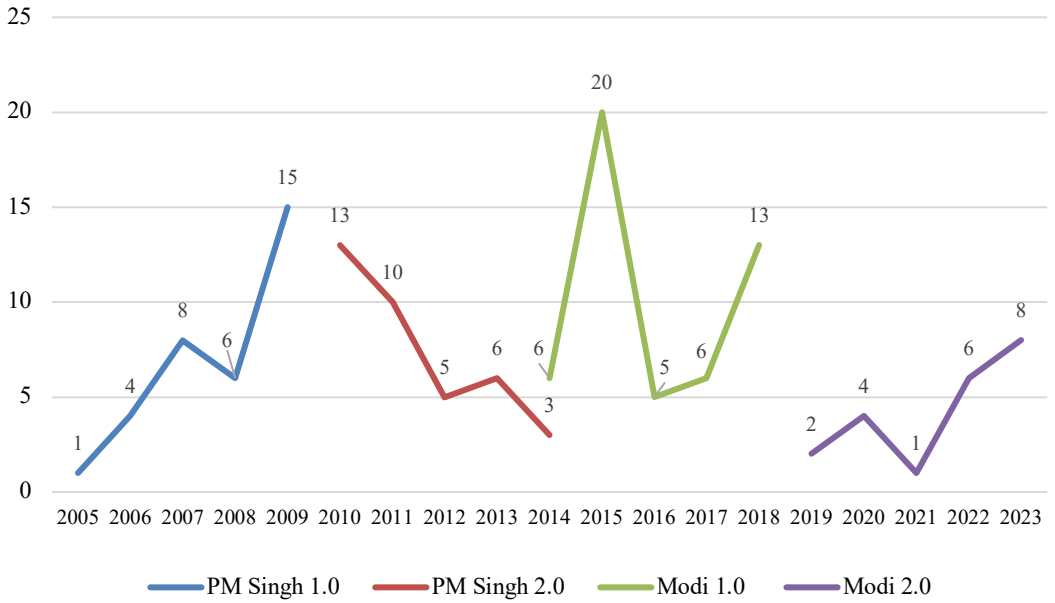
Besides the delegations to climate negotiations, India has entered into many climate-related Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with international partners throughout the years. MoUs can imply the first step towards a more extensive partnership, the intention to collaborate on a more concrete project, or an attempt at diplomatic expectation management.²⁸⁸ However, scholarship on Indian climate diplomacy has paid minimal attention to MoUs thus far. Strikingly, India entered into such MoUs both during Prime Minister Singh's first and second administrations, as well as during Prime Minister Modi's first and second administrations (see Figure 3 below).

According to a database on 'environment and resources' administrated by the Ministry of External Affairs, several different ministries have entered into climate-related MoUs and agreements in the past two decades. Strikingly, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has signed the highest number of MoUs and agreements. Thus, while Sengupta notes the increasing engagement by the MNRE in climate negotiations,²⁸⁹ the dataset suggests that the ministry has agreed to engage partners beyond traditional multilateral diplomatic negotiations (see Table 4 below).

²⁸⁸ Nordenstam, Axel. 2023. "India-EU Climate Relations: Mapping Diplomatic Engagement" in *Tracks to Transition: India's Global Climate Strategy*, edited by Constantino Xavier and Karthik Nachiappan. *Center for Social and Economic Progress*, 79.

²⁸⁹ Sengupta, Sandeep, 2020, "Deciphering India's Foreign Policy on Climate Change: Role of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas" in *India Rising: A Multilayered Analysis of Ideas, Interests, and Institutions* edited by Johannes Plagemann, Sandra Destradi, and Amrita Narlikar. Oxford University Press, 184.

Figure 3. Treaties and agreements on environment, signed by India



Source: India's Ministry of External Affairs, Indian Treaties Database, Environment and Resources. 2005-2023. N=148. Accessed 22 January 2024.

Table 4. Mapping of climate-related MoUs by India's Ministries

Ministry	Number of MoUs/Agreements
Ministry of New and Renewable Energy	35
Department of Atomic Energy	29
Ministry of Environment	15
Ministry of External Affairs	7
Ministry of Power	7
Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas	5
Ministry of Jal Shakti	3
Indian Space Research Organization	3
Ministry of Agriculture	2
Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs	2
Atomic Energy Regulatory Board	2
Ministry of Earth Sciences	2
Ministry of Environmental Conservation	2
Ministry of Urban Development	2
Ministry of Water Resources	2
Department of Science and Technology	1
Ministry of Shipping	1
Ministry of Mines	1
Niti Aayog	1
Planning Commission	1

Source: India's Ministry of External Affairs, Indian Treaties Database. 2005-2023. Environment and Resources. Accessed 22 January 2024

5.3. Internal reactions to India's green ambitions

With the historical background in mind, it is time to discuss the different reactions Indian officials have had to the country's green ambitions. This section is based on elite interviews with Indian elites in New Delhi, providing a unique insight into how civil servants deal with the uncertainty inherent in India's green ambitions.

5.3.1. A political vision, not a bureaucracy vision (yet)

Modi has a political vision that India should become a leading power which provides solutions to global problems. But such a vision has not yet gained broad acceptance in New Delhi. Skeptical reactions and views of India's green ambitions were visible in candid moments during my fieldwork. Many people were surprised when I mentioned my research interest. Besides these initial reactions, a more complicated story emerged during longer conversations. Regardless of whether they were working at the Foreign Ministry or at other ministries, many Indian officials maintained that India has green ambitions. They presented a different answer from the skeptical reactions I had experienced in candid moments. A few, still, were hesitant about India's ability to implement these green ambitions, whilst carefully avoiding comments that could be interpreted as too critical.²⁹⁰

For example, an official dealing with India's power sector admitted that India may have green ambitions but was "realistic about our energy security needs." Interestingly, they provided a European example to support this energy security angle:

We want a diversified energy mix and not [to] experience what Germany had to do with its gas dependency on Russia. The German example is a telling case of what happens if one energy source dominates the energy mix.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Author's interview with I#5, I#20, I#26.

²⁹¹ Author's interview with I#34.

The domestic angle to India's green ambitions was striking. Everyone I talked to thought about where India is today and shared thoughts about India's future when it has grown even further. As a senior official put it: "We must be a leader in this area since if we have no ambitions, we will not grow as we want. [The] PM is very clear about India's green ambitions."²⁹² He added: "We feel like we have, can do, and want to do a different path to development. We will be the first country in history to grow during times of decarbonization." Similarly, many Indian officials contended that green growth is indeed possible and that a climate friendly path towards becoming a leading power in the world is possible.²⁹³ As a civil servant put it:

India's GDP growth has been steady. I need clean energy to add up the GDP in the years to come and take care of our citizens. It's also for global good and other developing countries. The renewable energy plans are good for my growth.²⁹⁴

Although Indian officials emphasized India's green ambitions, these ambitions have not changed their conception of India's role as a developing country. As the highest ranked civil servant in the Foreign Ministry argued, India is "unique amongst developing countries and is placing itself on the path to realize its ambitions to be a leader in thought and action on climate."²⁹⁵ At the same time as India is attempting to be such a leader, Indian officials are seeking "an equitable carbon space for all developing countries." They want this to continue enabling developing countries to reach their rightful development levels, just like industrialized countries.²⁹⁶

While India still considers itself as a developing country, New Delhi is increasingly skeptical about China's self-proclaimed role as a developing country. One official stressed that China is "different to South Africa, India, and

²⁹² Author's interview with I#33.

²⁹³ Author's interview with I#13, I#19, I#28, I#29, I#33.

²⁹⁴ Author's interview with I#28.

²⁹⁵ Shringla, Harsh V., 2021. "Opinion: Moving beyond Paris, India steps up its climate ambitions", op-ed, *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, 21 January 2021.

²⁹⁶ Author's interview with I#17.

other developing countries.” They found it hard to accept China’s status as a developing country because, to them, China had reached a different level.²⁹⁷ Similarly, experts maintain that China’s financial contribution to climate action is limited, regardless of whether you look at the money it gives through the Belt and Road Initiative, through the green climate fund, or through the global south climate cooperation fund.²⁹⁸

Some officials provided a modest way of thinking about India’s green ambitions. One such official thought that India was taking “our own path” and argued that it is “doing a lot” with its national action plan, state action plan, climate mainstreaming, and renewable energy increasing in its energy mix.²⁹⁹ Yet, in between the lines, this official hoped that there would be more international support for India as it takes its own path. As they said:

Some have thoughts about what other countries can do, but we cannot do it. India has a huge population and huge size; we’re a large emitter in total but with a low-level per capita emission. We will still need energy, and our GDP growth will most likely bring more emissions. Our renewable energy capacity is growing, but we need more technology and investments. We are reaching out to partners for cooperative mechanisms, just like the Paris Agreement supports, and invite investment from abroad.³⁰⁰

Another argument these officials made rested on how the green ambitions were serving the people of India. They said this was necessary since “climate change is very real for us in India.”³⁰¹ In a meeting room in the Indian Foreign Ministry, a senior official stressed that India’s green ambitions had a strong domestic reasoning:

²⁹⁷ Author’s interview with I#17.

²⁹⁸ CSEP 2023. “Research Launch I Tracks to Transition: India’s Global Climate Strategy.” Transcript from event, 15.

²⁹⁹ Author’s interview with I#17.

³⁰⁰ Author’s interview with I#17.

³⁰¹ Author’s interview with I#32.

We have ambitions for the people in India. We have one billion people, trying to bridge the gap between the Global North and Global South, nation-building happening as we speak, how do you give hope to people? We need aspirations for growth, technology for the next generation. Just look at the moon landing, we chose the dark side of the moon, to show new aspirations.³⁰²

Interestingly, the domestic element did not just concern wealthy people but also workers. During fieldwork in Delhi, several people told me about the risks of protests by coal mine workers should coal mines close overnight. In fact, Delhi witnessed protests by local farmers in response to national policy, implying that discontented workers can raise their concerns on the streets. Such fear of protests affects India's external relations. In conversation with an Indian official, I learnt that external pressure about India's use of coal, coal mine closures, or phase-out of coal could backfire. This is because this external pressure can affect the attention being given to climate change in India.³⁰³ Thus, there is a strong domestic element that officials consider when thinking about India's climate diplomacy.

On this front, one person described India's green ambitions as a way of building knowledge about climate action: "All countries nowadays need to think about development with good impact on planet versus development with bad impact on planet. It's partly a contradiction, but not many people in India know about climate action."³⁰⁴ This suggests that India's green ambitions are elite-driven and have not yet reached the broader masses in India.

³⁰² Author's interview with I#19.

³⁰³ Author's interview with I#21.

³⁰⁴ Author's interview with I#26.

5.3.2. The ambition to become a green superpower

In the American foreign policy establishment journal *Foreign Affairs*, Ghosh presented India's green transition as an attempt to become a green superpower.³⁰⁵ Discussing India's net-zero announcement, which was made during COP26 in Glasgow, Ghosh admits that "it will be extremely difficult to meet." He states that "New Delhi will have to find a way to make this leap without spewing more carbon into the atmosphere. It will, in other words, have to grow in a manner that no major economy has before." Interestingly, the article is full of expressions about the tensions surrounding India's green ambitions that Indian officials may face in their professional habitat.

For instance, after discussing solar capacity, Ghosh admits that "India is unlikely to match" the green industrial policies that other countries have adopted, such as the American Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the European Union's Fit-for-55. He states that India cannot do this because "the country simply lacks the fiscal resources of Washington and Brussels." Instead, according to Ghosh, India would be more prudent to "become part of a renewable energy manufacturing supply chain that extends from the United States to the European Union and from Australia to Japan." He then goes on to state that, at the same time, India "must be careful not to fall into the trap of green protectionism." Here, he points to actual domestic progress in Indian states. Ghosh concludes that, instead of entering a great conflict with other countries, India should build partnerships with states and international companies. That way India can "become a green power player" that "helps design the energy security architecture that can bring power to people and guarantee a sustainable future."

The article is fascinating for several reasons. First, it puts India's green transition in a contemporary international context, accepting that India has the world's fourth-largest economy rather than presenting it as a low-income

³⁰⁵ Ghosh, Arunabha, 2023. Can India Become a Green Superpower? The Stakes of the World's Most Important Energy Transition. *Foreign Affairs*, 102, 144.

economy. Second, it sheds light on how India is pursuing its green ambitions in both domestic and international policy, with progress made in Indian states and various international initiatives. Third, the essay skips lengthy discussions about historical responsibilities and instead states clearly that “India desperately needs more financing.”

However, very few Indian officials who took the time to meet me had read the essay. Although people in Delhi are known to be well-read when it comes to political discussions, an American foreign policy journal might not attract as many readers in Delhi as in Washington. In fact, the term “green superpower,” which is used by Ghosh in the article, did not appear to be widely used inside the Indian government.³⁰⁶ This perhaps made officials unsure how to deal with my question about the feasibility of becoming a green superpower.

5.3.3. The cautious people

In New Delhi, I asked people about India’s potential to become a green superpower, using the same term employed by Ghosh in the article discussed above. I received a variety of answers which expressed the tensions involved in India’s green transitions. A recurring response to my forward-looking question was: “how do you define a green superpower?” Officials were well-aware that, if total capacity of renewable energy is taken as the main marker of a green superpower, China would qualify rather than India.³⁰⁷ The China factor was also present in responses to questions about climate governance. As one person remarked: “We’re a democracy and not an autocracy like China.”³⁰⁸

Several people pointed to the fact that India’s rise will take time.³⁰⁹ Interestingly, one expert argued that India “can be ready to become a green superpower” in 10-15 years, adding that this could happen only after “we have built

³⁰⁶ Author’s interview with I#17.

³⁰⁷ Author’s interview with I#34.

³⁰⁸ Author’s interview with I#10.

³⁰⁹ Author’s interview with I#10, I#14, I#17, I#20.

energy security with other resources [than coal].”³¹⁰ Some argued that India becoming a green superpower would be easier for the country’s rich than for its poor, since there is still a disparity.³¹¹ Similarly, one Indian diplomat admitted that the pace at which India can achieve green transition is dependent on available technology and funding, even if India is reducing its fossil fuel reliance.³¹²

Interestingly, several people voiced cautious perspectives that showed they felt priority should be placed on India’s economy while it could also seek opportunities to overlap the economic and the green agenda. For an Environment Ministry Official, the most important element for a superpower was to have a strong economy.³¹³ This official cautiously argued that if the new energy systems were green and formed a low-carbon economy, India could become a green superpower.³¹⁴ Slightly more optimistic was a retired official from the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, who thought that “if we can get green hydrogen and grow our economy, then we’re on good track.”³¹⁵

5.3.4. The optimists

Professionals from the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) offered the most optimistic and positive voices. This is unsurprising since the significance of the Ministry would increase if India became a green superpower. After all, before Modi became Prime Minister, the Ministry used to be called “the ministry of subsidies” among Indian civil servants.³¹⁶ As a former highest ranked civil servant from the ministry told me, after Modi came to power in 2014 “the MNRE received more attention from PMO [the Prime Minister’s Office] than before and started being seen as similar to the Ministry

³¹⁰ Author’s interview with I#14.

³¹¹ Author’s interview with I#14.

³¹² Author’s interview with I#17.

³¹³ Author’s interview with I#10.

³¹⁴ Author’s interview with I#10.

³¹⁵ Author’s interview with I#29.

³¹⁶ Author’s interview with I#29.

of Finance!”³¹⁷ Looking ahead, the person was convinced about India’s need for energy capacity without discarding renewable energy:

The power demand will continue to increase as we grow, but our average consumption is still lower than in the US. And renewable energy is cheaper than other energy sources. India can and could become a green superpower!³¹⁸

Upon my arrival at the MNRE, I noted the modern ministry building which had an exterior that reminded me of the financial district in Frankfurt. In the waiting room, there were some magazines, such as Business Today and the India-Russia Digest, on a table next to couches that looked like chesterfield sofas.³¹⁹ Sitting in a spacious and modern office, an official expressed positivity about India’s green ambitions:

We want to become a green superpower. We have a huge country, ample land, growing consumption. If you leave China apart, we are the fastest growing country, just see what Bloomberg reports and their ratings. In fact, we intend to become a green superpower.³²⁰

While many officials compared India with China or the US, a former MNRE secretary thought that if India became a green superpower this could affect the surrounding international region. Despite not being a diplomat, the official thought:

I actually think it will have implications for neighboring countries due to the energy pricing market in India. You know, if the energy prices in India are so low and the renewable capacity increases, the neighborhood would probably adapt to it.³²¹

This neighborhood outlook reminded me that high-level civil servants sometimes can take international elements into account. While I met many low-

³¹⁷ Author’s interview with I#29.

³¹⁸ Author’s interview with I#29.

³¹⁹ Author’s field note, March 2024.

³²⁰ Author’s interview with I#28.

³²¹ Author’s interview with I#29.

level civil servants who were curious about my research and helped me with different tasks in New Delhi, I also heard that many low-level officials tended primarily to focus on their own work rather than India's role in the world.

One Indian diplomat I spoke with was intrigued by the idea of India becoming a green superpower and skeptical about the idea of superpowers predominantly being military powers. This diplomat argued that “we need to redefine the global definition of superpowers.”³²² They contended that “being a green superpower implies the ability to deliver public good,” so if a country offers a solution to providing a global common good, then a country could be a superpower.³²³ Thus, the diplomat provided meaning and a definition that might fit India.

5.4. India's new institutional capacity

Currently India has around 900 diplomats, meaning the staff of India's Foreign Service is approximately equal in size to that of Singapore. When the Modi cabinet took the decision to hire 200 additional diplomats in the forthcoming years, many commentators welcomed this. To India's former Ambassador to Russia, the upgrade reflected India's growing economy: “We cannot have a foreign service of the same size when we are the 10th largest.” They pointed to the need for more expertise, since “a complex world also needs more specialization.”³²⁴ If Delhi appoints 200 additional diplomats, the foreign service would be 20 percent larger and have approximately the same number of officers as the Swedish Foreign Service. In light of these number, it is no surprise that scholars describe India's institutional capacity as a major

³²² Author's interview with I#19.

³²³ Author's interview with I#19.

³²⁴ Krishnan, Murali, 2023. “Why is India boosting its diplomatic workforce?”, *DW News*. 24 October 2023.

challenge for building and deepening the country's external relations.³²⁵ European and Indian experts view this limited diplomatic capacity as a constraining factor for deeper cooperation between India and the EU.³²⁶ Even India's former Ambassador to the US told the press that "India's diplomatic service has been badly short staffed."³²⁷ At the same time, even with an increase to 1100 diplomats India's foreign service would still be smaller than the diplomatic services of France, Brazil, or many other middle powers, and it would still be tiny in comparison to those in the US or China.

Against this backdrop, retired Indian officials argue that New Delhi should think long and hard about its climate diplomacy. For instance, the former Indian Ambassador Bhatia has argued that "it is simply not possible to carry forward state-to-state relations with many members of the international community" without discussing climate and sustainability.³²⁸ A similar argument was offered by the former Indian UN Ambassador, Puri, in a talk for prospective Indian diplomats. Puri explained that "diplomacy requires both a generalist's understanding of issues and the negotiating tactics and strategies, but it also requires a specialist's in-depth understanding of specific issues."³²⁹ Speaking on an Indian diplomacy television show, Ambassador Puri shared memories of receiving instructions from the capital, but also creating instructions, to push for India's national interest. When posted abroad, Puri recalled that "it was very much about idea entrepreneurship and policy entrepreneurship at the mission level. Many times, we'd never got any instructions."³³⁰

A report by an Indian think tank gives another indication that India's diplomacy will deal more with climate foreign policy in the coming years. In the

³²⁵ Bajpai, Kanti and Byron Chong, 2019. India's Foreign Policy Capacity, *Policy Design and Practice*, 2:2, 137-162.

³²⁶ Aspengren, Henrik Chetan, Emil Lidén, Axel Nordenstam, 2021. Circles of EU-India Engagement: How member states cooperate with India on global issues, *Swedish Institute of International Affairs*. UI Papers no. 1, February 2021,4.

³²⁷ Krishnan, 2023.

³²⁸ DD India, 2023. "Exclusive conversation with Rajiv Kumar Bhatia, Former Ambassador," YouTube, 00:34-01:30.

³²⁹ DD India, 2023. "Indian Diplomacy: A Career in the Foreign Service," YouTube, 11:31.

³³⁰ DD India, 2023. "Indian Diplomacy: A Career in the Foreign Service," 15:22.

report titled *Tracks to Transition: India's Global Climate Strategy*, which was published by the Indian think tank Center for Social and Economic Progress, scholars describe how India's Foreign Service increasingly devotes attention to climate diplomacy, even whilst the Ministry of Environment leads climate negotiations. Inside the MEA, the division United Nations Economic and Social (UNES) "only has a limited role that is mostly restricted to the UNFCCC" and India lacks a "dedicated department focused on climate."³³¹ The scholars argue that the increased attention to climate diplomacy risks producing a lack of clarity and confusion among India's partners. To manage such uncertainty, scholars put forward four proposals to strengthen the way in which India's green ambitions are presented in its diplomatic footprint worldwide:

- a) A high-level special envoy for climate cooperation reporting directly to the Prime Minister.
- b) A new climate cooperation division inside the Foreign Ministry.
- c) A secretary-level position overseeing climate diplomacy, operating alongside four other secretaries inside the Foreign Ministry.
- d) Climate wings at selected Indian representations abroad, such as in Washington DC, Brussels, and Tokyo, responsible for implementing bilateral partnerships.

I assumed that Indian officials could speak freely about how the proposals in the report affected their routines and professional tasks. After all, it is sometimes easier to talk about proposals rather than providing in-depth descriptions of demanding situations from the recent past. I therefore asked a number of elites what they thought about the proposals made in the report. These reflections by officials provide a deeper view about a contemporary challenge that Indian diplomacy is facing. These challenges were summed up by one observer as follows: "the MEA's budgetary limitation reflects a risk of a growing

³³¹ Xavier, C., and Nachiappan, K. 2023. "Introduction" in Xavier, C. and Nachiappan, K. (Eds). *Tracks to Transition: India's Global Climate Strategy*, 13. *Centre for Social and Economic Progress*.

gap between India's declared foreign policy ambition to serve as a Vishwa Guru and its limited institutional capacity to achieve such a role in practice."³³² The answers which officials gave me also help us understand the tensions facing Indian officials dealing with climate diplomacy. In addition, while officials, regardless of nationality, tend to be hesitant about reviewing their colleagues, asking this question allowed me to hear reflections about the tensions surrounding India's climate diplomacy in practice.

Maybe we should do it

Most respondents actually avoided commenting on the proposal of a special envoy. However, a few interviewees said that an appointment would be seen as a re-appointment, since the career diplomat Saran had served as special envoy in 2009.³³³ Back then, India was often portrayed as a naysayer in global climate politics. Saran thought this was "a completely unfair image," since to him Indian officials were simply reminding foreign counterparts about their signing of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.³³⁴ Today, on the other hand, India has acquired another reputation in the world. At a public event in New Delhi, Saran now argued:

Today perhaps our image is somewhat different and that image to me as a diplomat it seems because our in a sense location in the geopolitical landscape is somewhat different from what it was at the time that I was special envoy.³³⁵

Interestingly, Saran repeatedly told the audience about the importance of convening power inside the Indian government. As he put it:

If the Ministry of External Affairs or the Ministry of Environment and Climate is asking for the secretaries of five other ministries or six other ministries to come together to deal with a particular issue, you

³³² Xavier, Constantino and Riya Sinha, 2023. "How India Budgets to Become a Leading Power", *Center for Social and Economic Progress*, blog, 8 February 2023.

³³³ Author's interview with I#19 and I#35.

³³⁴ CSEP 2023, 9.

³³⁵ CSEP 2023, 10.

know, maybe he will send a deputy secretary or an undersecretary. Not much emerges out of this. What made a difference during those two years was that as the Prime Minister's special envoy, the office of the special envoy had tremendous *convening power*. You could get people at decision-making levels to come and sit with you and try and resolve the issues. That is what you need.³³⁶

However, gathering people in the same room might not bring clarity. As an insider told me: "A potential problem with the position is that it could create tension with the Foreign Secretary" since two such high-ranked civil servants might have different priorities, agendas, and preferred activities.³³⁷ Another potential challenge is to ensure that the Ministry of Environment feels respected and "buys into the idea, since they are the nodal ministry for COP."³³⁸ Thus, the relationship between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of External Affairs seems to be key in the navigation of different tensions.

Surprisingly, none of the officials I spoke to argued that a special envoy could be useful for the review of Agenda 2030, or for dealing with India's reputation amidst the global net-zero debate. These are topics which I thought they might be concerned about. One interviewee reflected, however, on India's bid to host a UN climate meeting in 2028 and thought that a special envoy could be helpful "if India wants an ambitious agenda for COP33."³³⁹

These examples illustrate how the inter-ministerial relationships, and the bureaucratic uncertainty in New Delhi, affects Indian officials' navigation between different ambitions. Tellingly, an insider told me that "think tanks and academics can present many ideas but it's a bit different inside the walls."³⁴⁰ The distribution of responsibilities among India's ministries seems to affect

³³⁶ CSEP 2023, 10-11. My *italics*.

³³⁷ Author's interview with I#35.

³³⁸ Author's interview with I#35.

³³⁹ Author's interview with I#35.

³⁴⁰ Author's interview with I#17.

the agency of different civil servants implementing India's strategies towards higher status in the world.

Such tension was also evident in answers about hiring additional civil servants dealing with climate diplomacy. As an official said: "we are *mindful* about the other ministries. [The] Ministry of Environment is the nodal ministry now, so we *need to* take that into account."³⁴¹ Such sensitivity might be the reason why many interviewees chose not to comment on the special envoy proposal. They knew that I was a visiting fellow at a private research institute that offers advice to the government and that the CSEP report was reviewed by India's former National Security Advisor. They might have been concerned about their own future access to such advice. Overall, interviewees displayed cautiousness about discussing a new special envoy.

In contrast to this caution, many more openly discussed the idea of a climate diplomacy division inside the MEA. As an insider reasoned, "maybe we should do it. We have one division – UN Economic and Social (UNES) – that deals a lot with climate talks and climate diplomacy. Maybe we should add climate diplomacy to the name."³⁴² Yet, at the end of the day, officials highlighted that it is a political decision which has precedents with the cyber diplomacy division, new technologies division, and Indo-Pacific division, which are all newly installed, functional MEA divisions.³⁴³ Thus, a future restructuring of the MEA could imply the introduction of a new division on climate diplomacy as a way to ease the implementation.

Surprisingly, the officials I spoke with did not overwhelmingly welcome the idea of hiring additional climate diplomats. An official frankly told me "I don't think we have an institutional capacity problem. There are many steps between our current 1000 diplomats and 20000 diplomats like the US has. And we will increase our capacity as we grow."³⁴⁴ At the same time as this

³⁴¹ Author's interview with I#19, my *italics*.

³⁴² Author's interview with I#19.

³⁴³ Author's interview with I#17.

³⁴⁴ Author's interview with I#21.

official dismissed the idea of more climate diplomats, they said they thought that energy diplomats who could talk about renewable energy “would be good to have.”³⁴⁵ Some officials argued that additional civil servants would not bring clarity due to their limited understanding of climate diplomacy. They said this made alternative approaches, such as the “whole-of-government approach” that India adopted during its G20 presidency, more appealing.³⁴⁶ With a whole-of-government approach implementing different targets, the official “responsible at the ministry must collaborate with countries that can help us achieve these targets.”³⁴⁷

At the same time, the Ministry of External Affairs already has the authority to instruct diplomats serving abroad to pay attention to climate debates.³⁴⁸ While it is more common that the Ministry of Commerce sends officials abroad, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy will “sometimes have scientists in Indian embassies who could help with issues.”³⁴⁹ Indeed, “Climate diplomats could learn more about the host country’s domestic priorities and find new projects to collaborate on.”³⁵⁰ A person exemplified how the current setting might enable New Delhi’s preparations for COP33:

You could ask the Ministry of Environment to send people to embassies and then return to Delhi ahead of COP33 so they would have updated views from different capitals. They could staff and report back to Delhi, as preparations for COP33. Already now, the MEA can give instructions to the embassies to pay attention to climate debates in their respective countries, so you don’t need special diplomats from the Ministry of Environment. MEA could also form a core team for COP33 a few years before it happens as preparations.³⁵¹

³⁴⁵ Author’s interview with I#21.

³⁴⁶ Author’s interview with I#11 and I#20.

³⁴⁷ Author’s interview with I#21.

³⁴⁸ Author’s interview with I#35.

³⁴⁹ Author’s interview with I#29.

³⁵⁰ Author’s interview with I#29.

³⁵¹ Author’s interview with I#35.

Thus, the hiring of new diplomats to the Indian Foreign Service induces new uncertainty about the extent India's green ambitions will reflect the hiring. The hiring committees will have to balance different wishes inside government, where these wishes reflect different views about India's rise to become a leading power.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how India's green ambitions challenge the institutional setup of India's climate foreign policy. These green ambitions put pressure on existing bureaucratic structures and expose the limited number of Indian diplomats. In this way, the ambitions alter the social dynamics of Indian climate foreign policy that have traditionally been shaped by the relationship between the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Indian Ministry of Environment (MOEFCC). Through their gradual integration into the bureaucracy, India's green ambitions induce tensions between ministries. This chapter has emphasized that the relationship between the MEA and the MOEFCC is significant for India's green ambitions and its broader international climate agenda. Officials serving in these ministries have different views and perspectives on India's social status in the world and development trajectory. The gradual integration of green ambitions into the bureaucracy therefore creates disarray and divergent understandings among officials. In other words, there are more moments where officials face demanding choices and so status dilemma dynamics become more likely.

However, the political leadership's ambition for India to pursue a green path to heightened status has not been fully mainstreamed into the bureaucracy. Some officials express thoughts aligning with a green strategy for status, whereas others remain highly skeptical. A mixed response is not entirely problematic for India's bureaucracy. On the contrary, it could lead to more debate about India's ability to become an active power in global affairs. Yet,

the mixed response that India's green ambitions have received illustrates the challenges and opportunities these cause for officials working in different ministries. The initial reactions to the integration of India's green ambitions into the engine room of status ambitions suggest that officials navigate numerous tensions in practice. Thus, besides hiring more diplomats for the Indian Foreign Service, the craft of diplomacy cannot be underestimated. Institutional capacity can provide a better starting point for navigating the different tensions that green ambitions induce, yet these tensions can be demanding in practice.

6. India's green ambitions in climate negotiations

6.1. Introduction

During the Modi era, which began in 2014 and stretches to the present day, the government has announced two significant milestones for India's rise: 2047 and 2070. The first, 2047, is the one hundred year anniversary of independence for modern India, and marks the year of *Viksit Bharat (Developed India)* by when it is hoped that the country will be fully developed and prosperous. The second, 2070, is the year by which it is hoped that India will achieve climate neutrality, when India will be a developed country and a net-zero economy. The *Modi Doctrine* therefore envisions India reaching developed-country status *before* becoming a net-zero economy. These aspirational goals together reflect India's green ambitions. This chapter describes how these green ambitions induce tensions in climate negotiations and put officials into situations where they must navigate different forms of tension. It does so by tracing the practices performed by Indian officials at two of the annual climate conferences held under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): COP27, which was held in 2022 in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, and COP28, which was held in 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

As Indian officials prepare for, and participate in, climate negotiations, they navigate multiple tensions that reflect status dilemma dynamics. In a nutshell, they navigate the choice between India's traditional approach to gaining status and new political instructions which aim to make it a leader in global climate

politics. There are indications that this balancing act can be demanding in climate negotiations. At COP26, which was held in 2021 in Glasgow, India faced a difficult situation regarding whether to endorse or reject a formulation about phasing out coal. In the end, the Indian Climate Minister rejected the formulation. Afterward, *The Economist* noted that India became the “skunk at the garden party” because of this rejection. At the same time, the magazine acknowledged that Prime Minister Modi had actually “made a series of pledges in Glasgow that, if kept, will make his country a green-energy powerhouse.”³⁵² This example from Glasgow illustrates that Indian negotiators thought they had the agency to oppose a contentious formulation at the final hour. An Indian think tank professional admitted in private that the Indian negotiators committed a “blunder” by impulsively rejecting the formulation without fully comprehending the potential consequences of siding with China and the US.³⁵³ Clearly, there is friction in the rollout of India’s green ambitions and officials deal with this on a regular basis.

This chapter makes the argument that Indian officials navigate severe status dilemma dynamics in climate negotiations, and that they do so because there are multiple tensions shaping the social processes in which Indian officials perform various practices. The chapter begins with a background section that sets the scene for this practice analysis. It then goes on to apply the practice approach to status dilemmas which was developed in the theory chapter of this thesis. This theory is applied to examine three forms of tensions: epistemic tensions, normativity tensions, and recognition tensions. Through this approach, we can better understand status dilemmas at the micro-level of Indian climate diplomacy.

The analysis presented in this chapter makes several findings. It emphasizes that status dilemma dynamics have not fully transformed India’s ways

³⁵² The Economist, 2022. “Skunk no more”, Briefing: Clean Technology in India. October 22, 2022.

³⁵³ Author’s interview with I#14.

of participating in climate negotiations in formal negotiation rooms. However, status dilemma dynamics produce change at the administrative level. Hence, the tensions shaping, and being shaped by, India's green ambitions induce change whilst simultaneously preserving some existing practices. The chapter concludes that the current administrative balance, between the new and the old approaches to participation in climate negotiations, risks producing unintended consequences for Indian climate diplomacy. This chapter is based on a unique set of interviews, official documents, news articles, meeting reports, and digital recordings.

6.2. India's participation in climate negotiations

The first part of this section depicts the participation of different ministries in climate negotiations, which is the material starting point for any navigation of status dilemma dynamics. To understand practice, we can study the delegation composition for climate negotiations. In essence, the Indian delegation comprises officials appointed by different ministries. The second part then discusses the administrative distinction between India's climate diplomats and India's climate negotiators. As such, this section shines a light on intrinsic administrative tensions in the contemporary Indian way of pursuing climate negotiations.

6.2.1. A brief overview

The first Conference of the Parties (COP) held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) took place in Berlin, in 1995. Ever since then, Indian officials have had ongoing interactions with their counterparts in preparatory meetings and formal negotiations. At every COP within the UNFCCC, there has been an Indian delegation comprised of officials appointed by different ministries. The ministries whose officials attend the climate negotiations engage in internal preparations ahead of COP,

usually beginning 2-3 months before.³⁵⁴ The ministries prepare texts and positions on those topics that “they have competence and responsibility for.” This implies that they “seldom have internal comments on each other’s positions.”³⁵⁵ Each ministry appoints individuals as their voice, eyes, and ears in different negotiation rooms, following different COP tracks. As the “nodal ministry,” the Ministry of Environment coordinates the Indian delegation during preparatory meetings and actual negotiations.³⁵⁶ As such, the Ministry of Environment plays a convening role inside the Indian government and is critical for India’s participation in climate negotiations.

Figure 4 presents an overview of the involvement which different ministries had in India’s participation in COP27 and COP28.³⁵⁷ In total, six ministries were involved in preparations and sent personnel to the two conferences. The Ministry of Finance sent two officials each year; the Ministry of Power had a representative; the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy sent four officials; and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting sent a person in charge of public relations. Interestingly, the Ministry of Environment sent a similar number of people to both conferences, with 24 people representing the Ministry sent to COP27 and 27 people sent to COP28. This means that the core group of Ministry of Environment officials dealing with climate negotiations was fewer than 30 people. The Ministry of External Affairs registered 18 officials for COP27 in Egypt. The following year, it registered more than 600 individuals for COP28 in the United Arab Emirates. However, a close review of these 600 delegates revealed that 117 were Indian diplomats, while the remaining delegates were mostly students or entrepreneurs. Many of the officials registered for both conferences were diplomats posted in the host

³⁵⁴ Author’s interview with I#10.

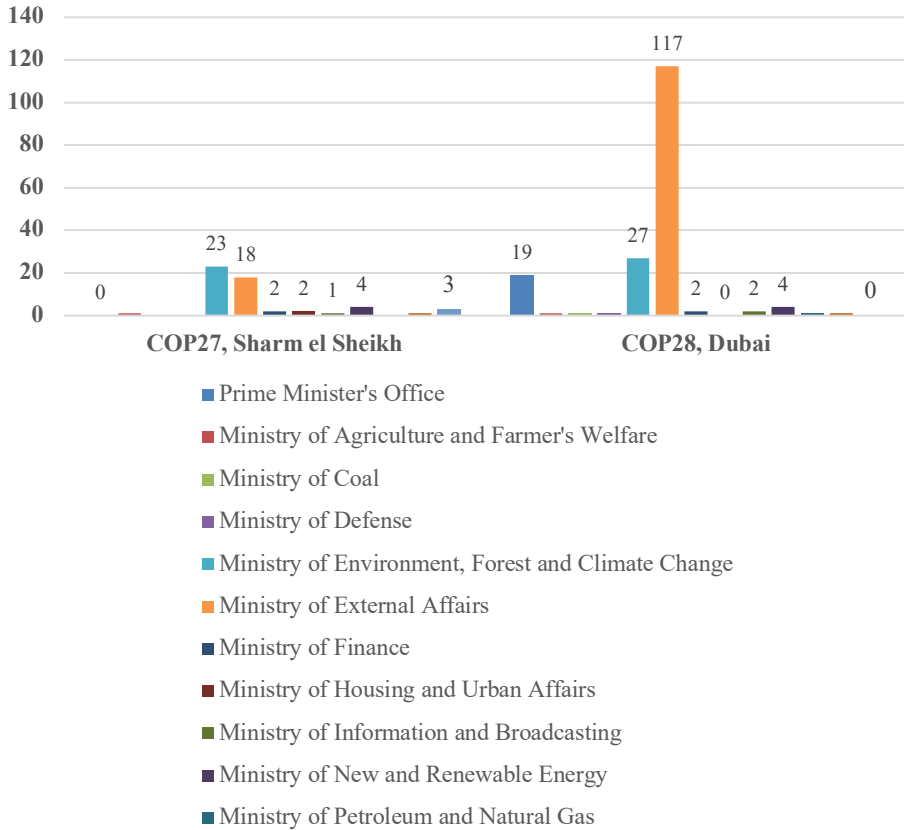
³⁵⁵ Author’s interview with I#10.

³⁵⁶ Author’s interview with I#10.

³⁵⁷ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2022. “List of participants. Part one. Parties and observer states.” FCCC/CP/2022/ INF.3 (Part I). 2 December 2022; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2023. “List of participants: on-site participation,” 22 December 2023.

countries. From this, it can clearly be seen that the individuals carrying out the practices involved in India’s participation in climate negotiations have different institutional origins.

Figure 4. Participation by India's Ministries, COP27 and COP28



Source: UNFCCC, Participant lists from COP27 and COP28.

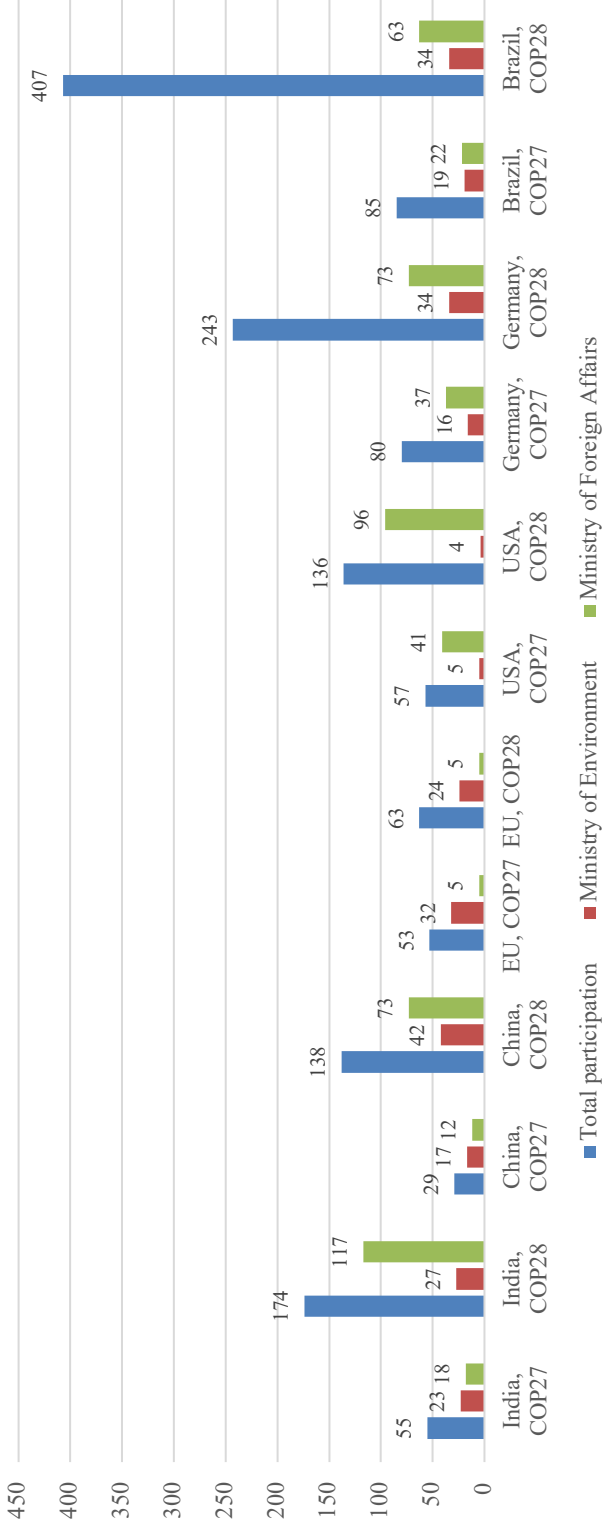
Figure 5 provides a comparison of India’s participation with that of other environmental powers.³⁵⁸ The international comparison demonstrates that, like India, other countries also sent larger delegations to COP28 in the UAE. The

³⁵⁸ The calculations for this table were conducted to create a new dataset on delegation sizes. The author produced the first version of this dataset in 2022 and expanded it with research assistance by Snehal Shirpurkar. A journal article for this dataset is in preparation.

Indian delegation size corresponds with that of other countries, suggesting that Indian officials are well-aware of the significance of representation. Scholarship stresses that the size of each countries' delegation is a factor shaping their ability to "assert, present, and defend their interests" at the COP meeting venues.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁹ Onderco, M. 2019. "Variation in delegation size in multilateral diplomacy", *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 21(2), 423.

Figure 5. Ministry participation by select actors, COP27 and COP28



Source: UNFCCC, Participant lists from COP27 and COP28. The Ministry of Environment data for the US = participation by the Environmental Protection Agency. Ministry of Environment data for Germany = Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety, and Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action.

6.2.2. Bureaucracy overview

The bureaucratic structures involved in COPs represent several ministerial divisions that had existed long before the political leadership expressed green ambitions. To understand how India's climate diplomacy operates in practice, this section presents an institutional overview. A core piece of background knowledge for any official joining the Indian Foreign Service is that the Ministry of Environment constitutes the nodal ministry for climate negotiations. Officials learn that this nodal ministry has engaged with multilateral environmental diplomacy throughout the decades, despite not being staffed by members of the Indian Foreign Service. Historically, Indian diplomats were called in to assist the Indian delegation to climate negotiations at the COPs. The preparations ahead of climate negotiation conferences are thus undertaken by either civil servants from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), or by non-career bureaucrats. The latter are brought in from outside to fill the International Cooperation Division desks inside the Ministry of Environment's building, which is located ten minutes by foot from Lodhi Garden in New Delhi.

The Indian way of participating in climate conferences involves a bureaucratic distinction between the climate negotiators and climate diplomats. An Indian official explained this as follows:

A negotiator works within a multilateral process, under a pre-defined framework, the UNFCCC. The climate diplomat works with bilateral and multi-stakeholder platforms. For instance, the Ambassador has more agency and can decide for themselves on bilateral climate diplomacy.³⁶⁰

This serving official suggested that there was more flexibility in bilateral and minilateral diplomatic arrangements, which occur almost separated from the climate negotiations at a COP. However, a retired official argued that these different diplomatic spaces hang together:

³⁶⁰ Author's interview with I#1.

The climate negotiator conveys the national positions; the climate diplomat conveys the position of the country and builds acceptance for the position among other countries. In India, we have two main ministries for this: The Ministry of Environment (MOEFCC) and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The MOEFCC is the nodal ministry, and the MEA helps and makes the positions tangible; The MEA helps us to push for the acceptance of our positions... The job of the diplomat is to sell the idea of a position.³⁶¹

However, such bureaucratic flexibility can lead to tensions between functional and territorial divisions inside the MEA that are overseeing different positions. Positions may co-exist since individuals high up in the internal hierarchy can adjust. The positions can also create tension within the Foreign Ministry because different divisions and partnerships hold different degrees of internal prestige. Bilateral relationships managed by the MEA territorial divisions, and implemented by Indian missions abroad, offer flexibility to new initiatives and tailor-made positions. Although the climate position inside the MEA is overseen by the United Nations Economic and Social (UNES) division, the territorial divisions and ambassadors can set country-specific directions. Overall, the administrative division of responsibility results in inherent tensions that Indian officials navigate in their day-to-day activities.

The Ministry of Environment employs approximately twenty people who oversee developments in climate diplomacy.³⁶² Internally, there is a division of labor between the civil servants. The Climate Change (CC) Division is comprised of eight civil servants and five scientists and is responsible for India's participation at COPs and the implementation of India's National Action Plan. The International Cooperation (IC) Division is smaller, with only six

³⁶¹ Author's interview with I#2.

³⁶² Author's review of websites available online, May 2024. See Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2024. "Who's Who," website.

civil servants responsible for bilateral cooperation, the signing of MoUs, participation in joint working groups, and relations with the UN Environment Programme.

Despite the Ministry of Environment's traditional role as a nodal ministry, any observer can find formulations about climate in various Ministry of External Affairs documents and speeches. Interactions about climate change feature regularly in both the public country briefs written by Indian diplomats at embassies, and probably also in currently confidential country briefs (although we do not know until declassification). However, the MEA has thus far not opened a Climate Diplomacy Division.

In the current organigram, a ministry chart, the central unit of interest for climate diplomacy is called the United Nations Economic and Social (UNES). The UNES Division constitutes the "functional" division responsible for climate diplomacy inside the MEA.³⁶³ The division between functional and territorial divisions dates back to the establishment of the MEA after independence.³⁶⁴ Besides the Permanent Mission in New York, which looks after the G77 grouping in which India is a member, the Indian High Commission in Nairobi is also active in climate diplomacy at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).³⁶⁵ An Indian official serving in a territorial division can "ask the functional division in MEA – the United Nations Economic and Social (UNES) for climate change – for input or send questions to them."³⁶⁶

The embassies can address climate diplomacy developments in their monthly reports to the capital or issue Demi-Official (D.O.) letters with analysis and calls for action.³⁶⁷ The embassies can also send proposals back to

³⁶³ Author's interview with I#32.

³⁶⁴ Khilnani, N.M. 1975. The Organization of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, *India Quarterly*, Vol. 31 (4), 385-393.

³⁶⁵ Author's interview with I#17.

³⁶⁶ Author's interview with I#32.

³⁶⁷ Rana (2000, 87) writes about these two options in a general sense in his book. I have tailored it to climate diplomacy in the text.

their territorial division in the capital. For instance, they might send a draft of a joint declaration or an event invitation.³⁶⁸ Back in the capital, however, the heads of the territorial divisions sometimes convene at the Foreign Secretary's Office to discuss policy options. These heads, in turn, can present policy options to the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister's Office.³⁶⁹ The highest serving civil servant in the MEA, the Foreign Secretary, has regular audience with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). However, thanks to the location of the PMO next door, there are numerous opportunities for informal coordination in the corridors.³⁷⁰

In addition, the Prime Minister (PM) can make announcements in speeches that only a few people know about in advance. When the PM comments on foreign policy, the entire bureaucracy must follow these instructions.³⁷¹ If a professional joining the Indian Foreign Service has read about the craft of speeches inside European ministries, where the entire ministry endorses speeches,³⁷² they might be surprised by the web of instructions in New Delhi. With this multitude of instructions, officials find themselves embedded in a bureaucratic structure that both constrains and facilitates diplomacy.

As time passes, a young professional in the Indian Foreign Service will likely come across senior colleagues conducting *démarches* on subjects to bring attention to tensions. For instance, following a conversation among high-level civil servants a couple of years before India's G20 Presidency, officials pursued a *démarche* about the International Solar Alliance (ISA) in the ministry corridors.³⁷³ We have seen Indian leaders and climate diplomats talking about the ISA at COPs. However, the primary division responsible for the

³⁶⁸ Author's interview with I#30.

³⁶⁹ Datta-Ray 2015, 218.

³⁷⁰ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. "South Block," website. Note: the PMO moved to a new location in 2026, see The Hindu, 2026. "What is Seva Teerth? Everything You Need to Know About the New PMO Building," *The Hindu*. 14 February 2026.

³⁷¹ Author's interview with I#11 and I#25.

³⁷² Neumann 2010, 73.

³⁷³ Author's interview with I#29.

ISA-related issues is the Economic Diplomacy & Multilateral Economic Relations Division.³⁷⁴ A senior official at the rank of Joint Secretary, stressed that India's green ambitions are linked to the ISA:

ISA's efforts in advancing solar energy are remarkable. We must prioritize youth and women and foster international engagement in India's energy vision for the Global South.³⁷⁵

The International Solar Alliance is a treaty-based multilateral organization hosted by India.³⁷⁶ Yes, despite this, it is not dealt with by the UNES Division which is a functional division inside the MEA on climate diplomacy. New Delhi has faced criticism for maintaining control of the ISA instead of letting the organization develop as other members wish.³⁷⁷ One insider commented to me bluntly that although the organization is called the International Solar Alliance, in reality it is India's solar alliance: "It says international in the title but the rest is India."³⁷⁸ Indian officials therefore need to navigate different views related to India's international climate agenda in practice. The web of bureaucracy is growing, making the navigation between different goals a continuous challenge.

Officials seeking information about the ISA can approach the organization itself. However, they might instead be expected to approach the Economic Diplomacy Division. If a young professional seeks guidance on international law, such as the conventions and legal agreements that underpin the UN system, they need to consult the Legal and Treaties Division (L&T). As an old functional division, established in 1957, the unit advises different ministries on international law and interprets treaties.³⁷⁹ Moreover, this individual will

³⁷⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. "Organigram", dated December 2023.

³⁷⁵ International Solar Alliance, website.

³⁷⁶ Vyoma Jha, 2023, *The Making of the International Solar Alliance: India's Moment in the Sun*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁷⁷ Author's memory note from informal chat at COP27, 7 November 2022.

³⁷⁸ Author's memory note from informal chat at COP27, 8 November 2022.

³⁷⁹ Author's interview with I#15. See also Shaw, Debnath, 2018. "Making of India Foreign Policy," Distinguished Lectures Details, Foreign Service Institute of the Ministry of External Affairs. 13 September 2018.

receive instructions from the Foreign Minister's Office, the External Affairs Minister's (EAM) Office, that coordinates Indian foreign policy. Like in other countries, the Indian PMO has desk officers and advisors dealing with diplomacy who can also be interested in climate diplomacy. In Modi's PMO, a high-ranked advisor, rather than a member of the Indian Foreign Service, looks after aspects related to climate and the environment in Modi's interactions with foreign leaders. Consequently, there are several officials involved in dealing with India's green credentials in global climate politics. Against the backdrop of India's complex institutional set-up, Indian officials engage in climate negotiations in ways that form, and are being formed by, tensions.

6.3. Epistemic tensions

With an increasing part of India's Foreign Service involved in bringing India's green ambitions abroad, friction has emerged about different ways of understanding these ambitions. In response to a knowledge deficit in Indian diplomacy, New Delhi has added climate to its recruitment and training sessions for future Indian diplomats. However, members of the bureaucracy have varying levels of knowledge about the physical spaces that matter for India's green ambitions. This creates limitations on attempts by India to shape global climate politics. Moreover, officials must navigate what has been described as the value of groupings in climate negotiations, handling India's membership in different groupings. Ultimately, India's green ambitions bring about epistemic tensions owing to the fragmented understanding of how these ambitions fit with existing priorities.

6.3.1. Background knowledge

Every year, thousands of young Indians sit the exam to join the civil service. Those interested in showcasing their suitability for the Indian Foreign Service

(IFS) take the specific UPSC exams on Political Science and International Relations.³⁸⁰ In two, three-hour exams with a maximum mark of 250, candidates provide answers of up to 150 words each to a set of questions. Two main questions with respective sub-questions are mandatory, while students must also select three questions and sub-questions from different sections. Looking at test papers provides a unique insight into the background knowledge that Indian civil servants are tested on before signing job contracts. Given the high competition among candidates, due to many applicants for a low number of job contracts, every answer matters for prospective candidates. These exams indicate the degree to which India's role in international climate politics, and ambitions to be a leading power, are treated as important background knowledge for India's future diplomats.

A close reading of the exams administered during Jaishankar's time as foreign minister suggests an evolving integration of India's green leading power ambitions into recruitment. Although there is no mandatory question about India's leading power aspirations, the exams included questions about India's role in international climate politics. This illustrates the wish that IFS employees have background knowledge relevant to India's green ambitions. After COP26 in Glasgow, every candidate had to provide an answer which discussed India's proposals. This showed the significance of climate negotiations for the Indian Foreign Service. The year afterward, every candidate had to provide an answer which described their understanding of public diplomacy for India's long-standing goal of reaching higher standing. In 2023, every candidate had to comment on the phrase "environmentalism of the poor," which probably resulted in diverse answers. Moreover, candidates could choose to provide answers to other questions related to India's evolving footprint in global climate politics. This trend suggests that the Indian Foreign Service ensures that it can recruit talent with the knowledge and skills to act as climate

³⁸⁰ Government of India, 2025. Website.

diplomats in the future. Table 5 depicts questions that India’s future diplomats responded to during the recruitment process.

Table 5. UPSC Exam questions for Indian Foreign Service, 2020-2024

	Mandatory question	Elective questions
2020	-	<p>“4a. Examine the role of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other major efforts by the UN to address the global environmental crisis.” (15)</p> <p>“8c. Critically examine the role of India in shaping the emerging world order.” (15)</p>
2021	“1e. Discuss the five proposals made by India in the recent COP-26 conference held in Glasgow.” (10)	“8b. Discuss the ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ as set by the United Nations.” (15)
2022	<p>“1b. What are the main challenges faced by the developing countries in the era of globalisation?” (10)</p> <p>“5e. Discuss the role of public diplomacy in the enhancement of India's global standing.” (10)</p>	“8c. Discuss India's vision of a New World order in the 21st century.” (15)
2023	“5b. [Comment on] Environmentalism of the poor” (10)	<p>“3c. Narrate the various ways in which rapid environmental degradation is posing a serious threat to human security. Illustrate your answer with suitable examples.” (15)</p> <p>“4a. Critically examine the impact of globalisation on the developing countries of the world.” (20)</p>
2024	-	<p>“8a. Discuss the role of environmental movements in shaping the environmental governance in India.” (20)</p> <p>“8c. ‘India has of late, chosen to debunk non-alignment in its pursuit of multi-alignment.’ Comment.” (15)</p>

Source: Author’s review of Political Science and International Relations (Paper 1 + Paper 2), Exams available on UPSC website. Points in brackets. Assessed 8 May 2025.

Candidates for the IFS undergo exams and interviews, then there are public announcements of the successful candidates. These appointed people then are given induction training in Mussoorie. Finally, the batches of new recruits reach New Delhi for two months training at the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS). This institute is named after the popular former Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj. At SSIFS, newly recruited young professionals listen to lectures, including climate sessions added in recent years.³⁸¹ These lectures indicate the need for additional background knowledge about India's green ambitions. Rather than workshops or executive training programs, the climate sessions are typically lectures.³⁸²

Without access to reading lists, I cannot say what knowledge about climate diplomacy Indian officials acquire at different trainings. However, it might be supposed that they closely read the thoughts of former the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister's Envoy on Climate Change, Ambassador Shyam Saran. In that case, they will receive clear advice:

We will need to ensure that any global climate change regime enhances rather than constrains our development prospects. This will demand a major focus on multilateral diplomacy and in building coalitions of like-minded countries to pursue equitable solutions... India's encounter with the new world around the corner need not to be fraught with anxiety. We have the instruments to shape that world in the service of a bright future for India.³⁸³

The ambition of shaping global climate politics is barely present in a handbook for Indian youth interested in joining the Indian Foreign Service.³⁸⁴ Chapter 6

³⁸¹ Author's email conversation with an Indian official, Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service. December 2023.

³⁸² Author emailed SSIFS with a request to join the trainings as an observer but was not granted access, December 2023.

³⁸³ Saran, Shyam, 2022. "Chapter 1: The World Around the Corner: India's Challenges in the Post-Covid-19 Era" in *India's Foreign Policy in the Post-Covid World: Through the Eyes of Indian Diplomats* edited by Amb. Surendra Kumar, Wisdom Tree: Delhi, 7, 9

³⁸⁴ Chakravorty, Sandeep, 2023. *International Relations & Diplomacy Primer: A Handbook for UPSC Aspirants and Practitioners*, Unique Publishers: New Delhi.

of this handbook, titled Environment, begins with a quote by Narendra Modi. This is not, however, a quote where he is demanding climate finance or climate justice, but instead a quote about Mission LiFE. Mission LiFE is a project reflecting India's green ambitions that is discussed later in this chapter. Interestingly, the terms 'equity' and 'climate justice' are absent from the chapter, and the phrase 'common but differentiated responsibility' only features once. The chapter does not state that India's position in climate diplomacy originated with PM Indira Gandhi's speech at the UN Environment Conference in 1972, which had been the standard line of early Indian negotiators at climate conferences. Tellingly, it primarily informs future Indian civil servants about PM Modi and Mission LiFE. At the same time, the chapter constitutes 11 percent of the book's total pages and offers scant clues about what shaping global climate politics entails. Nonetheless, the book received praise, with some commentators saying its "emphasis on the climate and the environment is topical and welcome."³⁸⁵

Suppose the next generation of Indian civil servants reads other texts, such as a former climate negotiator's contributions and contributions by 30 other retired Indian ambassadors. In that case, they will associate Indian climate diplomacy with multilateral diplomacy inside the UN and see "finger-pointing becoming the name of the game in the negotiations."³⁸⁶ They will learn about India's compliance with the norm of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR), which compares favorably with China's non-compliance. A retired negotiator reminds readers that when New Delhi hosted a UN climate COP for the first time in 2002, it was to "demonstrate its commitment to climate action."³⁸⁷ In the conclusion to his reflections about India's behavior in climate negotiations, this former negotiator says that one of India's negotiation

³⁸⁵ Swarup, Vikas, book cover of Chakravorty, 2023.

³⁸⁶ Sinha, Dilip 2022, "Chapter 24: India and the Global Climate Change Discourse in the Post-Covid-19 World", in *India's Foreign Policy in the Post-Covid World: Through the Eyes of Indian Diplomats* edited by Amb. Surendra Kumar, Wisdom Tree: Delhi, 251.

³⁸⁷ Sinha, 2022, 253.

groups, the BASIC negotiation group, is “weakened.” This means that India “will have to largely depend on its own diplomatic skills” and “be prepared for relentless international pressure in the build-up to the twenty-sixth UN-FCCC conference in Glasgow later this year.”³⁸⁸

Another type of knowledge is provided by the group of advisors to the Prime Minister. In New Delhi, I interviewed one of them who contended that climate diplomacy under Modi’s leadership is presented as part of India’s “civilizational heritage.” The insider told me that such framing challenges those viewing climate action as a “binary problem” between developed and developing countries:

Climate has become a key feature of Indian foreign policy, very much on the stage. It represents a shift in India’s engagement with the world. India is seeing a rise in the international hierarchy, and we formulate our own vision. The vision began being formulated in the late 2000s. We have a new mindset, originating from the late 2000s and the end of UPA government, under Jairam Ramesh. India realized that being a naysayer in every forum harms its rise and interests. Being a naysayer made India compete with the West. At this time, India said ‘let’s avoid that’. Under Modi, with a new government, our role in the world is redefined. We go from being a balancing power in the world to a leading power in the world in terms of aspirations about our role in the world. A leading power that provides solutions to global problems. Under Modi, climate is portrayed as a civilizational heritage in Indian policy. It is hard to present climate action as a binary problem – us versus the developed world – when you begin thinking of climate as something Indian civilization valued before the industrialization in the West.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ Sinha, 2022, 258.

³⁸⁹ Author’s interview with I#11. Quote as per hand-written notes, typed on computer shortly after interview.

The political leadership therefore gets extensive input about India's green ambitions and how these are related to India's rise on the world stage. Yet, some people inside the Indian diplomatic service contend that the idea India will become a "leading power does not mean anything, that is why we chose that phrase. We are not a great power, and we want to make that very clear."³⁹⁰ As one insider told me, although India's political leadership pursues the ambition to become "a leading power that provides solutions to global problems," some Indian elite are skeptical. The internal dissent about India's attempt to become a leading power produces tensions for Indian officials attempting to bring India's green ambitions into their way of doing climate negotiations.

Hence, Indian officials encounter various information about India's green ambitions. As their background knowledge is tested and developed during training, they may develop different understandings of Indian climate diplomacy. The different background knowledge creates conceptual challenges regarding India's green ambitions.

6.3.2. The locus problem

India's green ambitions induce epistemic tensions, where officials have different views about the physical spaces in which climate diplomacy occurs – the *locus* of climate negotiations. The existence of different physical spaces creates friction for the roll-out of India's green ambitions. In light of the political ambition to lead global climate discourses, Indian officials have a spectrum of possibilities regarding where India's green ambitions should be pursued. We can call this scenario the *locus problem*.

Climate diplomats maintain that climate negotiations occur in less structured formats than meeting rooms, such as in the venue corridors and at the lunch and dinner tables. At COP27, officials from different countries interacted across the venue, in the food queues, at coffee tables, and even afterward

³⁹⁰ Indian official cited in the podcast *The World After the West*: Primit Pal Chaudhuri issued by the *European Council on Foreign Relations*, recorded 25 June 2024, listened to 6 September 2024. Quote from 26:35-26:55.

at different restaurants.³⁹¹ An insider provided a surprisingly frank answer to my question about why, in contrast to others such as the Singaporean Pavilion, the India Pavilion at COP27 in Egypt did not host any receptions: “[The Ministry of Environment] just think we drink cocktails, they simply don’t get why these informal conversations are important,” the person said and laughed.³⁹² Indian climate negotiators focus on the meeting rooms, to the extent that the Ministry of Environment even outsourced the India Pavilion at COP28 to an external agency.³⁹³ Through hiring an agency, Indian climate negotiators secured working hours for formal negotiations instead of being bogged down in time-consuming public diplomacy. With three decades of engagement in climate negotiations, the Ministry of Environment officials focus on line-by-line discussions in the meeting rooms. A climate negotiator underlined how, prior to negotiations, “we were aware of the divisions of what different countries would say, what developed and developing countries would say.”³⁹⁴ This conflictual understanding of different spaces constitutes an epistemic tension that Indian officials navigate in their way of bringing India’s green ambitions to the world.

To navigate this conflictual understanding, the Indian Ambassador in the country hosting a COP gets a particular role. As a career diplomat with previous placement as Joint Secretary (International Cooperation) in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, the Indian Ambassador to the UAE had two years for building contacts before the run-up to COP28 in Dubai.³⁹⁵ The Ambassador facilitated India’s positions in the climate negotiations through activities outside the formal negotiation rooms. At COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh,

³⁹¹ Author’s memory notes from COP27, 21 November 2022.

³⁹² Author’s memory notes from COP27, 21 November 2022.

³⁹³ Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2023. “Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire Agency for Executing Work of Conceptualizing Design, Supervising Construction and Managing India Pavilion & Delegation Office at 28th Session of Conference of Parties to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to be held in Expo City, Dubai, during November 30-December 12, 2023.” August 2023.

³⁹⁴ Author’s interview with I#18.

³⁹⁵ Sudhir, Sunjay, 2023. “Experience,” LinkedIn profile, 29 November 2023.

the Indian Ambassador to Egypt spent ample time at his own pavilion, acting as the host of the India Pavilion. Without access to his hourly schedule, it is hard to determine whether he avoided informal conversations at other country pavilions. However, since I visited the India Pavilion every day during COP27, it was clear that the Ambassador prioritized presence at his pavilion during COP27.³⁹⁶

At the same time, the seniority of different officials provides them with varying background knowledge. At COP28, Indian officials had spent valuable preparation time on Loss and Damage negotiations. They were still, however, unsettled by informal back-door negotiations. A climate negotiator described this frankly: “Yes, I was [surprised]... We had prepared arguments and speaking points, and then there was this announcement [on the first day]. It was beyond my knowledge, higher in the system than me.”³⁹⁷ The negotiator was as surprised about the Loss and Damage agreement as a think tank professional. The civil servant and think tank professionals were reminded about their limited insight into actual negotiations, and the possibility of back-door negotiations as a way to sidetrack their work.³⁹⁸ The Minister, nonetheless, conveyed satisfaction about the outcome. Minister Yadav wrote the following on his LinkedIn account with a photo depicting himself and his team smiling:

On the first day of COP28 in the UAE we started with a positive signal of momentum. A landmark decision on the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund was adopted in the opening plenary of COP28... India strongly supports the decision to operationalize the Loss and Damage Fund.³⁹⁹

Whether the Minister was attempting to save face, or convince his domestic electorate about an internationally successful activity, the price of the back-

³⁹⁶ Author’s diary from COP27, 6.

³⁹⁷ Author’s interview with I#18.

³⁹⁸ Author’s interview with I#14 and I#18.

³⁹⁹ Yadav, Bhupender, 2023. “On the first day of COP27 in UAE...” LinkedIn post. 1 December 2023.

door negotiation for the civil servants was evident. Amidst the conflictual tension about spaces, the officials had lost precious working hours.

The locus problem also affects how Indian officials involved in the negotiations communicate with colleagues sitting in New Delhi. To ensure that officials in New Delhi stay up to date about the day-to-day negotiations, officials share information with colleagues sitting in the capital. The reporting is needed since “we still need to coordinate things although we are not there in person.”⁴⁰⁰ Besides the Minister’s public reporting in the form of blog posts,⁴⁰¹ the negotiators send confidential reports back to New Delhi daily during the negotiations.⁴⁰² Thus, the officials working abroad share their acquired knowledge with officials sitting in the capital.

Furthermore, the different interpretations about space affect the practice of information-sharing within the Indian delegation. The appointment of a new senior official as Joint Secretary in the Environment Ministry led to changes for Indian civil society actors at COP28. A think tank professional explained to me that Indian civil society actors no longer gathered between seven and eight every morning so that the Indian negotiators could inform and consult with them about ongoing negotiations.⁴⁰³ This routine change indicates restricted civil society access to ongoing negotiations even for those present at climate negotiations. At COP28, the routines for the India Pavilion also changed under the new senior official - civil society actors did not suggest topics and seminars, but were invited by the Ministry to arrange seminars and events at the India Pavilion. In this way, at COP28 the Indian government relied less on civil society actors in their efforts to lead global climate politics.

India’s green ambitions therefore have affected the daily activities of officials in not only the formal meeting rooms but also in other physical spaces.

⁴⁰⁰ Author’s interview with #18.

⁴⁰¹ See e.g., Yadav, Bhupender, 2023. “COP28 Diary: Deliberations on empowering youth with green jobs, to defining climate change.” Blogpost, 8 December 2023.

⁴⁰² Author’s interview with I#1.

⁴⁰³ Author’s interview with I#14.

Navigating the usage of different spaces constitutes an integral element of any official dealing with India's desire to become part of the global solution to climate change.

6.3.3. The value of groupings

Another tension concerning variation and fragmented knowledge revolves around the value of negotiating groups for India's green ambitions. Because different groupings have varying significance over time, officials must navigate the value of groupings in managing epistemic tensions. Such a value ultimately concerns the potential status backlash of different groupings. As discussed in the theory chapter, one of the risks involved in status-seeking is status backlash that becomes so costly that it even backfires. Indian negotiators find themselves embedded in climate negotiation groups that have had varying significance in climate negotiations over time. They may find themselves in groups that risk status backlash during times of revised ambitions.

The main idea for these groupings is that they form positions and negotiate as a powerful bloc against other groups on certain aspects of a climate negotiation. Since each negotiation group has red lines,⁴⁰⁴ Indian officials can incorporate their ministry red lines with those of a group, using the group to negotiate for their interests. As such, Indian officials know that being active in different groupings can be useful, especially in light of the conflictual positions between different countries. Yet, the challenge is to navigate which grouping has the strongest value in different negotiations, which is important because India has hard positions on some negotiating issues. Membership in a particular negotiation group, which speaks for them, also allows Indian officials to be silent in negotiations, avoiding any potential critique from the international press or partner countries. According to the detailed reports of the Earth Negotiation Bulletin, produced during COP28, Indian officials were silent in plenary sessions and negotiations with an audience. I asked an official

⁴⁰⁴ Author's interview with I#10.

about not talking in front of the cameras. The person said, “good,” smiled and shifted the topic.⁴⁰⁵ Another official underlined that colleagues were active in the margins: “Oh no, we spoke when we had to. We were there, had coordination meetings and informals.”⁴⁰⁶ One insider told me that if a grouping “takes a decision that doesn’t satisfy India, India will veto and argue against it.”⁴⁰⁷

However, participating in these group meetings is also a way for Indian officials to assist other countries in the ongoing negotiations. An official explained to me how this works:

Many smaller countries, like African countries, cannot afford to send representatives to the negotiations. They send 3-4 people funded by the UNFCCC Secretariat. Then, we in the groupings help them and tell them what happened in all rooms.⁴⁰⁸

Indian officials therefore view group memberships as a way to foster relationships with foreign counterparts and show the significance of solidarity in India’s green ambitions.

Indian officials sometimes face diplomatic friction while interacting with foreign counterparts in these groupings. Such friction occurs in three groupings in climate negotiations. First, there is the *Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC)* group. This puts Indian officials in contact with 20 counterparts, including counterparts from Arab countries, Latin American countries, and some Asian partners from countries such as China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. An official said the group is “the only forum where we talk with Pakistan and China despite the difficulties in the relationships.”⁴⁰⁹ Importantly, the members “have common positions on the Paris Agreement and similar economic status in the world economy.”⁴¹⁰ One insider speculated that

⁴⁰⁵ Author’s interview with I#5.

⁴⁰⁶ Author’s interview with I#17.

⁴⁰⁷ Author’s interview with I#14.

⁴⁰⁸ Author’s interview with I#10.

⁴⁰⁹ Author’s interview with I#10.

⁴¹⁰ Author’s interview with I#10.

“India is more active in LMDC than in G77” without specifying what this may entail in practice.⁴¹¹ They may have reached this conclusion because the Indian Climate Minister participated in one of the group’s preparatory coordination meetings ahead of COP27,⁴¹² and also because Indian climate negotiators participate in the group’s virtual coordination meetings throughout the year, not just during the months ahead of the COP summits.⁴¹³

Second, there is the large *Group of 77 (G77)*. This emerged in the 1960s in disarmament negotiations and has existed in multilateral climate negotiations since the first COP in 1995. An internal briefing document about India and the United Nations describes the historical context of the G77: “India’s status as a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 cemented its position within the UN system as a leading advocate of the concerns and aspirations of developing countries and the creation of a more equitable international economic and political order.”⁴¹⁴ This document suggests India’s contemporary green ambitions imply active advocacy for developing countries because of the G77 membership. Managing tensions inside the G77 constitutes a practice for Indian diplomats posted at the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in New York. In contrast to LMDC’s virtual preparatory meetings, the G77 coordination meetings traditionally took place in New York before each COP. However, these G77 preparatory meetings have become virtual recently.⁴¹⁵ This means that Indian officials can participate in G77 preparatory meetings from New Delhi instead of being posted in New York. However, since the G77 grouping has so many members and is consen-

⁴¹¹ Author’s interview with I#14.

⁴¹² Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2022. “Union Minister for Environment Forest and Climate change participated in Ministerial Meeting of Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDC)”, press release. 21 October 2022.

⁴¹³ Author’s interview with I#10. Author does not know the precise frequency of the virtual coordination meetings.

⁴¹⁴ Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations New York, 2025. “India and United Nations”.

⁴¹⁵ Author’s interview with I#10.

sus-focused, the positions it takes can be watered down and centered on common denominators in order to contain tensions.⁴¹⁶ This indicates that the G77 grouping has experienced status loss, since G77 is far from an exclusive grouping and since India no longer relies on only G77 as a negotiating bloc.

Another indication of how the G77 is facing status backlash was seen when India participated in the Group's Annual Foreign Minister meeting ahead of COP28. The G77 held this annual meeting in New York and agreed on a meeting declaration of 343 paragraphs, approximately 20 of which concerned the UNFCCC.⁴¹⁷ The Indian Foreign Minister, however, skipped the meeting and sent a senior official instead. This official used the meeting to highlight progress during India's G20 presidency.⁴¹⁸ Because of India's ambitions, the G77 grouping was made to seem to have low value, something which could negatively reflect on India in the long term. The grouping did not have high status for India's green ambitions at the political level. Nonetheless, Indian officials coordinated with the G77 before and during COP28. Two days before the climate negotiations began, representatives from the G77 countries convened for coordination meetings. The G77 had not had a preparatory meeting at COP27 due to a bomb threat to the meeting venue.⁴¹⁹ This bomb threat was an unusual irritant for G77 preparations. However, at COP28, they had a preparatory meeting as usual. During the actual COP proceedings, officials from the G77 met "twice a day, at 9:00 and 13:00... usually there is a chair within G77 that asks for views, which forms the common position."⁴²⁰ Thus, the G77 grouping is not immune to the risks of status backlash.

⁴¹⁶ Author's interview with I#17; Author's diary notes from COP27, November 2022, 10.

⁴¹⁷ G77, 2023. "Ministerial Declaration", website.

⁴¹⁸ TNN, 2023. "At G77, India reinforces its G20 Global South focus", *Times of India*. 18 September 2023.

⁴¹⁹ Author's diary notes from COP27, 10; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2023. "G77 & China Preparatory Meeting", website. 28 November 2023.

⁴²⁰ Author's interview with I#10.

Third, there is the *BASIC* grouping. This is where Indian officials interact with Brazilian, South African, and Chinese counterparts. Interestingly, insiders barely talked about this grouping, suggesting either that only a handful of officials have insights into its group dynamics, or that the BASIC grouping is facing status loss. At COP27, the offices of the Russian, Chinese, and South African delegations were close to each other, enabling coordination between them, whereas the Brazilian and the Indian offices were further away.⁴²¹ An official argued that:

China has reached a different [development] level now, we cannot really count them as a developing country anymore. China is different from South Africa, India, and other developing countries.⁴²²

This statement indicates that civil servants are becoming skeptical about the BASIC grouping's function as an exclusive club of developing countries in climate negotiations. At the same time, during the 58th SBSTA meeting in Bonn, a more technical climate conference held in June 2023, Indian officials coordinated with the BASIC grouping. Officials from the different countries discussed climate finance and the Global Stocktake ahead of COP28 in Dubai.⁴²³ This suggests that when officials are engaging with the BASIC grouping, they encounter fewer tensions in technical Bonn-based negotiations than in political COP-based negotiations.

In sum, although the negotiation groupings were set up to manage disagreements between developed and developing countries, they embody friction and a variety of challenges for officials using them in their agendas. Through continuously showing up at negotiation meetings for these three groupings, Indian officials maintain options to negotiate within different blocs despite the tensions that India's membership in these groupings brings to their desks. If one

⁴²¹ Author's diary notes from COP27, November 2022, 7.

⁴²² Author's interview with I#17.

⁴²³ Bansard, Jennifer, Cristina Munding, Timothy Neff, Hillary Rosentreter, and Lynn Wagner, 2023. "Summary of the Bonn Climate Change Conference: 5-15 June 2023", *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, 19 June 2023.

negotiating group falls apart for any reason, Indian officials ensure they are not left alone in the negotiations. Yet, in recent times, both the BASIC grouping and the G77 have faced status loss. For Indian officials, the challenge moving forward is whether to revitalize their status as negotiating groups, accept the contemporary value of these three groups, or build new negotiating groups that are better fitted to India's green ambitions.

6.4. Normativity tensions

The emergence of India's green ambitions has induced friction about India's image. This concerns whether it is seen as an environmentally friendly or obstructive rising power in the international system. Indian officials treat climate negotiations as a continuous process including political negotiations at COP and technical negotiations in Bonn.⁴²⁴ This section reveals how India's green ambitions affect normativity conceptions at COP negotiations. The normativity tensions shaping, and being shaped by, India's green ambitions concern the India Pavilion at COPs and conflictual views on energy sources.

6.4.1. The India Pavilion: Telling the India Story to the world

We go to COP to talk here and there, telling the India story to the world... but we have a limited role at COP negotiations.⁴²⁵

While pavilions are useful for officials attempting to convince foreign counterparts about the sincerity of their green ambitions, pavilions reveal normative tensions. Located in the web of other pavilions, the India Pavilion is in a social milieu where participants walking around can compare the pavilions of different countries. At COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh, the India Pavilion was far from the Chinese and Pakistani Pavilions, but near to the US Center and the

⁴²⁴ Author's interview with I#10 and I#17.

⁴²⁵ Author's interview with I#28.

Canadian Pavilion.⁴²⁶ The layout was totally different at COP28 in Dubai. Participants found the India Pavilion next to the US Center, which was located between it and the Chinese Pavilion. The COP28 map below reveals the social milieu of pavilions where officials and participants interacted with each other.



Map of COP28. Source: UNFCCC Secretariat, map received by author on March 20, 2024, upon request.

The India Pavilion was set up to persuade COP participants about the positive aspects of India’s green ambitions. It was intended to present these as normatively beneficial in global efforts to combat climate change. A government official told the press that the India Pavilion aimed to “highlight various ongoing initiatives of the government as well as its strategies for mitigation and adaptation measures to tackle climate change.”⁴²⁷ Similarly, a Ministry of Environment document stated that “the concept and design of the Indian Pavilion

⁴²⁶ Author’s diary notes from COP27, November 2022, 7.

⁴²⁷ Mohan, Vishwa, 2023. “COP28: ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ to be the theme of India pavilion at UN climate meet in Dubai,” *Times of India*. 21 August 2023.

to be set up at COP28 shall offer a unique opportunity to showcase India's positive actions on climate change."⁴²⁸

This illustrated how New Delhi cared about the pavilion and had identified it as an opportunity to tell the world about India's global green ambitions. The document clarified that "since the Pavilion will be viewed internationally, due care has to be taken in conceptualizing and managing the Pavilion."

With the dissemination of India's green ambitions and the stories told about positive Indian efforts towards climate action, a major normativity tension emerged. It concerned the presentation of India's green ambitions at the COP summit. With a fancy pavilion, India presented itself as a leading green power to COP27 participants walking around the conference venue that hosted the pavilions of many different countries. Yet, Indian negotiators continuously presented India as a country needing support rather than a leading green power at COP27.⁴²⁹ Such a disconnect between India's image in the negotiations and the pavilions constitutes what an insider called a "status contradiction."⁴³⁰ The disconnect between these gives COP participants a conflicting impression about India's green ambitions. Thus, India's green ambitions induced new forms of tensions that negotiators in the past did not have to deal with.

Nevertheless, climate negotiators seldom visited the pavilions since the negotiations took place in other meeting rooms, over dinner tables, and in group conversations in the corridors.⁴³¹ One Indian negotiator frankly stated that pavilions "don't matter for negotiations" since it is "nice here [at the Pavilions], but hard inside."⁴³² The pavilions do matter, however, for affecting the normative impression given to participants engaging in global climate politics at COP. An Indian official from another ministry alluded to this, stating that talking at pavilions is a way of "telling the India story to the world."⁴³³

⁴²⁸ Ministry of Environment, 2023. Document No. 13008/187/2023, italics added.

⁴²⁹ Author's memory note, informal chat with former Indian official, 19 November 2022.

⁴³⁰ Author's memory note, informal chat with former official, 19 November 2022.

⁴³¹ Author's diary from COP27, 1.

⁴³² Author's interview with I#1.

⁴³³ Author's interview with I#28.

In hindsight, an Indian official frankly explained how India presented two different messages. Despite investing material resources and intellectual thought into signaling India's green ambitions to the world, it also maintained its promotion of well-established norms. This was the case with the presentation of Mission LiFE, which is a green ambition project.⁴³⁴ As the official said:

Mission LiFE was very important for us, indeed a priority when we set the preparations. We even had LiFE on our Pavilion in COP27 as the main message. At COP28, our Pavilion had the G20 presidency slogan. But remember, despite this, we value the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, since climate justice, equity, and CBDR-RC are enshrined in them.⁴³⁵

Views about the functionality of the pavilion differ between officials in different capacities involved in the Indian delegation to COP. As such, the pavilions may be more useful for an official promoting green ambitions rather than an official demanding climate justice.

Furthermore, the activities in pavilions reveal normativity struggles about priority partners. On day one of COP28, Minister Yadav smiled while cutting the ribbon to the pavilion that featured the G20 slogan and Modi's Glasgow pledge on its walls.⁴³⁶ In line with the ministry instructions to the public relations firm overseeing the project, the India Pavilion had a modern look with digital screens and a theme centered on the Indian G20 presidency. However, no foreign guest ministers joined. This was in contrast to the Chinese Pavilion that was inaugurated by the COP28 president Sultan Al Jaber. Although Minister Yadav met Al Jaber the same day, the meeting was a bilateral conversation rather than the inauguration of the India Pavilion in front of the cameras. With the Chinese, in contrast, Al Jaber personally joined the inauguration of their

⁴³⁴ See discussion about Mission LiFE later in this chapter.

⁴³⁵ Author's interview with I#18.

⁴³⁶ Twitter/X, 2023. Bhupender Yadav @byadavbjp, tweet, 30 November 2023.

pavilion.⁴³⁷ The COP28 president therefore seemed to be acknowledging China's green ambitions more than those of India.

In attempts to manage the normative struggle about priority partners, Indian diplomats and officials provided day-to-day support to their ministers participating in events at different pavilions. During these occasions, officials navigated status dilemma dynamics under public scrutiny. For instance, as Minister Yadav visited the International Solar Alliance Pavilion, Indian officials stood nearby.⁴³⁸ Similarly, an Indian diplomat handed over speaking points to Minister Yadav at a side-event at COP28, which he read in front of the audience.⁴³⁹ As the minister is more confident in Hindi than in English, these speaking points have a significant impact on the minister's ability to appear as a competent political leader. This is something that the officials must consider when supporting their minister. The to-do-list for a diplomat assisting the Climate Minister at climate negotiations goes beyond speech editing. It also includes: booking hotel rooms, arranging food, attending bilateral meetings, sitting in the car with the minister, accompanying the minister at the conference venue.⁴⁴⁰ Hence, despite the limited institutional capacity of the Indian diplomatic service, they use some working time in navigating normativity tensions.

Thus, although the pavilion served to meaningfully disseminate India's green ambitions, it also created new tensions that Indian officials had to navigate in their attempt to affect India's green credentials.

6.4.2. Conflictual views on energy

Another indication of normative tension arising in India's participation at COP28 concerns conflicting Indian views on whether and how to phase out

⁴³⁷ Twitter/X, 2023. COP28 UAE @COP28_UAE, tweet, 30 November 2023.

⁴³⁸ Twitter/X, 2023. International Solar Alliance @isolaralliance, tweet.

⁴³⁹ Stockholm Environment Institute, 2023. "COP28 Side Event. LeadIT 2.0 – Partnerships for a Just and Equitable Industry Transition," *YouTube*. 12 December 2023. Minister Yadav enters the stage 7:05, the Indian diplomat hands over the speech at 7:09.

⁴⁴⁰ Author's interview with I#5.

coal. This tension is often revealed by officials seeking to paper over tensions and change the subject. With two weeks left until COP28 in Dubai, the Indian Ambassador to the UAE shared his remarks at a think tank event arranged by the Indian think tank Observer Research Foundation (ORF), together with its American affiliate ORF America, titled *Link G20, COP28 – Two Forums That Will Shape Global Governance*.⁴⁴¹ Speaking at the event, the Ambassador outlined New Delhi’s aspiration to treat COP28 as a continuation of the debates during India’s G20 Presidency. The Ambassador gave the following argument:

The Indian G20 presidency has placed the imperative of green development at the heart of the global governance agenda. In highlighting the pressing needs of the Global South, India has emphasized the need to intertwine sustainability with economic growth and human wellbeing. The inclusion of the green development pact in the G20 core agenda is a strong recognition of the disproportionate impact of climate change on developing nations and the need to support their efforts to transition beyond fossil fuels collectively.

Clearly, the Ambassador was attempting to speak for low- and middle-income countries that he grouped together as “developing countries.” He then pointed out four priorities that India would like to see discussed at COP28, providing a global outlook on energy transitions for these countries:

First, the vision of energy prosperity for all, and ensuring that the principle of justice and equity remain central to the energy transition agenda. The emerging green energy system should serve as a way to ensure dependable and cost-effective energy access for those who have been previously marginalized. Second, the need to effectively address the impact of climate change on other aspects of the Global South's development agenda. In particular, there is a pressing need to

⁴⁴¹ Observer Research Foundation, 2023. “Link G20, COP28- Two Forums That Will Shape Global Governance Agenda I Samir Saran – Ebtesam al-Ketbi,” *YouTube*.

address the linkages between climate, health, and gender, and to identify integrated policies to address these challenges in a holistic manner. Third, the need to empower green innovation as a means to pitch technological gaps that continue to hinder deployment of green energy in the Global South. Finally, there is a need to resolve the inequities in the global financial architecture, which restrict the flow of climate finance to countries in the Global South, which have the most potential to scale up green energy solutions.

Indian officials also avoided speaking about coal in a media briefing that they gave to New Delhi-based journalists on day one of COP28. This was likely because they knew that coal was a controversial issue. In the Foreign Secretary's initial remarks, he mentioned that "India's approach to climate action is deeply rooted in our civilizational ethos" and highlighted various international initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, Mission LiFE, and the Green Development Pact adopted at the G20 summit in September.

These points indicate how the Indian Foreign Ministry attempted to signal to the press, and also to foreign observers watching the press briefing, that India's priority was to be part of the solution. Nonetheless, what hit the headlines internationally was a statement about coal made in response to a Reuters journalist during the Q&A. The Foreign Secretary argued, "coal is and would remain an important part of India's energy mix, and it has always been, as we move forward to meet our developmental priorities in the country."⁴⁴² India's stance on coal therefore reached the international press because the media asked about it, not because Indian officials wanted to talk about it in the briefing ahead of COP28.

At the think tank event in the run-up to the negotiations, the Indian Ambassador in the UAE made normative statements about green energy sources and energy transitions. Despite this, however, Indian negotiators pursued "surgical

⁴⁴² Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. "Transcript of Special Briefing by Foreign Secretary on Prime Minister's visit to UAE (November 30, 2023)". 30 November 2023.

edits” to “remove paragraph 35” of the agreement discussed at COP28, which had originally outlined a fossil fuel phase out by 2050.⁴⁴³ This way of dealing with energy sources had an unintended effect on India’s partnerships since it brought India and China closer. In the discussions about the first Global Stocktake (GST) at COP28, India’s vision for energy sources supported a soft, rather than targeted, stance on coal, which was just like China’s vision. While it made sense for Indian negotiators at the time, those of India’s partners who were interested in providing funding to green energy sources received a reminder about the limits to India’s green ambitions.

6.5. Recognition tensions

This section deals with the reception of India’s green ambitions, which the theory chapter of this thesis has termed recognition tensions. As Indian officials navigate status dilemma dynamics in climate negotiations, they interact with foreign counterparts. In these interactions, they manage recognition tensions. As one official put it, “Reputation is important because it comes from others’ faith in you. It requires adequacy. If you can demonstrate to the world that you can be part of the solution, then you also will be so.”⁴⁴⁴ Yet, a retired Indian official contended that reputation should not be overstated as a source of recognition. As the insider put it:

Prestige and reputation are not that important. The prestige of the diplomat or country is not as important as the nature of the issue. I’d rather say credibility than prestige. Credibility is linked to the sincerity of the diplomat. You cannot take the credibility away from the country as long as you follow your national interest. Of course, there are difficult issues, such as equity, phase out of coal, IPR [Intellectual

⁴⁴³ Nandi, Jayashree, 2023. “COP28: No progress yet on Global Stocktake, climate finance,” *Hindustan Times*. 8 December 2023.

⁴⁴⁴ Author’s interview with I#1.

Property Rights], where there is legitimacy at stake. But it's rather legitimacy at stake than credibility or prestige.⁴⁴⁵

Rather than discussing the sources of recognition, this section offers evidence about tensions that Indian officials face in contemporary climate negotiations. In previous sections, we have learned about the epistemic and normativity tensions shaping status dilemma dynamics. In this section, we learn about the recognition tensions that shape the social processes of status dilemmas.

6.5.1. Mission LiFE: A new priority with mixed reviews

The Lifestyles for Environment Mission (Mission LiFE) constitutes a project fostering India's green ambitions. Modi presented Mission LiFE at COP26 in Glasgow, and the launch occurred in the run-up to COP27. By examining the acceptance of Mission LiFE, we learn about the tensions evolving in the external promotion of India's green ambitions. The Mission LiFE has produced new status dilemma dynamics in climate diplomacy, with both Indian and foreign officials exploring the diplomatic interface within this new project.

In a surprise move to strengthen India's green credentials, the Indian PM Modi and the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres launched the initiative Mission LiFE at the newly constructed Statue of Unity in Modi's home state Gujarat in western India, in the run-up to COP27 in Egypt. On October 20, 2022, Indian officials in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) released the statements from the event. These documents highlighted that India had received "congratulatory video messages on the launch of Mission LiFE by the heads of 11 nations representing all regions of the United Nations."⁴⁴⁶

A statement described how Modi:

Recalled that India has had a tradition of worshipping nature for thousands of years. The Vedas precisely mention the importance of elements of nature like water, earth, land, fire, and water. The Prime

⁴⁴⁵ Author's interview with I#2.

⁴⁴⁶ Press Information Bureau, 2022. "PM launches Mission LiFE at Statue of unity in Ekta Nagar, Kevadia, Gujarat", Prime Minister's Office. 20 October 2022.

Minister quoted the Atharvaveda and recited, ‘*Mata Bhumiah Putroham Prithivyah*’ that is, the earth is our mother and we are her children.⁴⁴⁷

Modi emphasized that the Mission LiFE initiative serves as a “next step” in India’s environmental protection leadership. Attending the launch was Jaishankar, a career diplomat who had become Foreign Minister. He listened to Modi’s argument that the political initiative was grounded in ancient Indian philosophy.

In newspapers, and on their internal digital platforms, officials learned about the introduction of a new political flagship program which they would need to consider in their thinking about promoting India’s green ambitions abroad. Similarly, foreign diplomats, fostering partnerships with India, saw this program as a new diplomatic opening to speak about climate cooperation with India. This was not just the diplomats of the 11 nations whose leaders endorsed Mission LiFE at the launch⁴⁴⁸ – among them French President Macron and the serving foreign policy chief of the European Commission, then Prime Minister of Estonia, Kallas – but it was also diplomats from other countries. These diplomats started asking what Mission LiFE entailed. A diplomat living in New Delhi reasoned: “Mission LiFE is very much about that India wants to be seen as a global leader and redefine sustainability in the world.”⁴⁴⁹ In private, however, other foreign officials wondered whether Mission LiFE was just a new political campaign and felt it might have only a limited effect on India’s green development path.⁴⁵⁰ Although few foreign diplomats who spoke to me expressed direct criticism of the program, informal conversations

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Press Information Bureau, 2022. “Congratulatory Messages on the Launch of Mission LiFE from Heads of States/Governments”, NITI Aayog. 20 October 2022.

⁴⁴⁹ Author’s interview with I#9.

⁴⁵⁰ A note on private conversations data points in the empirical analysis. The use of private conversations in the manuscript constitutes a writing style choice while maintaining privacy for respondents and people I talked to during the research. I protect my sources by not connecting any interview conversation or conversation with informed people to the specific private conversations. I was inspired by practice scholars who presented their analysis in this way, e.g., Pouliot 2016b.

with officials from different countries showed their mixed views on India's green credentials. When viewed through the lens of the theoretical framework developed in this thesis, these mixed views can be classified as recognition tensions. These tensions are revealed in varying answers to three questions: To what extent does Mission LiFE build societal acceptance inside India to gradually phase out coal? To what extent does Mission LiFE serve as window-dressing, especially in light of the lobbying by the fossil-fuel industry in India? How can international partners support Mission LiFE in a way that fosters an environmentally friendly development path and accelerates India's green transition?

Mission LiFE became part of India's efforts to build acceptance for its green ambitions. After this, Ministry of Environment officials quickly ensured that India's visibility on the sidelines of the formal negotiations in Egypt at COP27 included the initiative. One Indian climate negotiator described this: "We even had Mission LiFE on our Pavilion in COP27 as the main message since it was a priority and very important to us."⁴⁵¹ Another official stated that, "Nobody is opposed to the idea since it does not require obligations."⁴⁵² Similarly, Indian diplomats started talking about Mission LiFE abroad. In Stockholm and elsewhere, officials started speaking about the new initiative.⁴⁵³ This suggests that the Indian Foreign Service was using Mission LiFE as a public diplomacy tool, which in this study can be treated as part of *acceptance building*.

Indian officials have not yet managed to mobilize enough signatories for a UN General Assembly resolution about an International Day for Lifestyles for the Environment.⁴⁵⁴ However, their daily activities display their drive to build

⁴⁵¹ Author's interview with I#18.

⁴⁵² Author's interview with I#17.

⁴⁵³ See e.g., Embassy of India, Sweden, 2023. "Sustainability Dialogues: Decarbonizing Development Automotive: Remarks by Ambassador," speech, 18 April 2023.

⁴⁵⁴ Niti Aayog and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2022. "LiFE: Lifestyle for Environment", Brochure. The objective to adopt an International LiFE Day is mentioned in the Niti Aayog planning brochure on Mission LiFE, 17.

acceptance for India's green ambitions in the form of Mission LiFE. Annual reports from the Ministry of Environment indicate partial external acceptance for Mission LiFE. Indian officials have actually ensured international acknowledgements by the IPCC, G7, G20, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.⁴⁵⁵ Similarly, the United Nations Environment Assembly adopted a resolution on Mission LiFE on March 1, 2024, co-sponsored by Sri Lanka and Bolivia. The project serves as a bridge-building attempt to manage recognition tensions.

Indeed, Indian diplomacy sought endorsements for Mission LiFE in various diplomatic settings. Although Minister Lekhi had not attended climate negotiations in the past ten years,⁴⁵⁶ she agreed to promote India's green ambitions at an exclusive think tank forum sponsored by the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, attended by national representatives from 17 countries.⁴⁵⁷ At the 6th Dubrovnik Forum in 2023, she said:

India is one country which has achieved its target of renewables of 40 percent, nine years before the requisite time, and we did not stop there. The Prime Minister started a campaign called LiFE, which is sustainable living, and sustainable living in terms of life *for* environment.⁴⁵⁸

The promotion at the Dubrovnik Forum was not an isolated attempt. A few days before the 58th SBSTA Meeting in Bonn, an annual technical climate conference which Indian climate negotiators always attend, the BRICS Foreign Ministers convened in South Africa. The Indian Foreign Minister asked for their endorsement of India's new flagship project.⁴⁵⁹ The BRICS, however,

⁴⁵⁵ Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2023, Year-end Review. 22 Dec 2023.

⁴⁵⁶ Author searched for her name without success in the official UNFCCC lists of participation, 2012-2022.

⁴⁵⁷ Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2023. "List of Participants", Dubrovnik Forum. 7-8 July 2023.

⁴⁵⁸ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. "Remarks by Ministry of State for External Affairs, Smt. Meenakshi Lekhi at the Dubrovnik Forum 2023," website. 10 July 2023; Author's note: the MEA press release states "life or environment" but Mission LiFE refers to lifestyles *for* environment. Thus, I have interpreted this as a typo and added an *f* in the quote.

⁴⁵⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. "Opening remarks by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting," 1 June 2023.

rejected the Indian outreach and Mission LiFE was absent from the joint statement issued after the meeting.⁴⁶⁰ However, during the same month, Indian diplomacy received an endorsement in the US. When Modi visited Washington, D.C. on a state visit, invited by US President Biden, climate featured in the discussions among other issues. The joint statement had a separate section on partnership on the clean energy transition, with seven paragraphs dedicated to “climate action and clean energy leaders.” President Biden said that he:

Welcomed Prime Minister Modi’s Lifestyle for Environment initiative (LiFE) as a successful national model to address the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification and land degradation, and resolved to work together to implement the G20 High Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development.⁴⁶¹

As such, Indian diplomacy has overall received varying degrees of acceptance abroad.

The domestic angle is essential to understanding why Mission LiFE induces recognition tensions. In light of the tensions emerging, officials at the in-house think tank Niti Aayog produced internal planning documents outlining concrete, measurable milestones for the initiative. The Niti Aayog policy planners had grand expectations for the new project. In a public brochure, published in 2022, they outlined how 400 million people would be mobilized within two years. Then, within four years, or by 2028 and a year before national elections, “at least one billion Indians and other global citizens” would “take individual and collective action for protecting and conserving the environment.”⁴⁶² In the four years after the report, during which Indians were expected to be mobilized according to the initial plans, the Niti Aayog planners have

⁴⁶⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023. “Joint Statement of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, Cape Town, South Africa, 1 June 2023,” website. 2 June 2023.

⁴⁶¹ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “India-USA Joint Statement during the Official State visit of Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi to USA”, 23 June 2023.

⁴⁶² Niti Aayog and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2022. “LiFE Lifestyle for Environment,” Brochure, 8, 13.

not yet published any progress report. In February 2024, a Ministry of Environment official contended that “we don’t need to scale up everything” on the stage of the 23rd World Sustainable Development Summit, indicating dissent about the original grand plans for Mission LiFE.⁴⁶³

Initially, PMO officials instructed the in-house government think tank Niti Aayog to implement Mission LiFE. Over time, however, the PMO has separated the implementation into two governmental bodies: the Ministry of Environment and Niti Aayog, the former is responsible for national implementation, the latter is in charge of promotion abroad. However, an insider told me that “something happened,” without specifying what, such that the international element of implementing the project had now been returned to the Ministry of Environment.⁴⁶⁴ By bringing Mission LiFE back to the Ministry of Environment, the PMO pressured the ministry officials to speak more about Mission LiFE. However, the return also implied that a less influential body inside the Indian government would implement Mission LiFE. Instead of adding manpower to the implementation of Mission LiFE, the flagship project was sent to an understaffed ministry that lacks resources to respond to all requests from India’s partners.

Despite its grand plans to build a critical mass of Indians in favor of protecting the environment, Mission LiFE has thus far been a public diplomacy campaign rather than a campaign for domestic change. This lack of domestic change has induced recognition tensions about the limits of India’s green ambitions in contemporary diplomacy. Consequently, Mission LiFE sustained the interest of Indian officials and their foreign counterparts for a couple of years, but it has also led to so much recognition tension that it produces severe status dilemma dynamics.

⁴⁶³ Author’s field note from 23rd World Sustainable Development Summit, 11 February 2024.

⁴⁶⁴ Author’s interview with I#9.

6.5.2. Signing or rejecting partnerships

During seemingly innocent moments in the preparatory phase ahead of climate negotiations, Indian officials find themselves navigating recognition tensions in negotiations about different documents. Signing declarations constitutes a fast, instinctive practice that reveals common knowledge about India's positions. As an official put it frankly, "We do not sign declarations that are against our positions, especially on mitigation."⁴⁶⁵ In the run-up to the formal negotiations, government officials craft different forms of temporal partnerships expressed in declarations. These declarations are sometimes launched together with issue-based coalitions. The practice of signing and rejecting constitutes a way for Indian officials to navigate tensions inherent in India's quest to be recognized as an environmental power with green ambitions.

For example, in the preparations for COP28, some European officials were sitting in the offices of DG Energy (DG ENER), a Directorate General (DG) in the European Commission, in Brussels. Although the EU's participation in climate negotiations is prepared by another DG – the DG Climate Action (DG CLIMA) – officials dealing with energy politics invested resources and time into crafting a new global renewable energy and energy efficiency pledge.⁴⁶⁶ As the Indian embassy in Brussels received the draft, they sent a diplomatic cable back to the capital. As the cable reached a unit inside the Indian Foreign Ministry, an official realized that another unit had to have a say on the proposal.⁴⁶⁷ The cable travelled from a territorial division to the functional United Nations Economic and Social (UNES) division that coordinates India's international climate engagements. Had the energy declaration from Brussels reached New Delhi a year earlier, things might have been easier. But officials in New Delhi were surprised since the G20 countries had signed a similar

⁴⁶⁵ Author's interview with I#18.

⁴⁶⁶ European Commission, 2023. "Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge."

⁴⁶⁷ Author's interview with I#32.

pledge in the Green Development Pact adopted at the G20 summit in New Delhi a few months earlier.

Officials sitting in New Delhi thought they had experienced a backlash to the Green Development Pact. Instead of championing the Green Development Pact at COP28, 100 plus countries, including many G20 countries, decided to sign the Brussels-formulated Energy Declaration. The Green Development Pact included the ambitious goal of tripling renewable energy supply, had been ignored in Brussels. Consequently, New Delhi decided not to sign the Energy Declaration. In light of India rejecting the declaration's wording on coal, and Brussels not accommodating the G20 summit formulations, India decided to oppose the energy declaration.⁴⁶⁸ India refused to change its red line about coal formulations at the cost of not being part of the energy declaration.⁴⁶⁹ As Indian officials rejected the new pledge, they experienced the limits of the Green Development Pact endorsed during India's G20 presidency.

If the energy declaration represented a status backlash, other declarations suggest that India's partners accommodated India's green ambitions. India joined declarations on finance and hydrogen, but skipped pledges on agriculture since Indian officials still contend that its farming sector must develop without a constraining pledge.⁴⁷⁰ One official that I spoke to looked me in the eyes and said: "Mitigation is not a good idea for us since our agriculture sector is still developing and our society has not developed enough for mitigation."⁴⁷¹ In this way, there is a tension between India's green ambitions and the actual practices of officials. India's green ambitions have an effect on the practice of signing partnerships. However, parts of the Indian bureaucracy endorse

⁴⁶⁸ Author's interview with I#24.

⁴⁶⁹ The Wire Staff, 2023. "'I respect the Science in Everything I Do', Clarifies COP28 Prez; India Skips Two Declarations," *The Wire*. 4 December 2023.

⁴⁷⁰ Author's interview with I#18.

⁴⁷¹ Author's interview with I#18.

or reject declarations based on their own understandings of India's developmental status, rather than based on the country's green ambitions.

6.5.3. Foreign endorsements

Different endorsements by foreign officials manifest the recognition tensions in practice. Around the world, officials sitting in their Prime Minister's offices enable social interactions between their leaders and the Indian Prime Minister on the sidelines of climate negotiations. They signal recognition of India's green ambitions by enabling meetings between their leaders and the Indian Prime Minister Modi. Insiders refer to these meetings as interactions at "the political level" in contrast to the "technical level." Although this practice was impossible at COP27, as Modi did not participate in person, foreign officials from nineteen countries engaged in interactions with the Indian PM at COP28.⁴⁷² Inside the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, officials noted that the "PM only stayed for a short period, so he could not attend some invitations."⁴⁷³ The geographical variation among these twenty countries indicates that the Indian PMO takes a global outlook in their efforts to build acceptance for India's green ambitions. These meetings induce administrative burdens but also uncertainties for officials working on India's bilateral relationships who could not participate. Usually, India's ambassador sits in the room when Modi meets a foreign leader. However, during these meetings on the sidelines of climate negotiations, India's Foreign Minister Jaishankar, and the national security advisor Doval, participated in the meetings.⁴⁷⁴ Thus, foreign counterparts conveyed their acceptance of India's green ambitions directly to Modi and his two closest aides, even though the Indian ambassador in their country

⁴⁷² According to the author's data collection of photos from COP28, Modi met representatives from: the Netherlands, Bahrain, Jordan, Tajikistan, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom (King Charles, Rishi Sunak, Tony Blair and David Cameron), Ethiopia, Italy, Brazil, Vietnam, Maldives, France, UAE, Sweden, Israel, Switzerland, Turkey, Barbados, Guyana, European Commission (von der Leyen). See Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023 in bibliography.

⁴⁷³ Author's interview with I#17.

⁴⁷⁴ Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi). 2023. "In the midst of COP-28 proceedings, caught up with President Ranil Wickremesinghe of Sri Lanka." Post. *X (formerly Twitter)*, December 1.

could not hear or witness the conversation firsthand. Instead, the diplomats responsible for bilateral relations must rely on written meeting notes, photos, and oral recollections from the meetings.

Besides these bilateral meetings, foreign officials prepare speeches that their leaders present in the presence of their Indian counterparts. At the launch of the Green Credits Initiative, the President of the European Council, Michel, expressed his gratitude to Modi during a speech:

We believe in working together to address common challenges in a respectful way. Thank you, Prime Minister Mr. Modi for bringing us together today. You can count on the European Union. Thank you for your leadership.⁴⁷⁵

Showing up and uttering such accommodating words indicates recognition of India's green ambitions. The foreign leaders strengthened Modi's green credentials by endorsing India's green ambitions with their participation. New Delhi had invited other leaders too, but an official admitted afterward that "we were a bit tight on time in our outreach."⁴⁷⁶

Despite the social interactions at the political level, foreign officials underscore the difference between the political and the technical level as a major point of friction. Several interviewees told me that despite the ambitious political level, Indian officials involved with technical negotiations still talk about their developing country status and historical responsibilities held by developed countries.⁴⁷⁷ This contradiction between the political and the technical level irritated a foreign official who even argued that Indian officials present "two faces in global climate politics: the leading power face and the poor country face."⁴⁷⁸ The foreign official thought these faces represented an identity crisis: "They don't know their identity!" With this identity crisis in

⁴⁷⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2023. "High-level event on Green Credits Programme at #COP28 World Climate Actions Summit," *YouTube*, 23:55-24:12.

⁴⁷⁶ Author's interview with I#17.

⁴⁷⁷ Author's interview with I#36.

⁴⁷⁸ Author's interview with I#15.

mind, combined with grand slogans about smart cities and green hydrogen, the person was dismayed, believing India's green ambitions were "blah, blah, blah."

Some foreign diplomats in New Delhi pay attention to public discussions about India's participation in the upcoming climate negotiations.⁴⁷⁹ The allocated resources indicate the seriousness with which foreign diplomats take multilateral climate diplomacy. This implies reading the news, listening to webinars, sometimes joining events, and speaking with stakeholders. Ahead of COP28, British diplomats prepared an opinion piece that the *Indian Express* published halfway through the negotiations.⁴⁸⁰ Highlighting cooperation with India, the British High Commissioner to India suggested three areas for British Indian co-leadership: stopping any global temperature rise, mobilizing climate finance for developing countries, and biodiversity. In these areas, India and the UK could lead "for our benefit and for the benefit of the world." The British Ambassador concluded with a wish: "And just as the UK continues to cut its greenhouse gas emissions, which are now nearly half of what they were in 1990, so India can inspire the world through its clean energy transition." The high-level meetings between the British leaders and Modi at COP28 were, thus, accompanied by public writing by British diplomats in New Delhi. The British diplomats accepted India's green ambitions.

We can also learn about tensions shaping India's green ambitions by studying events in New Delhi. During fieldwork in New Delhi, I witnessed foreign diplomats attending the 23rd World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS), sponsored by the Indian Ministry of Environment, and arranged by their think tank, The Energy and Resource Institute (TERI). On the speaker's list there were not only Indian speakers. Sri Lanka sent a senior official as a speaker because their minister was managing a domestic scandal. The Spanish

⁴⁷⁹ Author's participant observation as speaker at an event about COP28, arranged by the Center for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP).

⁴⁸⁰ Ellis, Alex, 2023. "How India and UK can do more at COP28", *Indian Express*, December 6, 2023.

Ecology Minister traveled from Madrid. A Sustainable Energy Minister came from Kiribati and a politician from Fiji. At this event, I noted participation by foreign officials, indicating their interest in India's green ambitions and attempts to build partnerships with India. However, they were probably surprised that barely any Indian speaker at this flagship event talked about India as a leading power shaping global climate politics.⁴⁸¹ While the logo of Mission LiFE decorated the main stage, India's green ambition to become a leading power in climate cooperation barely featured in the conversations onstage.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined India's green ambitions in contemporary climate negotiations. The analysis reveals that Indian officials find themselves in severe status dilemma dynamics since they encounter multiple forms of tensions. The management of one tension will only reduce this form of tension but not eliminate a more demanding operational challenge: the navigation of status dilemmas. This chapter has used a practice lens to study status dilemmas, revealing a conceptual clash in India's contemporary approach to international climate negotiations. This is a clash between the Indian officials that follow the new instructions, about climate being part of India's civilizational heritage, and the officials that follow older instructions, about climate being part of India's role in the community of developing countries.

Indian officials may be able to learn about the nature of climate diplomacy, to understand India's domestic needs, or to conceive of how partners will react to India's stances in a changing world. But, navigating one of these elements is not sufficient to navigate a green status dilemma. In fact, practical mastery or competence in Pouliot's vocabulary, requires constant attention. Thus, to master the severe status dilemma dynamics, Indian officials must cope with

⁴⁸¹ Author's memory notes from 23rd World Sustainable Development Summit, New Delhi, February 2024.

the lack of a common ground on the standards of competence in a diluted system like the global climate regime.

A theoretical insight from the analysis concerns the structure in which status dilemma dynamics operate. In the fluid international system, *relationship linkages* emerge in the management of these social dynamics. These linkages manifest themselves in forms of interaction between individual officials. These relationship linkages should not be mistaken for “issue linkages” in the negotiation literature.⁴⁸² Relationship linkages induce expectations and perceptions at the individual level. They operate at the individual level of analysis but are affected by structures constraining them. To clarify, these relationship linkages were produced by the Foreign Office’s distribution of work with outreach to bilateral partners. The distribution of work pertaining to India’s green ambitions in climate negotiations forges new relationship linkages for India’s role in the world. However, these relationship linkages come with risks of status backlash if officials misinterpret them. For instance, by arguing together with China about loose coal formulations, Indian officials used their relationship linkage with China to deal with tensions. Yet, by supporting the same positions as China in the COP28 negotiation about coal in the Global Stocktake, Indian officials missed the chance to boost their green credentials in their relationship linkages with other partners. The collaboration with China enabled them to ease the normativity tension about coal, but accelerated recognition tensions about India’s green ambitions among other partners.

As an unintended consequence of India’s green ambitions on the world stage, diplomatic friction has taken a new form. Several Western partners endorse India’s green ambitions and welcome a more active Indian role in the international system. In effect, negotiation groupings that once were cornerstones in Indian climate diplomacy face a pressing risk of status backlash. Old groupings had a role in the past that might not be suitable today. Moreover,

⁴⁸² Keohane, Robert O. and Joseph S. Nye Jr. 1973. Power and interdependence, *Survival*, 15:4, 159-161.

the new diplomatic milieu for Indian officials produces multiple tensions that Indian diplomats attempt to manage through *acts of acceptance building*. The contemporary project for such acceptance building is the Mission LiFE, a program that has thus far only had a partial impact on building acceptance abroad for India's green ambitions, due to the lukewarm reception in various capitals worldwide. This chapter has revealed how India attempts to build acceptance for its green ambitions in formal climate negotiations. The next chapter provides insights into acceptance building in the G20 process. The status dilemma dynamics shaping India's green ambitions in climate negotiations require plenty of bureaucratic attention.

7. The green assertion during India's G20 presidency

7.1. Introduction

Everything we did for G20, we wanted to do in India. We wanted to bring change in India, the goal was to do for India, not just for G20! The domestic change element was very important to us.⁴⁸³ – Indian official interviewed by author

Despite the issues and chaos, Indians will always make things happen on the last day. On the last day, things will happen. There is a relevant saying: Indians start planning their weddings on the day they begin! And then, there is a massive show! G20 was just like that. Say that something is urgent, and it will happen.⁴⁸⁴ – Indian expert interviewed by author

This chapter uses a practice lens, focused on status dilemmas,⁴⁸⁵ to examine how Indian officials navigated the tensions that emerged in India's green ambitions during its first-ever presidency of the Group of 20 (G20). In the preparations and during the presidency, Indian officials were exposed to various tensions that form the social processes of status dilemma dynamics. This chapter argues that Indian officials faced a major status dilemma in the execution of the country's first-ever G20 presidency. This dilemma revolved around

⁴⁸³ Author's interview with I#19.

⁴⁸⁴ Author's interview with I#27.

⁴⁸⁵ Presented in chapter 3 in this thesis.

how to present India to the world: Would they present it as a poor, developing country, needing financial assistance for its green transition? Or would they present it as a proud nation on the rise? Would they attempt to present India as part of the solution in global efforts to combat climate change? Or would they present it as a country that is vulnerable to climate change? This case study reveals how Indian officials managed this green status dilemma during the administration of India's G20 presidency.

Behind the scenes, Indian officials had been trying to secure India's first G20 presidency for several years. In 2015, a Ministry of Finance official told the press, "China is chairing the G20 this time, followed by Germany in 2017, and then...the chair will pass on to India for 2018."⁴⁸⁶ This did not happen. The next G20 member in line was Argentina, which seemingly was unwilling to swap its G20 presidency with India. An unnamed official admitted to the press that there were logistical hurdles:

We do not have a world-class convention center yet. The one in Dwarka will take time, and then you have the elections in 2019. Therefore, it would be safer to make a bid to host the 2021 or 2022 meeting. We want to showcase our best and therefore it would be better to postpone it and not make a serious bid for the 2019 meeting.⁴⁸⁷

Consequently, Indian officials kept waiting for a more opportune moment, aware of both domestic and international expectations. The political leadership accepted the delay. As time passed, Indian officials convinced their counterparts about India's willingness to host the G20 presidency in 2022, confirmed at the Osaka G20 summit in 2019.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Mehra, Puja, 2015. "India to hold G20 Chair in 2018, Delhi may play host", *The Hindu*. 1 October 2015.

⁴⁸⁷ Gupta, Surojit and Sidhartha, 2017. "India not to host G20 meet due to absence of mega centre, 2019 polls," *Times of India*. 17 July 2017.

⁴⁸⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019. Osaka G20 Summit Declaration.

However, a year later, in the run-up to the summit in Saudi Arabia, Indian officials contacted Indonesian counterparts with a proposal to swap presidencies. Officials in Jakarta were receptive. An insider explained, “Jakarta did not want to have both ASEAN and G20 presidency during the same year. Jakarta talked to Cambodia about swapping ASEAN presidencies and considered it but decided to go with India instead.”⁴⁸⁹ The possibility of swapping presidencies enabled the political leaders of both countries to use the G20 as a platform for domestic election campaigning.⁴⁹⁰ Officials knew their political leaders sought campaign opportunities. However, in New Delhi, the swapping had an additional advantage since it decreased the stress on the bureaucracy. One official described the issue, stating that India “had come directly from the pandemic and simply had to switch with Indonesia,” and adding “we were not prepared for it.”⁴⁹¹ With the swap, Indian officials gained more time for managing different goals in the margins of the G20 negotiations.

With COVID lockdowns fresh in their minds, officials considered domestic politics and how India could develop with partners in a post-COVID world.⁴⁹² At the height of the first wave of COVID-19, in May 2020, the Prime Minister announced the mission of self-reliant India (*Atmanirbhar Bharat*), bringing isolationist connotations to public debate. In response, the Foreign Minister repeatedly clarified that Indian nationalism supported international partnerships. In light of foreign observers becoming confused about the meaning of self-reliant India, a few clarifying lines made it into a speech delivered by the Foreign Minister at the Bloomberg India Economic Forum in October 2020. In front of foreign diplomats, the Minister reiterated that self-reliant India “is not about protectionism; it is about building greater strengths at home to play

⁴⁸⁹ Author’s interview with I#30.

⁴⁹⁰ Author’s interviews with I#20 and I#30.

⁴⁹¹ Author’s interview with I#27.

⁴⁹² See e.g., Surendra Kumar, 2022, “Editor’s Note” in *India’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Covid World: Through the Eyes of Indian Diplomats*. Wisdom Tree: New Delhi.

more effectively abroad.” He then went on to discuss US-India relations and India’s involvement in the Quad.⁴⁹³

In global climate politics, officials found themselves navigating net-zero politics. Foreign counterparts inquired of Indian officials about their plans to announce a net-zero goal. India eventually announced this, albeit later than many other countries.⁴⁹⁴ Some Indian civil servants worried that India would be portrayed as a “green problem” in international media.⁴⁹⁵ The worry was significant because being seen as a green problem would imply a status backlash for India in world affairs. Moreover, a little under ten months before India took over the G20 presidency, Russia invaded Ukraine. This shifted the attention of many bureaucracies worldwide to the war in Europe and away from numerous other pressing issues, including climate action and recovery from the pandemic.

7.2. Background: Getting India ready for the world

The vision for India’s G20 presidency evolved in the Ministry of External Affairs and inside the Prime Minister’s Office. The ideas shaping the execution can be traced back to a small group of Indian officials who convened for preparations. They had noted the headlines in the international press about their Climate Minister Yadav’s veto act during COP26 in November 2021, when he blocked formulations about phasing out coal from being included in an agreement. However, this publicity barely concerned the group.⁴⁹⁶ After all, before COP26, a top-level official had already outlined opportunities to present solar panel projects through the International Solar Alliance. This official encouraged the ISA to plan for the summit in 2023.⁴⁹⁷ Instead of worrying

⁴⁹³ Ministry of External Affairs, 2020. “Remarks by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar at the Bloomberg India Economic Forum 2020,” 15 October 2020.

⁴⁹⁴ Author’s interview with I#20.

⁴⁹⁵ Author’s interview with I#27.

⁴⁹⁶ Author’s interview with I#13.

⁴⁹⁷ Author’s interview with I#13.

about the COP26 situation, the officials focused on how they could best organize the G20 presidency to respond to a dysfunctional multilateral system that was bogged down in conflict with the war in Ukraine. They also discussed how they could use the presidency to overcome the difficulties bringing reform as a temporary member of the United Nations Security Council 2021-2022. As the group had a “couple of months with uncertain priorities,” they decided to wait for Modi’s announcement regarding what approach should be taken.⁴⁹⁸

However, waiting for the Prime Minister’s Office created ambiguity. This was because the G20 process occurred amidst multiple tensions in global affairs. This ambiguity made it necessary to reassure foreign diplomats asking for the presidency agenda, and domestic stakeholders planning for their activities during the presidency. The chief coordinator of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) G20 Secretariat therefore agreed to deliver two speeches at Indian think tanks. At the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), the official gave a speech with 28 bullet points and priorities, including climate, digital, and health.⁴⁹⁹ At the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), the official gave a similar speech with 33 bullet points, once again with climate, digital, and health as some of the priorities.⁵⁰⁰ This practice of sharing the reasoning inside the MEA in prepared speeches in semi-public settings enabled Indian officials to share their thinking with foreign diplomats seated in the audience. But the ambiguity remained. Listing priorities in public speeches also enabled the Indian bureaucracy to inform domestic stakeholders about the ongoing preparations, yet the long list showed an unwillingness to pick points. An insider admitted that “[the speech at ICWA] did not say much about priorities

⁴⁹⁸ Author’s interview with I#27.

⁴⁹⁹ G20a, 2022. “India’s priority areas in the G20 Presidency”, Curtain Raiser Address ORF, *Observer Research Foundation*, 3 August 2022.

⁵⁰⁰ G20, 2022b. “G20@2023-The Roadmap to Indian Presidency,” *Indian Council of World Affairs*, 8 August 2022, Sapru House.

for the G20 presidency. There were too many points!”⁵⁰¹ However, considering this list, Indian officials sought “concepts and ideas that worked globally and would bring change domestically.”⁵⁰² The inclusion of climate action illustrated the impact that India’s green ambitions had on the G20 presidency.

There were several more months of internal preparations, with ongoing discussions about how officials could handle different tensions during the presidency. After this, Indian civil servants learned that the PM would announce the priorities for India’s presidency at the G20 summit in Bali. To reduce the administrative confusion and provide more political steering, the PMO had identified Bali summit as an opportunity to announce the priorities two weeks before India formally took over the presidency. The timing was critical because the G20 Bali summit occurred during the climate negotiations at COP27 in Egypt. The Indian climate negotiators, at that time involved with the climate negotiations in Sharm el Sheikh, learned that their PM had announced that renewable energy, green development, and Mission LiFE were priority issues for the forthcoming Indian G20 presidency, alongside a set of other issues. These three elements were the parts of India’s green ambitions that made their way into the G20 presidency. Indian diplomats in Egypt could breathe a sigh of relief, since the theme of the India Pavilion was Mission LiFE. However, they also realized that Indian officials active in negotiations in Egypt risked being under greater scrutiny. Hence, the political instruction from the Prime Minister to the officials regarding the G20 priorities also had a strong normative message: Do not devote all your time to old climate diplomacy, with speaking points merely about equity and CBDR-RC; devote your efforts to building a new image about India’s positive contributions to global climate action. The normative vision for Indian climate diplomacy had received new political steering to bolster India’s green credentials.

⁵⁰¹ Author’s interview with I#27.

⁵⁰² Author’s interview with I#19.

Shortly after the Prime Minister's political instructions about how the officials should manage status dynamics in the G20 process, officials at the G20 Secretariat undertook a new task. They sought to compile a list of policy options and insights ahead of the presidency. To do this, Indian officials consulted global research institutes such as the Brookings Institution and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, asking about their wish lists from the Indian G20 presidency. Having conducted this mapping exercise, civil servants sent an internal report to the PMO, which approved the list with global perspectives on the presidency. To remind the civil servants at desks across New Delhi's ministries about the international relevance of the presidency, the G20 Secretariat officials sent the internal report to the ministries.⁵⁰³ Interestingly, the ministries received this internal report as a reminder after producing their own issue papers, a practice that served as background knowledge production in the run-up to the presidency.⁵⁰⁴ This meant that before the negotiations inside the working group meetings began, Indian officials had familiarized themselves with international perspectives on the processes they were about to coordinate. The G20 Secretariat officials had identified a need to provide further instructions to the ministry officials about dealing with status dynamics in the working groups. They worked hard since "G20 was about getting the world ready for India, and India ready for the world."⁵⁰⁵

India's G20 presidency was not inexpensive. The Indian government allocated US\$ 119 million. The budget was almost three times as large as Indonesia's spending of US\$ 44 million, and larger than Germany's 72 million euro presidency a few years earlier.⁵⁰⁶ Such a budget allocation indicates that the

⁵⁰³ Author's interview with I#19.

⁵⁰⁴ I have only heard about this report, never read it, so I cannot say what it contains. I could ask Carnegie and Brookings for their written input but that does not give me the list that Indian officials compiled.

⁵⁰⁵ Author's fieldnote, 24 February 2024.

⁵⁰⁶ Sabharwal, Vasudha, 2023. "As India Spends 4100 Cr On G20 Summit, Here's How Much Money Previous Host Countries Had Spent," *Scoopwhoop*. 9 September 2023; Anand, Jatin. 2023. "G20 India Summit: Over Rs 4,100 crore spent on Delhi for G20: where and by whom," *Indian Express*. 7 September 2023.

Indian government took the presidency seriously, realizing that it could help strengthen India's footprint in the world. At the same time, not all Indian officials saw the advantage of presenting India as a significant force in global affairs. Some Indian civil servants thought the presidency did not result in much beyond "a tourism event with all the events happening all around India."⁵⁰⁷ However, other insiders thought that hosting events across India was a deliberate tactic: "we were hoping that they [the G20 delegates] would return and have good memories."⁵⁰⁸ Although the summit in September received the most international publicity, more than 200 meetings occurred across the host country during the presidency which was between December 2022 and November 2023. One insider summarized India's aims with the presidency: "We wanted to showcase the path India is on, its diversity, and success stories relevant for developing countries." This indicates how officials tried to use the presidency to boost India's reputation.⁵⁰⁹

7.3. Epistemic tensions

The first form of tension can be captured analytically by studying the use and production of knowledge by Indian officials. Background knowledge gives us intriguing insights into how officials approach their day-to-day operations. During the G20 presidency, Indian officials found ways to deal with a knowledge deficit by establishing a temporary secretariat and producing internal background papers.

7.3.1. Background knowledge

Before the presidency, knowledge about the nuts and bolts of the G20 process constituted exclusive expertise, held by just a few officials in the G20 Division in the Ministry of External Affairs and the Department of Economic Affairs

⁵⁰⁷ Author's interview with I#26.

⁵⁰⁸ Author's interview with I#27.

⁵⁰⁹ Author's interview with I#28.

in the Ministry of Finance. The expertise lay with mid-career and senior professionals, since low-level officials “move now and then,” and there was “no collective memory of G20 presidencies before.”⁵¹⁰ Learning the G20 process per se was neither a primary goal during introductory training nor during the subsequent specialized education officials undertook across India. In the recruitment process for the civil service, Indian officials take the prestigious UPSC exam which tests background knowledge on a broad array of issues. After passing this exam, Indian officials receive specialized training ahead of their jobs in the ministries with minimal background knowledge about the G20 process. Different branches of Indian bureaucracy require different tests as part of this exam. After this, officials undergo further administrative education at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Shimla, Northern India. One official described to me what they do in Mussoorie, as the Academy is called informally: “We are taught to follow instructions and do paperwork mostly. Just ensure that things proceed.”⁵¹¹ The background knowledge about the G20 process held by members of the administrative services was therefore very limited.

With such a low level of background knowledge as a starting point, Indian diplomats continued their standard *modus operandi* during the G20 presidency. Despite being neither trained in diplomacy, nor members of the Indian foreign service, non-diplomats also stepped in. For instance, an IAS officer with professional experience from a state government worked with international cooperation in a ministry.⁵¹² In another ministry, an official involved had spent most of his career in the private sector before working with international affairs inside the government.⁵¹³ These officials came from different branches of the Indian civil service. The Ministry of Finance hires members of the Indian Economic Service. The Ministry of External Affairs comprises

⁵¹⁰ Author’s interview with I#11 and I#27.

⁵¹¹ Author’s interview with I#29.

⁵¹² Author’s interview with I#34.

⁵¹³ Author’s interview with I#28.

members of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and regular staff.⁵¹⁴ In comparison, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) employs 400,000 individuals across India who alternate between the local, regional, provincial, and national governments during their careers as civil servants.⁵¹⁵ Thus, officials from different branches of Indian civil service – with different background knowledge and recruitment – faced the task of advancing India’s green ambitions in social processes. They were the ones dealing with status dilemma dynamics.

7.3.2. The G20 Secretariat inside the Ministry of External Affairs

The Foreign Office was not negligent in addressing the lack of background knowledge in different Indian government departments. An insider explained that the Foreign Office realized that the varying knowledge levels could cause problems during the presidency.⁵¹⁶ Consequently, it established a G20 Secretariat as a new institutional body that could bridge different foreign policy goals.⁵¹⁷ The new institutional body enabled Indian diplomats to navigate tensions much more extensively than just monitoring the logistics, not least by coordinating officials involved across New Delhi’s ministries. Led by the G20 Sherpa and the deputy head, the Chief Coordinator, the body was predominantly staffed by officers from the IFS and the IAS.⁵¹⁸ Insiders thought that the Secretariat was not composed of many people, but that it had very competent people and was well-staffed by Indian standards.⁵¹⁹

Realizing the need for in-house knowledge from an international perspective, MEA published a call for experts and hired a handful of people to support

⁵¹⁴ The ministries employ individuals with other backgrounds as well, who are not members of different services, but the core group are the members of different services.

⁵¹⁵ Author’s interview with I#29, a former top-ranked IAS civil servant who estimated 400,000 employees.

⁵¹⁶ Author’s interview with I#20.

⁵¹⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, 2022. “Question No.4068 Presidency Role of India in G-20,” Rajya Sabha, Unstarred Question No.4068. 7 April 2022.

⁵¹⁸ G20 Secretariat, 2023. “Who’s who,” Website.

⁵¹⁹ Author’s interview with I#13, I#22.

the Secretariat's day-to-day operations.⁵²⁰ As such, the ministry hired experts who had never experienced the internal hierarchies of Indian bureaucracy professionally before. International consultancies and philanthropies also offered staff on loan. For instance, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation deployed a consultant to assist with the operations inside the Foreign Office.⁵²¹ These individuals continuously balanced different priorities. The staffing of the Secretariat shows that New Delhi wanted a knowledgeable group of people in charge of coordination inside the government.

Fairly early, however, a few consultants quit "in frustration" since they were dissatisfied with the inner functioning. A person with insight thought that these consultants "wanted to be close to power," implying that their roles provided access to power.⁵²² There were increasing returns for those consultants who stayed and worked hard. For instance, a consultant co-authored an op-ed with the G20 Sherpa at the end of the presidency.⁵²³ This illustrates that people could raise their social ranking in informal social hierarchies by managing the tensions from India's green ambitions, despite being low in the formal hierarchies. While such informal high status was reached relatively quickly, it was short-lived and temporary since the consultants were not rewarded with exciting new positions, unlike the civil servants who performed well.

Indian officials identified the need for knowledge on climate-related issues. An insider explained how this worked: "We put climate as a priority deliberately, we wanted to draw attention to the need for climate finance. We wanted to define the global discussion on climate."⁵²⁴ Given such a green ambition, it

⁵²⁰ Author's interview with I#26; Government of India, 2022. "Advertisement for Consultants in Logistics Vertical of the G20 Secretariat of the Ministry of External Affairs," No. Q/PF/575/44/2022. 31 October 2022.

⁵²¹ David, Supriti. 2023. India's G20 Presidency: From Vision to Legacy, *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 3-4, July-December 2022, 158.

⁵²² Author's interview with I#26.

⁵²³ Kant, Amitabh, and Prabhat Upadhyaya, 2023. "Green Development Pact: India's G20 Presidency Shows The Way," *Mint*. 2 October 2023.

⁵²⁴ Author's interview with I#35.

made sense that the G20 Secretariat had a unit devoted to climate diplomacy. This unit became the unit that dealt with various kinds of tensions forming the green status dilemma that Indian officials navigated throughout the presidency. Officials also consulted trusted experts to understand contemporary tensions in global climate politics better.⁵²⁵ In regular phone conversations and occasional meetings, officials reached out to research institutes such as the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), and the Energy and Resource Institute (TERI). Many experts at these institutes contributed with analyses to the think tank track of the G20 process called T20.⁵²⁶ Experts hired by some of these research institutes also participated in working group meetings throughout the presidency. Hence, the embedding of India's green ambitions into the G20 chairmanship produced a need to strengthen the Foreign Office's expertise on climate foreign policy.

The G20 Secretariat had internal hierarchies that facilitated the navigation of tensions on a day-to-day basis. Many people referred to "the Sherpa office," "the Secretariat," "the Sherpa" and mentioned these internal hierarchies. As one person put it, "The internal hierarchy was visible inside the office: different people had desks and seats dependent on internal hierarchy. The seating represented personnel hierarchy."⁵²⁷ On visits to the MEA building that hosted the G20 Secretariat, I noted the different seating arrangements, with open office space for consultants, individual offices for higher-ranked officials, and different waiting rooms dependent on the host of the individual meeting.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ Author's interview with I#11.

⁵²⁶ Author co-authored a T20 policy brief with experts from CEEW, see Raha, Shuva, Jain, Prayank, Dang, Kinshu, Nordenstam, Axel. 2023. Jobs, Growth, and Sustainability: The Case for a G20 Task Force on Integrated Climate Actions. T20 Policy Brief, *Observer Research Foundation*.

⁵²⁷ Author's interview with I#24.

⁵²⁸ Based on the author's memory notes, as per documented immediately after visiting the empty office space in a building where civil servants worked during India's G20 presidency. The author received a guided tour inside the building after the G20 presidency was concluded.

The office space hosted consultants and low-level officials during the presidency. Higher-level officials had offices in another part of the building. On every desk there was a phone allowing the official to receive immediate internal instructions. Personnel could store papers in the office cupboards next to their desks. The civil servants working in this office landscape would observe an Indian flag whenever they looked at the central clock on the glass wall in front of the meeting room. This way the staff could be reminded of an essential national symbol every day and, possibly, feel a sense of national pride as they dealt with different tensions in their profession.

It was necessary to ensure that officials understood the relationship between India's green ambitions and the other ambitions that the political leadership had announced for the G20 presidency. To do this, the officials serving the G20 Secretariat inside the Foreign Ministry faced a diplomatic concur. In the first week of the presidency, the top-ranked official, the Sherpa, walked through the corridors towards the room with the Indian flag hanging on the wall. The Sherpa instructed the staff: "We are not looking for India-centric input, but international content!" He announced an internal exam a few days later.⁵²⁹ With the announcement came stress, a stress that "people who have taken the UPSC exam [the Indian civil service entry exam] can imagine."⁵³⁰ For the following days, the officials had to study. One person told me that "there was no naming and shaming" and their jobs "did not depend on it, but there were informal grades."⁵³¹ The reading material was not the latest IPCC report, or speeches by Indian leaders, but 13 issue papers produced by Indian ministries. With this internal test, the officials "understood the seriousness" of India's first-ever G20 presidency.⁵³² This test enabled the Indian Foreign Service to update its knowledge base, review the internal issue papers, and ensure that India could run a G20 presidency with green ambitions.

⁵²⁹ Author's interview with I#24.

⁵³⁰ Author's interview with I#24.

⁵³¹ Author's interview with I#24.

⁵³² Author's interview with I#24.

7.3.3. The production of internal papers

To prepare themselves for diplomatic interaction during the actual presidency, Indian officials produced internal papers ahead of the presidency.⁵³³ These issue papers enabled the Indian bureaucracy to produce an updated knowledge base ahead of the upcoming G20 negotiations on various issues. Moreover, writing issue papers enabled the people sitting in the engine room of status ambitions to identify potential conflictual positions between ministries. In the final months leading up to the presidency, a limited number of staff inside the MEA G20 Secretariat began writing internal background papers based on priorities announced by the Prime Minister. However, instead of following the instructions and guidance that the MEA G20 Secretariat provided in such internal papers, the ministries produced their own papers informed by their own language and priorities.⁵³⁴ As “line ministries” – the term used in the bureaucratic lingo for ministries responsible for different issues in New Delhi – they were included in the implementation of India’s G20 presidency despite the fact there was also a special task force in the G20 Secretariat. This meant that officials were sitting at their desks in different buildings across New Delhi, thinking about implementing priorities during the presidency.

This wider approach led to new, demanding situations. As a person said, “The problem was that the ministries did not listen to what experts [working in the MEA G20 Secretariat] wrote in their internal issue papers.”⁵³⁵ Consequently, the officials working inside the Secretariat had to “ensure that these issue papers worked internationally, not contradicting each other” while knowing that “bureaucrats love handling files and thinking about their next position.”⁵³⁶ The officials dealing with India’s G20 presidency therefore had to navigate the wish lists of multiple ministries. These lists were based on

⁵³³ Chatterji, Saubhadra, 2022. “From global high table to voice of Global South: India’s wide G20 plan,” *Hindustan Times*, 23 November 2022.

⁵³⁴ Author’s interview with I#27.

⁵³⁵ Author’s interview with I#27.

⁵³⁶ Author’s interview with I#27.

varying understandings of the international context for the G20 presidency, on top of the PM's priorities. This issue paper production process reveals epistemic tensions at the administrative level. Officials had to decide between different options for how they would deal with knowledge. Officials could abide by instructions, decide the implementation procedure themselves, or let someone else deal with the issue. These three different approaches which Indian officials took reflect the ways in which they dealt with epistemic tensions in practice.

In light of the sprawling wish lists and the risks of misarranging the historic presidency, the MEA implemented a division of labor between the Secretariat and the ministries. Different ministries were allocated the responsibility for different working group negotiations. These took place alongside the Sherpa track of the G20 process. The Secretariat oversaw the arrangements and paid attention to “small details so countries would not be offended,” which included such things as arrangements of flags.⁵³⁷ Meanwhile, the ministries set up venues for the different working groups of the G20 process, arranged meetings, and produced issue papers for the negotiations.

7.4. Normativity tensions

The second form of tensions relates to conceptions about visions. This section describes the ways in which Indian officials dealt with normativity tensions during the G20 presidency. It highlights the significance of normative contestation in the dilemmas which Indian officials face as they pursue green status ambitions.

⁵³⁷ Author's interview with I#35.

7.4.1. Interministerial ways of administration

During the G20 presidency one clear normative tension became visible. This was when one ministry defended its traditional role in the interministerial hierarchy inside government, while another ministry gained convening power among different ministries in New Delhi. Stressing its special competence as the nodal ministry for climate negotiations, which it had maintained for several decades, the Ministry of Environment brought to the G20 process its multilateral negotiation experience gained from handling UN climate negotiations (the UNFCCC and its annual COPs). To Ministry of Environment officials, the G20 presidency was a side-negotiation occurring alongside the significant negotiations at the COPs. As such, these officials had a particular attitude to interministerial coordination in the Environment, Climate and Sustainability Working Group: “We have done this before; we don’t need to consult all the time.”⁵³⁸ This attitude, however, varied among staff inside the ministry. Low-level officials ignored or did not prioritize coordination attempts, whereas higher-level officials made time for interministerial coordination.⁵³⁹ The Ministry of Environment therefore had preferences about how to conduct climate diplomacy in multilateral negotiations, grounded in many years of negotiations. Normative differences between ministries revealed themselves during the presidency, with officials behaving differently depending on their ministry’s affiliation.

With substantially less expertise, and barely any prior exposure to multilateral negotiations, officials at the Ministry of Power preferred another way of engaging in interministerial coordination. These Ministry of Power officials decided to lead interministerial coordination meetings during the presidency to ensure that the talks inside the Energy Transitions Working Group proceeded as New Delhi preferred. In both in-person and virtual meetings, the Ministry of Power convened a small group of officials tasked to steer this

⁵³⁸ Author’s interview with I#24.

⁵³⁹ Author’s interview with I#24.

working group. The core group occasionally included G20 Secretariat staff from the Ministry of External Affairs, and encompassed officials from the Ministry of Power, Ministry of Coal, Ministry of Mines, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. In this way, the ministry strengthened its convening power and positioned itself as a ministry that managed the tension between India's global ambitions and India's domestic energy needs with interministerial coordination. Hence, the green ambitions promoted during India's chairmanship resulted in different administration strategies among officials.

It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Coal was included in the core group, despite New Delhi emphasizing that climate action was a presidency priority. The green ambitions were insufficiently forceful for the exclusion of the Coal Ministry. This indicates that there are limits to green ambitions in a country that still relies on coal to a high degree in its energy mix. A Ministry of Power official explained:

We are realistic about our energy security needs. We want a diversified energy mix and not experience what Germany had to do with its gas dependency on Russia. Germany is a telling case of what happens if one energy source dominates the energy mix.⁵⁴⁰

These limits to India's green ambitions risk producing negative reactions from the international community since some parts of this regard coal as environmentally unfriendly. As such, an unintended consequence of the tension management in practice is the production of a new risk: the risk of status backlash in the eyes of other international actors.

Another surprise effect was that the green ambitions strengthened the Ministry of Power and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, rather than the Ministry of Environment. In addition to playing a convening role, Ministry of Power officials teamed up with their "sister ministry," the Ministry of New

⁵⁴⁰ Author's interview with I#34.

and Renewable Energy.⁵⁴¹ This bolstered the standing of both ministries in the interministerial hierarchy. The advanced partnership between the Ministry of Power and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy was significant, as the latter had received more attention from the Prime Minister's Office during the Modi era than it had seen before. It was a prudent move from officials at the Ministry of Power to team up with a ministry that had "started to be seen as similar to the Ministry of Finance" within the interministerial hierarchy in New Delhi.⁵⁴²

In a nutshell, the different ways civil servants approached interministerial coordination had unexpected effects. The Ministry of Power gained convening power among other ministries during the Indian G20 presidency. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Environment defended its position as the nodal ministry for climate negotiations. Although the ministries all implemented the political instructions provided by the political leadership, their modes of implementation were informed by working practices that had begun evolving even before Modi started to assert India's global ambitions on the world stage. Still, their various styles of administration were put under the spotlight by India's green ambitions.

7.4.2. Modern working practices for India's global ambitions

During the G20 presidency, there were attempts to change the administrative norms to make bureaucratic procedures fit India's global ambitions. The vision of a new way of doing things reflected India's ambition to become a more effective green leader in contemporary world politics. Some visionary low-level officials dreamed about transforming Indian bureaucracy from the inside. They thought that the working practices of Indian bureaucracy were old-fashioned and in need of an update for India's global ambitions. With the establishment of the G20 Secretariat as a coordinating body, they "wanted to get

⁵⁴¹ Author's interview with I#28.

⁵⁴² Author's interview with I#29.

rid of the slow, paper-oriented approach” with files sent back and forth inside the government.⁵⁴³ This push for change to bureaucratic norms caused tension between these low-level officials and senior officials who were used to the existing way of doing things. As they dealt with a multi-purpose G20 presidency, the visionaries realized they did not have time to craft files, write texts, send documents, and wait for the next person. Their vision of a new bureaucratic approach to India’s external relations was an emancipatory idea, because the dependency on papers was part of the legacy of the British Raj. This way of working had ensured that the Indian bureaucratic system remained “old and slow.”⁵⁴⁴ The vision being proposed was a reform to ways of doing things inside government. It showed a tension between traditional communication, through the circulation of files, and contemporary methods such as WhatsApp communication inside bureaucratic structures.⁵⁴⁵ It is too early, however, to assess whether this group of people were able to bring change to the bureaucratic system. It remains unclear whether they enabled this system to transform itself from within, updating itself in a way geared towards executing India’s green ambitions on the world stage.

The new vision also challenged a traditional norm where, inside of the government, the responsibility always lies “with the next guy.” The officials serving in the Secretariat took responsibility by working long days and occasional nights. One official explained to me that the “G20 presidency occurs every 20 years or so, so you better make the most of it when you can!”⁵⁴⁶ Hard-working career diplomats who performed well during the presidency were rewarded with prestigious positions inside the government.

⁵⁴³ Author’s interview with I#27.

⁵⁴⁴ Author’s interview with I#27.

⁵⁴⁵ Author’s interview with I#13 and I#27.

⁵⁴⁶ Author’s interview with I#19.

7.4.3. The Green Development Pact

We can also gain new insights about India's green status dilemma through study of the social processes that produced one of the key outcomes of the presidency. This was the *Green Development Pact for a Sustainable Future* (Green Development Pact) which G20 countries endorsed at the New Delhi G20 Summit, held on 9 and 10 September, 2023. Several months into the presidency, Indian officials tested the idea of aiming for a Green Development Pact as a main green deliverable. This was an opportunity for India's green ambitions to make it into the final summit outcomes. Most G20 members favored a declaration as a deliverable, although some were surprised by the content. "We did not expect it," a G20 diplomat told me frankly.⁵⁴⁷ Argentina, Mexico, and another country opposed the idea of calling it a "green" development pact.⁵⁴⁸ A European official recalled that the negotiation became primarily a negotiation between China and India. The negotiators from these two countries invested great effort into getting their own formulations included in the negotiated text, rather than endorsing the formulations of the other side.⁵⁴⁹ The tensions between different G20 members became clear in the working groups and the ministerial meetings. Some G20 diplomats were surprised and hesitant about India's suggestion for a new G20 declaration. Indian officials therefore had to assuage different forms of normative tensions through talks inside the working groups which took place in the lead up to the summit.

Indian officials had several reasons to invest efforts and resources into formulating the document. One expert argued that producing a Green Development Pact "signaled India's intent to reclaim the narrative and space in global climate space."⁵⁵⁰ Another expert emphasized that the declaration brought public attention to climate-friendly energy options instead of coal.⁵⁵¹ As such,

⁵⁴⁷ Author's interview with I#6.

⁵⁴⁸ Author's interview with I#33.

⁵⁴⁹ Author's interview with I#9.

⁵⁵⁰ Author's interview with I#27.

⁵⁵¹ Author's interview with I#20.

the declaration clearly showed that India seeks to be seen as embracing green development instead of being seen as building multiple new coal plants annually as China has done.⁵⁵² Although the Indian G20 Sherpa lauded the adoption of the pact in opinion pieces in Indian papers afterward, insiders admitted that the declaration lacked operational elements.⁵⁵³ At the same time, the declaration was called a pact, not an agreement.

Normative struggles took place in four working groups: the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group, the Energy Transitions Working Group, the Development Working Group, and the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group. Working group negotiations were chaired by Indian officials employed at different ministries in charge of preparing each meeting. The draft text negotiated in these four working groups eventually evolved into the foundation document for the Green Development Pact. The schedule for this process is reconstructed in Table 6.

⁵⁵² Author's interview with I#20.

⁵⁵³ Author's interview with I#20 and I#27.

Table 6. Working Group Meetings leading up to the Green Development Pact

	1st WG	2nd WG	3rd WG	4th WG	Ministerial
Development Working Group	13-16 Dec 2022, Mumbai*	6-9 April, Kumarakom	8-11 May, Goa	6-9 June, New Delhi	12 June, Varanasi
Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group	30 March-1 April, Gandhinagar	23-25 May, Mumbai	24-26 July, Chennai	N/A	N/A
Energy Transitions Working Group	5-7 February, Bengaluru	3 April, Gandhinagar	15-17 May, Mumbai	19-20 July, Goa	22 July, Goa
Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group	9-11 February, Bengaluru	29 March, Gandhinagar	21-23 May, Mumbai	28 July, Chennai	28 July, Chennai

Source: Author's compilation of press releases. All dates in 2023, except for *.

The declaration consists of three introductory paragraphs.⁵⁵⁴ It starts with the following sentence:

Recognizing that the prosperity and well-being of present and future generations depends on our current development and other policy choices and actions, we resolve to pursue environmentally sustainable and inclusive economic growth and development in an integrated holistic and balanced manner.

The text begins by describing the Paris Agreement and the norms of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities

⁵⁵⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration: New Delhi, India, 9-10 September 2023, 11-19.

(CBDR-RC). The introductory section then states that “timeframes for peaking may be shaped by sustainable development, poverty eradication needs, equity, and in line with different national circumstances.” As such, the introduction draws on the IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report’s warning about peaking emissions while highlighting the importance of national circumstances. It is noteworthy that the declaration excludes the words green growth. This tells us that the G20 negotiators did not see eye to eye about those words. Instead, the introduction shows that the G20 negotiators found normative common ground on the term economic growth. Interestingly, the G20 negotiators also found common ground on the inclusion of the norms of equity and CBDR-RC, concepts that are traditionally conflict points in multilateral climate diplomacy.

The declaration discusses a collection of different themes. It consists of eight pages, divided into 14 blocks of text. After the introduction, these are structured with these headings: a) Macroeconomic risks stemming from climate change and transition pathways, b) Mainstreaming Lifestyles for Sustainable Development (LiFE), c) Designing a Circular Economy World, d) Implementing Clean, Sustainable, Just, Affordable & Inclusive Energy Transitions, e) Delivering on Climate and Sustainable Finance, f) Conserving, Protecting, Sustainably Using and Restoring Ecosystems, g) Harnessing and Preserving the Ocean-based Economy, h) Ending Plastic Pollution, i) Financing Cities of Tomorrow, j) Reducing Disaster Risk and Building Resilient Infrastructure.

As such, instead of a niche declaration with limited scope, the declaration adopted at the G20 summit in New Delhi was broad and addressed a number of different subjects. It is hard to say whether Indian officials interpreted previous statements about green ambitions as lacking force or being too general. However, in this declaration the statements about green ambitions go beyond old formulations about climate justice. The declaration reflects the breadth of India’s contemporary green ambitions, reminding readers that India would like to influence global climate politics. Producing a new global declaration

became a way for Indian officials to assert India's green ambitions to the world.

7.5. Recognition tensions

The third form of tension seen in the status dilemma dynamics which were evident during India's G20 presidency concerns how other actors received and recognized its green ambitions. The analytical lens employed in this thesis understands the varying foreign views about India's green ambitions as recognition tensions. This section shows that during the G20 presidency recognition tensions were wide-ranging. These tensions were related to other countries' expectations, India's participation in groupings, and new priorities. Indian officials navigated these tensions by building acceptance in social interactions with foreign counterparts.

The G20 presidency was a prestige project for the Modi administration. As part of this, a group of people designed a G20 presidency slogan and logo. However, this slogan produced recognition tensions. In November 2022, the Prime Minister's Office announced the theme of the presidency: the Sanskrit words *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which can be translated into English as *The world is one family*.⁵⁵⁵ The Ministry of External Affairs opted for a catchier translation: *One Earth, One Family, One Future*.⁵⁵⁶ A foreign expert commented on the slogan: "I've seen it everywhere on the streets in Delhi. But haven't really thought about the meaning."⁵⁵⁷ Another foreign expert had a stronger view, stating that "people just saw Modi's face, not the slogan – G20 was all about Modi."⁵⁵⁸ Such sentiment was, however, not shared by Indian officials and insiders who thought the slogan reflected India's new ambitions

⁵⁵⁵ Prime Ministry of India, 2022. "Unveiling of The Logo, Theme and Website of India's G20 Presidency", 8 November 2022. Website.

⁵⁵⁶ Haidar, Suhasini, 2023. "Centre defends use of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in G-20 logo as China raises objections," *The Hindu*. 12 August 2023.

⁵⁵⁷ Author's interview with I#8.

⁵⁵⁸ Author's interview with I#16.

to shape global issues. An insider emphasized that the slogan represented “an articulation of a role for India” and showcased “the self-image India wants to portray to the world.”⁵⁵⁹ Foreign officials viewed the slogan as part of an election campaign, with photos of Modi and posters ahead of national elections in 2024, whereas domestic officials attempted to strengthen India’s ties with the world.

7.5.1. Dealing with expectations

Building recognition for India’s green ambitions during the G20 presidency became a task for Indian officials interacting with the diplomatic community in New Delhi, for diplomats posted at Indian embassies in G20 member capitals, and for officials directly involved in the working groups. Although climate change is a global challenge that is affecting economies worldwide, some G20 members were skeptical about India’s proposal to address the issue during its presidency. However, Indian officials had noted that several G20 presidencies had discussed climate in the past and that “our economies must be green economies... so we thought climate had to be discussed in G20.”⁵⁶⁰ Indian officials therefore navigated initial foreign skepticism by making reference to, and showing their conformity with, previous experiences of the G20 process.

Ironically, Indian officials faced a challenge from foreign diplomats who wanted to strengthen their bilateral relationships with India, but wanted to do so at the same time as New Delhi prepared for the G20 presidency. Some heads of missions were unfamiliar with the G20 process since they had never been involved in the G20 before. This mean it was “not easy to convey information.”⁵⁶¹ For foreign diplomats serving in India, learning the style of diplomatic interactions in the capital was more valuable than understanding the G20 process. Diplomats posted to India focused on building relationships with

⁵⁵⁹ Author’s interview with I#11.

⁵⁶⁰ Author’s interview with I#19.

⁵⁶¹ Author’s interview with I#34.

India rather than multilateral G20 negotiations.⁵⁶² A foreign diplomat even suggested that there is inherent ambiguity in the diplomatic style in New Delhi. Bluntly expressed, the diplomat said “You never really know when a decision is made in Delhi. The confirmation can come in a WhatsApp call, an email, or a public press release.”⁵⁶³ While Indian officials were building acceptance for their green push, they also had to manage expectations held by foreign diplomats working in New Delhi. In a hospitality gesture four days before the presidency began, more than 40 diplomats from international organizations and embassies in New Delhi convened at a resort in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for briefings on the presidency.⁵⁶⁴ The Indian government’s decision to provide numerous briefings in this vacation paradise was a way to ensure that foreign diplomats posted in New Delhi had an updated view of the G20 presidency. The briefings also offered Indian officials a chance to gain external recognition.

Indian missions ensured that foreign counterparts received information about the G20 presidency from their embassies in New Delhi and directly from the Indian ambassadors posted in G20 countries. The Indian Prime Minister issued invitation letters to foreign counterparts, and Indian ambassadors handed over the letters personally to political leaders in the G20 capitals.⁵⁶⁵ Broadly, the missions had a minor role, talking about G20 at events and assisting with logistics.⁵⁶⁶ The Indian Embassy in Stockholm hosted an event during which Indian and Swedish officials shared their thoughts about the presidency.⁵⁶⁷ In this way, the Foreign Service sought to proactively prevent any type of rejection of India’s G20 presidency agenda.

⁵⁶² Author’s interview with I#6.

⁵⁶³ Author’s interview with I#30.

⁵⁶⁴ Haidar, Suhasini, 2022. “Government takes G20 diplomats to Andaman for preview briefing,” *The Hindu*, 27 November 2022. Ministry of External Affairs, 2022. “Special Briefing for envoys of G20 and invitee countries and International Organisations on India’s upcoming G20 Presidency,” 26 November 2022.

⁵⁶⁵ Author’s interview with I#19.

⁵⁶⁶ Author’s interview with I#13 and I#19.

⁵⁶⁷ Author participated in the meeting in January 2023, see Embassy of India Stockholm, 2023. “India’s G20 Presidency,” January. LinkedIn post.

Building acceptance for India's G20 agenda also had a logistical element, one which involved a mixture of promise and peril. On the one hand, hosting G20 enabled India to welcome international guests and present the idea of a planet-friendly India evolving on the world stage. On the other hand, the administrative burden of arranging logistics for ministers and foreign officials became a peril that few people wanted to discuss. "There was sometimes chaos, just like on the streets in Delhi," a G20 diplomat told me, comparing the logistics during India's presidency with the infamously disorderly Delhi traffic.⁵⁶⁸ At the same time, the G20 diplomat thought that Indian civil servants working in New Delhi and in different states across India "probably provided the best service possible." However, for some ministers coming from abroad the service was considered insufficient.⁵⁶⁹ The initial logistical disarray remained on some foreign officials' minds during the presidency. Impressions made at the beginning became latent tensions that Indian officials had to navigate as they cultivated recognition for India's presidency agenda.

7.5.2. Navigating groupings involved in geopolitics

A significant task for Indian officials working on the presidency was to navigate the geopolitical turbulence between different groupings. Like multilateral climate negotiations at the UN climate COPs, the G20 process involved groupings active in the working groups and the ministerial negotiations.⁵⁷⁰ Indian officials chairing the discussions noted tensions between the G7 and Saudi Arabia, which was supported by Russia. Initially, some officials in New Delhi were surprised that G20 members brought their geopolitical competition into the meetings. This was the case for the US and China, and for Europe and Russia.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁸ Author's interview with I#30.

⁵⁶⁹ Author's interview with I#30.

⁵⁷⁰ Author's interview with I#13.

⁵⁷¹ Author's interview with I#20.

Throughout the negotiations, the Saudis emerged as tough negotiators who strongly opposed peaking of fossil fuel emissions, tripling renewable energy, and phasing out fossil fuels, since they had built their economy on fossil fuels.⁵⁷² With thorough opposition, the negotiations in the energy track failed to reach a consensus on phasing down fossil fuels at both the administrative and the ministerial negotiating levels.⁵⁷³ An observer told the Indian press, “The US-China track did not work well. There is Saudi resistance on fossil fuels, and there is generally a lot of resistance on financing transition.”⁵⁷⁴ The resistance to financing transitions came from the US, which “argued for climate finance in developing countries instead of climate finance for developing countries.”⁵⁷⁵ At the same time, another G7 member, Canada, argued extensively with Saudi Arabia about peaking throughout the negotiations.⁵⁷⁶ An anonymous observer told the Indian press that such tensions between G20 members contributed to a “diluted summary from the chair, which is India.” This observer added that “India, however, has been very supportive of renewable energy targets and other issues.”⁵⁷⁷ Overall, these events show that promoting climate action in the working groups was extremely demanding.

With this friction, mid-level and senior Indian officials handed over the task of forming a consensus between August and September to the Indian G20 Sherpa. “It was not an easy job,” the Sherpa told me. He explained that “We had to find a consensus by pushing Saudi Arabia that Russia supported, push China back, manage the US that the G7 supported, and speak for developing countries in the Global South who were usually not at the table.”⁵⁷⁸ Thus, Indian officials had to navigate tensions over positions as well as over words used in the negotiated text. For instance, a G20 country preferred the word

⁵⁷² Author’s interview with I#19, I#33, I#24.

⁵⁷³ Nandi, Jayashree, 2023. “Poor outcome following resistance by G20 members over renewable energy targets,” *Hindustan Times*. 22 July 2023.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁵ Author’s interview with I#24.

⁵⁷⁶ Author’s interview with I#24.

⁵⁷⁷ Nandi, 2023.

⁵⁷⁸ Author’s interview with I#33.

“challenge” over “crisis” in the declaration. In the end, to resolve this, the declaration stated the following: “We commit to urgently accelerate our actions to address environmental crises and challenges including climate change.”⁵⁷⁹

In parallel to the tensions between different groupings on energy as a way to accelerate climate action, Indian officials faced a challenge from G7 negotiators pushing for statements on Ukraine. The negotiations in different working groups were primarily focused on climate action. Yet, despite this, European diplomats consistently prioritized their support for Ukraine, irritating Indian officials.⁵⁸⁰ An Indian official described how European representatives had consistently said, “Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has influenced [followed by statements].”⁵⁸¹ The official asked me: “We see the point of stating it once, but seriously, what will it do if you keep on stating it during every meeting?” Another insider argued that Brussels made a mistake by extensively focusing on Ukraine during the presidency, since it gave the impression that Europeans messed up India’s presidency.⁵⁸² For Indians attempting to build recognition for India’s green push during its presidency, the European support for Ukraine took attention away from the green agenda.

Despite the frustration in New Delhi, Indian officials pushed until the final hour for a statement about the tripling of renewable energy capacity to be included in the Green Development Pact. With a paragraph stating the need for accelerated renewable energy capacity, Indian officials were satisfied for the time being. However, in the following months, they were reminded of the lack of long-term acceptance of India’s efforts to push renewable energy capacity to be built worldwide. In Brussels, the European Commission formulated a statement and received support from numerous countries for a similar proposal

⁵⁷⁹ Author’s interview with I#33; Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. G20 New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration, New Delhi, India, 9-10 September 2023, 11.

⁵⁸⁰ Author’s interview with I#13, I#20, I#28, I#34.

⁵⁸¹ Author’s interview with I#34.

⁵⁸² Author’s interview with I#20.

announced at COP28. However, the EU statement combined the tripling of renewable energy with a phasing out fossil fuel energy, which “is a no-go for India.”⁵⁸³ Consequently, Indian officials decided not to sign the EU pledge and, possibly, felt a small quantity of grief.

Another example of attempts by Indian officials to build recognition was their push, during the G20 presidency, for greater support to be offered to developing countries worldwide. Early in the presidency, in January 2023, India hosted the first virtual *Voice of the Global South Summit*, with representatives from 125 countries participating in ten different sessions. “Balancing growth with environment friendly lifestyles (LiFE)” was the title for the environmental session that had a select group of participants representing Ethiopia, Guinea, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Marshall Islands, Moldova, North Macedonia, Palau, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Tajikistan, Togo, and Tuvalu.⁵⁸⁴ Indian diplomats had been in touch with their foreign counterparts before the sessions, not least to float the idea of a summit and extend the invitations. The list of participating countries tells us how Indian officials attempted to broaden the number of engaged foreign diplomats and officials during the G20 presidency. Indian diplomacy stepped up India’s global outreach to demonstrate that India values its reputation amongst all countries of the globe rather than just its reputation among G20 members.

The summit participants excluded the other BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa) but included European countries in the Balkans. Serbia, a former state of Yugoslavia, participated, as did the NATO-member North Macedonia, its neighbor Albania, and the former neutral country Moldova. Consultation with officials from these countries, often at the highest political level, provided Indian officials with a new argument in the G20 negotiations: the leadership of the Global South. At the end of the G20 presidency,

⁵⁸³ Author’s interview with I#24.

⁵⁸⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “Summary of Deliberations: Voice of Global South Summit 2023 (January 12-13, 2023),” 13 January 2023.

Indian officials circulated invitations roughly three weeks before the second summit, which enabled feedback conversations.⁵⁸⁵ However, despite these two summits, foreign diplomats told me that Global South countries do not necessarily accept that India's Global South leadership role is as extensive as India itself presents it to be.⁵⁸⁶ However, the Voice of the Global South Summit received sufficient appreciation among India's partners to be reconvened for a third iteration in August 2024, eight months after the end of India's G20 presidency. Talking to developing countries was a way to listen to the concerns of countries absent from G20 meetings. It was a way to remind more than 100 countries that India remains committed to South-South cooperation, and a way for India to compete with China for leadership within this major group of countries. Indian officials therefore had many reasons to talk to non-G20 members during their presidency and this showed another way in which they tried to navigate recognition tensions.

7.5.3. Pushing Mission LiFE

There was a lukewarm initial diplomatic reception of India's initiative Mission LiFE (Lifestyles for Environment) among G20 members. Yet despite this, India's green ambitions during its G20 presidency led to new diplomatic conversations about Mission LiFE.⁵⁸⁷ By putting Mission LiFE on the agenda in three working groups, New Delhi pushed foreign officials to craft statements about lifestyles for the environment. The discussions in the Development, Environment, and Energy Working Groups and their respective ministerial meetings culminated in the High-Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development, which the G20 New Delhi Declaration then included in an annex. As the title reveals, Indian officials were able to build recognition for the principles, but not for the project itself, largely because the principles refer to sustainable development rather than the environment. Through pushing Mission

⁵⁸⁵ Author's interview with I#30.

⁵⁸⁶ Author's interview with I#30; Author's memory notes from WSDS 2024.

⁵⁸⁷ See chapter 6 for the background of Mission LiFE.

LiFE during India's G20 presidency, an insider thought India pioneered a new kind of climate agenda.⁵⁸⁸ At the same time, a G20 diplomat thought that India's green leadership ambitions were contradictory because India continues to import coal and palm oil despite its ambitious targets and Mission LiFE.⁵⁸⁹

Negotiations focused on G20 High-Level Principles on Lifestyle for Environment were held in the Development Working Group meetings in April and May 2023.⁵⁹⁰ Following this, the Varanasi Developmental Ministerial Meeting in June 2023 endorsed the G20 High-Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development.⁵⁹¹ The ten-page document covers many issues, but does not mention Mission LiFE explicitly, indicating that G20 countries did not reach consensus about endorsing this. Despite the efforts by Indian officials and their advisors, they only secured external endorsements on their draft text on sustainable development principles, and not on principles for the environment. In this setting, Mission LiFE did not have sufficient recognition to gain a place in the G20 declaration.

Soon after the Varanasi Ministerial Meeting, the G20 Chief Coordinator, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, talked about India's attempt to bridge the developed and developing world at the Kigali Global Dialogue. Describing climate change as a global challenge, the official argued that green development, climate finance, and Mission LiFE were priorities for India's G20 presidency.⁵⁹² After Shringla's virtual outreach, Indian officials quickly drafted text ahead of the climate ministerial meeting in Chennai in July. They saw a window of opportunity just before the European G20 officials headed for summer vacation. At the Chennai ministerial, G20 officials debated specific formulations through the night. A European official told me that they were up until 4 a.m.

⁵⁸⁸ Author's interview with I#19.

⁵⁸⁹ Author's interview with I#30.

⁵⁹⁰ Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2023. "G20 Series #48, India's G20 Presidency, 2nd Development Working Group Meeting," *Press Information Bureau*. 9 May 2023.

⁵⁹¹ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. "Varanasi Development Ministerial: G20 High Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development", 12 June 2023.

⁵⁹² YouTube 2023. "India: Bridging the Developed and Developing World I Harsh Vardhan Shringla I KGD 2023," *Observer Research Foundation*. 15 June 2023.

for the negotiations since there were struggles about CBDR-RC and free trade formulations.⁵⁹³ Eventually, the officials accepted the formulation:

We note the importance of the transition to sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption and production for efforts to address climate change, as noted in the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, pollution, desertification, and biodiversity loss in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. We stress the importance of achieving SDG 12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production. We note with appreciation the G20 High-Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development.

In the run-up to the Environment Ministerial negotiations, Indian officials turned on a video message to participants of the 4th Environment Working Group Meeting with Modi explaining that Indian citizens will be rewarded for green activities as part of their support for Mission LiFE. In front of foreign delegates, Modi said:

Last year, along with the UN Secretary-General, I launched Mission LiFE – Lifestyle for Environment. Mission LiFE, as a global mass movement, will nudge individual and collective action to protect and preserve the environment. In India, environment-friendly actions by any person, company or a local body will not go unnoticed. It can now earn them green credits under the recently announced ‘Green Credit Programme.’ This will mean that activities like tree plantation, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture can now generate revenue for individuals, local bodies and others.⁵⁹⁴

A week earlier, officials had prepared speaking points on LiFE that Modi used during the Energy Ministerial Meeting:

⁵⁹³ Author’s interview with I#9.

⁵⁹⁴ Prime Minister of India, 2023. Text of PM’s address at the G20 Environment and Climate Sustainability Ministerial Meeting. 28 July 2023.

Caring for your surroundings can be natural. It can also be cultural. In India, it's a part of our traditional wisdom. And that is where Mission LiFE gets its strength from. A Lifestyle for Environment will make each one of us a climate champion.⁵⁹⁵

Indian officials were therefore repeatedly reminded about Modi's preference for Mission LiFE. During the G20 presidency, they used Modi's message to remind foreign delegates about their preference for Mission LiFE. At the summit in September 2023, a group of Indian officials demonstrated their roles as successful officials in the engine room of status ambitions, helping to showcase India's green ambitions. Through organic discussions in the working groups, they navigated recognition tensions and secured high-level principles for the first time in history.

Even after the G20 New Delhi summit, the efforts to build recognition for India's green ambitions continued. In September 2023, a week after the summit, all members of the UN gathered for the General Assembly. In this meeting, climate action featured prominently among India's announced priorities.⁵⁹⁶ While climate action was labeled under the separate heading "developmental issues and climate action," neither climate justice nor climate finance qualified for the list of 52 priorities. Tellingly, LiFE featured in a separate point prepared by Indian diplomacy:

India is a leader in Climate Action. Great momentum in this regard was added with the launch of the 'Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE)' initiative, by the Prime Minister and the UNSG in October 2022. Mission LiFE envisions making individual behavior change the center of the climate action narrative and sustainable lifestyles a global mass

⁵⁹⁵ Prime Minister's Office, 2023. Text of PM's video message during G20 Energy Ministers' Meet. 22 July 2023.

⁵⁹⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. "Priorities for the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly". Press release.

movement, thus inviting measurable and scalable behavior change solutions to drive climate-friendly actions among individuals and communities.

When Indian diplomacy attempted to portray itself in the best light in New York, Indian officials utilized Mission LiFE as a positive Indian initiative.

Furthermore, in the final phase of India's G20 presidency, Indian officials arranged a Parliamentary Forum for parliamentarians from G20 members. The first point on the agenda related to LiFE. This included a presentation of LiFE by a senior Ministry of Environment official, followed by interventions by speakers from the following countries: Australia, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Nigeria, South Africa, Mauritius, Oman, Indonesia, the Russian Federation, and Mexico.⁵⁹⁷ During these interventions, foreign speakers had a chance to showcase their environmental efforts and endorse India's push for lifestyles for the environment. Notably, during this session, environmental powers such as the US, the European Union, Germany, and China, were not assigned speaking slots. Instead, the vice-chairperson of the European Parliament spoke just before the Chinese deputy speaker in the agenda point on Agenda 2030. Moreover, when these parliamentarians were invited to speak, the Indian officials had put "Sustainable Energy Transition-Gateway to Green Future" in the headline instead of any traditional climate diplomacy norm that Indian diplomacy has pushed for historically, such as climate justice or equity.⁵⁹⁸ This clearly shows how Indian officials continuously tried to build recognition for the Indian approach to climate action during the entire duration of the Indian G20 presidency. However, this analysis has also revealed that building recognition in practice was not an easy task.

⁵⁹⁷ 9th G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20) and Parliamentary Forum, 12-14 October 2023, New Delhi, India. Programme.

⁵⁹⁸ 9th G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20) and Parliamentary Forum, 12-14 October 2023, New Delhi, India. Programme, 5.

7.5.4. The aftermath: The continuation of acceptance building⁵⁹⁹

India's G20 Presidency formally ended at midnight on 30 November 2023, when Brazil took over the presidency. However, the civil servants in New Delhi did not forget the diplomatic experience and decided to continue with their acceptance building. The practice of building acceptance had proved to be a rewarding strategy for navigating recognition tensions. However, tension emerged between the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and the Ministry of External Affairs about India's outreach to foreign partners and attempts to advance India's green ambitions during its presidency. Within a few weeks, the three ministries hosted international conferences to attract foreign attention to India. During the same week as the 23rd World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) in New Delhi, the 2nd India Energy Week took place in Goa. The Ministry of Environment has supported the former since it first took place in 2001, while the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas supports the latter. According to a senior insider, despite supporting WSDS, Ministry of Environment officials attended the India Energy Week instead.⁶⁰⁰ During a coffee break at WSDS, a diplomat told me that Goa was more prominent with country pavilions and foreign delegations attended mainly by the private sector.⁶⁰¹ So, for the Indian officials dealing with logistics, February was truly intensive, with three significant conferences requiring bureaucratic attention to logistics simultaneously. Foreign diplomats serving in India had to gamble about which conference to attend, just as they must continuously gamble about what role India sees for itself in global climate politics. The ambiguity about India's green ambitions has continued.

Tensions between the different approaches of ministries to India's green ambitions have been visible to foreign observers at times. Despite the division of labor at climate negotiations, between the Ministry of Environment and the

⁵⁹⁹ Part of this section is copied from my course paper for the reading course Ethnography in international relations.

⁶⁰⁰ Author's fieldnote, 11 February 2024.

⁶⁰¹ Author's fieldnote, 11 February 2024.

Ministry of External Affairs,⁶⁰² the director general of the Ministry of Environment-affiliated think tank The Energy and Resource Institute (TERI) encouraged foreign diplomats to behave in a certain way with India. At the WSDS, the think tank representative argued that partners “need to help us” deal with climate change.⁶⁰³ Through this practice, the person reminded diplomats sitting in the front row that India requires foreign assistance. However, the Indian government has developed a skeptical attitude toward aid in the past 15 years, so the Ministry of External Affairs prepared a statement as part of a speech for foreign delegates attending the Raisina Dialogue downplaying the call for help. Instead of requesting aid, the ministry representative argued that partners must say “development partnerships” because “we do not use the words grants or aid” and argued against traditional aid packages.⁶⁰⁴ Hence, Indian officials conveyed two conflicting messages to India’s partners. While one could debate to what extent this constituted a turf battle between the two ministries, the tension between the ministries forming India’s climate diplomacy was evident. At the same time, I neither witnessed nor heard of any reaction from the Ministry of Environment. The question is whether the ministry understood the adjusted message to India’s foreign partners. Nonetheless, the conference enabled Indian ministry officials to manage recognition tensions.

Two weeks after the 23rd World Sustainable Development Week (WSDS), the 9th Raisina Dialogue supported by the Ministry of External Affairs took place in New Delhi, gathering foreign delegations and visiting ministers from abroad.⁶⁰⁵ The Raisina Dialogue was “a conference of conversations, not a conference targeting an agreement or any concrete outcome,” I wrote in my

⁶⁰² See chapter 6 about climate negotiations for evidence about this division of labor.

⁶⁰³ Author’s fieldnote, 11 February 2024.

⁶⁰⁴ Author’s fieldnote, 24 February 2024. See also Observer Research Foundation, 2024. “Raisina Dialogue 2024 Live I Ministerial Remarks I Meenakshi Lekhi,” *YouTube*. 9:10-10:27.

⁶⁰⁵ Observer Research Foundation, 2024. “Raisina Dialogue 2024: Chaturanga: Conflict, Contest, Cooperate, Create,” Conference Booklet, 21-23 February 2024.

diary afterward.⁶⁰⁶ Indeed, the G20 presidency featured in discussions at “Raisina,” as the conference is referred to by word of mouth. “India prioritized G20 over BRICS last year,” an expert who had talked to several Indian officials said in a 7:30 a.m. session in a room with approximately 30 seats but double the number of participants, including myself. Interestingly, the expert claimed that BRICS is facing a “status loss since BRICS has opened up to more members and status is built on exclusivity.”⁶⁰⁷ Thus, India’s G20 presidency made Indian officials more inclined to pick up the phone and engage with G20 counterparts than with officials from BRICS countries. It remains to be seen whether such a prioritization at the administrative level continues.

7.6. Conclusion

As India’s green ambitions were brought to the G20 process, they produced a significant green status dilemma. India’s first-ever G20 presidency was a marathon of tension navigation. The wide-ranging tensions about India’s green ambitions suggest that Indian officials found themselves navigating severe status dilemma dynamics. As officials managed different tensions in their day-to-day operations, they continuously implemented their political leadership’s green drive. Throughout the presidency, Indian officials navigated tensions by presenting India in a positive light, talking to as many partners as possible, and working hard under pressure from the Prime Minister’s Office. However, the bureaucracy was exposed to tensions in their social interactions among colleagues as well as in exchanges with foreign counterparts. In their attempt to avoid status backlash for themselves, their ministries, and India’s position in the multipolar world, Indian officials were far from silent; they sought guidance from knowledgeable people and learned foreign perspectives. This act of

⁶⁰⁶ Author’s fieldnote, 24 February 2024.

⁶⁰⁷ Author’s fieldnote, 24 February 2024.

navigation reveals how officials can navigate status dilemmas in a changing world.

In a nutshell, the analysis reveals that India's green ambitions during the presidency were constrained by internal bureaucratic structures and external expectations while also strengthened by internal flexibility and external endorsements. Such a duality enabled a marathon of tensions in the social processes forming the presidency. Such a marathon suggests that Indian officials navigated severe status dilemma dynamics rather than status dilemmas in their milder form.

In practice, this navigation was made possible through a set of measures that enabled daily activities needed at the administrative level. New Delhi appointed a Sherpa with a strong personal reputation, created the G20 Secretariat that played the role of a special task force within the Foreign Ministry, tasked Indian diplomats abroad to share invitations and calendars with foreign counterparts, and ensured that the political leadership treated G20 as part of their political calendar. Thus, despite the administrative turmoil that some foreign counterparts experienced, the Indian Foreign Service invested a lot of effort into navigating tensions in practice during the presidency. These daily activities may be remembered ahead of future multilateral gatherings in India, such as the COP33 climate negotiations in 2028.

However, the navigation of different tensions also produced the risks of status backlash for different actors within Indian climate diplomacy. The Ministry of Environment asserted its traditional role in climate negotiations in their attempt to avoid status backfiring in the New Delhi hierarchy between different ministries. Significantly, Indian bureaucracy pushed for the green agenda during India's G20 presidency to avoid any major status backlash for India in a changing world. An official argued that India's green ambitions were for India itself, but this chapter illustrates that these ambitions were also exposed to international partners. The status dilemma dynamics were, undoubtedly, demanding.

8. Green ambitions before the 16th India-EU Summit

8.1. Introduction

Name signs, coffee mugs, biscuits, and miniature flags had been placed on a long table. Ten officials sat facing each other – five from each side – with their folders and arguments ready for deliberations. On a November day in 2022, five Indian officials welcomed five European officials to New Delhi for the 9th India-European Union (EU) Foreign Policy & Security Consultations. The delegation on the European side, which was led by a senior official of the European External Action Service (EEAS), found themselves in a room with Indian counterparts from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). This was an important meeting for the Indian officials in charge of India’s relationship with the EU. The 15th India-EU summit had taken place virtually two years earlier. After this, the Indian side had coordinated on numerous ministerial visits to India by representatives from EU member states. They had also worked to facilitate the Indian Prime Minister Modi’s participation in the India-EU Leaders’ Meeting in Porto 2021. Moreover, they had helped to arrange the European Commission President von der Leyen’s visit to New Delhi in April 2022. The timing was right to start talking about the next India-EU summit and to react to each other’s foreign policy goals.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁸ Twitter, 2022. Randhir Jaiswal @MEAIndia, tweet, 22 November 2022.

This chapter examines how officials navigated status dilemma dynamics in a contemporary case of summit preparations. The green status dilemma concerned the role of green ambitions in the bilateral relationship. This dilemma revolves around a question: How would Indian officials balance between pushing for their own green ambitions and reacting to European green ambitions? In this chapter, we will learn about how Indian officials navigated different tensions in diplomatic settings. In this case, the dilemma appeared as modest epistemic tensions, highly critical normativity tensions, and relatively mild recognition tensions. This case is therefore an example of a softer status dilemma dynamic than those seen in the previous empirical chapters.

As the first summit after the COVID pandemic, the diplomatic context in which preparations were made for the summit was extraordinary. The global climate crisis continued, heatwaves struck populations across Europe and India, and there was renewed turbulence between the US and China.

However, by far the largest factor shaping the context in which diplomacy took place was President Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and the different approaches by Indian and European officials to this event. Consequently, the bilateral India-EU relationship had undergone an endurance test characterized by significant dissatisfaction on both sides. On the European side, there were complaints about the stances Indian officials took on Russia. On the Indian side, there were complaints about the singular focus Europeans placed on the war. However, the continuous trips that ministers from EU member states still made to New Delhi indicated to their Indian counterparts that not condemning Russia's invasion and trading in Russian oil were acceptable at a base level.

Officials on both sides evaluated the first two phases of the India-EU Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (CECP). They agreed on a workplan between 2025 and 2028, in which period the third phase of the climate partnership would be carried out. In parallel, the tentative date for the 16th India-EU summit shifted multiple times, with commentators speculating about when it would take place. It was finally held in January 2026. Yet, already when I

spoke with them in March 2024, Indian officials expressed hopes that they could agree on a forward-looking plan during the next summit. An official explained to me that New Delhi was focused on agreeing upon an updated roadmap, since the existing one was due to expire in 2025.⁶⁰⁹ Despite welcoming the idea of a new roadmap, another insider admitted that there was still scope for negotiations about the joint statement in the final hours before the summit.⁶¹⁰ By studying how these officials prepared for the summit, we can dissect the tensions they experienced in the run-up period.⁶¹¹ The social processes leading up to a summit continued for an extended period of time, in contrast to the other cases studied in the previous chapters. This is a relevant additional case to study as part of the examination of India's green status dilemma in this thesis because of these social processes.

8.2. Background: From inertia to a bureaucratic grid

Indian and European officials have interacted in summit preparations since the run-up to the first EU-India summit in Lisbon, 2000.⁶¹² After the fourth summit in 2004, an event that “almost never happened,” the officials prepared an upgrade of the bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership.⁶¹³ Since then, a strategic partnership has underpinned India's bilateral relationship with the European Union, which can be seen as a collective of EU institutions and member states. In addition to this EU-level strategic partnership, Indian officials have also nurtured their bilateral strategic partnerships with France and

⁶⁰⁹ Author's interview with I#32.

⁶¹⁰ Author's interview with I#16.

⁶¹¹ The 16th India-EU summit occurred on 27 January 2026, in New Delhi. This chapter was written prior to the summit.

⁶¹² For a comprehensive overview of the bilateral EU-India relationship, see Gieg, Philipp, Ummu Salma Bava, Timo Lowinger, Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, Manuel Pietzko, and Anja Zürn, 2021. *EU-India Relations*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

⁶¹³ Mukherjee, Bhaswati, 2019. *India and EU: An Insider's View*. Indian Council on World Affairs, New Delhi: Vij Books, 87.

Germany, as well as other bilateral relationships with EU member states.⁶¹⁴ Yet, the limited outcomes of these relationships led some observers to label relations between India and Europe as “a loveless arranged marriage.”⁶¹⁵

At the 13th summit in March 2016, officials agreed on the first phase of the Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (CECP).⁶¹⁶ Since the inception of CECP, Indian and European civil servants have negotiated joint statements, established a roadmap, and interacted in various diplomatic formats to produce concrete climate action. The settings for these social interactions include the Energy Panel, the Climate Change Dialogue, and the Working Group for Clean and Green Technologies of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC).⁶¹⁷ Brussels and New Delhi have given each other increased bureaucratic attention. However, despite this, experts have claimed that “until now attempts to strengthen ties have been hampered by bureaucratic inertia on both sides as well as a lack of clear strategic rationale.”⁶¹⁸ But this argument about a lack of progress in relations somewhat underplays the 2018 European Strategy on India. This endorsed India’s climate action efforts and was something that Indian officials also welcomed.⁶¹⁹ Before this strategy was released, the Indian Ambassador in Brussels had suggested there “was a feeling that the EU was all about dialogues with little capacity to implement things on the ground.”⁶²⁰ This

⁶¹⁴ For an overview of India’s engagements with EU member states, see Aspengren, Henrik Chetan, Emil Lidén, Axel Nordenstam, 2021. Circles of EU-India Engagement: How member states cooperate with India on global issues, *Swedish Institute of International Affairs*. UI Papers no. 1, February 2021. 1-29.

⁶¹⁵ Khandekar, Gauri, 2011. The EU and India: A loveless arranged marriage. FRIDE Policy Brief No. 90. *Foundation for International Relations and Foreign Dialogue*.

⁶¹⁶ Mukherjee 2019, 209.

⁶¹⁷ For an overview, see Nordenstam, Axel, 2023. “India-EU Climate Relations: Mapping Diplomatic Engagement” in *Tracks to Transition: India’s Global Climate Strategy*, edited by Constantino Xavier and Karthik Nachiappan. *Center for Social and Economic Progress*. 75-85.

⁶¹⁸ Crabtree, James, 2025. In the wake of Trump: The EU’s chance to redefine its India relationship, *Commentary, European Council on Foreign Relations* (ECFR).

⁶¹⁹ Mohan, Garima, 2019. Prospects for the New EU Strategy on India: Game changer or business as usual? *Ifri Asiae.Visions 108. French Institute of International Relations*.

⁶²⁰ Indian official cited in Winand, Pascaline, 2021. “A Partnership Between Two Large Elephants? Opportunities and Challenges in India-EU Relations” in *EU-India Relations*, 114.

kind of sentiment made the strategy, and what it said about implementation, particularly interesting for New Delhi.

In this context, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen's historic visit to India in February 2025 provides a backdrop for the 16th EU-India summit. The President, together with her College of 20 European Commissioners, visited New Delhi for high-level inter-governmental consultations, a second ministerial Trade and Technology Council (TTC) meeting, and deliberations ahead of the forthcoming EU-India Strategic Agenda. Prior to their arrival, Indian officials at the highest administrative level were convened by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) for internal deliberations and presentations by ministry officials on key issues.⁶²¹ During the visit, officials normally sitting in offices in New Delhi and Brussels interacted face-to-face, getting a reminder that email and phone exchanges could result in proper meetings.

Indian officials had traditionally been more comfortable with bilateral relationships with EU member states. However, by welcoming the College of Commissioners from Brussels, the political leadership in New Delhi interacted with politicians at the EU level. The political leadership in Brussels, on the other hand, signaled their priorities to India by giving it special treatment and arranging for the entire College of Commissioners to visit. This was the first time that the commissioners had all travelled together to a country in Asia. Although the visit received little media attention outside of India, which reduced public awareness, the meetings made the headlines of the European Commission's daily news center.⁶²² The Indian Ambassador in Brussels thought "it is good that there is greater interest in the EU towards India."⁶²³

⁶²¹ Mishra, Ravi Dutta, 2025. "At top secretaries' meeting ahead of delegation visit, focus on cohesive, collaborative approach," *The Indian Express*. 27 February 2025.

⁶²² European Commission, 2025. Press Center: Daily News 28 / 02 / 2025.

⁶²³ Foy, Henry, 2025. "Why the EU is reaching out to India in search of new friends", *Financial Times*. 27 February 2025.

The College-to-government meeting therefore brought bureaucratic attention to both Brussels and New Delhi.

Three months later, during a trip to Berlin, the Indian Foreign Minister described why the College's visit was so important. He explained that when 21 commissioners meet 21 counterpart:

It immediately sets up a kind of grid between the Indian system and the EU system... All sorts of issues – digital issues, labor issues, sustainability issues, women's development issues – all these start moving because now people are talking to each other instead of funneling everything through one or two channels.⁶²⁴

The main effect of these interactions was the creation of bureaucratic grids.

The next three sections of this chapter describe the multiple tensions that officials navigated in their preparations for the 16th India-EU summit, which was historic for the trade deal announcement, but also featured discussions of the green agenda. These sections show that summit preparations entail more than simply *calendar politics* for officials interacting with each other.

8.3. Epistemic tensions

As outlined in the theory chapter of this thesis, status dilemma dynamics can be studied through the way they appear in three forms of tensions. The first are epistemic tensions that can be revealed through background knowledge. This part of the chapter begins by discussing the epistemic tensions shaping the bilateral India-EU relationship, then continues with discussions of the normativity tensions and recognition tensions that also impact on these relations.

⁶²⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, 2025. "Transcript of EAM's interaction at German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)", May 24, 2025.

8.3.1. The steering level challenge

One knowledge tension shaping social interactions is that concerning the level at which to deal with issues. In their interactions with European counterparts, Indian officials experience this tension as a question of choosing between multilateral and bilateral diplomacy. An Indian diplomat reflected:

Gradually, I realized that Brussels viewed the climate cooperation with us in relation to next COP summit rather than the next India-EU summit. For them, COP steered the conversation. For us, we sought practical cooperation rather than rulesmaking positions. With our practical approach, we wanted to build up our renewable energy capacity with cooperation with the Commission.⁶²⁵

This quotation suggests that officials have different preconceived ideas about where results should be presented or agreed upon.

Yet, for Indian officials, the tension is also a matter of navigating the bureaucratic structures comprising the European Union (EU). They need to determine whether subjects and issues should be dealt with at the EU-level, through interactions with civil servants representing EU institutions, or at the bilateral level, with the EU member state representatives. I call this knowledge tension the *steering level* challenge. It is a tension that emerges from the embedded institutional complexity in India-EU relations, largely because the European side is comprised of both EU member states and EU institutions. This challenge is particularly pressing for Indian diplomats implementing India's green ambitions because there is no climate diplomacy division inside the Ministry of External Affairs.

To deal with the steering level challenge, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs has traditionally had three divisions that deal with diplomatic relations with European countries. The Europe West Division oversees relations with

⁶²⁵ Author's interview with I#21.

the EU institutions and a handful of EU member states. Meanwhile, the Central Europe Division oversees relations with some other EU member states. Moreover, the Eurasia Division deals with matters concerning Ukraine and Russia.⁶²⁶ Yet, since the EU-India summit in 2020, officials in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs have started to think about the steering level challenge differently. Today, diplomatic relations with European countries are dealt with by the Europe West Division, the Southern Europe Division, the Central Europe Division, the Northern Europe Division, and the Eurasia Division.⁶²⁷ By categorizing different European countries into different divisions, Indian officials attempt to navigate the steering level challenge and make better sense of the European audience.

Officials working in these divisions have different approaches to staying up to date. Besides the regular reporting that they receive from Indian missions in Brussels and other European capitals, they occasionally compile lists of publications with recent analysis about EU-India relations. Through reading external analysis, they seek new ideas, update their knowledge base, and look for input that they could include into the internal preparations.⁶²⁸ Similarly, diplomats occasionally participate in think tank dialogues to get an updated view, convey their thoughts to a wider audience and test arguments ahead of formal negotiations.⁶²⁹ In the run-up to the summit, they likely read that an expert was arguing that “many Brussels bureaucrats working on India-related issues still perceive the country as difficult. Experience with New Delhi keeps them pessimistic about gains from the partnership.”⁶³⁰ This expert has also argued that European officials need to be prepared for discussions, saying that

⁶²⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “Organogram of the Ministry of External Affairs,” 11 May 2023.

⁶²⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, 2025. “Divisions,” website page.

⁶²⁸ Author’s interview with I#30.

⁶²⁹ European Policy Centre, 2025. “EU-India relations: What’s next after the European Commission’s historic visit”, policy dialogue, 20 March 2025. Recording available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEklDpzoQ_Y

⁶³⁰ Mohan, Garima, 2024. “Can the EU Elevate Its Partnership with India?”, *German Marshall Fund*, Insights. 27 November 2024.

these officials “should be provided a timeline for clear deliverables that can be presented to and approved by political leaders at every EU-India summit.”⁶³¹ At the same time, Indian public intellectuals have produced articles that argue for the need to work with Europe. One such article stated that Europe can be “a valuable partner for India.”⁶³² In this way, external knowledge has informed the diplomatic approach which Indian officials take to the steering level challenge. The production and circulation of information has enabled Indian officials to navigate knowledge tensions.

8.3.2. Recruiting colleagues

As the partnership with the European Union grows, the Indian Foreign Service ensures there is a knowledge base inside the Ministry of External Affairs by being mindful about their hirings. Through reviewing background knowledge levels in the recruitment processes, the Foreign Ministry prepares itself for future interactions with European counterparts.

Background knowledge constitutes a core element that helps officials to navigate tensions in diplomatic settings. Since competence in the form of background knowledge facilitates the management of status dilemmas, certain expertise was sought in the entry exams taken by aspiring diplomats. European Studies is embedded into the UPSC civil service exam and young Indians taking the exam can showcase their knowledge about India-EU relations. In the exams titled *Political Science and International Relations*, which are the entry exams for the Indian Foreign Service, candidates answer mandatory questions but can also choose a set of questions to manifest their insights. Between 2021 and 2024, these elective questions included: “Explain India’s relations with the European Union in the context of Brexit”⁶³³; “The Russian-Ukraine crisis

⁶³¹ Mohan 2024.

⁶³² Mohan, C. Raja, 2025. “In Trump’s world, India and Europe need each other”, *The Indian Express*, 27 February 2025.

⁶³³ Union Public Service Commission, 2021, *Political Science and International Relations*, HXS-B-POLI (Paper 2), 4c.

has cast a dark shadow on the energy needs of the member states of the European Union (EU). Comment”⁶³⁴; “Account for the rise of the European Union as a highly influential regional organization”⁶³⁵; “Do you agree with the view that the EU has thus far proved to be the most successful experiment in the regional integration processes? Account for its successes and also some of the recent challenges that it is faced with.”⁶³⁶ The inclusion of elective essay questions on EU-related topics every year indicates that the Indian Foreign Service has identified the need to continuously recruit professionals with valuable background knowledge about India’s strategic partnership with the EU.

8.3.3 Updated background knowledge

In mid-September 2025, European and Indian officials working on India-EU relations checked their smartphones and computers. The new European strategy on India was public. They had seen earlier drafts before, heard the Commission President von der Leyen advocating for deepened India-EU ties in her state of the union speech a week earlier, and seen the European diplomats from the Political and Security Committee visit New Delhi two weeks earlier. Now, they could read the opening lines:

The visit of the College of Commissioners to India in February 2025 laid the foundation for a new chapter in EU-India relations. During this landmark visit – the first of its kind to the Indo-Pacific – both sides committed to raising the Strategic Partnership to a higher level to boost shared prosperity, strengthen security, and tackle major global challenges together.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁴ Union Public Service Commission, 2022, Political Science and International Relations; CRNA-S-POLI 22 (Paper 2), 4c.

⁶³⁵ Union Public Service Commission, 2023, Political Science and International Relations; SKYC-B-POLI (Paper 2), 3b.

⁶³⁶ Union Public Service Commission, 2024, Political Science and International Relations; PHKM-B-POL (Paper 2), 4c.

⁶³⁷ European Commission, 2025. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on a New Strategic EU-India Agenda, JOIN (2025) 50 final, 17 September 2025.

As the Indian officials read the new strategy, they noted a key sentence at the end of the strategic document: “Building on these proposals, the EU stands ready to work with India on developing a Joint EU-India Comprehensive Strategic Agenda which could be adopted at the next EU-India Summit.”⁶³⁸

The document was structured around five pillars with Pillar 1 referring to prosperity and sustainability, including the desire to expand clean energy cooperation. Indian officials could read that “the EU welcomes the expression of leadership in India’s intention to host COP33 in 2028.” But the document made no mention of the Indian project Mission LiFE, which was a core part of its green ambitions. The document was released on the Indian Prime Minister’s 75th birthday. On the day of its release, the Commission President von der Leyen congratulated Modi on his birthday and told him about the new strategic agenda, which Modi endorsed in a phone call.⁶³⁹ With this new document and leadership phone call in mind, officials in Brussels and New Delhi realized that they needed to refresh their understanding of India-EU relations ahead of the coming summit.

One approach was to engage in direct dialogue with each other. A week after the release of the new strategic document, a delegation of young Indian diplomats visited the European Diplomatic Academy.⁶⁴⁰ As they updated themselves about the European proposal, they also interacted with the President of the Academy, Mogherini. As the former foreign policy chief of the European Union, she shared her perspective on India-EU relations with the diplomats and responded to questions. Similarly, a group of senior Indian diplomats traveled to the European External Action Service (EEAS) in Brussels

⁶³⁸ European Commission, 2025.

⁶³⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, 2025. President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen conveys warm birthday greetings to Prime Minister Modi (September 17, 2025), press release, 17 September 2025.

⁶⁴⁰ Twitter/X 2025. European Union Diplomatic Academy @EUDiploAcademy, tweet, 24 September 2025.

for the annual review of the EU-India strategic partnership, as well as for foreign policy and security consultations.⁶⁴¹ Updating each other about the efforts in the run-up to the summit was crucial to navigate the geopolitical fog that shaped status competition in the world.

Besides these bilateral meetings, a broader pattern emerged in the fall of 2025. Several think tanks, both private and public, convened events about India-EU relations with participants from government, academia, and the private sector. Strikingly, no famous think tanks which were specialized in climate diplomacy, decarbonization, or green transitions arranged any events. Table 7 below documents events that occurred in the run-up to the summit, after the publication of the new European strategic document. Officials and policy experts engaged in conversations about the future of India-EU relations, discussing facets of the strategic partnership. There were both opportunities and challenges ahead, with these partly about how India would present its green ambitions to a European audience. This meant that in the bureaucracies on both sides, there was a major need for updated background knowledge. This was required for the whole diplomatic community involved. However, it was particularly necessary for the senior Indian official who was appointed as Secretary West in late August 2025. This person was responsible for navigating different foreign policy goals in preparations for the summit which were going on inside the Indian Foreign Ministry.

At the same time as these conversations occurred, skepticism toward European green ambitions floated among serving and retired Indian officials. A retired Indian Ambassador, with substantial experience from postings in Europe noted the following:

⁶⁴¹ Ministry of External Affairs, 2025. "Secretary (West) Shri Sibi George co-chaired the 6th India–European Union (EU) Strategic Partnership Review Meeting", 19 November 2025. News item; European External Action Service, 2025. "EU-India: Joint Press Release on the 11th Foreign Policy and Security Consultations and the 6th Strategic Partnership Review Meeting in Brussels", 25 November 2025. Joint press release.

[The EU] was supposed to take on the global leadership role as the only ‘green superpower’... Far from charting a path toward climate leadership, the Green Deal has exposed the European Union’s structural weakness and its inability to reconcile environmental ambitions with economic, democratic, and geopolitical realities. Over the past two years, opposition to the Green Deal has exploded in Europe – from farmers, industry groups and ordinary citizens and to populist political parties.⁶⁴²

In this blog post, the retired official continued:

Recent reversals include watering down soil and chemical safety regulations, repurposing climate funds for military spending, watering down biodiversity protections, and removing the phrase ‘Green Deal’ from the European Parliament’s reports... The signs are clear: Europe’s purported ‘green revolution’ is in retreat.

The next section of this chapter addresses the struggles that Indian officials have confronted as they have responded to European green ambitions.

⁶⁴² Kumar, Mohan, 2025. “The world has abandoned the fight against climate change”. Blog-post. 11 July 2025.

Table 7. Think tank events in the run-up to the 16th India-EU summit

Date (2025)	Thematic	Organizer	Location
24 Sept	Green Horizons: Leveraging the EU-India Partnership on Climate Action	Heinrich Böll Stiftung and Council for Strategic and Defense Research (CSDR)	Online
25 Sept	India after Trump: America's Turn, China's Challenge, and Europe's Opportunity	European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)	Online
29 Sept	Navigating India-EU Strategic Ties	India's World Magazine and Heinrich Böll Stiftung	New Delhi
9-10 Oct	EU-India Strategic Dialogue	European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)	Brussels
10 Oct	The New Strategic EU-India Agenda	Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA)	New Delhi
17 Oct	The New Strategic EU-India Agenda	Indian Council on World Affairs (ICWA)	New Delhi
4 Nov	Evolving Landscape: (Re) Thinking Europe's Security Role in the Indo-Pacific	IRSEM Europe	Brussels
18 Nov	EU-India Day	German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)	Brussels
1-2 Dec	Brussels Indo-Pacific Dialogue	Center for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy with the Brussels School of Governance	Brussels
5 Dec	The Partnership Moment: Building a Shared Agenda in a Shifting World Order	European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) and Carnegie India	Berlin
Source: Author's compilation.			

8.4. Normativity tensions

This section examines two incidents that reveal normativity tensions in the run-up to the India-EU summit which was being planned for early 2026. The first case, which can be termed the *CBAM clash*, illustrates how Indian officials have reacted to European green ambitions. The second case concerns the

trade talks between the EU and India, where green ambitions featured prominently, especially in the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter. In both cases, there are clear normativity tensions present in the interactions between Indian and European officials. These tensions are excellent examples of the kind of demanding situations, or dilemmas, that officials can face when they must balance different strategies. The normativity tensions can both ease and escalate as events unfold, because they form an important part of the status dilemma dynamics that are produced by India's green ambitions.

8.4.1. The CBAM clash

This section details the normativity tensions that emerged in reactions to the European Commission's attempt to decrease carbon leakage. This attempt was part of how the Commission aimed to implement its own green ambitions, an aspect of the Fit for 55-package of legislative proposals and the European Green Deal. One mechanism proposed as part of this attempt was called the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). In a nutshell, CBAM attempts to prevent carbon leakage by regulating emissions associated with goods imported into the EU. India's reactions to CBAM reveal deeper normativity tensions about regulating emissions. Indian officials reacted to this European legislation instead of concentrating their efforts on promoting India's green ambitions in Brussels and lobbying for European financial investments. The Indian steel sector pushed the government to speak out. According to an insider, the Indian embassy in Brussels was not able to deal with CBAM, despite the fact that the Ministry of Environment had seconded a person to the embassy.⁶⁴³ The normativity tensions about CBAM generated statements by ministers and conversations between officials. European officials even translated a CBAM guidebook into Hindi.⁶⁴⁴ In this way, CBAM became a clash that civil servants had to navigate.

⁶⁴³ Author's interview with I#20.

⁶⁴⁴ Guidance package in Hindi.

The EU launched the European Green Deal in 2019. Following the announcement in 2019, over 600 stakeholders provided input to European officials in a public consultation held in 2020.⁶⁴⁵ In July 2021, the European Commission published a legislative proposal that bodies of the European Union deliberated in different meeting rooms across Brussels. In June 2023, the CBAM began its transitional phase before becoming fully operational in 2026. Soon after the publication of the legislative proposal, Indian officials communicated with foreign officials from the informal BRICS grouping (consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) who wanted to take a public stance against CBAM. Among these officials, there was both a sense of urgency and divergent understandings of what CBAM would imply in practice. In preparations for a virtual meeting for the environment ministers of five BRICS countries in August 2021,⁶⁴⁶ officials crafted a statement that mentioned CBAM. In this five-page document, with 22 bullet points, a single sentence made international headlines: “We noted with grave concern the proposals for introducing trade barriers, such as unilateral carbon border adjustment, that are discriminatory.”⁶⁴⁷ With this formulation, officials from the BRICS countries established a common position against CBAM. Just two months after the EU had introduced the legislative proposal, Indian officials followed the BRICS-line, rather than negotiating patiently behind the scenes in Brussels.

The opposition to CBAM continued. China hosted a virtual high-level meeting on climate change in May 2022. The joint statement from the meeting underlined their principled opposition. The officials from BRICS countries

⁶⁴⁵ [EUR-Lex - Ares\(2021\)70541 - EN - EUR-Lex](#) The consultation data informs that 33 of these stakeholders were “non-EU” stakeholders without indicating from which region or country.

⁶⁴⁶ At the time of the meeting, BRICS was comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Now, it also includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

⁶⁴⁷ New Delhi Statement on Environment: 7th Meeting of BRICS Environment Ministers. New Delhi, India, August 27, 2021. 2.

typed on their laptops that CBAM is “incompatible with multilateral rules under the World Trade Organization.”⁶⁴⁸ Subsequently, Indian diplomats in Geneva and officials sitting in New Delhi contemplated turning to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in an oppositional move. At the same time, Indian officials reached out directly to European counterparts in different capitals. The normativity tensions were visible in both multilateral diplomacy and bilateral diplomacy.

The friction about CBAM continued at the WTO. In Geneva, Indian officials argued that “CBAM is in violation of special and differential treatment provisions of the WTO that advocates longer time periods for implementing agreements and commitments for developing nations to safeguard the trade interests of developing countries.”⁶⁴⁹ This was an argument against the implementation timeline for CBAM which had been outlined by the EU. Making a statement like this was less confrontational than filing a formal complaint.

Instead of a formal complaint to the WTO, Indian officials raised their concerns directly with their European counterparts. They said that CBAM was “not helpful” and constituted a “trade barrier” for economic relations.⁶⁵⁰ The Indian Finance Minister voiced objections while downplaying the risk the CBAM would hamper the trade talks between India and the EU, saying “I’m sure it won’t be escalated to the level of hurting the talks.”⁶⁵¹ The powerful Finance Ministry therefore understood there was a danger CBAM tensions could spill over to the trade talks, but denied the potential for an escalation.

The normative tensions around CBAM affected the ongoing social processes taking place to bring about deepened India-EU trade talks. The European chief negotiator later attempted to explain this demanding situation. He

⁶⁴⁸ Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People’s Republic of China, 2022. Joint Statement issued at the BRICS High-level Meeting on Climate Change. 13 May 2022.

⁶⁴⁹ Mishra, Ravi Dutta, 2023. “India may compensate exporters against UK, EU carbon tax”, *Indian Express*, 22 December 2023.

⁶⁵⁰ Reed, John, Chris Kay, Stephanie Findlay, and Andy Bounds, 2024. “India denounces ‘stifling’ EU carbon tax on imports”, *Financial Times*. 9 October 2024.

⁶⁵¹ Reed et al. 2024.

said his counterpart, the Indian chief negotiator, had continuously maintained that the EU must do something concrete for India on CBAM, because otherwise “there shall be no agreement between the EU and India.”⁶⁵² Indian officials tried to ease the normativity tensions about CBAM by asking European counterparts for either exemptions or longer transition periods.⁶⁵³ The Indian argument reflected a principled position, which was then framed as a conditional argument to deal with the friction.

Finding a compromise to ease the normativity tensions was by no means easy. Researchers at the think tank Observer Research Foundation published an article about what not to do in the EU-India strategic partnership. This featured the following warning: “Trying to force India’s hand on [CBAM] – a country committed to addressing climate change in its own right – will not help the bilateral relationship.”⁶⁵⁴

Some Indian newspapers ran articles about New Delhi’s plans to file a formal complaint against CBAM at the WTO. However, despite this, India refrained from doing so. The first formal complaint against CBAM at the WTO was filed by Russian, and not Indian, officials.⁶⁵⁵ One reason for this cautious attitude may be that Indian officials had become increasingly pragmatic and able to see new opportunities. As Indian experts put it, “for India, CBAM poses a threat, no doubt, but also offers a proverbial opportunity...The opportunity in CBAM is whether India and other countries are able to initiate their own carbon trading systems or carbon price.”⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵² Sanchez Manzanaro, Sofia, 2025. “India trade talks ‘extremely difficult,’ EU negotiator warns”, *Euractiv*, March 19, 2025.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ Amrita Narlikar and Gokul Sahni, 2025. “Renewing the EU-India Strategic Compact: Doing Better, Doing More, and Key How Not To’s,” ORF Issue Brief No. 770, January 2025, *Observer Research Foundation*, 5.

⁶⁵⁵ Reuters, 2025. “EU rejects Russia’s request for talks on carbon border tariff, WTO document shows”. 26 May 2025.

⁶⁵⁶ Kathuria, Rajat, Neha Gupta, Navya Kumar, 2025. “India’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) Challenge: Strategic Response and Policy Options”, Working Paper 90, February 2025. *Center for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)*.

Yet, the CBAM friction made it into the Indian statement during the WTO's Trade Policy Review meeting in June 2023. At this meeting, officials from over fifty countries had produced questions and comments to European counterparts. The Indian representative started his statement politely, conveying "our deep appreciation to the EU delegation in Geneva, ably led by my friend H.E. João Aguiar Machado and his colleagues, for their excellent work and close cooperation with our delegation."⁶⁵⁷ After highlighting that the EU is India's second-largest trading partner, the official described CBAM as an "irritant acting as barriers preventing us from achieving the full potential of our economic partnership."⁶⁵⁸ The Indian delegation therefore chose to include criticism of CBAM in their statement instead of filing a formal complaint.

Another reason for the eased normativity tensions can be traced to social interactions between Indian officials and European officials working at the EU's Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD), the organization responsible for the CBAM implementation.⁶⁵⁹ Moreover, European experts contend that the EU provided countries with incentives to agree with CBAM:

[It could] offer reinforced cooperation on the implementation of CBAM, either as part of the trade agreement or separately. It could also start discussions with countries that have already or are developing domestic carbon markets (as is the case for India), to develop a framework for cooperation on decarbonization commitments.⁶⁶⁰

A former EU official even argued that the cooperation on the implementation could include other benefits for countries:

⁶⁵⁷ World Trade Organization, 2023. "Trade Policy Review: European Union." Minutes of the Meeting, WT/TPR/M/442, 57.

⁶⁵⁸ World Trade Organization, 2023, 58.

⁶⁵⁹ Twitter 2024. India in Belgium & Luxembourg, @IndEmbassyBru, tweet. 13 May 2024.

⁶⁶⁰ García-Bercero, I. and A. Sapir, 2025. 'The time is right to make a European Union-India trade deal happen', Policy Brief 19/2025, Bruegel, 10.

Measures to reduce the administrative burden on SMEs, technical assistance to support India in the development of its carbon pricing scheme, facilitation of accreditation and early consultation about future regulatory developments. Together with the support for investment in energy-intensive industries, such as green steel intermediate products, this could go a long way towards alleviating Indian concerns. In the medium term, a climate coalition could provide an alternative to the application of CBAM.⁶⁶¹

Despite the initial normativity tensions, solution-minded officials gradually came to see the CBAM clash as an invitation to transform the tensions into domestic change and an additional push to ink new deals.

Indian officials sought ways to protect domestic interests while accepting that CBAM would remain. Even in the final push to carry out the trade talks, however, Indian trade negotiators tried to introduce some formulations related to this. For instance, they wanted a statement about the reciprocal effects of carbon tax to ensure that European exporters were faced with similar taxes to those applied to Indian exporters.⁶⁶² The next section of this chapter discusses these trade talks in more detail.

In sum, the EU's efforts to pursue green ambitions by regulating emissions in the form of carbon leakage caused demanding normativity tensions for Indian officials. The normativity tensions manifested themselves in social interactions with foreign counterparts, not least from third actors, such as officials from BRICS countries. This section has shown that Indian officials began with a principled stance, but have increasingly become more pragmatic as they have navigated the ongoing normativity tensions which arose as part of the CBAM clash.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Dutta Mishra, Ravi, 2025. "Deadline rush: As India pushes for EU deal, legal team told to avoid leaves; key EU team in Delhi expected this week", *Indian Express*. 2 December 2025.

8.4.2. The TSD chapter in the trade talks

This section describes the normativity tensions which emerged about including a sustainability chapter in the trade deal negotiations. In June 2022, the trade negotiations resumed after eight years in which they had lain dormant. Negotiations about 24 chapters towards a free trade agreement restarted. One of these chapters is vital for understanding the normativity tensions surrounding green ambitions. This is the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter. This section of the chapter draws on public reports issued by the European Commission from the different rounds of talks, interviews, and documents, to describe the normativity tensions. Unfortunately, the Indian government does not publish public reports from the negotiation rounds.

The analysis describes how Indian officials contested a script performed by European officials representing a specific executive branch of the European Commission. This administrative script implied efforts to shape the trade agreement. This was the Directorate General for Trade, commonly called DG Trade, which is a powerful branch since it negotiates trade deals for the entire EU. In practice, the efforts by DG Trade sought the inclusion of environmental protection norms, similar to those which were enshrined in the trade agreements that the EU had reached with all its trading partner worldwide. Despite India's own ambitions, the trade negotiators contested these efforts continuously.

The normativity tensions, which concerned including a chapter on environmental protection and environmental standards, were sparked by a proposal by the European side. Indian officials received a draft proposal for a TSD chapter from Brussels.⁶⁶³ Indian officials had to react to a draft text that they likely wished they had never received. They may have remembered their opposition to similar clauses in the first phase of the trade negotiations before they were frozen.

⁶⁶³ Author's interview with I#36.

Understanding that the TSD chapter was essential for the Europeans, the officials engaged in tit-for-tat discussions about the details. They told their counterparts that they could not accept “the possibility of sanctions for breaching TSD commitments, and therefore a binding dispute settle mechanism.”⁶⁶⁴ An insider admitted, “the EU proposed a very ambitious draft that India couldn’t accept since it was too ambitious. The EU needs to take a few steps back, and India must meet the position.”⁶⁶⁵ The skepticism reflected the fear which Indian officials had of “hidden protectionist measures,” a fear which their European counterparts addressed by clarifying their formulations.⁶⁶⁶

As a way of navigating the normativity tensions, Indian officials started thinking about a new possibility: to rewrite the entire chapter. An insider contended, “we need a new chapter on sustainability for the FTA to proceed.” They felt that the rewritten chapter could “work as a template for developing-developed countries trade deals.”⁶⁶⁷ An Indian expert realized that the normativity tensions about the chapter might stop the entire trade deal. She suggested that “the EU needs to reconsider whether non-trade issues such as labor standards and sustainability clauses in trade agreements are appropriate methods of achieving environmental and other goals in a fraught geopolitical environment, or whether a more compact deal may be more pragmatic.”⁶⁶⁸ This was no minor thought in New Delhi, but a thought that originated from the normativity tensions in practice.

⁶⁶⁴ García-Bercero, I. and A. Sapir, 2025. ‘The time is right to make a European Union-India trade deal happen’, Policy Brief 19/2025, Bruegel, 10.

⁶⁶⁵ Author’s interview with I#21.

⁶⁶⁶ Aspengren, Henrik Chetan, and Mihir Swarup Sharma, 2024. “India and the World: Taking stock of economic cooperation between the EU and India”, Newsletter, 6 February 2024.

⁶⁶⁷ Author’s interview with I#19.

⁶⁶⁸ Malhotra, Shairee, 2025. “A New EU-India Strategic Agenda in 2025”, ORF Issue Brief No. 781, February 2025, *Observer Research Foundation*. 5.

Weeks afterwards, Indian officials actively participated in five days of negotiations. The chief negotiators have been described as “playing a more active role” in the negotiation on the TSD at this point.⁶⁶⁹ Just like in the sixth round, officials:

Reviewed progress on the TSD chapter as well as related EU-funded programs and projects in India. Negotiators agreed on several provisions and exchanged proposals aiming at bridging the very substantive divergences that remain.⁶⁷⁰

Interestingly, there are no reports of discussions regarding forthcoming Indian projects in Europe, where these projects could help accelerate the implementation of the European Green Deal.

An attempt to ease the normativity tensions occurred after ten rounds of negotiations. At this point, the European Commission reports indicated “good progress was made in a large number of areas of the TSD chapter, with negotiators bringing their respective positions closer.”⁶⁷¹ Yet, despite the progress in the negotiations, some European stakeholders thought they could maintain normative preferences. The lead EU negotiator told Members of the European Parliament that India could “in no way” agree on sustainability clauses in the trade negotiations like other trade partners, implying that Europeans could not expect agreements on sanctions and dispute settlements, on legally binding provisions, or on any involvement of civil society.⁶⁷² Shortly after this, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), an advisory body, issued a report regarding their discussions of EU-India relations. The EESC stakeholders had met the Indian Ambassador in Brussels,⁶⁷³ but despite this they

⁶⁶⁹ European Commission 2024. “Report of the Seventh Round of Negotiations On a Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and India”, 19-23 February 2024, New Delhi.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 4-5.

⁶⁷¹ European Commission, 2025. “Report of the Tenth Round of Negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and India”, 10-14 March 2025, Brussels.

⁶⁷² Sanchez Manzanaro, Sofia. 2025.

⁶⁷³ European Economic and Social Committee, 2025. Record of the proceedings: EU-India Strategic Partnership, 595th plenary session. REX/588. Meeting of 26 March 2025, Agenda item 10, 9.

took a principled stance. In the report, the EESC concluded that “the FTA must uphold an ambitious TSD chapter of labor rights and climate and environment protections with the structural monitoring and advisory role for civil society organizations including the social partners on both sides.”⁶⁷⁴ This shows how, even though the lead negotiator had made a desperate call for less internal pressure, some stakeholders maintained their normative stance regarding the inclusion of a sustainability chapter in the trade talks. The normativity tensions remained, despite the attempts to ease them.

The tensions about efforts to include passages on sustainability in any trade agreement reflected normativity tensions. However, these normativity tensions concerned the bureaucratic efforts by one branch of the EU to shape the contents of the agreement, rather than actual cooperation with Brussels. Indian officials continued to show up at the negotiations, showing their willingness and patience for finding compromises.

8.5. Recognition tensions

Despite the CBAM clash and the trade negotiation difficulties, European officials endorsed India’s green ambitions on several occasions in the run-up to the summit. In practice, recognition tensions sparked action by a coalition of the willing and the production of a new strategic document. The outreach trip involving European officials and the new strategy reveal how India’s green ambitions produced recognition tensions.

8.5.1. Signaling cooperative will

Previously, the bilateral climate relationship between India and the EU had been constrained by disagreements in multilateral climate negotiations. Despite this historical friction, in the decade prior to the trade agreement Indian

⁶⁷⁴ European Economic and Social Committee, 2025. Record of the proceedings: EU-India Strategic Partnership, 595th plenary session. REX/588. Meeting of 26 March 2025, Agenda item 10.

officials had accepted many climate-related partnerships with EU institutions and member states.⁶⁷⁵ In practice, this was a signal of willingness to cooperate that some foreign officials recognized.

In January 2024, Indian diplomats in Brussels followed a plenary session in the European Parliament that resulted in a new resolution on EU-India relations. The resolution stressed the importance of the strategic partnership and eased the normative tensions at the administrative level. It emphasized that “India is providing an important example for the world by showing that simultaneously combating climate change and pursuing a development agenda is possible.”⁶⁷⁶ Moreover, it stated the need to “enhance cooperation on climate and energy issues with India as a key partner in the global fight against climate change and biodiversity degradation and in a green transition towards renewable energy and climate neutrality, with due regard to their impact on the most vulnerable.” These statements, prepared by European civil servants and endorsed by the European Parliament, suggested there was a political will to ease tensions and proceed with cooperation, despite previous friction. Indian diplomats in Brussels experienced a breath of relief.

A few months after the historic visit by the College of the European Commission, the EU Ambassador to India stood in front of Indian policymakers and industry representatives participating in the 2025 India Net Zero Forum.⁶⁷⁷ The career diplomat began by reminding the audience of the common ground between India and the EU:

Climate action and decarbonization is one of the key areas where Prime Minister Modi and European Commission President von der

⁶⁷⁵ Nordenstam 2023.

⁶⁷⁶ European Parliament 2024. “European Parliament recommendation of 17 January 2024 to the Council, Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning EU-India relations (2023/2128(INI))”. P9 TA (2024)0033, 11.

⁶⁷⁷ The Delegation of the European Union to India and Bhutan, 2025. “Speech by EU Ambassador Hervé Delphin at the India Net Zero Forum”, 18 June 2025.

Leyen asked for deeper cooperation when they met in February during the unprecedented EU-India College-to-Government meeting. Because it holds great potential for our bilateral cooperation, and because it is crucial for our planet and our people.

The EU Ambassador applauded India's efforts with the International Solar Alliance. He went on to say that "the European Union deeply respects India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the unique context in which these commitments have been made." The use of the words "deeply respects" showed the diplomat's recognition of India's green ambitions, but they also reflected his awareness of the historical friction. In fact, his job was to facilitate cooperation, not create friction. The concluding part of the speech displayed further recognition of India's green ambitions. The Ambassador concluded that the:

EU and its Member States look forward to continuing to work with India on the implementation of its decarbonization ambition. The level of India's ambition will be the determining factor in whether the world as a whole is able to meet its collective objectives in the years and decades to come.

In a nutshell, the Ambassador gave a speech which had been written by European diplomats who were willing to accommodate India's green ambitions. The Ambassador knew that his colleagues were positive toward enhanced climate cooperation. He had participated in the 10th India-EU Energy Panel six months earlier, where the third phase of the India-EU Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (CECP) was adopted.⁶⁷⁸ In Brussels, more than twenty officials attended this India-EU Energy Panel.⁶⁷⁹ Indian officials from the Ministry of Environment were busy with the final negotiations at COP29 in Baku, which was taking place on the same day. This meant that Indian officials from

⁶⁷⁸ DD India, 2024. "India-EU Energy Panel holds tenth meeting in Brussels," YouTube, 1:14.

⁶⁷⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, 2024. "10th Meeting of the India-EU Energy Panel and 3rd Phase of the Clean Energy and Climate Partnership", 22 November 2024. Press release.

the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, and the Ministry of Power attended the meeting in Brussels instead. They reviewed recent years of cooperation and agreed on five priority areas for 2025-2028: green hydrogen, offshore wind, regional connectivity with electricity integration, energy efficiency, and energy and climate diplomacy. During the meetings, they also expressed their appreciation for those EU member states that had engaged in the International Solar Alliance. The participation during this meeting, and the agreed work plan, showed recognition of India's green ambitions among European officials.

Meetings and speeches did not solve all of the existing tensions shaping the social processes occurring before the India-EU summit. The interpersonal relationships between Ministry of Environment officials and their European counterparts took a turn when they were sidelined while the India-EU Clean Energy and Climate Partnership's next phase was agreed upon in Brussels. The absence of Indian Ministry of Environment officials reflected the fact that India has only a limited number of officials working on international cooperation in this Ministry. It also reflected the constrained working relationship between EU officials and the Indian Ministry of Environment at that time.

8.5.2. The coalition of the willing Europeans

Diplomats from a small group of EU member states, bearing in mind the CBAM clash and the positive Indian reaction to the European Commission visit, decided to form a coalition of the willing. They showed in practice that some Europeans had a supportive attitude toward India's green ambitions.

In April 2025, a group of senior EU officials went to India to conduct *mini-lateral* climate diplomacy within the broader EU-India strategic partnership. This group was comprised of officials from Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Brussels. These EU member states all had existing climate partnerships with India. Those involved in this diplomacy knew that Indian officials experienced what has been termed a *steering level* challenge regarding their

navigation between India-European Commission relations and India-EU member state relations. They therefore excluded officials from the Directorate Generales (DGs) in Brussels dealing with CBAM (DG TAXUD), climate negotiations (DG CLIMA), and climate finance (DG INTPA, DG CLIMA). Instead, the European External Action Service (EEAS) assigned a senior official to join the outreach trip. Because the EEAS had formed an internal task force for relations with India and had coordinated the preparations ahead of the India-summit, it made sense for it to partake in the outreach trip. Besides the CBAM clash, this group of Europeans also had in mind the third work plan for the India-EU Clean Energy & Climate Partnership for 2025-2028, something which India and the EU had agreed upon during meetings in Brussels in November 2024.⁶⁸⁰

In New Delhi, Indian officials from several ministries and research institutions agreed to meet. Officials from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC), and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) allocated time for meetings.⁶⁸¹ At the meeting with the MNRE, members of the group of senior EU officials "commended India for its remarkable progress in the renewable energy sector, recognizing it as a valuable opportunity to learn from India's innovative strides." The MNRE published this statement from the EU officials on their social media account. During an interaction with six MNRE officials, the Europeans heard the highest ranked official place emphasis on "India's deep-rooted, nature-aligned lifestyle" and heard him underline "the importance of technology transfer and collaborative research to further advance scientific solutions for the planet's well-being."⁶⁸² The Swedish official participating in this meeting thought that it was "truly impressive to see India's

⁶⁸⁰ Ministry of External Affairs, 2024. "10th Meeting of the India-EU Energy Panel and 3rd Phase of the Clean Energy and Climate Partnership", 22 November 2024. Press release.

⁶⁸¹ Koshy, Jacob, 2025. "Climate envoys from EU discuss climate action with Indian officials", *The Hindu*. 5 April 2025.

⁶⁸² Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, 2025. "Today, EU Climate Envoys met the Secretary of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).", 4 April 2025. LinkedIn post.

achievements in renewable energy.” However, this official did not comment on India’s reliance on coal for its energy security. They spoke about how the Swedish Energy Agency was open to cooperation.⁶⁸³

After the meetings, which were held in the government buildings in New Delhi, the foreign officials talked to a select group of journalists. A quote from the EEAS Special Envoy for Climate and Environment revealed the tense tone of some of the conversations:

Coming from the EU, you [India] do not always have to like us. We do not have the monopoly on virtue but neither on vice. What you see is what you get. We fulfill our treaties. As Prime Minister Modi and the EC President have reiterated, we are big democracies, huge pluralist societies with an intent to uphold the multilateral order.⁶⁸⁴

This statement reveals that some of the conversations between Indian and European officials during this visit still displayed signs of recognition tensions.

In sum, a single outreach visit may not have entirely solved the recognition tensions that India experienced in its relations with Europe. However, this visit showed India that there was a coalition of European partners willing to support India’s green ambitions.

8.5.3. The 2025 European India Strategy

The European side attempted to ease tensions and update their approach to India. To do so, European officials saw that they might take advantage of the fact that the European Commission started a new mandate in 2024.⁶⁸⁵ At the beginning of the 2024-2029 mandate, European officials sitting in Brussels discussed an agenda that involved active European diplomacy and presence around the world for the next five years. The section titled “A Global Europe:

⁶⁸³ Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, 2025. "Today, EU Climate Envoys met the Secretary of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).", 4 April 2025. LinkedIn post.

⁶⁸⁴ Koshy, 2025.

⁶⁸⁵ European Commission, 2025. “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions,” COM (2025) 45 final, 11 February 2025.

Leveraging Our Power and Partnerships” stressed that “the EU needs to be more assertive in pursuing its strategic interests.”

Considering this, Europeans felt they needed a new strategic document for their relationship with India. They needed a strategy that would “pinpoint areas of common strategic interest and the initiatives that will help to secure those interests, in line with joint priorities.” European officials realized that their partnership with India needed reassurance and reinforcement if the two sides were to continue the deepening of relations. Therefore, Brussels-based officials at the European External Action Service (EEAS) formed a new task force that produced the drafts for this new strategic document. To ensure that the officials writing the formulation were knowledgeable about India, the EEAS South Asia Division was made responsible.

The task force had to keep in mind both those interested in deepening relationships and also those who wanted to avoid a grand foreign policy mistake, like that the EU had made with China in the past. The mandate for the new strategic document was to depict India as “a key partner in Asia.”⁶⁸⁶ However, despite this, an insider has argued that there are competing views about India within Europe.⁶⁸⁷ Another respondent argued that Europeans must avoid building another systemic rival and economic competitor, the way China has become for the EU.⁶⁸⁸ They said that the EU must become more strategic with India. In this way, the production of a new strategic document revealed a number of recognition tensions among European civil servants.

Before the drafting process began, European diplomats asked their Indian counterparts about their thoughts on the strategy and learned that New Delhi welcomed the initiative.⁶⁸⁹ European officials learned from the think tank community in New Delhi that there was a hope that their unilateral document

⁶⁸⁶ European Commission, 2025, 10.

⁶⁸⁷ Author’s interview with I#16.

⁶⁸⁸ Author’s interview with I#9.

⁶⁸⁹ European External Action Service, 2024. EU-India: Joint Press Release on Strategic Partnership Review Meeting and 10th Foreign Policy and Security Consultations in Brussels, 22 November 2024.

would be “more targeted and operational” than the previous bilateral roadmap to 2025, a document which featured over 100 bullet points.⁶⁹⁰ The social interactions about the new strategic document therefore started before the actual drafting had even begun.

In the consultation process that took place before the writing of the new strategy, it became clear that the task force did not see India’s increasingly important role in the world as confined to Asia. In their view, the mission was “to enhance the EU’s partnership with an increasingly important global player whose political, diplomatic, and economic influence is on the rise.”⁶⁹¹ India had a global role and was involved in both regional and global challenges.⁶⁹² This meant that the strategy had to deal with climate change, because this constituted a major global challenge.

An early draft of the strategy shared with the public emphasized that climate action was a priority issue for the India-EU partnership. The document stated that climate change was a challenge that India and the EU “will be facing together in the next five years.” It pointed to the “major potential to expand EU-India cooperation on renewable energy, other elements of the green transition, and multilateral solutions.”⁶⁹³ In the consultation phase, an expert from the Jacques Delors Institute cautioned the drafting team about tensions concerning climate cooperation:

The EU must be very adept at acknowledging India's concerns over the economic development vs. climate adaptation conundrum based on the country's current lower-middle-income economic status. Failing to do so can easily antagonize New Delhi and complicate matters

⁶⁹⁰ Malhotra, Shairee, 2025. “A New EU-India Strategic Agenda in 2025”, ORF Issue Brief No. 781, February 2025, *Observer Research Foundation*. Council of the European Union, 2020. “EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025,” 15 July 2020.

⁶⁹¹ European Commission, 2025. Call for Evidence for an Initiative (without an impact assessment). Ref. Ares(2025)2929814 - 10/04/2025. *Italics* added.

⁶⁹² European Commission, 2025.

⁶⁹³ European Commission, 2025. Call for Evidence for an Initiative (without an impact assessment). Ref. Ares(2025)2929814 - 10/04/2025.

on implementing the EU's CBAM, Deforestation Regulation, and its litany of economic security measures vis-à-vis its partners.⁶⁹⁴

This input also provided a concrete suggestion to ease tensions: the EU and India should sign a Clean Trade & Investment Partnership to “address Indian concerns over CBAM design, unlock renewable energy and critical raw material projects, and thus remove major obstacles from the FTA negotiations.”⁶⁹⁵

In this early stage, India’s green ambitions were absent from the draft. This could have been expected because the document was then quite brief. A two-page “fact sheet” provided glimpses into the core pillars of the EU-India strategic partnership: trade and technology, connectivity, security and defense, green transition, people-to-people connections, and international relations and common values.⁶⁹⁶ In the section called “green transition”, the European document mentions the India-EU “partnership in the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), LeadIT 2.0, and the Global Biofuels Alliance.” However, the exclusion of the Modi government’s project Mission LiFE from this document reveals that there is still tension about the climate action agenda.⁶⁹⁷ The new strategy was released in September 2025.

8.6. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how green ambitions shaped social interactions ahead of the 16th India-EU summit. The analysis described how elements of status dilemma dynamics affected the social processes through which Indian and European officials met and discussed different issues. Green ambitions

⁶⁹⁴ European Commission, 2025.

⁶⁹⁵ European Commission, 2025.

⁶⁹⁶ European External Action Service, 2025. Fact sheet. “EU-India Towards a new strategic agenda,” June 2025.

⁶⁹⁷ More analysis of Mission LiFE is found in chapter 6 and 7 of this thesis.

produced critical normativity tensions, which were evident in the ways Indian officials navigated their own and European attempts to develop climate relations. The analysis indicated mild recognition tensions and multiple acts of accommodation from European officials. It also found that there were modest epistemic tensions which Indian diplomats navigated by internal restructuring of the Foreign Ministry and by recruiting competent diplomats.

The green status dilemma dynamics which were found to be present in the run-up to the 16th India-EU summit should not be underestimated. The tensions forming these dynamics, which revolved around India's responses to European green ambitions, could have consequences for India's broader climate diplomacy in coming years. India's status in global climate governance is at stake. This is because, by navigating such tensions in particular ways, India risks portraying itself as a bandit. It may risk being seen as a country that is unwilling to accelerate its green transition together with international partners if sustainability concerns interfere with non-green economic interests. The disputes about the sustainable development-chapter in the India-EU trade negotiations showed signs that this might happen, with tensions threatening to harm the climate partnership.

At the 16th India-EU summit in January 2026, Indian officials accepted a version of the TSD chapter in the trade talks. Consequently, Indian negotiators might be able to formulate a stronger argument for securing a future Clean Trade and Investment Partnership with the EU that could bring new investments into green industries.⁶⁹⁸ If Indian officials agree to and implement the chapter, they might also be able to implement other trade agreements with less ambitious sustainability chapters. Yet, they might receive criticism from domestic stakeholders portraying them as weak negotiators. The management of

⁶⁹⁸ This type of partnership is suggested as a new form of partnership during the European Commission mandate 2024-2029. See ; García-Bercero, I. and A. Sapir, 2025. 'The time is right to make a European Union-India trade deal happen', Policy Brief 19/2025, *Bruegel*, 11.

sustainability clauses in India's bilateral trade deals may also affect how international partners think about COP33 in 2028 that Modi wants to host.

The findings of the analysis in this chapter show that tensions can have major economic consequences that affect India's green ambitions beyond the negotiation rooms.

9. Conclusion

This thesis has shown that India's contemporary climate diplomacy is best understood as the practical management of green ambitions within the everyday work of diplomacy. In a series of case studies, the analytical chapters have examined how Indian officials navigate the recognition, normativity, and epistemic tensions generated by the new political instructions India adopts to pursue an elevated status as a green leader in international climate politics. This analysis has demonstrated that these new green ambitions that India's leadership has outlined have led to considerable pressures in diplomatic settings. These pressures, faced by Indian officials, have been sustained over time rather than only experienced during discrete moments of elite-led negotiation or contestation. Overall, the study has demonstrated that the green ambitions outlined by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have produced significant tensions in diplomatic settings, particularly apparent during key international events.

Existing literature tends to portray the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) as sidelined by technocratic climate governance. In contrast, the findings in this thesis reveal the continued – and in some respects renewed – centrality of diplomatic management. India's climate diplomacy emerges not as instrumental positioning alone, but as an ongoing effort by the bureaucracy to reconcile competing expectations across domestic and international arenas. This thesis has developed and applied a practice approach to studying the everyday work of climate diplomacy. In doing so, it yields new insights into the challenges that green ambitions have generated for the bureaucracy managing India's climate diplomacy. The study views Indian officials' climate diplomacy through

a practice lens, reinterpreting India's role in climate governance as one of coping with, rather than resolving, the tensions that green ambitions generate.

The study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it conceptualizes the notion of a *green status dilemma*, arguing that this is an underappreciated idea in an era of contemporary status competition. A status dilemma arises when actors must balance competing role expectations and institutional goals across different arenas – within an organization, across a domestic government, among international partners – such that advancing one position risks undermining another. In this thesis, the focus is placed on a particular kind of status dilemma – a green status dilemma. This kind of status dilemma reflects the dynamic described above in global climate politics.

Second, the study develops a practice approach to status dilemmas that focuses on the process of status-seeking, with individual officials as the unit of analysis. Individual officials rarely discuss the status dilemmas they face openly, because they care about their reputations. Given this, the study constructs an analytical framework for studying tensions at the practice level, as a proxy for the study of status dilemmas. The study uncovers how officials navigated a range of demanding situations in practice. Through the case of India, the analysis yields new insights into the social world of diplomacy that plays out when officials are engaged in global climate politics. This study of the navigation of tensions reveals how Indian diplomats manage status dilemmas in practice.

This conclusion is structured as follows. It first summarizes the study's main findings, bringing together insights from the empirical chapters. It then examines one key finding in greater depth. This is the central finding about how Indian officials manage the status dilemmas generated by green ambitions in their everyday diplomatic practices. Following this, the chapter discusses the broader implications of these findings for research on status politics, for practice-based approaches in International Relations, and for climate

diplomacy more broadly. It concludes by reflecting on the study's limitations and outlining directions for future research.

9.1. Key findings

Reviewing the evidence across the empirical chapters, this thesis provides four key findings about the status dynamics and practical challenges of India's green ambitions.

First, India's green ambitions have transformed climate diplomacy from a primarily technical or administrative issue into a status-laden domain of foreign policy. India's climate action has become intertwined with questions of international recognition, leadership, and role performance. This places climate diplomacy squarely within India's broader pursuit of status in the international system, rather than at its margins. By studying these processes, this thesis brings greater depth to existing literature which has pointed to links between the country's status considerations and its climate diplomacy. For instance, Jha previously indicated that India displayed "the strategic use of climate change to assert greater power on the global stage."⁶⁹⁹

This thesis has shown how Indian diplomats deal with the country's aspirations to gain a new status and role in the international climate order, one that extends beyond traditional climate negotiations. The thesis develops the arguments made by what I have called the *wideners* in the existing literature on India's climate foreign policy. It moves these arguments beyond questions of identity to micro-level dynamics. The thesis traces the integration of green ambitions into India's diplomatic drive and into the minds of practitioners involved in diplomacy. It reveals the careful navigation involved in claiming green leadership amidst uncertainty about the effects of such status claims. This is particularly discussed in Chapter 5. Meanwhile, in Chapter 6, the thesis

⁶⁹⁹ Jha, Vyoma, 2022. "India and Climate Change: Old Traditions, New Strategies", *India Quarterly*, Vol 78, 280.

shows how officials involved in climate negotiations experience a conceptual clash as old priorities encounter new ambitions.

Second, this demonstrates that green ambitions generate persistent and overlapping tensions for Indian diplomats. These tensions are found to be sustained rather than isolated moments of conflict in climate negotiations. As illustrated in Chapter 7, India's green ambitions became a core diplomatic priority when India held the G20 presidency for the first time. As green ambitions permeate diplomatic life, Indian officials must navigate competing expectations across domestic and international arenas, including pressures to demonstrate climate leadership, uphold development priorities, maintain postcolonial solidarity, and respond to growing demands for global power status. Such tensions recur across organizational, multilateral, and bilateral settings, indicating that they are structural features of contemporary climate diplomacy rather than case-specific anomalies. The interplay between India's G20 diplomacy and climate negotiations, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, illustrates these overlapping tensions.

Third, the thesis demonstrates that the Indian Foreign Service remains a central and active site of political management in climate diplomacy. Existing literature frequently portrays diplomacy as displaced by technocratic governance. In contrast, this thesis found that Indian diplomats play a crucial role in interpreting political instructions and shaping how green ambitions are presented and adjusted in international interactions. Although officials from the Ministry of Environment remain in charge of climate negotiations, their colleagues in the Ministry of External Affairs also play a central role in the social life of diplomacy. This finding was made possible by practice-oriented analysis carried out in this thesis. Such detailed study of Indian diplomatic practices is something which the literature on the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) has hitherto lacked. In Chapter 8, the thesis shows how the IFS navigated multiple tensions in its efforts to deepen the India-EU relationship. Diplomacy thus

continues to matter, because of, and not despite, the increasing complexity and politicization of climate governance.

Fourth, and most centrally, the thesis finds that Indian officials do not seek to resolve the tensions generated by green ambitions once and for all. Instead, they engage in ongoing strategies of status dilemma management, employing everyday diplomatic practices to contain, balance, or temporarily soften competing expectations. These strategies allow diplomats to advance green ambitions while preserving flexibility and avoiding backlash, constituting a distinctive mode of bureaucratic agency in status-laden policy domains. The following sections examine these management strategies in greater detail.

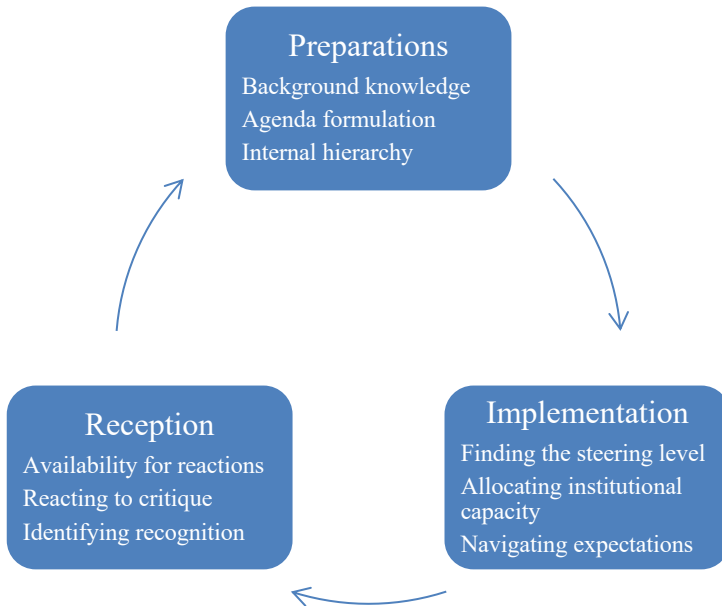
9.2. Status dilemma management

This study conceptualizes green status dilemmas as a social process shaped by individual efforts to cope with friction about epistemic authority, normativity, and recognition. Through a detailed study of the India case, we have not only learned about individual agency in social processes but also about the conceptual and operational challenges facing officials assigned to implement green ambitions. This section theorizes the insights from the India case by asking what this study reveals about the global phenomenon of status dilemma management in global climate politics.

The empirical chapters of this study, taken together, reveal that Indian civil servants are engaged in what might be called *status dilemma management* in global climate politics. The combination of the different practices that Indian officials were found to perform in social interactions can produce a comprehensive understanding of the variety of ways in which individuals in general will navigate status dilemmas within competitive contexts. In particular, the case studies revealed what might be considered as three intertwined phases of this process: the preparatory phase, the implementation phase, and the reception phase.

In the preparatory phase, individuals acquire background knowledge, formulate agendas and plans, and establish internal hierarchies. These constitute prerequisites for the actual statecraft to be performed by them in the next phase. In the implementation phase, they allocate resources and dedicate institutional capacity to meet expectations. Identifying the appropriate steering level is particularly important to ensure that limited resources are used efficiently. During this phase, actions are shaped by status considerations. In the reception phase, diplomats manage reactions such as external criticism and identify acts of recognition – a task that demands background knowledge and realistic expectations. If acts of recognition are overlooked or missed, there is a risk of backlash since external actors may adjust their behavior if their acts of recognition go unnoticed. Hence, in this phase, status considerations come under scrutiny. These phases often overlap, and they remain open to ongoing negotiation and renegotiation rather than following a predetermined path. Such fluidity makes status dilemma management a demanding process in practice. The demands of managing status dilemmas are illustrated in Figure 6, which visualizes the process as it occurs in global climate politics.

Figure 6. The process of status dilemma management in global climate politics



Source: Author's own analysis.

9.3. Strategies of status dilemma management

The evidence presented above suggests that individuals engage in a range of practices to survive the friction inside the process of status dilemma management. They adopt active and passive strategies that enable them to navigate challenging tensions inherent in their diplomatic duties. These strategies are an important part of dealing with the challenge of *status dilemma management*. The challenge embeds uncertainty, because agents often do not know how their counterparts will act in response to their status considerations. They therefore may fail to recognize behavioral signals. In short, the uncertainty of others' reactions makes status dilemmas much more difficult to navigate. Although individuals are constrained by the social structures in which they perform their actions, they still have the agency to perform strategies to advance

their agendas. This agency argument is valid during times of status competition. To better comprehend these strategies, this section reflects on a crucial question: What does this study tell us about the strategies that officials use to manage status dilemmas?

The data shows that we might recognize three management strategies at the micro-level: (i) the deepened comprehension strategy, (ii) the add-on strategy, and (iii) the watch-and-wait strategy. These strategies emerge from a cross-case analysis of the empirical chapters. In interpretivist practice-tracing, such comparative analysis can produce new “analytical constructs” based on patterns emerging from the data.⁷⁰⁰ By identifying these strategies, we gain a deeper understanding of how diplomats position themselves socially, beyond simplistic explanations of transactional diplomacy.

Two decades ago, Narlikar demonstrated that, when engaging with foreign counterparts, Indian negotiators employed a “strict distributive strategy,” also known as a “value-claiming strategy.”⁷⁰¹ Cross-case analysis of the findings from the different case studies carried out in this thesis suggests that we need to update the strategies that Indian officials employ in their professional practice. This analysis shows that Indian climate diplomacy now extends beyond the actions of those involved in formal climate negotiations. Although these findings come from a study of Indian diplomacy, it is worth stressing that such strategies could be applicable to any bureaucracy navigating status dilemmas in global climate politics. The following sections examine each strategy in turn.

⁷⁰⁰ Pouliot, 2014, 251.

⁷⁰¹ Narlikar, Amrita, 2006. Peculiar chauvinism or strategic calculation? Explaining the negotiating strategy of a rising India. *International affairs*, 82(1), 59-76.

The Deepened Comprehension Strategy

The first management strategy involves proactive action and reliance on knowledge acquisition. Individuals navigate tensions by developing expertise and maintaining up-to-date knowledge. This approach focuses on actively pursuing new information and insights. It requires intellectual openness to new ideas, as it involves deepening one's understanding, questioning existing assumptions, and updating knowledge levels. By reading relevant texts, engaging with reasoning, and processing insights, individuals deepen their understanding and thereby orient themselves in the complex process. The necessary knowledge may come from colleagues or external experts who share their expertise. This analytical endeavor enables proactive management of status dilemmas.

The Add-on Strategy

The second management strategy involves rapidly and precisely integrating climate considerations into existing agendas and priority lists. This approach is faster and less time-consuming than deepening knowledge. It is an active management strategy in which climate action is incorporated into declarations, project proposals, joint communiqués, and speeches. By embedding climate-focused language into these documents, individuals navigate and manage status dilemmas in practice. In real-world settings, this strategy can be implemented across government divisions or by specific units responsible for content development. To avoid repetition and demonstrate mastery in signaling, individuals applying this strategy employ creative variation.

The Watch-and-Wait Strategy

The third management strategy involves passive observation rather than active engagement. It requires the least effort of the three strategies, as individuals choose to observe unfolding events and wait for further instructions. Through repeated observation, individuals become passive agents in the process of status dilemma management. As waiting time extends and attention shifts to

other agenda points, officials may conclude that they have no immediate obligation to act. In practice, the watch-and-wait strategy can be costly, as delayed action often means missed opportunities to gain important status recognition. To mitigate this risk, officials can combine this approach with another strategy for managing status dilemmas.

In the real world, there is naturally variation, and different combinations of these strategies are adopted. The performance of simultaneous strategies, however, produces incoherence in the bureaucracies. The risk of incoherence occurs when individuals in a ministerial division perform one strategy, whereas individuals in another division perform another strategy. An incoherent combination might also be seen when one ministerial division performs a strategy, while a division in another ministry performs a different strategy. This therefore entails that the more ministries and divisions involved, the higher the risk of strategic incoherence. At the same time, the fewer ministries involved, the lower the capacity for managing status dilemmas. Mastery, creativity, and coordination can ensure temporary coherence of different strategies, but there is a looming risk of incoherence since social relations in the international system are constantly evolving.

Multiple audiences matter for the execution of the strategies used to carry out status dilemma management. The management of status dilemmas takes place in international and domestic hierarchies. This means that these audiences can be found inside and outside bureaucracies. The execution of strategies can assist with the goals and priorities of different ministries. In the case of India, this study demonstrated that the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), acting as a status group, assisted with the efforts of other ministries to accelerate India's green transition. It did this by forming international partnerships. As such, the IFS was speaking to two different audiences – both an internal audience, i.e., other ministries, and an external audience, i.e., foreign partners. Similarly, the IFS positioned itself as a status group supporting green development and environmentally friendly initiatives. Hence, the approach taken

by Indian diplomats relates to multiple internal audiences within government, across corridors in different ministries in New Delhi. Moreover, the IFS is also engaging with another audience in ambassadorial networks in New Delhi and ministries located in other capitals. The IFS then also relates to an external audience which is composed of foreign counterparts trying to understand and engage with India. They observe the status group's behavior from the outside, seeking signs of strategies in practice.

The variation of strategies can induce confusion and competing interpretations about the sincerity of the strategy. External audiences may even assess whether the strategies represent desired or unwanted behavior, making judgments about the legitimacy of the actions taken by a country such as India. These judgments and interpretations can produce recognition tensions and shows the risk of social costs that is associated with actions taken to manage status dilemmas. If the strategies which officials use to manage status dilemmas are criticized, or lead to the country being stigmatized, by external observers, then this can bring social costs such as neglect or even isolation. In practice, the external audiences for officials' status management strategies typically encompass members of the diplomatic community. As recognition tensions increase, so does the risk of social costs. These costs are important because they both shape and are shaped by perceptions of strategic credibility.

While the internal and external audiences are separate entities in theory, they can be intertwined in practice. Members of the external audience can warn the internal audience about potential social costs, thereby helping to mitigate the consequences of ineffective management of status dilemmas.

9.4. Implications

By examining Indian climate diplomacy through the lens of status dilemmas, this study has revealed the increasing importance of this diplomacy for India's rise in the international system. As the IFS grows and brings India's positions

to the world, it could benefit from learning about the range of different strategies officials may use when navigating status dilemmas. Learning these strategies comes with the promise of signaling ambition in a more coherent way and thereby facilitating climate cooperation. The strategies provide an alternative to the signaling of ambitions through implicating desires, something which Indian diplomats have frequently done in Asia where they have China and the United States on top of their minds.⁷⁰² The strategies outlined above instead might enable Indian diplomacy to increase its global footprint. As the attention to green ambitions in the international system increases, India's own aspirations face scrutiny regarding their sincerity. As Indian diplomacy grows and the foreign service involves more members in status dilemma management, it faces the risk of a one-voice challenge.

9.4.1. For Indian diplomacy

Future generations of diplomats will likely pursue their own conceptions of India's green ambitions. This means that the IFS will increasingly face the challenge of ensuring it speaks with one voice about India's role in global climate politics. If India wants to be seen as a credible actor in the world, officials in New Delhi would benefit from planning ahead to ensure that India has a clear and unified position in global climate politics. This is slightly different from the challenge faced by the European Union (EU), where the institutional setup of the union makes it difficult for it to speak as a coherent whole. In contrast, India's one voice challenge emerges from the strategies that its officials use to deal with status dilemmas. The challenge of speaking with one voice is urgent because external audiences can easily question India's capacity, asking themselves: How will India be able to become a leader when it has a substantially smaller foreign service than China?

⁷⁰² Khan, Raphaëlle and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 2025. Signalling through implicature: How India signals in the Indo-Pacific. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 27(1), 43–68.

Conversely, an extended foreign service offers opportunities to create internal rewards for those officials most capable of managing status dilemmas. A larger diplomatic service means more possibilities to provide attractive jobs for those who perform well. As India's Ministry of External Affairs grows, it can create more positions that serve as rewards – such as positions in capitals with high standards of living, or with strategic importance to India. A larger diplomatic service would better enable New Delhi to navigate the complex and sometimes uncomfortable situations inherent in the social world of diplomacy.

This thesis found that green ambitions create challenges for bureaucracies. Given this, policymakers might consider whether the political leadership should discard green ambitions and focus on other foreign policy objectives. Similarly, analysts can discuss how India's domestic energy mix and environmental protection legislation affect its green ambitions. The findings do not provide any straightforward answers to these questions. However, considering the tensions embedded in diplomatic interactions, they call for greater awareness of green ambitions in the social world of diplomacy. Policymakers can benefit from learning and executing the strategies discussed in this conclusion, instead of omitting green ambitions from their own efforts in diplomatic settings.

Furthermore, this thesis offers a counterargument to those who claim public diplomacy about green ambitions is merely greenwashing that delays significant climate action. Undoubtedly, green ambitions may start as a greenwashing attempt. However, as they circulate among officials within the bureaucracy, they take root in the minds of civil servants and become institutionalized. While this process is difficult for researchers to uncover, this thesis has shown a way to do so through analysis of practices that are performed over time within bureaucratic processes. This analysis has suggested that, at least in the case of India, the incorporation of green ambitions into the social life of bureaucracy has produced real action.

The approach taken in this thesis about Indian officials' actions in global climate politics is distinct from other literature because of its emphasis on social dynamics rather than material factors. A material explanation would proceed as follows. A thousand years ago, ancient India and China were the biggest economies in the world. Until industrialization began in the 18th century, they were the economic centers in the international system. Economic power shifted westward as the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany industrialized in the 19th century and onward. The modernization of these Western powers also caused environmentally devastating emissions. Yet, these powers had little need to take the planet into account during their own rises. As China reappeared as a great power in the recent past, it mimicked this environmentally unfriendly path. China's re-emergence followed the old brown path. India, on the other hand, wants to be different from China and advance the green path. India's 2023 income per capita was in line with China's income per capita in 2007,⁷⁰³ while its emissions per capita in 2023 was in line with China's emissions per capita in 1986.⁷⁰⁴ This suggests that India's path is undoubtedly not predetermined. Yet, it is not an understatement to say that how India re-emerges as a great power will have severe consequences. Rising emissions in India will have effects domestically for the 1.4 billion people living in the country. They will also affect people across the Indian subcontinent, and people all around the globe. Whether India succeeds in pursuing the green path with minimal harm to the planet will have substantial effects on the planet, as well as on the ongoing status competition. This material account therefore clearly provides a different understanding than the social understanding that this study has produced.

⁷⁰³ World Bank, 2023. "GDP per capita (current USD)."

⁷⁰⁴ Our World in Data, 2023. "CO2 emissions per capita."

9.4.2. For diplomatic services across the world

This thesis has described the complex organizational nature of Indian diplomacy. This interacts with the myriad practices of the diplomats who navigate it. This indicates that foreign diplomats engaging with Indian officials should remember that Indian bureaucracy consists of multiple hierarchies. Approval in one bureaucratic hierarchy can be a rejection in another hierarchy. When interacting with Indian officials about modern green ambitions in one hierarchy, foreign officials can encounter counterparts with old views and lower ambitions in another setting. While this fluidity of hierarchies creates challenges for foreign counterparts, it opens the opportunity to cooperate with multiple parts of the Indian bureaucracy simultaneously.

The study revealed how green ambitions create complex, extended processes that bureaucracies must manage. A direct implication of this finding is that bureaucracies need to allocate resources to manage the processes before, during, and after high-profile events often treated as prestige projects. As officials regularly face demanding situations throughout these processes, these projects should not simply be understood as status symbols. Instead of treating summits as isolated prestige projects, this study indicates that officials should approach them as ongoing processes requiring sustained attention and strategic management. This finding is relevant for all bureaucracies in the world.

In their navigation of these processes, diplomats should develop analytical capacity to dissect the strategies that their counterparts are adopting. In times of status competition, strategy identification becomes increasingly important and must be incorporated into diplomatic reporting. By incorporating this into diplomatic reporting, in an appropriate way, officials can better navigate the uncertain times of status competition. Material explanations such as transactional diplomacy may be helpful to identify individual deals, but a process-perspective enables diplomats around the world to better grasp how status dilemmas can be dealt with in the social life of diplomacy. This is by no means

effortless, but requires new learning about status competition in contemporary affairs.

Furthermore, policymakers should see this study as offering a different explanation for India's green ambitions from those studies that concentrate only on the political leadership. The attempts by Modi to make India a frontrunner in the race for higher international status, which include his green ambitions and desire for India to become a climate leader, have coincided with other actions by international leaders that are also partly seen as achieving higher status. For instance, to some, President Putin's invasion of Ukraine showed that leaders can, and do, still choose what are sometimes thought of as old-fashioned ways of seeking status through military power. This is despite the risk of becoming a pariah in the international community. While analyses of political leaders can be useful, they do not capture the whole picture.

9.4.3. Climate realism

Will India's green status dilemma become a smoother diplomatic dance when the Trump administration withdraws from global climate cooperation? The American withdrawal from the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement ushers in a new era of climate realism in global climate politics.⁷⁰⁵ Although a leadership vacuum may emerge in the system, a multitude of tensions remain. Maintaining the UNFCCC may be easier because a historical blocker of global solidarity is leaving. Hierarchies characterized by historical friction and cooperation are exposed to a new reality, even as they persist in people's minds. Actors that cooperated with the US in the UNFCCC in the past need new partners, including the EU. Practical questions that could be asked are: will India reach out and offer to negotiate together with the EU in the UNFCCC? Will it try to position itself against other negotiating groups that are attracted to China and Saudi Arabia? Taking a clear stance before India hosts COP33 in 2028

⁷⁰⁵ Colgan, Jeff, and Federica Genovese, 2025. Global Climate Politics after the Return of President Trump. *International Organization*, 79, 88-102.

may be difficult, but Indian diplomacy can contribute to creating the conditions of a new global system of climate cooperation going forward. Regardless of the response by Indian diplomacy to the new, more hierarchical global system, which may invite foreign partners to regroup and adjust to the new structure, epistemic and normativity tensions are likely to remain in this new era of global climate politics. Therefore, Indian officials will continue to navigate these status dilemma dynamics in the future.

9.5. Limitations and future research

Limitations

This thesis has suggested that the processes of status considerations are crucial in the social life of diplomacy. While it has produced substantial new knowledge about how diplomats navigate status dilemma dynamics in their everyday practices, it also has a number of limitations and reveals areas which would benefit from more research.

The first concerns the risks entailed by practices used to manage status dilemmas. In essence, these practices are a matter of social survival for individuals engaged in diplomacy. They face not only tensions but also the risk of stigmatization, which is always looming in diplomatic life.⁷⁰⁶ A limitation of this study is that the empirical analysis barely deals with the process of stigmatization. This occurred because the research design prioritized capturing everyday activities in practice rather than tracing long-term stigmatization processes. Adler-Nissen once wrote that “the small everyday stories of groups and individuals coping with stigma are linked to the bigger issue of marginalization.”⁷⁰⁷ Although the process of stigmatization management and the process of status dilemma management both take place at the micro-level, this

⁷⁰⁶ Adler-Nissen, Rebecca, 2014. “A political sociology of European integration”, in *Opting Out of the European Union: Diplomacy, Sovereignty and European Integration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 47–73.

⁷⁰⁷ Adler-Nissen, 2014, 73.

study treats them as different processes in the social life of diplomacy since they produce different strategies among diplomats.

Another limitation of this study is that all case studies occurred during Modi's second term (2019-2024). The study could have been enriched by also including a case study from Modi's first term (2014-2019). However, it would have been difficult to obtain access for that period, and it would have required an adjusted methodological approach.

Furthermore, the study could benefit from a new round of interviews. With a revised interview protocol, interview questions could be formulated to shed light on three types of tensions instead of on concrete cases. Even though the methodological tactic of asking concrete cases resonates with practice-tracing methodology, the study could have been improved with more interviews. At the same time, the challenge of access and finding respondents remains, forcing the researcher to seek alternative sources should the data collection be extended.

Future research

In the next wave of status scholarship, scholars should embrace a bureaucratic turn by bringing analytical attention to status considerations inside administrations. This turn could be applied to scholarship on bureaucracies in many different capitals across the world. A bureaucratic turn in status scholarship could reveal new insights about debates that the literature has not resolved, such as how status accommodation plays out in diplomacy and how individual officials adjust their actions in different status orders. Such a turn would bring status scholarship closer to bureaucratic politics and interministerial relations. For instance, in the case of India, this could be pursued by comparing how officials from different ministries act in different situations and thereby illuminating the differences between the status groups staffing the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Coal, the Ministry of Power, and the Ministry of En-

vironment. Similarly, this bureaucratic turn can address generational differences among members of different generations. In the case of India, such differences can be identified through qualitative research about how different batches of the foreign service approach status considerations.

Moreover, a bureaucratic turn in status scholarship can inspire new research about diplomatic training since competence is key for managing status considerations. How do officials learn to evaluate positive versus negative rankings in their professional trainings? How do officials learn which index, score, or ranking they should be satisfied with, aim for, or oppose? How do senior officials teach their young professionals about the value of ranking? To what extent do state government officials learn status considerations in their trainings and recruitment tests, in comparison to the federal government officials?

A bureaucratic turn need not imply a mere focus on contemporary affairs. On the contrary, archival research can help us reinterpret the past with new concepts, such as status dilemmas and status considerations. If archives are opened and diplomatic cables are declassified, scholars could produce a dataset with instances of status dilemmas navigated inside government during critical situations in the past. In the case of climate diplomacy, such a dataset could chart when Indian climate diplomats and climate negotiators engaged in negotiations about proposals that were never agreed upon. Such historical research could enable scholars to better understand the extent to which India was a naysayer in the early days of climate negotiations, or whether this reputation was unsupported by real interactions documented in classified diplomatic reporting.

Another strand of future research could develop new insights about status dilemmas in domains other than climate diplomacy, using the analytical framework developed in this study. Such a status dilemma research agenda should position its work within dilemma studies in diplomatic studies, to remind the IR community that international affairs can be understood through

not only security dilemmas but also status dilemmas. The conception of status dilemmas presented in this study can be applied across cases, making it critical in times of great power rivalry and changing power relations across the world. The changing world that scholars live in today needs more scholarship on status dilemmas.

Furthermore, future research can evaluate the strategies uncovered in this study, presented earlier in the conclusion. While these strategies may evoke India's multi-alignment strategy for scholars of contemporary India, they offer new insights into strategic action beyond the international security domain with which multi-alignment is typically associated. They reveal how officials in the Modi administration position themselves socially in world affairs. Thus, these strategies have little to do with Indian officials behaving transactionally, that is, exchanging perceived wins in their negotiations with foreign counterparts. Rather, these strategies reflect the navigation of status dilemmas. Future research can evaluate these strategies and refine our understanding of how officials navigate status dilemmas in practice.

This concluding chapter has summarized the idea of India's green status dilemma. The chapter has structured the findings by conceptualizing the process and strategies through which officials manage status dilemmas in global climate politics. The study carries important implications for Indian and foreign elites seeking closer cooperation, as outlined in this conclusion. As this thesis seeks to contribute to the emerging status literature in IR, it also outlines a future research agenda that brings the status and practice literatures into closer dialogue.

India's green status dilemma will undoubtedly require sustained and nuanced performances by bureaucracies in the coming years, but this is by no means unsolvable. In practice, a green status dilemma can be managed, as this thesis has shown through empirical analysis of contemporary diplomacy. In the future, the management of status dilemmas may become harder, but it is

by no means impossible. Any rigorous interpretation of Indian diplomacy cannot simply count the number of times it has engaged in conflict, or the number of official visits it has enabled, nor can it simply applaud the ambitions of the proposed green rise. Instead, analysis of Indian diplomacy, in international climate politics and other areas, must engage with the social dynamics through which status considerations play out. It needs to study in detail how these considerations about status – consciously and unconsciously – shape diplomacy. India's green status dilemma requires persistent work.

Bibliography

Articles and books

- Adler, Emanuel, 2013. "Constructivism in International Relations," in *SAGE Reference Handbook of International Relations* edited by W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse, B.A. Simmons, 112-144. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Adler, Emanuel, Niklas Bremberg, and Maïté Sondarjee, 2024. Communities of Practice in World Politics: Advancing a Research Agenda. *Global Studies Quarterly*, Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2024, ksad070.
- Adler-Nissen, Rebecca, 2014. "A political sociology of European integration," in *Opting Out of the European Union: Diplomacy, Sovereignty and European Integration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 47–73.
- Atteridge, Aaron, Manish Kumar Shrivastava, Neha Pahuja, and Himani Upadhyay, 2012. Climate Policy in India: What Shapes International, National and State Policy? *Ambio*, 41:68, 68-77.
- Bajpai, Kanti and Byron Chong, 2019. India's Foreign Policy Capacity, *Policy Design and Practice*, 2:2, 137-162
- Baldwin, David A., 2016. *Power and International Relations: A Conceptual Approach*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Banerjee, Kiran and Joseph MacKay, 2020. Communities of practice, impression management, and great power status: Military observers in the Russo-Japanese War. *European Journal of International Security*, 5(3), 274–293.
- Barnett, Michael, 2018. Human rights, humanitarianism, and the practices of humanity. *International Theory*, 10:30, 314-349.
- Barnett, Michael and Raymond Duvall, 2005. Power in International Politics. *International Organization*, Vol. 59 (1), 39-75.
- Basrur, Rajesh and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 2017. *Rising India: Status and Power*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Baylis, John and N.J. Rengger, 1992. "Introduction," in *Dilemmas of World Politics: International issues in a changing world* edited by John Baylis and N.J. Rengger, 1-28.
- Beach, Derek and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, 2012. *Analyzing foreign policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Beach, Derek, 2016. It's All about Mechanisms – What Process-Tracing Case Studies Should Be Tracing. *New Political Economy* 21 (5), 463-72.

- Beach Derek. 2022, November 22. Process Tracing Methods in the Social Sciences. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
- Beaumont, Paul. D., 2024. *The Grammar of Status Competition: International Hierarchies and Domestic Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Beaumont, Paul, Lucas de Oliveira Paes, and Christiana Maglia, 2024. Prestige and punishment: Status symbols and the danger of white elephants. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 60(1), 166-192.
- Bellamy, Alex J., 2013. Mainstreaming the Responsibility to Protect in the United Nations system: Dilemmas, challenges and opportunities. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 5(2), 154-191.
- Berger, Peter L., 1969. *The sacred canopy: elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Berry, Jeffrey M., 2002. Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 35 (4), 679-682.
- Bicchi, Federica, 2022. Communities of practice and what they can do for International Relations. *Review of International Studies*, 48 (1), 24-43.
- Blarel, Nicolas and Avinash Paliwal, 2019. Opening the black box – The making of India's foreign policy. *India Review*, 18:5, 457-470.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 1992. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Brady, Linda P., 1977. Planning for Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis. *International Journal*, 32(4), 829-848.
- Bremberg, Niklas and Anna Michalski, 2024. The European Union Climate Diplomacy: Evolving Practices in a Changing Geopolitical Context. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 19(3), 506-535.
- Bremberg, Niklas, 2016. Making Sense of the EU's Response to the Arab Uprisings: Foreign Policy Practice at Times of Crisis. *European Security* 25 (4), 423-441.
- Bremberg, Niklas, 2023. The OSCE and climate security: diplomatic practice in a changing geopolitical context. *International Affairs*, 99(3), 1149-1165.
- Bueger, Christian, 2014. Pathways to practice: praxiography and international politics. *European political science review*, 6(3), 383-406.
- Bueger, Christian, 2019. "Praxiography," in P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug, & R.A. Williams (Eds.), *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*.
- Chatterjee Miller, Manjari, 2013. India's Feeble Foreign Policy: A Would-Be Great Power Resists Its Own Rise. *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2013, Vol. 92, No. 3, 14-19.
- Chatterjee Miller, Manjari and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 2018. Continuity and change in Indian grand strategy: The cases of nuclear non-proliferation and climate change. *India Review*, 17:1, 33-54.
- Cohen. Raymond, 1998. Putting diplomatic studies on the map. *Diplomatic Studies Program Newsletter*, Center for the Study of Diplomacy.
- Cohen, Stephen P., 2001. *India Emerging Power*. Washington: Brookings Institution.
- Colgan, Jeff, and Federica Genovese, 2025. Global Climate Politics after the Return of President Trump. *International Organization*, 79, 88-102.

- Cover, Robert M., 1982. The Supreme Court, 1982 Term – Forward: Nomos and Narrative. *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 97, 4-68.
- Danielson, August and Elsa Hedling, 2022. Visual diplomacy in virtual summitry: Status signalling during the coronavirus crisis. *Review of International Studies*, 48(2), 243-261.
- Dasgupta, Chandrashekhar, 2011. Climate Change Negotiations: Guarding the “Overriding Priorities.” *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, 6(2), 217–229.
- Datta-Ray, Deep K., 2013. “4. The Analysis of the Practice of Indian Diplomacy,” in *Political Science: Volume 4: India Engages the World*, edited by Navnita Chadha Behera and Achin Vanaik, 234-270.
- Datta-Ray, Deep K., 2015. *The making of Indian diplomacy: a critique of Eurocentrism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- David, Supriti, 2023. India's G20 Presidency: From Vision to Legacy. *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 3-4, July-December 2022, 158-169.
- De Certeau, Michel, 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dubash, Navroz K. and Neha B. Joseph, 2016. Evolution of Institutions for Climate Policy in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(3), 44-54.
- Duque, Marina G., 2018. Recognizing international status: A relational approach. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(3), 577-592.
- Eggeling, Kristin Anabel, 2023. Embracing the ‘inverted commas’, or How COVID-19 can show us new directions for ethnographic ‘fieldwork’. *Qualitative Research*, 23(5), 1342-1358.
- Epstein, Charlotte, 2012. “Norms: Bourdieu's nomos, or the structural power of norms” in *Bourdieu in International Relations*, 165-178. Routledge.
- Falkner, Robert and Barry Buzan (eds), 2022. *Great powers, climate change, and global environmental responsibilities*. Oxford University Press.
- Filep, B., 2009. Interview and translation strategies: coping with multilingual settings and data. *Social Geography*, 4 (1), 59-70.
- Fleischman, Forrest, 2016. Understanding India's forest bureaucracy: a review. *Regional Environmental Change*, 16(Suppl 1), 153-165.
- Fordham, Benjamin O, 2011. Who wants to be a major power? Explaining the expansion of foreign policy ambition. *Journal of Peace Research*, 587-603.
- Freistein, Katja and Thomas Müller, 2025. Capitalizing on virtue: Global climate politics and the life cycle of status symbols. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 60(1), 120-144.
- Fujii, Lee Ann, 2012. Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 45 (4), 717-723.
- Fung, Courtney J., 2019. *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling status*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ganguly, Sumit, 2015. *Oxford India Short Introductions: Indian Foreign Policy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- Ganguly, Sumit and Manjeet S. Pradesi, 2015. "Chapter 4. Foreign Policy Analysis in India" in *Foreign Policy Analysis Beyond North America* edited by Klaus Brummer, and Valerie M. Hudson, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 57-76.
- Geertz, Clifford, 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essay*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giddens, Anthony, 1984. *The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration*. Polity Press.
- Gieg, Philipp, Timo Lowinger, Manuel Pietzko, Anja Zürn, Ummu Salma Bava, and Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, 2021. *EU-India Relations: The Strategic Partnership in the Light of the European Union Global Strategy*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Ghosh, Arunabha, 2023. Can India Become a Green Superpower? The Stakes of the World's Most Important Energy Transition. *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 102, Issue 4 (July/August 2023), 144-155.
- Gilady, Lilach, 2018. *The price of prestige: Conspicuous consumption in international relations*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gilpin, Robert, 1981. *War and Change in World Politics*. Cornell University Press.
- Guha, Ramachandra, 2024. *Speaking with Nature: The Origins of Indian Environmentalism*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Hall, Ian. 2017. Narendra Modi and India's normative power. *International Affairs*, Vol. 93 (1), 113-131.
- Hall, Ian, 2019. *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Hopf, Ted, 2018. Change in international practices. *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 24(3), 687-711.
- Hudson, Valerie, 2013. "Chapter 1: Foreign Policy Analysis Beyond North America," in *Foreign Policy Analysis Beyond North America*, edited by Klaus Brummer and Valerie M. Hudson. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Hudson, Valerie, 2014. *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Huju, Kira, 2022. Saffronizing diplomacy: the Indian Foreign Service under Hindu nationalist rule. *International Affairs*, 98(2), 423-441.
- Huju, Kira, 2023. *Cosmopolitan elites: Indian diplomats and the social hierarchies of global order*. Oxford University Press.
- Hurrell, Andrew and Sandeep Sengupta, 2012. Emerging powers, North-South relations, and global climate politics. *International Affairs*, 88:3, 463-484.
- Irgil, Ezgi, Anne-Kathrin Kreft, Myunghee Lee, Charmaine N. Willis, and Kelebogile Zvobgo, 2021. Field Research: A Graduate Student's Guide. *International Studies Review*, 23(4), 1495-1517.
- Jaishankar, S., 2020. *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*. New Delhi: HarperCollins.
- Jayaram, Dhanasree, 2020. 'Climatizing' military strategy? A case study of the Indian armed forces. *International Politics*, Vol. 58, 619-639.

- Jayaram, Dhanasree, 2021. *Climate Diplomacy and Emerging Economies: India as a Case Study*. Routledge.
- Jha, Vyoma, 2022. India and Climate Change: Old Traditions, New Strategies. *India Quarterly*, 78(2), 280-296.
- Jha, Vyoma, 2023. No climate for cooperation: India-US climate relations during the Trump years. *India Review*, 22(2), 150–160.
- Jha, Vyoma, 2023. *The Making of the International Solar Alliance: India's Moment in the Sun*. Oxford University Press.
- Karnad, Bharat, 2015. *Why India is not a Great Power (yet)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaur, Navtej, 2008. Nehru as a Prophet of World Peace. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 203-222.
- Kennedy, Paul, 1988/2017. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. London: William Collins.
- Kettle, Louise, 2020. The Role of Policy Planning Staff in British Foreign Policy: Historical Lessons and Contemporary Insights. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 31 (3), 487-508.
- Khan, Raphaëlle and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 2025. Signalling through implicature: How India signals in the Indo-Pacific. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 27(1), 43–68.
- Khilnani, N.M., 1975. The Organization of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. *India Quarterly*, Vol. 31 (4), 385-393.
- Larson, Deborah Welch and Alexei Shevchenko, 2010. Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy. *International Security*, 34(4), 63–95.
- Larson, Deborah Welch and Alexei Shevchenko, 2019. *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Leech, Beth L., 2002. Asking Questions: Techniques for Semi structured Interviews. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Dec 2002, 35 (4), 665-668.
- Lequesne, Christian, 2019. Studying Diplomatic Practices Through The Lens Of Direct Observation. [Research Report] *SAGE Publications*. Hal-01985778.
- Levaillant, Mélissa, 2017. “The Contribution of Neo-Institutionalism to the Analysis of India's Diplomacy in the Making” in *Theorizing Indian Foreign Policy*, edited by Mischa Hansel, Raphaëlle Khan, and Mélissa Levaillant. New York: Routledge, 160-180.
- Levy, Jack, 1983. *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Loh, Dylan M.H., 2024. *China's Rising Foreign Ministry: Practices and Representations of Assertive Diplomacy*. Stanford University Press.
- MacDonald, Paul K. and Joseph M. Parent, 2021. The status of status in world politics. *World Politics*, 73(2), 358-391.
- Malone, David, C. Raja Mohan, Srinath Raghavan, 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*. Oxford University Press.
- Marcus, George E., 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 95–117.

- Marland, Alex and Anna Lennox Esselment, 2019. Negotiating with gatekeepers to get interviews with politicians: qualitative research recruitment in a digital media environment. *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 19 (6), 685-702.
- Mathur, Nayanika, 2016. *Paper tiger: Law, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State in Himalayan India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Menon, Shivshankar, 2016. *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy*. Gurgaon: Penguin.
- Mercer, Jonathan, 2017. The Illusion of International Prestige. *International Security*, 41(4), 133–168.
- Michael, Arndt, 2019. “India and Multilateralism: Concepts, New Trajectories and Theorizing,” in *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis* edited by Harsh Pant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 149-172.
- Milani, Carlos R. S., Pinheiro, Letícia and De Lima, Maria Regina Soares, 2017. Brazil's foreign policy and the ‘graduation dilemma’. *International Affairs*, 93(3), 585-605.
- Misra, K. P., 2010. Foreign Policy Planning Efforts in India. *Strategic Analysis*, 34(4), 652-666.
- Mohan, Raja, 2006. India and the Balance of Power. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85 (4), 17-32.
- Moore, Sam, and Alex Roberts, 2022. *The Rise of Ecofascism: Climate Change and the Far Right*. Polity Press.
- Mukherjee, Anit, 2020. *The absent dialogue: Politicians, bureaucrats, and the military in India*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Mukherjee, Bhaswati, 2019. *India and EU: An Insider's View*. Indian Council on World Affairs, New Delhi: Vij Books.
- Mukherjee, Rohan, 2019. “Power and Indian Foreign Policy” in *New Directions of Indian Foreign Policy* edited by Harsh V. Pant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 23-47.
- Mukherjee, Rohan, 2022. *Ascending Order: Rising Powers and the Politics of Status in International Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mukherjee, Rohan, 2024. A Hindu Nationalist Foreign Policy: Under Modi, India is Becoming More Assertive. *Foreign Affairs*, April 4, 2024.
- Murray, Michelle, 2018. *The struggle for recognition in international relations: status, revisionism, and rising powers*. Oxford University Press.
- Nachiappan, Karthik, 2019. *Does India Negotiate?* Oxford University Press: New Delhi.
- Nachiappan, Karthik, 2019. Agenda-setting from behind: India and the framework convention on climate change. *India Review*, 18(5), 552–567.
- Nachiappan, Karthik, 2023. India's Sprawling Climate Diplomacy. *ISAS Brief*, No. 1016 – 8 May 2023.
- Nair, Deepak, 2019. Saving face in diplomacy: A political sociology of face-to-face interactions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 25(3), 672-697.

- Nair, Deepak, 2021. "Hanging out" while studying "up": doing ethnographic fieldwork in international relations. *International Studies Review*, 23(4), 1300-1327.
- Narang, Vipin and Paul Staniland, 2012. Institutions and Worldviews in Indian Foreign Security Policy, *India Review*, 11:2, 76-94.
- Narlikar, Amrita, 2006. Peculiar chauvinism or strategic calculation? Explaining the negotiating strategy of a rising India. *International Affairs*, 82(1), 59-76.
- Narlikar, Amrita, 2011. Is India a Responsible Great Power? *Third World Quarterly*, 32:9, 1607-1621.
- Narlikar, Amrita and Aruna Narlikar, 2014. *Bargaining with a Rising India: Lessons from the Mahabharata*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nayar, Baldev Raj and T.V. Paul, 2003. *India in the World Order: Searching for Major-Power Status*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Naylor, Tristen, 2018. *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilized Nations to the G20* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Naylor, Tristen, 2022. Social closure and the reproduction of stratified international order. *International Relations*, 36(1), 23-39.
- Naylor, Tristen, 2025. The production and performance of status: Behind the scenes of an international summit. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 60(1), 97-119.
- Nayudu, Swapna Kona, 2020. "India looks at the world": Nehru, the Indian Foreign Service and world diplomacy. *Diplomatica* 2: 1, 100-17.
- Neumann, Iver B. 2002. Returning practice to the linguistic turn: The case of diplomacy. *Millennium*, 31(3), 627-651.
- Neumann, Iver B., 2012. *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry*. Cornell University Press.
- Nicolini, Davide, 2009. Articulating practice through the interview to the double. *Management Learning* 40(2): 195-212.
- Nicolini, Davide, 2017. "Practice theory as a package of theory, method and vocabulary: Affordances and limitations," in *Methodological reflections on practice-oriented theories* edited by Michael Jones, Beate Littig, and Angela Wroblewski. Springer, 19-34.
- Norman, Ludvig, 2015. Interpretive process tracing and causal explanations. *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research*, 13(2), 4-9.
- Noy, Chaim, 2008. Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of social research methodology*, 11(4), 327-344.
- Ogden, Chris, 2011. "International 'aspirations' of a rising power" in *Handbook of India's International Relations*, edited by David Scott. London: Routledge.
- Ortner, Sherry. 2010. Access: Reflections on Studying Up in Hollywood. *Ethnography* 11 (2): 211-33.
- Pachirat, Timothy, 2018. *Among Wolves: Ethnography and the Immersive Study of Power*. New York: Routledge.
- Pande, Aparna, 2017. *From Chanakya to Modi: The Evolution of India's Foreign Policy*. Noida: HarperCollins.

- Pant, Harsh (ed.), 2019. *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pant, Harsh and Avinash Paliwal, 2019. "Chapter 6. Foreign Policy Analysis and Indian Foreign Policy" in *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis* edited by Harsh Pant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 106-124.
- Paterson, Matthew, 1996. *Global Warming and Global Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Paul, T.V. (ed.), 2016. *Accommodating rising powers: Past, present, and future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paul, T.V., 2024. *The Unfinished Quest: India's Search for Major Power Status from Nehru to Modi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paul, T. V. and Mahesh Shankar, 2014. "Status accommodation through institutional means: India's rise and the global order" in *Status in world politics*, 176, 165-91.
- Paul, T.V. and Erik Underwood, 2019. Theorizing India-US-China strategic triangle. *India Review*, 18 (4), 348-367.
- Plagemann, Johannes and Miriam Prys-Hansen, 2020. 'Responsibility', change, and rising powers' role conceptions: comparing Indian foreign policy roles in global climate change negotiations and maritime security. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Volume 20, 275–305.
- Pouliot, Vincent, 2014. "Chapter 9: Practice tracing" in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 237-259.
- Pouliot, Vincent, 2016a. Hierarchy in practice: Multilateral diplomacy and the governance of international security. *European Journal of International Security*, 1(1), 5-26.
- Pouliot, Vincent, 2016b. *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Powers, Ryan and Jonathan Renshon, 2023. International status concerns and domestic support for political leaders. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(3), 732-747.
- Pradesi, Manjeet S., 2015. Is India a Great Power? Understanding Great Power Status in Contemporary International Relations. *Asian Security*, 1-30.
- Prys-Hansen, Miriam, 2022. "Futures in the Making: An Analysis of Indian Climate Policy Articulations" in *Global India: The pursuit of status and influence* edited by Chris Ogden, London: Routledge, 173-190.
- Pu, Xiaoyu and Randall L. Schweller, 2014. "Status signaling, multiple audiences, and China's blue-water naval ambition" in *Status in world politics*, 141-62.
- Pu, Xiaoyu, 2022. The Status Dilemma in World Politics: An Anatomy of the China–India Asymmetrical Rivalry. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 15, Issue 3, Autumn 2022, 227–245.
- Putnam, Robert D., 1988. Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games. *International Organization*, 42(3), 427–460.
- Rajamani, Lavanya, 2009. India and Climate Change: What India Wants, Needs, and Needs to Do. *India Review*, 8:3, 340-374.
- Rana, Kishan S., 2000. *Inside Diplomacy*. Manas Publications: New Delhi.

- Renshon, Jonathan, 2017. *Fighting for status: Hierarchy and conflict in world politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Røren, Pål, 2019. Status seeking in the friendly Nordic neighborhood. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 54(4), 562-579.
- Røren, Pål, 2023. The belligerent bear: Russia, status orders, and war. *International Security*, 47(4), 7-49.
- Ross, George, 1994. *Jacques Delors and European Integration*. Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Saran, Samir and Alex Jones, 2017. *India's Climate Change Identity*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Saxena, Chayanika, 2023. Letting failure be: COVID-19, PhD fieldwork and to not (want to) learn from failures. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 44(2), 322-338.
- Schatz, Edward (ed.), 2013. *Political ethnography: What immersion contributes to the study of power*. University of Chicago Press.
- Scott, David (ed.), 2011. *Handbook of India's International Relations*. Routledge.
- Sengupta, Sandeep, 2020. "Deciphering India's Foreign Policy on Climate Change: Role of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas" in *India Rising: A Multilayered Analysis of Ideas, Interests, and Institutions* edited by Johannes Plagemann, Sandra Destradi, and Amrita Narlikar. Oxford University Press, 167-194.
- Sindre, Gyde M., 2021. "Chapter 19: Gatekeepers" in *The Companion to Peace and Conflict Fieldwork* edited by R. Mac Ginty et al. (eds.), 237-248.
- Snidal, Duncan, 1985. Coordination versus prisoners' dilemma: Implications for international cooperation and regimes. *American Political Science Review*, 79(4), 923-942.
- Snyder, Jack, 1991. *Myths of empire: Domestic politics and international ambition*. Cornell University Press.
- Sridharan, Eswaran, 2015. "Rising or Constrained Power?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy* edited by David M. Malone, R. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sullivan de Estrada, Kate, 2023. US retreat, Indian reform: multilateralism under Trump and Modi. *India Review*, 22:2, 139-149.
- Sullivan de Estrada, Kate, 2023. What is a vishwaguru? Indian civilizational pedagogy as a transformative global imperative. *International Affairs*, Vol. 99 (2), 433-455.
- Talukdar, Ruchira, 2018. Reigniting a debate on coal: Case study on the Indian Government's crackdown on Greenpeace. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 10(1), 47-62.
- Tang, Shiping, 2009. The security dilemma: A conceptual analysis. *Security studies*, 18(3), 587-623.
- Tavory, Iddo and Stefan Timmermans, 2014. *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative research*. University of Chicago Press.
- Thakur, Vineet, 2018. "'Panditji Knows Best': Bureaucratic Culture and the Making of the Ministry of External Affairs" in *Postscripts on Independence: Foreign*

- Policy Ideas, Identity, and Institutions in India and South Africa*, edited by Vineet Thakur et al., 145-201.
- Timmermans, Stefan and Iddo Tavory, 2012. Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological theory*, 30(3), 167-186.
- Tomz, Michael, 2007. Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach. *International Organization*, 61 (4), 821-840.
- Van Hulst, Merlijn and E. Lianne Visser, 2024. Abductive analysis in qualitative research. *Public Administrative Review*, Vol.85, Issue 2, 567-580.
- Wagner, Christian, 2005. "From Hard Power to Soft Power? Ideas, Interaction, Institutions, and Images in India's South Asia Policy", Working Paper 26, Heidelberg, Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics.
- Wang, William Ziyuan, 2019. Destined for Misperception? Status Dilemma and the Early Origin of US-China Antagonism. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 24, 49-65.
- Ward, Steven, 2017. *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ward, Steven, 2020. Status, stratified rights, and accommodation in international relations. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 5(1), 160-178.
- Ward, Steven, 2022. Decline and disintegration: National status loss and domestic conflict in post-disaster Spain. *International Security*, 46(4), 91-129.
- Watson, Adam, 1992. "Chapter 6: Diplomacy" in *Dilemmas of World Politics: International issues in a changing world* edited by John Baylis and N.J. Rengger. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 159-173.
- Weber Max, 1978. *Economy and Society*.
- Wedeen, Lisa, 2010. Reflections on ethnographic work in political science. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13(1), 255-272.
- Winand, Pascaline, 2021. "A Partnership Between Two Large Elephants? Opportunities and Challenges in India-EU Relations" in *EU-India Relations*, 113-139.
- Wohlforth, William C., 2009. Unipolarity, status competition, and great power war. *World politics*, 61(1), 28-57.
- Wohlforth, William C., 2014. "Status dilemmas and inter-state conflict" in *Status in World Politics* edited by TV Paul, Deborah Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 115-140.
- Xiaoyu Pu, 2022. The Status Dilemma in World Politics: An Anatomy of the China-India Asymmetrical Rivalry. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 15, Issue 3, Autumn 2022, 227-245.

Online sources

- 9th G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20) and Parliamentary Forum, 12-14 October 2023, New Delhi, India. Programme. Available: <https://www.ipu.org/file/17511/download>
- Anand, Jatin, 2023. "G20 India Summit: Over Rs 4,100 crore spent on Delhi for G20: where and by whom," *Indian Express*. 7 September 2023. Available:

- <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/security-to-roads-lighting-to-signage-citys-expense-bills-for-g20-8928183/>
- Amrita Narlikar and Gokul Sahni, 2025. “Renewing the EU-India Strategic Compact: Doing Better, Doing More, and Key How Not To’s,” ORF Issue Brief No. 770, January 2025, *Observer Research Foundation*. Available: [20250107102714.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/pdf/publication/20250107102714.pdf)
- Aspengren, Henrik Chetan, Emil Lidén, and Axel Nordenstam, 2021. Circles of EU-India Engagement: How member states cooperate with India on global issues. *Swedish Institute of International Affairs*. UI Papers no. 1, February 2021, 1–29. Available: <https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/ui-publications/2021/ui-paper-no.-1-2021.pdf>
- Aspengren, Henrik Chetan, and Mihir Swarup Sharma, 2024. “India and the World: Taking stock of economic cooperation between the EU and India,” Newsletter, *Swedish Institute of International Affairs*. 6 February 2024. Available: https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/research/asia/pnir-india-and-the-world_issue-15.pdf
- Bansard, Jennifer, Cristina Mundin, Timothy Neff, Hillary Rosentreter, and Lynn Wagner, 2023. “Summary of the Bonn Climate Change Conference: 5–15 June 2023,” *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, 19 June 2023. Available: <https://enb.iisd.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/enb12829e.pdf>
- Carnegie India [@CarnegieIndia], 2025. “The Partnership Moment: Building a Shared Agenda in a Shifting World Order” [Policy workshop co-hosted with European Council on Foreign Relations, Berlin]. *X (formerly Twitter)*, 5 December 2025. Available: <https://x.com/CarnegieIndia/status/1996940752329253083>
- Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy, 2025. “Brussels Indo-Pacific Dialogue 2025.” Conference, Stanhope Hotel, Brussels, Belgium, 2 December 2025. Available: <https://csds.vub.be/event/brussels-indo-pacific-forum-2025/>
- Chatterji, Saubhadra, 2022. “From global high table to voice of Global South: India’s wide G20 plan,” *Hindustan Times*, 23 November 2022. Available: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/from-global-high-table-to-voice-of-global-south-india-s-wide-g20-plan-101669228198456.html>
- Council of the European Union, 2020. “EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025,” 15 July 2020. Available: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45026/eu-india-roadmap-2025.pdf>
- CSEP, 2023. “Research Launch I Tracks to Transition: India’s Global Climate Strategy.” Transcript from event. Available: <https://csep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Tracks-to-transition-Indias-global-climate-strategy-doc-2.pdf>
- DD India, 2023. “Exclusive conversation with Rajiv Kumar Bhatia, Former Ambassador,” *YouTube*, 00:34–01:30. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGC4L-WxQWQ>
- DD India, 2023. “Indian Diplomacy: A Career in the Foreign Service,” *YouTube*, 23:43. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMwR2jV3bGw>
- DD India, 2024. “India-EU Energy Panel holds tenth meeting in Brussels,” *YouTube*, 1:14. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4Zd0hudEjY>

- Dutta Mishra, Ravi, 2025. "Deadline rush: As India pushes for EU deal, legal team told to avoid leaves; key EU team in Delhi expected this week," *Indian Express*. 2 December 2025. Available: <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/deadline-rush-as-india-pushes-for-eu-deal-legal-team-told-to-avoid-leaves-key-eu-team-in-delhi-expected-this-week-10396867/>
- ECFR, 2025. "India after Trump: America's Turn, China's Challenge, and Europe's Opportunity," *YouTube*. 29 September 2025. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoS04ZERptI>
- Ellis, Alex, 2023. "How India and UK can do more at COP28," *Indian Express*, 6 December 2023. Available: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/cop28-india-uk-relations-india-energy-transition-narendra-modi-9055974/>
- Embassy of India, Sweden, 2023. "Sustainability Dialogues: Decarbonizing Development Automotive: Remarks by Ambassador," speech, 18 April 2023. Available: https://www.indembassysweden.gov.in/content/1683212604_5755_Remarks%20Ambassador%20Sustainability%20Dialogues%20SIBC.pdf
- Embassy of India, USA, 2009. "Address by Mr. Shyam Saran Special Envoy of the Prime Minister for Climate Change at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC on India's Climate Change Initiatives: Strategies for a Greener Future," 24 March 2009. Available: <https://www.indianembassyusa.gov.in/ArchivesDetails?id=1105>
- ET Online, 2023. "India approves major foreign service restructuring after 19 years, to add 200+ IFS officers," *Economic Times*, online. Available: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-approves-major-foreign-service-restructuring-after-19-years-to-add-200-ifs-officers/articleshow/104366058.cms>
- European Commission, 2023. "Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge." Available: https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-12/Global_Renewables_and_Energy_Efficiency_Pledge.pdf
- European Commission, 2024. "Report of the Seventh Round of Negotiations On a Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and India," 19–23 February 2024, New Delhi. Available: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/09242a36-a438-40fd-a7af-fe32e36cbd0e/library/6b9ce338-79f4-4d7a-9a43-7dc0153ad8c7/details>
- European Commission, 2025. Call for Evidence for an Initiative (without an impact assessment). Ref. Ares(2025)2929814 - 10/04/2025.
- European Commission, 2025. "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions," COM (2025) 45 final, 11 February 2025. Available: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/f80922dd-932d-4c4a-a18c-d800837fbb23_en
- European Commission, 2025. "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on a New Strategic EU-India Agenda," JOIN (2025) 50 final, 17 September 2025. Available: https://www.eas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025/documents/JOIN_2025_50_1_EN_ACT_part1_v9.pdf

- European Commission, 2025. Press Center: Daily News 28/02/2025. Available: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/mex_25_646
- European Commission, 2025. "Report of the Tenth Round of Negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and India," 10–14 March 2025, Brussels. Available: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/09242a36-a438-40fd-a7af-fe32e36cbd0e/library/836e1345-eda1-431b-82ff-f55d8b47ad14/details>
- European Council on Foreign Relations, 2024. "The World After the West: Pramit Pal Chaudhuri," recorded 25 June 2024, listened to 6 September 2024. Available: <https://ecfr.eu/podcasts/episode/the-world-after-the-west-pramit-pal-chaudhuri-on-india/>
- European Economic and Social Committee, 2025. Record of the proceedings: EU-India Strategic Partnership, 595th plenary session. REX/588. Meeting of 26 March 2025, Agenda item 10. Available: https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-03/cr_rex588_eesc-2024-04035-00-00-cr-ref-en.docx
- European External Action Service, 2024. "EU-India: Joint Press Release on Strategic Partnership Review Meeting and 10th Foreign Policy and Security Consultations in Brussels," 22 November 2024. Available: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-india-joint-press-release-5th-strategic-partnership-review-meeting-and-10th-foreign-policy-and_en
- European External Action Service, 2025. Fact sheet, "EU-India Towards a new strategic agenda," June 2025. Available: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2025/EU-INDIA_Factsheet_2025_250610.pdf
- European External Action Service, 2025. "EU-India: Joint Press Release on the 11th Foreign Policy and Security Consultations and the 6th Strategic Partnership Review Meeting in Brussels," 25 November 2025. Available: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-india-joint-press-release-11th-foreign-policy-and-security-consultations-and-6th-strategic_en
- European Parliament, 2024. "European Parliament recommendation of 17 January 2024 to the Council, Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning EU-India relations (2023/2128(INI))." P9_TA (2024)0033.
- European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2025. "2025 EU-India Strategic Dialogue," event report. 14 October 2025. Available: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/activities/events/2025-eu-india-strategic-dialogue>
- Fondation pour la recherche strategique, 2025. "Conference highlights. Evolving Landscape: (Re)Thinking Europe's Security Role in the Indo-Pacific," *YouTube*, event highlights. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkyDzG6ciPs>
- Foy, Henry, 2025. "Why the EU is reaching out to India in search of new friends," *Financial Times*. 27 February 2025. Available: <https://www.ft.com/content/97eefe5b-24f8-4a30-9b2e-e89ef6e606e3>
- G20, 2022a. "India's priority areas in the G20 Presidency," Curtain Raiser Address ORF, *Observer Research Foundation*, 3 August 2022. Available: <https://www.g20.org/en/media-resources/speeches/august-22/address-orf/>

- G20, 2022b. “G20@2023-The Roadmap to Indian Presidency,” *Indian Council of World Affairs*, 8 August 2022, Sapru House. Available: <https://www.g20.org/en/media-resources/speeches/august-22/map-to-indian/>
- G20, 2023a. “2nd Energy Transitions Working Group (ETWG) meeting concludes successfully in Gandhinagar, Gujarat with focus on collaboration, global cooperation and commitment for clean energy transition,” press release. Available: <https://www.g20.org/en/media-resources/press-releases/april-23/etwg-concludes/>
- G20, 2023b. “3rd Energy Transitions Working Group (ETWG) meeting under India's G20 Presidency to commence in Mumbai from May 15–17, 2023,” press release. Available: <https://www.g20.org/en/media-resources/press-releases/may-2023/etwg/>
- G20, 2023c. “Third G20 Development Working Group Meeting under Indian Presidency in the vibrant state of Goa, India,” press release. Available: <https://www.g20.in/en/media-resources/press-releases/may-2023/dwg-3.html>
- G20, 2023d. “G20 Varanasi Developmental Ministerial. Outcome Document & Chair's Summary,” official document. Available: https://g7g20-documents.org/fileadmin/G7G20_documents/2023/G20/India/Sherpa-Track/Development%20Ministers/1%20Ministers%20Language/G20%20Varanasi%20Development%20Ministerial.%20Outcome%20Document%20&%20Chair's%20Summary_12062023.pdf
- G20, 2023e. “The Second Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRRWG) meeting of the G-20 concludes in Mumbai today,” press release. Available: <https://www.g20.in/en/media-resources/press-releases/may-2023/drrwg.html>
- G20, 2023f. “Third and Final G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRRWG) meeting concludes in Chennai,” press release. Available: <https://www.g20.in/de/media-resources/press-releases/july-2023/drrwg.html>
- G20, 2023g. “Environment and Climate Ministers’ Meet concludes in Chennai; G20 ministers stand united in their commitment to create a sustainable and resilient future,” press release. Available: <https://www.g20.org/en/media-resources/press-releases/july-2023/climate-meet/>
- G20 Secretariat, 2023. “Who's who,” website. Available: <https://www.g20.org/en/g20-secretariat/>
- G77, 2023. “Ministerial Declaration,” website. Available: <https://www.g77.org/doc/Declaration2023.htm>
- Garcia-Bercero, Ignacio and André Sapir, 2025. “The time is right to make a European Union-India trade deal happen,” Policy Brief 19/2025, *Bruegel*.
- Government of India, 2022. “Advertisement for Consultants in Logistics Vertical of the G20 Secretariat of the Ministry of External Affairs,” No. Q/PF/575/44/2022. 31 October 2022. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/Adv2.pdf>
- Government of India, 2025. Website. Available: <https://upsc.gov.in/examinations/previous-question-papers/archives>
- Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2023. “List of Participants,” Dubrovnik Forum. 7–8 July 2023. Available: https://mvep.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2025/dato-teke/DUFO2023_LIST%20OF%20PARTICIPANTS.pdf

- Gupta, Surojit and Sidhartha, 2017. "India not to host G20 meet due to absence of mega centre, 2019 polls," *Times of India*. 17 July 2017. Available: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/india-not-to-host-g20-meet-due-to-absence-of-mega-centre-2019-polls/articleshow/59625041.cms>
- Haidar, Suhasini, 2022. "Government takes G20 diplomats to Andaman for preview briefing," *The Hindu*, 27 November 2022. Available: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/government-takes-g20-diplomats-to-andamans-resort-for-preview-briefing/article66188132.ece>
- Haidar, Suhasini, 2023. "Centre defends use of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in G-20 logo as China raises objections," *The Hindu*. 12 August 2023. Available: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/centre-defends-use-of-vasudhaiva-kutumbakam-in-g-20-as-china-raises-objections/article67184856.ece>
- Heinrich Böll Stiftung Delhi, 2025. "Green Horizons: Leveraging the EU-India Partnership for Climate Action," *YouTube*, webinar. 24 September 2025. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ufb3cjDzqtE>
- Human Rights Watch, 2016. Country chapter: India. Available: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/india>
- India's World, 2025. "Cultivating Europe: Navigating India-EU Strategic Ties. Launch of India's World Magazine Issue 5," event report. 29 September 2025. Available: <https://indiasworld.in/event/cultivating-europe-navigating-india-eu-strategic-ties-launch-of-indias-world-magazine-issue-5/>
- Indian Council of World Affairs, 2025. "Previous events," website. 17 October 2025. Available: https://www.icwa.in/show_events.php?page=3&lang=1&level=1&ls_id=78&lid=31&arch=1&year=
- Kant, Amitabh, and Prabhat Upadhyaya, 2023. "Green Development Pact: India's G20 Presidency Shows The Way," *Mint*. 2 October 2023. Available: <https://epaper.livemint.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=210dbdd5505&imageview=0>
- Kathuria, Rajat, Neha Gupta, and Navya Kumar, 2025. "India's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) Challenge: Strategic Response and Policy Options," Working Paper 90, February 2025. *Center for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)*. Available: <https://csep.org/working-paper/indias-carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism-cbam-challenge-strategic-response-and-policy-options/>
- Keohane, Robert O. and Joseph S. Nye Jr., 1973. Power and interdependence, *Survival*, 15:4, 158-165.
- Khandekar, Gauri, 2011. The EU and India: A loveless arranged marriage. FRIDE Policy Brief No. 90. *Foundation for International Relations and Foreign Dialogue*. Available: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/132670/PB_90_EU_and_India.pdf
- Khilnani, Sunil, 2005. "India as a Bridging Power." In *India as a New Global Leader*, edited by Prasenjit K. Basu, Brahma Chellaney, Parag Khanna, and Sunil Khilnani. Foreign Policy Centre, 1–15.
- Koshy, Jacob, 2025. "Climate envoys from EU discuss climate action with Indian officials," *The Hindu*. 5 April 2025. Available: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci->

- tech/energy-and-environment/climate-envoys-from-eu-discuss-climate-action-with-indian-officials/article69416373.ece
- Krishnan, Murali, 2023. "Why is India boosting its diplomatic workforce?," *DW News*. 24 October 2023. Available: <https://www.dw.com/en/why-is-india-boosting-its-diplomatic-workforce/a-67198699>
- Kumar, Mohan, 2025. "The world has abandoned the fight against climate change." Blogpost. 11 July 2025. Available: <https://ambmokumar.com/2025/07/11/the-world-has-abandoned-the-fight-against-climate-change/>
- Malhotra, Shairee, 2025. "A New EU-India Strategic Agenda in 2025," ORF Issue Brief No. 781, February 2025, *Observer Research Foundation*. Available: <https://www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20250220000858.pdf>
- Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2025. "MP-IDSA hosted a Round-table chaired by Director General Sunjan Chinoy on 10 October 2025 to discuss the recently unveiled 'Strategic EU-India Agenda and explore ways to strengthen India-EU strategic partnership.'" *LinkedIn*, 10 October 2025. Available: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/manohar-parrikar-institute-for-defence-studies-and-analyses_india-eu-euindiaeksaath-activity-7382398109689184257-qRx_
- Mehra, Puja, 2015. "India to hold G20 Chair in 2018, Delhi may play host," *The Hindu*. 1 October 2015. Available: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-to-hold-g20-chair-in-2018-delhi-may-play-host/article7708086.ece>
- Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China, 2022. Joint Statement issued at the BRICS High-level Meeting on Climate Change. 13 May 2022. Available: https://brics2022.mfa.gov.cn/eng/hywj/ODMM/202205/t20220529_10694182.html
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2022. "Union Minister for Environment Forest and Climate Change participated in Ministerial Meeting of Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDC)," press release. 21 October 2022. Available: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1870125>
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2023. "Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire Agency for Executing Work of Conceptualizing Design, Supervising Construction and Managing India Pavilion & Delegation Office at COP28," August 2023. Available: <https://moef.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RFPIndia.pdf>
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2023. Year-end Review. 22 December 2023. Available: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1989495>
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2024. "Who's Who," website. Available: moef.gov.in/moef/about-the-ministry/whos-who/index.html (Accessed 15 April 2024)
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2002. "Speech of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the High-Level Segment of the Eighth Session of the Conference of the Parties

- to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change,” 30 October 2002. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/8813/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2020. “Remarks by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar at the Bloomberg India Economic Forum 2020,” 15 October 2020. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33124>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2022. “Question No.4068 Presidency Role of India in G-20,” Rajya Sabha, Unstarred Question No.4068. 7 April 2022. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/35171/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2022. “Special Briefing for envoys of G20 and invitee countries and International Organisations on India's upcoming G20 Presidency,” 26 November 2022. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35925/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration: New Delhi, India, 9–10 September 2023.” Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/G20-New-Delhi-Leaders-Declaration.pdf>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “High-level event on Green Credits Programme at #COP28 World Climate Actions Summit,” *YouTube*, 23:55–24:12. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tDKnjLMsRI>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “India-USA Joint Statement during the Official State visit of Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi to USA,” 23 June 2023. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36711/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “Opening remarks by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting,” 1 June 2023. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36634>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “Organogram of the Ministry of External Affairs,” 11 May 2023. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/amb1/MeA_organograms_NW_23_22NN.pdf
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “Priorities for the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.” Press release. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/India-Priorities-UNGA.htm>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “Remarks by Ministry of State for External Affairs, Smt. Meenakshi Lekhi at the Dubrovnik Forum 2023,” 10 July 2023. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36772/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “South Block,” website. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/south-block.htm>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “Summary of Deliberations: Voice of Global South Summit 2023 (January 12–13, 2023),” 13 January 2023. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36119/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “Transcript of Special Briefing by Foreign Secretary on Prime Minister's visit to UAE (November 30, 2023).” 30 November 2023. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/37310/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2023. “Varanasi Development Ministerial: G20 High Level Principles on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development,” 12 June 2023. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/G20_High_level.pdf

- Ministry of External Affairs, 2024. “10th Meeting of the India-EU Energy Panel and 3rd Phase of the Clean Energy and Climate Partnership,” 22 November 2024. Press release. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38585/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2024. “Indian Treaties Database, Environment and Resources,” website page. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/treaty.htm> (Accessed 22 January 2024)
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2025. “Divisions,” website page. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/divisions.htm> (Accessed 13 August 2025)
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2025. “President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen conveys warm birthday greetings to Prime Minister Modi (September 17, 2025),” press release, 17 September 2025. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/40144/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2025. “Secretary (West) Shri Sibi George co-chaired the 6th India-European Union (EU) Strategic Partnership Review Meeting,” 19 November 2025. News item. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/newsdetail1.htm?14000/>
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2025. “Transcript of EAM's interaction at German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP),” 24 May 2025. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/interviews.htm?dtl/39530>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019. Osaka G20 Summit Declaration. Available: <https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Declaration-1.pdf>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023. “Joint Statement of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, Cape Town, South Africa, 1 June 2023,” 2 June 2023. Available: https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1873948/
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2023. “India's G20 Presidency: 2nd Development Working Group Meeting,” press release. Available: <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2023/may/doc202359195701.pdf>
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2023. “India's G20 Presidency: Environment and Climate Sustainability Ministers' Meeting,” press release. Available: <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2023/aug/doc2023822242301.pdf>
- Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), 2025. “Today, EU Climate Envoys met the Secretary of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).” *LinkedIn*, 4 April 2025. Available: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7313961430104346626/>
- Ministry of Power, 2023a. “Final Energy Transitions Working Group Meeting under India's G20 Presidency Concludes,” press release. Available: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1941232>
- Ministry of Power, 2023b. “G20 Energy Ministers Adopt Ambitious and Forward-looking Outcome Document and Chair's Summary,” press release. Available: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1941796>

- Mishra, Ravi Dutta, 2023. "India may compensate exporters against UK, EU carbon tax," *Indian Express*, 22 December 2023. Available: <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/india-compensate-exporters-uk-eu-carbon-tax-9077978/>
- Mishra, Ravi Dutta, 2025. "At top secretaries' meeting ahead of delegation visit, focus on cohesive, collaborative approach," *The Indian Express*. 27 February 2025. Available: <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/at-top-secretaries-meeting-ahead-of-eu-delegation-visit-focus-on-cohesive-collaborative-approach-9858272/>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "In the midst of COP-28 proceedings, caught up with President Ranil Wickremesinghe of Sri Lanka." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730520157984841768>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Productive interaction with His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730519679465103404>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Delighted to meet His Majesty @KingAbdullahII of Jordan at COP-28." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730508555621371910>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Meaningful conversations with @president_uz Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the President of Tajikistan." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730508816666571212>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Happy to meet my friends, UK Foreign Secretary @David_Cameron and former UK PM." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730539591411568743>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Interacting with PM @AbiyAhmedAli on the sidelines of #COP28. India values the longstanding friendship with Ethiopia." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730532289925239049>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Met PM @GiorgiaMeloni of Italy on the sidelines of the #COP28 Summit." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730576489350041775>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "The meetings and interactions in Dubai continue. Met my friend, President Lula and discussed a wide range of issues." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730575455571661292>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "An excellent interaction with UK PM @RishiSunak during the #COP28 Dubai Summit." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730551906089500910>

- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Met Prime Minister of Vietnam, Mr. Pham Minh Chinh and had a great conversation on various issues." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730637618671743193>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "President @MMuizzu and I had a productive meeting today. We discussed ways to enhance the India-Maldives friendship." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730619812186144865>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Happy to have met my good friend, President @EmmanuelMacron in Dubai." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730617476692738057>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "I am always very happy to meet my brother HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Today's meeting during #COP28 has been very productive." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730615821020668307>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Excellent meeting with @SwedishPM Ulf Kristersson. We talked about deepening cooperation in futuristic sectors." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730608977199931450>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Had a very productive meeting with President @Isaac_Herzog of Israel earlier today." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730607999251849330>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "President @alain_berset and I had a wonderful meeting in Dubai. We discussed the full range of India-Switzerland relations." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730602082561118479>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Happy to have met President @RTERdogan on the sidelines of the #COP28 Summit in Dubai." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730594929704108231>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Happy to have met Barbados PM @mi-aamormottley during the #COP28 Summit." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730594448164180247>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Delighted to meet Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of Guyana." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730583137371988153>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Earlier today in Dubai, I had the opportunity to interact with King Charles, who has always been passionate towards environmental conservation." Post. X (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730637249275195399>
- Modi, Narendra (@narendramodi), 2023. "Thank you, Dubai! It's been a productive #COP28 Summit. Let's all keep working together for a better planet." Post. X

- (formerly Twitter), 1 December 2023. Available: <https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1730638708645523919>
- Mohan, C. Raja, 2025. “In Trump's world, India and Europe need each other,” *The Indian Express*, 27 February 2025. Available: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raja-mohan-writes-in-trumps-world-india-and-europe-need-each-other-9856313/>
- Mohan, Garima, 2019. Prospects for the New EU Strategy on India: Game changer or business as usual? Ifri Asia. Visions 108. *French Institute of International Relations*. Available: https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/mohan_prospect_new_ue_2019.pdf
- Mohan, Vishwa, 2023. “COP28: 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' to be the theme of India pavilion at UN climate meet in Dubai,” *Times of India*. 21 August 2023. Available: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/cop28-vasudhaiva-kutumbakam-to-be-the-theme-of-india-pavilion-at-un-climate-meet-in-dubai/articleshow/102892712.cms>
- Nandi, Jayashree, 2023. “COP28: No progress yet on Global Stocktake, climate finance,” *Hindustan Times*. 8 December 2023. Available: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/cop28-no-progress-yet-on-global-stocktake-climate-finance-101701973921158.html>
- Nandi, Jayashree, 2023. “Poor outcome following resistance by G20 members over renewable energy targets,” *Hindustan Times*. 22 July 2023. Available: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/g20-energy-transition-talks-nearly-break-down-over-renewable-energy-and-fossil-fuel-phasing-go-a-meeting-observers-say-101690027375060.html>
- Narlikar, Aruna, Amitabh Mattoo, and Amrita Narlikar, 2023. “Chapter 10. On Compassion and Ecologism: The Story of the Noble Parrot and the Tree.” In *Strategic Choices, Ethical Dilemmas: Stories from the Mahabharat*. Gurugram: Penguin Random House India, 119–132.
- New Delhi Statement on Environment: 7th Meeting of BRICS Environment Ministers. New Delhi, India, 27 August 2021. Available: [doc202182731.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/2021/08/27/2021082731.pdf)
- Niti Aayog and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2022. “LiFE: Lifestyle for Environment,” Brochure. Available: https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-11/Mission_LiFE_Brochure.pdf
- Nordenstam, Axel, 2023. “India-EU Climate Relations: Mapping Diplomatic Engagement.” In *Tracks to Transition: India's Global Climate Strategy*, edited by Constantino Xavier and Karthik Nachiappan. *Center for Social and Economic Progress*, 75–85. Available: <https://csep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/8-1.pdf>
- Observer Research Foundation, 2023. “Link G20, COP28 – Two Forums That Will Shape Global Governance Agenda I Samir Saran – Ebtesam al-Ketbi,” *YouTube*. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=210Q-0QBKR0>
- Observer Research Foundation, 2023. “India: Bridging the Developed and Developing World I Harsh Vardhan Shringla I KGD 2023,” *Observer Research Foundation. YouTube*, 15 June 2023. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3A2JPnCB6k>

- Observer Research Foundation, 2024. “Raisina Dialogue 2024 Live I Ministerial Remarks I Meenakshi Lekhi,” *YouTube*. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvvXLM0mhFI>
- Our World in Data, 2023. “CO2 emissions per capita.” Accessed 27 October 2024. Available: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/co-emissions-per-capita?tab=chart&country=CHN~IND~USA>
- Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations New York, 2025. “India and United Nations.” Available: https://pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/menu/sub-menu__1173178539.pdf
- Press Information Bureau, 2015. Government of India, Prime Minister's Office. PM to Heads of Indian Missions, 7 February 2015. Available: <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115241>
- Press Information Bureau, 2022. “Congratulatory Messages on the Launch of Mission LiFE from Heads of States/Governments,” NITI Aayog. 20 October 2022. Available: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1869544>
- Press Information Bureau, 2022. “PM launches Mission LiFE at Statue of Unity in Ekta Nagar, Kevadia, Gujarat,” Prime Minister's Office. 20 October 2022. Available: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1869466>
- Prime Minister of India, 2022. “Unveiling of The Logo, Theme and Website of India's G20 Presidency,” 8 November 2022. Available: https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/unveiling-of-the-logo-theme-and-website-of-indias-g20-presidency/
- Prime Minister of India, 2023. Text of PM's address at the G20 Environment and Climate Sustainability Ministerial Meeting. 28 July 2023. Available: https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-address-at-the-g20-environment-and-climate-sustainability-ministerial-meeting/
- Prime Minister's Office, 2023. Text of PM's video message during G20 Energy Ministers' Meet. 22 July 2023. Available: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1941629>
- Raha, Shuva, Prayank Jain, Kinshu Dang, and Axel Nordenstam, 2023. Jobs, Growth, and Sustainability: The Case for a G20 Task Force on Integrated Climate Actions. T20 Policy Brief, *Observer Research Foundation*.
- Reed, John, Chris Kay, Stephanie Findlay, and Andy Bounds, 2024. “India denounces 'stifling' EU carbon tax on imports,” *Financial Times*. 9 October 2024. Available: <https://www.ft.com/content/40648adc-b621-41a3-958a-dd038c811986>
- Reuters, 2025. “EU rejects Russia's request for talks on carbon border tariff, WTO document shows.” 26 May 2025. Available: <https://www.reuters.com/en/eu-rejects-russias-request-talks-carbon-border-tariff-wto-document-shows-2025-05-26/>
- Sabharwal, Vasudha, 2023. “As India Spends 4100 Cr On G20 Summit, Here's How Much Money Previous Host Countries Had Spent,” *Scoopwhoop*. 9 September

2023. Available: <https://www.scoopwhoop.com/finance/g20-summit-cost-to-different-host-countries/>
- Sanchez Manzanaro, Sofia, 2025. "India trade talks 'extremely difficult,' EU negotiator warns," *Euractiv*, 19 March 2025. Available: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/india-trade-talks-extremely-difficult-eu-negotiator-warns/>
- Sethi, Nitin, 2009. "Jairam for major shift at climate talks," *Times of India*. 19 October 2009. Available: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/jairam-for-major-shift-at-climate-talks/articleshow/5136979.cms>
- Shaw, Debnath, 2018. "Making of India Foreign Policy," Distinguished Lectures Details, Foreign Service Institute of the Ministry of External Affairs. 13 September 2018. Available: <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?764>
- Shringla, Harsh V., 2021. "Opinion: Moving beyond Paris, India steps up its climate ambitions," op-ed, *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, 21 January 2021. Available: <https://news.trust.org/item/20210121095650-7f4b9>
- Stockholm Environment Institute, 2023. "COP28 Side Event. LeadIT 2.0 - Partnerships for a Just and Equitable Industry Transition," *YouTube*. 12 December 2023. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiZ3CukVk3E>
- Sudhir, Sunjay, 2023. "Experience," *LinkedIn*, 29 November 2023. Available: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sunjay-sudhir-3a74b3104/details/experience/>
- The Delegation of the European Union to India and Bhutan, 2025. "Speech by EU Ambassador Hervé Delphin at the India Net Zero Forum," 18 June 2025. Available: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/speech-eu-ambassador-herve-delphin-india-net-zero-forum_en
- The Economist, 2022. "Skunk no more," Briefing: Clean Technology in India. 22 October 2022.
- The Hindu, 2026. "What is Seva Teerth? Everything You Need to Know About the New PMO Building," *The Hindu*. 14 February 2026. Available: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/what-is-seva-teerth-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-new-pmo-building/article70631753.ece>
- The Wire Staff, 2023. "I respect the Science in Everything I Do', Clarifies COP28 Prez; India Skips Two Declarations," *The Wire*. 4 December 2023. Available: <https://thewire.in/environment/cop-28-president-respect-science-india-declarations>
- TNN, 2023. "At G77, India reinforces its G20 Global South focus," *Times of India*. 18 September 2023. Available: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/at-g77-india-reinforces-its-g20-global-south-focus/articleshowprint/103739716.cms>
- Twitter/X, 2022. Randhir Jaiswal @MEAIndia, tweet, 22 November 2022. Available: <https://x.com/MEAIndia/status/1595018670866046979/photo/3>
- Twitter/X, 2023. Bhupender Yadav @byadavbjp, tweet, 30 November 2023. Available: <https://twitter.com/byadavbjp/status/1730158429552120238>
- Twitter/X, 2023. COP28 UAE @COP28_UAE, tweet, 30 November 2023. Available: https://twitter.com/COP28_UAE/status/1730144309930758349

- Twitter/X, 2023. International Solar Alliance @isolaralliance, tweet. Available: <https://twitter.com/isolaralliance/status/1734139720903393684/photo/1>
- Twitter/X, 2024. India in Belgium & Luxembourg @IndEmbassyBru, tweet, 13 May 2024. Available: <https://x.com/IndEmbassyBru/status/1790072075157205257>
- Twitter/X, 2025. European Union Diplomatic Academy @EUDiploAcademy, tweet, 24 September 2025. Available: <https://x.com/EUDiploAcademy/status/1970824798176457126>
- Union Public Service Commission, 2021. Political Science and International Relations, HXS-B-POLI (Paper 2). Available: <https://upsc.gov.in/examinations/previous-question-papers/archives> (Accessed 8 May 2025)
- Union Public Service Commission, 2022. Political Science and International Relations, CRNA-S-POLI 22 (Paper 2). Available: <https://upsc.gov.in/examinations/previous-question-papers/archives> (Accessed 8 May 2025)
- Union Public Service Commission, 2023. Political Science and International Relations, SKYC-B-POLI (Paper 2). Available: <https://upsc.gov.in/examinations/previous-question-papers/archives> (Accessed 8 May 2025)
- Union Public Service Commission, 2024. Political Science and International Relations, PHKM-B-POL (Paper 2). Available: <https://upsc.gov.in/examinations/previous-question-papers/archives> (Accessed 8 May 2025)
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2023. “List of participants” 1991-2023.
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2022. “List of participants. Part one. Parties and observer states.” FCCC/CP/2022/INF.3 (Part I). 2 December 2022. Available: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2022_inf03_part1.pdf
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2023. “G77 & China Preparatory Meeting,” website. 28 November 2023. Available: <https://unfccc.int/event/g77-china-preparatory-meeting-0>
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2023. “List of participants: on-site participation (Excel file),” 22 December 2023. Available: <https://unfccc.int/documents/636674>
- World Bank, 2023. “GDP per capita (current USD).” Accessed 27 October 2024. Available: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=IN-CN>
- World Trade Organization, 2023. “Trade Policy Review: European Union.” Minutes of the Meeting, WT/TPR/M/442. Available: <https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?file-name=q:/WT/TPR/M442.pdf&Open=True>
- Xavier, Constantino and Riya Sinha, 2023. “How India Budgets to Become a Leading Power,” *Center for Social and Economic Progress*, blog. 8 February 2023. Available: <https://csep.org/blog/how-india-budgets-to-become-a-leading-power/>
- Yadav, Bhupender, 2023. “COP28 Diary: Deliberations on empowering youth with green jobs, to defining climate change.” Blogpost, 8 December 2023. Available:

<https://bhupenderyadav.in/blog/cop28-diary-deliberations-on-empowering-youth-with-green-jobs-to-defining-climate-change>
Yadav, Bhupender, 2023. "On the first day of COP27 in UAE..." *LinkedIn*, 1 December 2023. Available: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7136209548062711808/>

Appendix

List of interviewees

Table 8 below provides information about the interviews conducted for this study. To protect respondent anonymity, I have excluded their exact workplaces within the bureaucracy and the exact dates of the interviews.

Table 8. List of interviewees

Interview code	Description of role	Month of interview	Type of interview, location
I#1	Official, Government of India	November 2022	In person, Sharm el Sheikh
I#2	Retired official, Ministry of Environment	November 2022	In person, Sharm el Sheikh
I#3	Official, European Commission	July 2023	Phone, Stockholm
I#4	Official, European Commission	August 2023	Phone, Stockholm
I#5	Official, Ministry of External Affairs	December 2023	In person, New Delhi
I#6	Foreign diplomat	December 2023	In person, New Delhi
I#7	Official, Niti Aayog	December 2023	In person, New Delhi
I#8	Foreign expert	December 2023	In person, New Delhi
I#9	EU official	December 2023	In person, New Delhi
I#10	Official, Ministry of Environment	January 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#11	Think tank professional	January 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#12	Foreign official	January 2024	Phone, New Delhi
I#13	Official, Government of India	February 2024	In person, New Delhi

I#14	Think tank professional	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#15	Foreign official	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#16	Foreign expert	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#17	Official, Ministry of External Affairs	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#18	Official, Ministry of Environment	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#19	Official, Ministry of External Affairs	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#20	Think tank professional	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#21	Official, Ministry of External Affairs	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#22	Retired Ambassador, Ministry of External Affairs	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#23	Think tank professional	February 2024	Phone, New Delhi
I#24	Official, Government of India	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#25	Expert	February 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#26	Official, Government of India	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#27	Think tank professional	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#28	Official, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#29	Former Secretary, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#30	G20 diplomat	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#31	Director General, International Solar Alliance	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#32	Official, Ministry of External Affairs	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#33	Official, Ministry of External Affairs	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#34	Official, Ministry of Power	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#35	Official, Ministry of External Affairs	March 2024	In person, New Delhi
I#36	Official, European Commission	March 2024	Phone, Sweden

Interview protocol

The semi-structured interviews were guided by two interview protocols: interview protocol 1 for Indians, interview protocol 2 for non-Indians. After ten interviews, I stopped saying “India’s green foreign policy” and changed to “India’s climate diplomacy,” as discussed in chapter 4. The PhD monograph examines three cases, and I intended to use the same interview protocols for these three cases. When the interview protocol mentions [insert case], the cases refer to my three cases: A. India’s G20 Presidency during which the Green Development Pact was adopted; B. India’s participation at COP27 and COP28; C. The next India-EU Summit which was originally planned for late 2023 or early 2024.

Interview protocol 1

Thanks for making time to talk to me, for my PhD research project on India’s green foreign policy. The research is funded by Stockholm University and deals with how Indian officials navigate the tensions between India’s green ambitions and the reality. I’m not very interested in the evolution of India’s policy position but about daily activities by Indian officials and foreign diplomats who engage with Indian officials. I use practice theory to study this. I believe that acknowledging the role of individuals will help us understand how India behaves in contemporary global affairs. Talking to me is voluntary. The data will be stored in accordance with Stockholm University guidelines and GDPR. You answer the questions you like to and can stop anytime. Do you have time for a 30–40-minute conversation?

Questions about consent and attribution

- Do I have your consent to use your answers for my research?
- Would you like to be acknowledged by name in my research or is it better without name?

Warm-up questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about current job? Where do you work?
2. Are you a member of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) or the Indian Administrative Service (IAS)?
3. Do you remember the day you first heard about;
 - A. India’s G20 Presidency and the Green Development Pact?
 - B. India’s participation at COP? [recent COPs]
 - C. The next India-EU Summit?

Follow up: How did you feel about it when hearing about it for the first time? Can you tell me about the mood among colleagues?

Concrete questions about the cases

4. Could you walk me through what your organization did in preparation to [insert case: A, B, or C]? Could you tell me about what happened behind the scenes?
Follow up: Can you tell me about the other ministries involved?
Follow up: Did your division work together with any other divisions? Did you ever feel sidelined by any ministry? Did you speak up or disagree verbally at any point? Was someone emotional?
5. Can you give me an example of when foreign counterparts reacted to your proposals? Did you meet any resistance?
Follow up: Did anyone raise eyebrow or laugh at your drafts? How did they communicate with you?
6. I recently read an essay in Foreign Affairs arguing that India could become a green superpower. Do you think that is feasible? If so, why and how do you envision India's behavior in the world if India were a green superpower? If not, why do you disagree with the argument?
7. Don't you think there is a contradiction between India's green ambitions and other ambitions, such as economic development? Why?
Follow up: From your perspective to what extent is climate action a priority for Indian diplomacy? Why? Why not?
8. Academic literature considers reputation and prestige as essential drivers in foreign policy, does that sound accurate to you? Have you ever experienced that yourself? Please elaborate.
9. I noticed the slogan of India's G20 Presidency, 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'. Does it mean anything for [insert case A, B, or C]?
Follow up: Don't you think that a slogan like that raises some expectations about India's engagements with the world, outside the G20 framework? Do you think India can meet those expectations?
10. I attended a G20 event hosted by the Indian Embassy in Stockholm earlier this year. Did your division have any contact with Indian missions abroad ahead of [insert case]?
Follow up: Did you ever experience that an Indian mission requested

a green thematic for an event, a statement, or something else?

11. [Ask if I have time or the person wants to talk more]
By the way, did you ever hear about the new report on India's Global Climate Strategy published in October 2023 by the Center for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP, former Brookings India)? The report calls for 'climate wings' at select Indian embassies and a climate diplomacy division inside MEA. Would a new division within the ministry actually help Indian diplomacy? Why, why not?

End

12. Thank you so much for helping me with my research. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
13. Do you know anyone I could talk to? Can you share the person's contact details with me?

Thanks a lot for your help!

Prompts: "Interesting, please elaborate", "tell me more", "can you give me an example?", "and then...?", "wait, how did you do it?", "did you ask your colleague?", "could you explain that?"

Interview protocol 2

Thanks for making time to talk to me, for my PhD research project on India's green foreign policy. The research is funded by Stockholm University and deals with how Indian officials navigate the tensions between India's green ambitions and the reality. I'm not very interested in the evolution of India's policy position, but I'm more interested in the daily activities by Indian officials and the daily activities by foreign diplomats who engage with Indian officials. I use practice theory for my study. I believe that acknowledging the role of individuals will help us understand how India behaves in contemporary global affairs, and how foreign officials perceive India. Talking to me is voluntary and you don't have to answer my questions if you don't like to. Do you have time for a 30-40 minutes conversation?

Questions about consent and attribution

- Do I have your consent to use your answers for my research?
- Would you like to be acknowledged by name in my research or is it better without name?

Warm-up questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about current job? Where do you work?

2. Are you a member of the [insert country] Foreign Service?

General questions about the reception of India's green foreign policy

3. In general, do you think other countries view India as a leader in global climate politics? Why? Why not?
4. Did you ever notice when an Indian official took or rejected an initiative in global climate politics? Could you give me an example?

Questions about concrete cases

5. Can I ask you some questions about a concrete case? Do you remember the day you first heard about [insert case A, B, or C]?
 - a. India's G20 Presidency and the Green Development Pact?
 - b. India's participation at COP? [recent COPs]
 - c. The next India-EU Summit?

Follow up: Where were you? In the office, together with colleagues?
How did you feel when hearing about it for the first time? Can you tell me about the mood among you and your colleagues?

6. Could you walk me through what your organization did in preparation to [insert case: A, B, or C]? Did you get in touch with the Indian side? Did they approach your division?
Follow up: I have heard about India's lack of diplomats, have you experienced that? How did the lack of diplomatic resources affect your interaction with the Indian side?
7. How did Indian counterparts react to your suggestions and proposals? Did you meet any resistance? Can you give me an example of when Indian counterparts reacted to your proposals?
Follow up: Did you experience any conflict among Indians? Did they disagree with each other at any point?
8. I recently read an essay in Foreign Affairs arguing that India could become a green superpower of the 21st century. Do you think India has what it takes to become a green superpower? Why, why not?
9. Actually, don't you think there is a contradiction between India's green ambitions and other ambitions? Such as economic development? Why?

10. Academic literature considers reputation and prestige as essential drivers in foreign policy, does that sound accurate to you? Have you ever experienced that yourself? Please elaborate.
11. During my Fellowship in Delhi, I noticed that the slogan of India's G20 Presidency, 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' was everywhere. Do you really think it has any meaning for [insert case]?
Follow up: Don't you think that a slogan like that raises expectations about India's engagements with the world, outside the G20 framework?
12. [Ask if I have time or the person wants to talk more]
By the way, did you read the new report on India's Global Climate Strategy published in October 2023? The report calls for 'climate wings' at select Indian embassies and a climate diplomacy division inside India's Foreign Ministry. Does your country have climate divisions at embassies abroad and inside your foreign ministry? Do you have any experience of that? Does such a division help your country's green foreign policy?
Follow up: Do you think your country would change its approach to India if Indian embassies would establish climate wings and appoint climate diplomats?

End

13. Thank you so much for helping me with my research. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
14. Do you know anyone I could talk to? Can you share the person's contact details with me?

Thanks a lot for your help!

Prompts: "Interesting, please elaborate", "tell me more", "can you give me an example?", "and then...?", "wait, how did you do it?"

Sammanfattning på svenska

Indiens politiska ledarskap har uttryckt gröna ambitioner i flera år, men att omsätta dessa ambitioner i praktiken är fortsatt utmanande för den indiska förvaltningen. Denna avhandling undersöker hur Indiens gröna ambitioner formar den indiska diplomatikårens vardagliga praktiker. Avhandlingen ställer frågorna: hur manifesterar sig dilemman som är inneboende i Indiens gröna ambitioner i den indiska diplomatikårens vardagliga agerande och sociala interaktioner? Hur formar dessa manifestationer de sätt som den indiska diplomatikåren representerar och främjar Indiens klimatutrikespolitik sinsemellan och utomlands?

För att besvara dessa frågor utvecklar avhandlingen ett praktisknära analytiskt ramverk för studiet av statusdilemman. Avhandlingen utmanar en vanlig tendens inom ämnet internationella relationer att behandla status primärt som ett motiv för utrikespolitiskt beteende. Istället förskjuts det analytiska fokuset från politiska ledare till de sätt på vilka tjänstemän hanterar statusöverväganden i praktiken, inom byråkratin och i diplomatins värld. Avhandlingen omdefinierar begreppet statusdilemma, kontextualiserar statusdilemman som sociala processer, och applicerar praktikspårning för att undersöka hur statusdilemman utvecklas i diplomatisk praktik. Det analytiska ramverket presenterar en *statusdilemma triangel* som består av tre inbördes relaterade spänningar: erkännandespänningar, normativitetsspänningar, och epistemiska spänningar.

Metodologiskt använder avhandlingen praktikspårning för att analysera hur diplomater tolkar och hanterar statusdilemma triangelns tre spänningar i vardaglig diplomatisk praktik. Den empiriska analysen baseras på en kombination av källor. Författaren deltog vid klimatförhandlingarna i Sharm el-Sheikh

och genomförde fältstudier i New Delhi som möjliggjorde intervjuer med tjänstemän, diplomater, och experter. Analysen baseras även på pressmeddelanden, offentliga dokument, nyhetsrapportering, och foton från olika möten. Det empiriska bidraget kretsar kring de operativa utmaningar och dagliga aktiviteter som tjänstemän ägnar sig åt när de navigerar gröna ambitioner i diplomatiska sammanhang. Den empiriska analysen fokuserar på tre samtida arenor för klimatdiplomati: Indiens deltagande i klimatförhandlingar (klimat-toppmötena COP27 och COP28), Indiens G20 ordförandeskap, samt Indien-EU klimatrelationer i upptakten till det 16:e Indien-EU toppmötet, då det uppstod konflikt kring EU:s gränsjusteringsmekanism för koldioxid (CBAM) och hållbarhetsformuleringar i handelsavtalsförhandlingarna.

Empiriskt visar studien hur Indiens gröna ambitioner skapar komplexa statusdilemman för indiska tjänstemän som navigerar mellan konkurrerande påtryckningar och förväntningar. Hanteringen av Indiens gröna statusdilemma är en utmanande uppgift för tjänstemän och diplomater men på inget sätt omöjlig. Avhandlingen identifierar diplomatiska strategier som förvaltningar kan använda för att hantera statusdilemman i allmänhet, och Indiens gröna statusdilemma i synnerhet. Studien är relevant för forskare inom klimatdiplomati, diplomatiska praktiker, utrikespolitisk analys, indisk utrikespolitik, samt status inom internationella relationer.

India's political leadership has expressed green ambitions for several years, yet officials continue to face difficulties implementing these ambitions in practice. As Indian officials pave the way for India's new role in the world, they find themselves navigating tensions in global climate politics. This PhD dissertation examines how India's green ambitions shape the everyday practices of the Indian Foreign Service. By redefining status dilemmas and building a new analytical framework to understand them, the dissertation contributes to the growing status literature in International Relations. The dissertation argues that India's pursuit of green leadership generates what can be conceptualized as a status dilemma for its diplomats. It uncovers the strategies that the Indian Foreign Service has at its disposal to navigate the demanding process of status dilemma management in global climate politics.



Axel Nordenstam

Axel Nordenstam is a researcher at the Department of Economic History and International Relations, Stockholm University. He is also affiliated with the Asia Program, the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, and the Stockholm Center on Global Governance.

ISBN 978-91-8107-532-8
ISSN 2003-1343

**Department of Economic History and
International Relations**

