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COP31: An electrifying breakthrough or a geopolitical blackout?

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As economic and geopolitical rivalries intensify, and the gap between climate realities and political responses widens, COP31 must show whether electrification can unite countries around a shared economic and climate agenda—or whether international cooperation will be left in the dark. Beyond electrification, the joint Turkish-Australian COP Presidency sets priorities on zero waste and methane reduction, resilient cities and buildings, green industrialization and awareness raising.

Connecting climate objectives with immediate priorities

Climate impacts are intensifying, energy security has returned to the center of international politics, and the economic case for transforming energy systems is becoming harder to ignore. The green transition is also reshaping industrial competitiveness and global value chains—both today's developments and aspirations. And today's heatwaves, glacier melt and landslides show we are all underprepared. Yet, despite these converging pressures, political consensus on accelerating climate action is increasingly difficult. This is the widening gap COP31 must confront: the distance between the realities countries face and the political response they are prepared to deliver.

The question for COP31 is therefore not simply whether countries can agree on another declaration, but whether it can help accelerate action on the ground—faster, fairer and more resilient. The joint Turkish-Australian Presidency seeks to connect climate objectives with countries' immediate priorities: affordable and secure energy, industrial development, resilient economies and societies, and access to infrastructure and finance. Can the COP process turn these shared interests into political commitments and practical cooperation? This blog post highlights where COP31 can make a meaningful contribution in today's context.

Electrification: the defining political test for COP31

COPs remain among the few forums where countries can collectively discuss climate change. Their value cannot be measured only by whether they produce a major new negotiated outcome. They also provide moments to reaffirm political direction, maintain trust in the Paris Climate Agreement architecture and send signals that governments, investors and businesses can use to guide decisions.

The clearest opportunity for such a signal at COP31 is electrification in the context of equitable transitions away from fossil fuels (TAFFs). The Turkish Presidency has proposed a collective global goal to increase the share of final energy demand met by electricity from just over 20% today to 35% by 2035. Beyond the precise wording and figures, a strong and universal commitment to accelerate electrification could become the summit's most prominent political outcome and catalyze practical action, particularly on the demand side and through support for grid development. Furthermore, accelerating demand for electricity and its infrastructure is overall a good signal to build an investment case for renewables (IEA's 2026 Electrification Report)

Electrification is not only a climate objective. It is increasingly central to energy security, affordability and industrial competitiveness. Expanding electricity use in transport, buildings and industry can reduce countries' exposure to volatile fossil-fuel markets—as the recent disruption around the Strait of Hormuz has made clear (IDDRI, 2026a)—while improving energy efficiency and creating opportunities for industrial development. But a target alone will not deliver this transformation: it needs to be backed by an enabling package and to remain embedded within the broader transition away from fossil fuels.

The package requires investment in grids, storage and end-use technologies such as heat pumps, electric vehicles, electric cooking and power-based industrial processes, as well as clean power generation. It also requires policies to ensure affordable and predictable electricity prices for households and businesses. Countries will also need to consider how these investments can support domestic industrial strategies, diversify supply chains and create local economic opportunities (Agora-IDDRI, 2026, IEA's 2026 Electrification Report).

Second, electrification must be understood as a central component of TAFFs, not as a substitute for the wider transformation required. The electrification goal should be seen as complementary to, and reinforcing, existing commitments like the Dubai Consensus to triple renewable energy capacity and double the rate of energy-efficiency improvements. Sector-specific organizational changes, such as will also be needed to promote less energy-dependent patterns of mobility (cf. "Avoid and Shift" strategies; IDDRI, 2025), housing, production and consumption, reducing pressure on power generation and critical resources.

Crucially, reducing fossil fuels demand through electrification must be planned and managed. The Global Roadmap recently published by the COP30 Presidency offers insights into the supply-side changes and broader economic restructuring needed to reduce fossil fuels production and dependence (IDDRI, 2026b). National roadmaps now emerging from the Santa Marta process—already developed in France, the Netherlands and Germany—can help translate this global direction into country-led pathways and implementation.

Beyond electrification and beyond consensus: the broader climate agenda

Electrification may be the central political test, but it is only one part of the COP31 agenda. The Presidency has also prioritized zero waste and methane, resilient cities and buildings, green industrialization, climate-resilient agriculture and climate education. Alongside these action-oriented priorities, the multilateral process will need to address the longstanding challenges: finance, at the heart of climate negotiations; adaptation, which has so far struggled to gain political traction; and trade, increasingly intertwined with climate negotiations. The role of science will also be important amid growing disinformation and climate denialism, and political difficulties surrounding the IPCC.

Finance will be central to COP31, even if a breakthrough is highly unlikely. The difficult political context, illustrated by the recent World Bank and IMF meetings in Bangkok (IDDRI, 2026c), makes it more vital to bring focus on the quality, accessibility and accountability of climate finance. The Australian Presidency's proposed Access to Finance Declaration could help advance access to concessional finance for least developed countries and small island developing states, although it has so far been criticized for lacking teeth. The new two-year Climate Finance Work Programme will provide a space at COP31 to discuss how finance obligations will be met in the context of existing commitments for 2035: the new collective quantified goal (NCQG) and the goal of tripling adaptation finance. This includes clarifying what developed countries—and other countries contributing on a voluntary basis—are expected to provide, and how. Greater clarity on what counts towards existing goals and where finance is flowing in the economy will be essential to identifying gaps and preparing for the next Global Stocktake (GST), which will be finalized for COP33 (2028). COP31 should also better connect these efforts to wider initiatives to reform multilateral development banks and the international financial architecture.

Adaptation. The implications of climate overshoot for both mitigation and adaptation, alongside the need to strengthen climate resilience and address systemic, transboundary and cascading risks will generate political momentum at COP31. The opportunity lies in setting a clear trajectory for greater adaptation ambition towards COP32, particularly important given the lack of finance highlighted in the latest Adaptation Gap Report, the risk of the goal of tripling adaptation finance losing momentum as climate finance targets are being rolled back in multilateral development banks. The negotiations on the Global goal on adaptation will advance the technical work on indicators to be able to measure progress but are also due to be finalized at COP32, providing yet another building block for a comprehensive adaptation outcome in Ethiopia. Meanwhile, countries should ensure that evidence on adaptation progress, gaps and cooperation needs informs the Second Global Stocktake (GST2) before June 2027, if not captured already by the transparency reports already submitted and synthesized.

Trade. Trade is likely to be one of the more contentious issues at COP31. The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is expected to feature prominently, with EU institutional discussions on ETS and CBAM reform to be finalized in early 2027 (IDDRI, 2026d). Yet discussions at COP are moving beyond a narrow focus on unilateral measures towards the broader challenge of ensuring that trade and economic relationships support, rather than constrain, countries' climate transitions. Trade arrangements can help create demand for low-carbon products, improve access to clean technologies and support the development of regional markets and industrial capabilities. But without cooperation, the pursuit of competitiveness and economic security risks making the transition more fragmented, costly and unequal. At COP31, the Just Transition Work Programme could provide a space to explore

how trade and industrial cooperation can expand equitable access to the economic opportunities of the transition, particularly focusing on how countries can build domestic capabilities, capture greater value and share in the benefits of emerging green industries. COP31 may also see discussion on how these trade aspects could feature in GST2. In all cases, the discussion will continue beyond Antalya, as countries approach the Second Trade-Climate Dialogue in June 2027, and will require cooperation through other international, regional and bilateral processes.

Science & GST2. The latest IPCC plenary brought further uncertainty about the ability to deliver the scientific assessments needed to inform international climate action. Against this political blockage, the GST offers an opportunity to strengthen the role of scientific evidence and wider sources of knowledge in informing the UNFCCC process A practical way forward is to strengthen the GST's information-collection phase, which will kickstart at COP31 and has received little political attention to date. This phase could draw on the wider body of academic research, practitioners' perspectives and evidence generated through independent and government-led national processes. This would help address concerns about adequately capturing different national circumstances. For COP31, this would translate into specific call for countries to submit relevant plans and evidence on cooperation needs, including national and regional TAFF roadmaps, deforestation plans and updated .

Making cooperation count: leadership, coalitions and delivery

As with many multilateral processes, much of COP31's ability to deliver will depend on the leadership of individual countries. Within the joint Presidency, Turkey can play an important role as a North-South bridge-builder, while Australia can help ensure that Pacific Island voices and their priorities, including the oceans agenda, remain prominent. EU-China engagement will also be important. Although progress in trade negotiations had raised hopes of a joint political signal in support of climate action ahead of COP31, this has not materialized. The summit nevertheless offers an opportunity for both sides to demonstrate that climate cooperation can continue despite wider tensions. Brazil's renewed political mandate following its elections should provide further impetus for a strong contribution to the World Leaders Summit, including to ensure continuity of their TAFF diplomatic efforts to date. For India, the energy crisis offers an opportunity to combine its historic role as a voice for developing countries with energy security and economic concerns; its willingness to embrace that role remains uncertain, however, as suggested by its withdrawal of its COP33 hosting bid. African countries, increasingly proactive in shaping the climate agenda, will also have an opportunity to use the upcoming Ethiopian Presidency of COP32 to pave the way for an agenda that looks into changes in the international system that strengthen adaptation and expand access to green industrialization and shared economic development, including through trade policy.

As an implementation-focused COP, governments in Antalya will use the margins of the negotiations to launch new cooperation initiatives and reinforce existing ones—and this is a positive trend that is increasingly weighing on the COP outcome. Targeted cooperation between countries, businesses, investors and other actors is the way forward to helping address specific bottlenecks—provided it complements the multilateral process. The choice is not between multilateralism and practical coalitions. The key to success is finding the right balance and deciding where to focus diplomatic priorities (IDDRI-Chatham House, 2026). Although these efforts can be difficult to track as a whole, the Global Climate Action Agenda can help connect them to the UN process.

To conclude, COP31 is an opportunity to demonstrate that competition does not preclude cooperation where countries share economic and climate interests. Above all, COP31 can reaffirm a shared direction of travel and show that international climate diplomacy remains a practical tool to strengthen conditions for the implementation of existing commitments.

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