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Green Politics in India: The Role of Political Parties in Addressing Climate Change Since 2014-2024

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Abstract
Green politics in India emphasizes environmental sustainability, ecological justice, and climate action within the political framework. It advocates for policies addressing pollution, renewable energy, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development, often championed by civil society and select political parties. This article explores the role of political parties in India in addressing climate change within the framework of green politics, specifically focusing on the period from 2014 to 2024. Drawing on secondary sources including electoral manifestos, official policy documents, scholarly studies, and media analyses it evaluates how major national parties such as BJP and Congress, along with influential regional parties, have articulated and integrated climate and environmental sustainability concerns into their agendas. Findings highlight a growing rhetorical acknowledgment of climate issues in party manifestos, notably intensified after India's commitments under the Paris Agreement (2015). However, the analysis reveals a notable gap between rhetorical commitments and tangible policy actions, emphasizing inconsistencies and fragmented implementation of sustainable initiatives, particularly renewable energy expansion, climate resilience, and pollution control measures. The paper also considers electoral dynamics, assessing whether and how environmental promises influenced voter behavior across general and state elections during this decade. Ultimately, it argues for stronger political commitment and cohesive policymaking, stressing the urgency of translating party pledges into robust, actionable climate strategies to enhance India's climate resilience and sustainable development trajectory.

Keywords: Green Politics, Climate Change, Political Parties, Environmental Sustainability, India

Introduction

Climate change has moved from the margins of India's policy debate to the center of political discourse over the last decade. Rising temperatures, erratic monsoons, intensified cyclones in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea, recurrent floods and droughts, and chronic air-quality crises in major cities have turned environmental stress into an everyday governance challenge. Against this backdrop, "green politics" the set of ideas and practices that place ecological sustainability, intergenerational equity, and just transitions at the heart of decision-making has become a useful lens for assessing how India's political parties frame problems, mobilize support, and translate promises into policy (Saunik & Shaw, 2024).

The period 2014-2024 is particularly salient. It spans two complete central government terms and a third electoral contest, alongside watershed global milestones such as the Paris Agreement (2015) and subsequent stocktakes that pressured parties to position themselves on mitigation, adaptation, and climate finance. During these years, climate policy in India evolved from a largely technocratic agenda to one with visible electoral and media salience. Parties increasingly referenced renewable energy, energy security, air pollution, water stress, disaster resilience, and urban sustainability albeit with varying levels of coherence, ambition, and follow-through (Bushra & Singh, 2024).

Understanding party behavior is essential for three reasons. First, parties aggregate societal interests and channel them into manifestos and legislative priorities; their narratives shape whether climate is framed as a growth opportunity (green jobs, clean energy), a public-health imperative (air and water quality), a resilience agenda (disaster management, climate-smart agriculture), or a distributive question (who

pays and who benefits in transitions). Second, India's federal structure gives significant implementation power to states; regional parties can champion or dilute climate agendas through state policies on forest management, mining, mobility, and coastal regulation. Third, the political economy of development land acquisition, infrastructure expansion, and industrial policy creates trade-offs that parties must navigate between near-term growth and long-term ecological limits (Chakravarty & Ghosh, 2023).

Objectives and Methodology

This article uses secondary sources party manifestos, parliamentary debates, government policy documents, think-tank and academic studies, media reports, and election analyses to trace how major national parties (notably the BJP and Congress) and influential regional parties articulated climate and environmental commitments between 2014 and 2024. It assesses the evolution of rhetoric and policy content, identifies flagship initiatives (for example, clean energy expansion, afforestation and landscape restoration, pollution control, and resilience planning), and examines where implementation lagged due to institutional capacity, fiscal constraints, or competing political incentives. The analysis also considers whether climate promises affected electoral behavior, acknowledging that while livelihood and welfare concerns often dominate voting decisions, environmental quality and disaster risks are increasingly visible to urban and rural voters alike.

A core theme running through the discussion is the gap between announcement and delivery. Many climate-related pledges are packaged within broader development or welfare schemes, creating ambiguity in targets, baselines, and accountability. Conversely, some initiatives show programmatic continuity across administrations, suggesting that once policies gain bureaucratic traction and attract investment, parties are incentivized to maintain them regardless of who is in power. The article therefore pays attention not only to headline commitments but also to the durability, funding, and institutionalization of programs.

Finally, the paper outlines a pathway for more effective climate politics: clearer, measurable goals in party documents; better alignment of fiscal transfers and regulatory instruments with climate outcomes; stronger center-state coordination; and mechanisms for citizen oversight and data transparency. By situating party strategies within India's development priorities and vulnerability profile, the article argues that credible, evidence-based climate action can be electorally and economically advantageous if parties move beyond symbolic green rhetoric toward sustained, accountable governance.

Understanding Green Politics and its Relevance in India

Green politics is more than adding "environment" to existing party agendas; it is a normative and institutional project that centers ecological limits, intergenerational justice, and transformed patterns of production and consumption. Political theorists distinguish between mainstream environmentalism (which seeks incremental fixes within existing growth models) and ecologism (which calls for deeper socio-economic change and ecological citizenship) (Dobson, 2007; Dryzek, 2022). In practice, parties operationalize green politics through discourse, manifestos, legislative action, budgeting, and coalition-building with civil society and sub-national governments.

India is simultaneously climate-vulnerable and development-aspiring. The IPCC's AR6 Synthesis Report warns that near-term climate risks are already material for South Asia via heat extremes, water stress, and intensified rainfall requiring accelerated mitigation and adaptation (IPCC, 2023). District-level assessments find that a large majority of Indian districts are hotspots of compounding extremes (CEEW, 2021). These risks interact with air pollution, groundwater depletion, and coastal/hill-ecosystem fragility, turning ecological stress into an everyday governance problem. For parties competing for office, the salience of heatwaves, floods, and air quality converts climate from a technocratic niche into a political issue that voters can feel and measure.

Long before 2014, India established a baseline framework via the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC, 2008) with missions on solar, energy efficiency, sustainable habitat, water, Himalayan ecosystems, the Green India Mission, sustainable agriculture, and strategic knowledge. This architecture provided durable "policy containers" for later governments and parties to update or reinterpret (MoEFCC, 2008).

Two national instruments frame party positions in this decade. First, India's Updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC, 2022) commits to reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 45% by 2030 from 2005 levels and to achieving about 50% cumulative electric-power installed capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030, alongside adaptation aims and forest-sink targets (Government of India, 2022). Second, the Long-Term Low-Emissions Development Strategy (LT-LEDS, 2022) outlines seven strategic transitions power, transport, urban form/buildings, industry, CO_2 removal, forests/land, and finance toward net-zero by 2070 (MoEFCC, 2022). Together, these documents create measurable benchmarks that parties reference in manifestos, parliamentary debates, and state-level policies.

In India, green politics gains traction when linked to co-benefits that parties can credibly deliver: public health gains from cleaner air (NCAP, 2019), energy security and jobs from renewables and domestic manufacturing, and leadership through the International Solar Alliance (Government of India, 2022; MoEFCC, 2022).

India's federal structure means states control many levers land, local transport, policing of pollution, urban planning, and disaster management. Regional parties therefore act as crucial brokers of green politics, shaping (or blunting) national goals through state missions on electric mobility, renewables siting, urban heat action plans, and coastal regulation. The LT-LEDS anticipates center–state coordination and differentiated pathways, which invites parties to frame green politics as competitive federalism: attracting green industry, mobilizing climate finance, and piloting just-transition policies in coal-dependent districts (MoEFCC, 2022).

Dryzek's discourse lens helps interpret how Indian parties narrate climate: as ecological modernization (clean growth via technology and market instruments), as sustainability and equity (lifestyles and behavioral change Mission LiFE), or as resilience and adaptation (climate-smart agriculture, disaster preparedness) (Dryzek, 2022). These discourses are not mutually exclusive; coalitions often blend them to widen appeal while managing trade-offs with industrial policy and welfare priorities.

Parties translate national commitments into programmatic choices: subsidy designs for renewables and storage; fiscal transfers and performance-linked grants for NCAP cities; agricultural extension for climate-resilient crops; and state-level EV policies. They also control how benefits and burdens

are distributed whose neighborhoods are prioritized for clean air, which districts get grid upgrades, and how just-transition packages are sequenced. Because many climate measures deliver near-term co-benefits (health, lower bills, jobs), parties that effectively package these benefits can align electoral incentives with sustained green action moving beyond symbolic rhetoric to measurable delivery (IPCC, 2023; Government of India, 2022).

In India, green politics is not a niche ideology but a competitive arena where parties frame climate as public health, energy security, and economic modernization within firm national guardrails (NDC and LT-LEDS) and a federal implementation reality.

Political Parties and Climate Change: A Comparative Analysis

In 2014, climate and environment appeared in broad-brush language across major manifestos. The BJP's national manifesto placed sustainability at the centre, promised ecological audits, green-building guidelines, a Himalayan fund, and a priority Clean Ganga push alongside faster environmental clearances to spur growth (BJP, 2014). Congress's 2014 program committed to continuing the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and missions such as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (INC, 2014). By 2019, both parties explicitly featured climate change in their Lok Sabha manifestos, marking a rhetorical mainstreaming of climate (Down To Earth, 2019).

The decade also saw the central government build out climate-adjacent instruments: the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP, 2019), the Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy (LT-LEDS, 2022), and the National Green Hydrogen Mission (2023). These pillars coexist with an economy that continued to expand coal capacity, creating political space for parties to stress energy security and just transition differently in their platforms (UNFCCC, 2022; MNRE, 2023).

In 2024, both BJP and Congress re-endorsed net-zero by 2070 but proposed different pathways. The BJP promised energy independence by 2047 via EVs, clean energy corridors, mega solar/wind parks, bioenergy, small modular nuclear, storage, and green hydrogen while Congress emphasized a Green New Deal Investment Programme, a Green Transition Fund, decentralised renewables, a stronger National Adaptation Fund, and an independent environment authority (BJP, 2024; INC, 2024; CPI[M], 2024; Carbon Brief, 2024). Analysts noted silences and controversies, including limited specificity on coal phase-down and debates over environmental governance changes such as the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023, and EIA rules (Down To Earth, 2023; 2024).

At the state level, practical climate action is often party-agnostic. Delhi's EV Policy (2020) set a 25% new-registrations target by 2024 with incentives and dense charging; Tamil Nadu's Climate Change Mission mainstreamed adaptation/mitigation across departments. Regardless of party, states are implementing NCAP and updating State Action Plans on Climate Change so administrative quality and local priorities often matter as much as party labels.

Key Initiatives and Policies by Political Parties (2014–2024)

At the national level, India updated its Paris pledge to cut emissions intensity of GDP by 45% from 2005 levels by 2030 and reach about 50% cumulative electric-power capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030 guardrails now referenced across parties (NDC, 2022). The Long-Term Low-Emissions Development Strategy sketched seven transitions toward net-zero by 2070. Supply-side drivers included the National Green Hydrogen Mission (2023) with a ₹19,744-crore outlay targeting 5 MMT green hydrogen annually by 2030; and Production-Linked Incentives (PLIs) for high-efficiency solar PV modules and advanced chemistry cell batteries. Demand and systems policies complemented these: UJALA LEDs, the PAT scheme in industry, FAME-II for EVs (later bridged by EMPS-2024), and city-level policies such as Delhi's EV policy. Air-quality governance through NCAP and the CAQM Act (2021) created measurable urban targets. Land, forests, and environmental clearance reforms particularly EIA changes and the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023 were contested, balancing speed with safeguards. Programs such as Namami Gange, NMSA, PM-KUSUM, and green finance innovations (Sovereign Green Bonds) added adaptation and finance pillars, while international initiatives like the International Solar Alliance and Mission LiFE provided diplomatic and behavioral anchors (LT-LEDS, 2022).

Table 1: Major climate-relevant initiatives (2014–2024)

Pillar	Instrument (year)	Core target/feature	Political/administrative locus
National targets	Updated NDC (2022)	–45% emissions intensity vs 2005; ~50% non-fossil power capacity by 2030	Union government; referenced by all parties
Long-term pathway	LT-LEDS (2022)	Net-zero by 2070; seven systemic transitions	Union; coordination with states
Clean hydrogen	National Green Hydrogen Mission (2023)	₹19,744 cr; 5 MMT green H_2 by 2030	Union (MNRE); state facilitation
Manufacturing	PLI-Solar PV	₹24,000 cr for high-efficiency modules	Union (MNRE/PIB)
Manufacturing	PLI-ACC batteries	₹18,100 cr; ~50 GWh domestic cells	Union (DHI)
Transport	FAME-II (2019–2024)	Demand incentives; outlay later enhanced to ₹11,500 cr	Union (MHI) + state EV policies
Transport (bridge)	EMPS 2024	Short bridge subsidy for e-2W/e-3W	Union (MHI)
Air quality	NCAP (2019)	20–30% PM reduction vs 2017–18 baseline by 2024/25	Cities & states of all parties
AQ enforcement (NCR)	CAQM Act (2021)	Statutory commission for NCR	Union statute; multi-state
Land/forests	Forest (Conservation) Amendment (2023)	Scope clarified; expanded permissible uses	Union law; state implementation

Agriculture/adaptation	NMSA (ongoing)	Climate-resilient agriculture, water efficiency, soil health	Union & states
Agri-energy	PM-KUSUM	Solarize irrigation; decentralized capacity	Union (MNRE) & states
Finance	Sovereign Green Bonds	Framework 2022; issuances from 2023	MoF/RBI; market ecosystem
Diplomacy	International Solar Alliance (2015)	Treaty-based solar initiative	MEA/MNRE; member states
Behavior	Mission LiFE (2022)	Lifestyle for Environment mass movement	MoEFCC/NITI; UN partnership

Sources: Secondary Source

Gaps between Political Commitments and Implementation

Despite mainstreaming climate across manifestos and national pledges, delivery gaps persist. First, ambition vs. energy-system reality: while the updated NDC (2022) targets a 45% emissions-intensity reduction and ~50% non-fossil power capacity by 2030, coal capacity continues to expand through 2032, complicating absolute-emissions containment. Second, grid, storage, and curtailment bottlenecks: high-renewable states face evacuation delays and curtailment episodes, muting on-paper gains. Third, decentralised renewables lag: rooftop solar fell short of the 40 GW-by-2022 target, reflecting permitting frictions, DISCOM revenue concerns, and uneven net-metering rules; newer schemes aim to close the gap. Fourth, air-quality accountability is mixed: NCAP's original 20–30% PM reduction target evolved to up to 40% by 2025–26, but monitoring coverage and source-apportionment remain uneven, limiting precise targeting. Fifth, EV policy volatility: mid-course subsidy revisions (FAME-II) and a short bridge scheme (EMPS-2024) caused adjustment shocks even as the long-run sales curve trends upward. Sixth, environmental safeguards and trust deficits: frequent EIA changes and the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023 sparked concerns about weakening safeguards, creating governance uncertainty. Finally, finance and distribution-sector constraints especially DISCOM finances slow distribution-side transitions.

Aligning with national guardrails and clean-tech bets is necessary but insufficient; reforms must tackle distribution-side change, governance certainty, network upgrades, and just transition for coal regions.

Electoral Dynamics and Voter Behavior

Across national cycles, climate rarely decides vote choice; surveys around the 2024 election show economic concerns crowding out climate on average priority lists (Reuters, 2024). Even during dangerous heat, climate received limited campaign attention. However, local environmental issues especially air pollution do influence urban agendas. In Delhi, a majority of residents reported pollution would influence their 2020 assembly vote (YouGov, 2019; Indian Express/Lokniti-CSDS, 2019), underpinning a policy brand around clean transport (Delhi's 2020 EV Policy). Disaster politics also matters: voters often reward or punish governments for disaster management quality rather than hazards per se (Cole *et al*., 2012). Studies around Cyclone Fani (2019) suggest effective evacuation and relief shaped local evaluations (Asghari-Ghara, 2021). Lokniti-CSDS's 2024 post-poll shows party brands remain salient, implying credible delivery records can carry environmental co-benefits into voting decisions.

Low national climate salience coexists with rising local environmental salience where impacts are immediate (pollution, heat, floods). Voters tend to reward performance and co-benefits cleaner air, reliable water, safer heat seasons more than abstract climate targets.

Recommendations for Effective Climate Politics

Make party pledges measurable and anchored to national guardrails (Updated NDC, 2022; LT-LEDS, 2022) via annual KPIs and third-party audits. Build state-centric delivery compacts for air, water, heat, and floods, using NCAP and heat-action plan metrics with verified outcomes. Pair hardware bets (RE, hydrogen, EVs) with distribution-side reforms (grids, storage, DISCOM health, rooftop solar) and publishes ward-level uptake targets for schemes such as PM Surya Ghar. Expand sovereign green bonds and guide states/ULBs to adopt the framework with MRV-ready project pipelines. Institutionalize just-transition roadmaps for coal regions covering worker reskilling, MSME diversification, municipal revenue buffers, and land rehabilitation. Back behavior change (Mission LiFE) with infrastructure and incentives appliance rebates plus standards enforcement, non-motorized transport plus heat shelters. Put health at the center of climate messaging to raise electoral salience (air quality, heat stress, water security). Finally, publish a cross-party list of 'non-reversible policies' (e.g., NGHM design, sovereign green bond rules, core grid codes) to de-risk investment and accelerate execution across cycles.

Conclusion

Between 2014 and 2024, climate action in India moved from the periphery of campaign rhetoric to a visible if still uneven strand of party politics. Major parties now speak a common language of national guardrails (updated NDCs, LT-LEDS, net-zero by 2070) and headline instruments (renewables, green hydrogen, EVs, efficiency). This convergence matters: it reduces policy whiplash, signals continuity to investors, and sets a shared baseline for scrutiny. Yet beneath the consensus on "what" lies persistent divergence on "how" the strength of environmental safeguards, the balance between centralized megaprojects and decentralized energy, the pace and fairness of coal-region transitions, and the design of regulators and accountability systems.

The decade also shows that climate politics gains traction when framed through proximate benefits voters can feel cleaner air, lower energy bills, safer heat seasons, and resilient water systems. Federalism is decisive here: states and cities governed by different parties translate national ambitions into budgets, permits, and enforcement. Where institutions are capable and incentives aligned, delivery follows; where grids, DISCOM finances, land governance, or MRV systems are weak, ambition stalls. The most durable advances LEDs and efficiency, parts of EV adoption, pieces of the RE build-out combine technocratic design with everyday benefits and clear metrics.

Closing the implementation gap is therefore less about adding new slogans and more about upgrading the machinery of delivery. Parties can make their climate promises credible by publishing measurable, annual KPIs; funding outcome-linked compacts with states for air quality, heat, floods, and water; fixing distribution-side bottlenecks (grids, storage, DISCOMs,

rooftop); and building project pipelines that can absorb green finance at scale. Equally vital is a people-first transition: planning for coal-dependent districts, protecting workers and MSMEs, and ensuring that environmental rule-of-law is not traded away for short-term speed. When behavior-change campaigns are paired with infrastructure and incentives, they shift norms; when they stand alone, they fade.

The central lesson of 2014–2024 is that climate action becomes politically durable when it is synonymous with development healthier cities, reliable and affordable energy, safer livelihoods, and quality public services. If parties compete on delivering those outcomes and preserve a short list of non-reversible rules that de-risk investment green politics will cease to be a rhetorical add-on and become a core test of governance.

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