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The uneven influence of the Global Stocktake on national climate policy and NDCs

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Key takeaways

- The first Global Stocktake (GST) has influenced national climate governance in diverse and uneven ways.
- While some states have integrated its conclusions deeply into climate policy and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), others have engaged selectively, rhetorically, or not at all.
- The GST functions primarily as a soft governance mechanism, whose effectiveness depends heavily on domestic political, economic, and institutional conditions.
- The translation of GST findings into national policy is shaped less by international guidance than by domestic political economy constraints, including electoral dynamics, sectoral interests, and access to climate finance.
- Current NDCs reflect a shift toward implementation-oriented and adaptation-heavy planning – a fact that can be ascribed to the upcoming 2030 target year as much as to the GST
- This may suggest that the GST is reinforcing a focus on feasibility, reporting, and support needs rather than driving a uniform increase in mitigation ambition.

Introduction

The Global Stocktake (GST), concluded at the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP) in Dubai in 2023, is seen as a central component of the Paris Agreement's ambition cycle, as it is meant to assess collective global progress, which should inform future Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Many commentators and Parties

put significant hope in the Stocktake's ability to ratchet up ambition in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process. Following the Dubai COP, which resulted in the impressive "Outcome of the global stocktake" (Decision -/CMA.5) spanning almost 200 detailed paragraphs, some Parties expected the GST to become a new impulse for collective efforts to combat climate change. More critical voices, however, expressed unease and concern about "replacing the Paris Agreement with the Global Stocktake" – which meant departing from the nationally determined and diversified approach that was agreed in 2015.

Indeed, there is some visible political tension around the shape and role of the GST. The Paris Agreement itself says very little about what the GST should look like, let alone what its impact should be, and imposes no binding obligations on Parties. Article 14 of the Agreement only states that the Parties "shall periodically take stock of the implementation of this Agreement" to assess the collective progress towards its purpose and long-term goals and that the outcome of the GST shall "inform Parties in updating and enhancing, in a nationally determined manner, their actions and support [...] as well as in enhancing international cooperation for climate action". In other words, the Agreement does not explicitly connect the GST and NDCs, leaving wide room for interpretation.

The Katowice Climate Package (aka "Rulebook") concretized how the GST would work, but only on the input side: it charged the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement with specifying what sources of information would feed into the stocktaking process. It did not, however, mention the output side by specifying any ways through which the GST should "inform" Parties' climate action, and in which areas.

The GST's impact thus relies on the political will of the Parties on whether and how they translate its findings into domestic policy and political processes. We therefore ask what we can we learn from the most recent round of pledges – the so-called "NDCs 3.0"? Have parties used the GST findings, to what extent and how?

This policy brief draws on comparative evidence from a dataset of 23 country case studies to show that GST influence varies significantly across three dimensions:

• integration into NDCs

• incorporation into domestic policy frameworks

• salience in political and public debate

Based on these patterns, we propose a four-category typology of state responses to the "signal" of the Global Stocktake: Parties can be seen either as deep integrators, selective adopters, or symbolic users, with a residual category of marginal cases where GST influence is virtually non-existent.

Deep integrators: GST as a policy framework

One group of Parties has incorporated GST outcomes systematically into their domestic climate governance. The European Union, Norway, and the United Kingdom exemplify this approach. The EU's updated NDC explicitly states that it "takes into account the results of the Global Stocktake (GST)", while the UK's 2035 NDC is "explicitly informed" by GST outcomes, including detailed sectoral commitments such as renewable expansion and fossil fuel phase-down. In both cases, the GST functions as a guiding framework for target-setting and sectoral policy design, rather than merely a reference point.

Similarly, Switzerland and Singapore demonstrate highly structured integration. Switzerland's NDC includes a dedicated annex aligning national measures with GST priorities and affirms commitment to implementing GST decisions. Singapore translates GST priorities into concrete actions across sectors (e.g. solar deployment, EV transition, hydrogen development), showing how global signals can be operationalized domestically.

A distinctive technocratic model is visible in China, where "China's third NDC directly incorporates the findings of the GST... into the nation's five-year planning framework". This integration produces more quantifiable targets and allows iterative adjustment over time.

- Across these cases, the GST serves as:
- a planning tool for aligning long-term strategies,
- a legitimating reference for more ambitious policy,
- and a mechanism for integrating global scientific benchmarks into national governance.

Selective adopters: strategic and partial uptake

A second group of countries engages with the GST selectively, adopting elements that align with domestic priorities while avoiding politically sensitive commitments. Indonesia illustrates this dynamic. While officials describe the GST as a "catalyst for accelerating climate action," this recognition "has not translated into explicit policy action". Civil society actors report that only "less contentious" elements – such as electric vehicles or blue carbon – are likely to be incorporated, whereas coal phase-out is avoided: "Coal phase-out? I don't think so"

– one civil society expert commented.

India similarly engages selectively but combines this with explicit critique. While its upcoming NDC is "informed by the Global Stocktake", domestic actors argue that the process has failed, particularly on climate finance, with commitments described as "a joke". Indian negotiators also emphasize equity, insisting that "developed countries' net zero [must come] first". This reflects a strategic use of GST to reinforce longstanding positions on climate justice.

In Thailand, the GST serves primarily as "reference material", with NDC formulation remaining rooted in national economic constraints and energy security considerations. In Morocco, GST influence is visible in technical design features – such as expanded sector coverage and improved monitoring systems – even though it is not prominently referenced in public discourse.

Overall, selective adopters treat the GST as:

- a flexible menu of options,
- a source of external pressure filtered through domestic constraints,
- and a tool to support incremental rather than systemic change.

Symbolic users: GST as a discursive resource

A third group of countries engages with the GST primarily at the rhetorical or diplomatic level, with limited impact on policy transformation. In the United States, the GST is formally acknowledged – "the outcomes… have informed the approach" to the 2035 NDC – but plays a secondary role in practice. PULLP project interviews suggest it is only one among many influencing factors. Moreover, domestic debate is highly polarized: Democratic actors use the GST to advocate stronger action, while Republican actors criticize its implications, particularly regarding fossil fuel transition.

Brazil and Australia also show strong rhetorical engagement. In Australia, government statements fully endorse GST findings, including calls for renewable expansion and emissions reductions, yet media coverage remains relatively limited and policy change incremental. In Brazil, the GST features prominently in public speeches and diplomatic positioning but does not fundamentally reshape domestic policy direction. South Korea described the GST as "the compass that tells us how far we have come", but substantial policy integration is deferred to future NDC development.

In these cases, the GST functions primarily as:

- a discursive legitimizing tool,
- a means of signalling international commitment,
- and a reference point for future rather than immediate policy change.

Marginal or ignored Cases: limited or no influence of the GST

In several countries, the GST has had minimal or no observable influence on climate governance. Argentina is a particularly stark example. Following political change and the election of a strongly anti-climate government, the GST "had little resonance in public debate" and "went completely unnoticed" by officials. Climate policymaking has been downgraded, both in the institutional hierarchy of the government and in operational capacity, and the GST has effectively disappeared from both policy and public discourse. In Russia, discussions of the GST are "practically absent" in political, economic, and media contexts, reflecting limited engagement with international climate norms beyond symbolic participation.

In Mexico, the GST is formally acknowledged but "did not feature in public debate or media analysis" and has not influenced economic or policy priorities. Similarly, Vietnam shows "no clear evidence" of GST integration into NDC formulation. Across several developing countries, including Egypt and Gambia, GST uptake is constrained by structural factors such as limited financing, institutional capacity constraints, and economic pressures.

In these cases, the GST is:

- politically marginal or irrelevant,
- overshadowed by domestic crises or priorities,
- or reduced to a formal reporting requirement without substantive impact.

Conclusion and policy implications

We can notice some overarching dynamics that emerge from our comparative analysis of a sample of UNFCCC Parties. Firstly, domestic politics determines uptake. Political context is the strongest predictor of GST influence. Electoral shifts (e.g. Argentina), partisan polarization (USA), or competing priorities (e.g. Thailand) can significantly enhance or suppress its impact. Secondly, climate finance is central. Developing countries consistently interpret the GST through the lens of climate finance, with perceived failures in financial commitments limiting willingness to adopt more ambitious targets and undermining trust in the process. Thirdly, policy uptake is highly selective, and governments favour technically feasible and politically acceptable measures while avoiding high-cost or contentious structural changes

(see Table below). This reflects the political economy of decarbonization because it captures how material interests, costs, and power structures shape policy choices & undermine environmental goals. Put differently, most governments prioritize low-cost, politically feasible measures and avoid actions that threaten powerful interests or impose immediate economic costs.

Policy Uptake Pattern	Examples of Uptake
Prioritized areas	• Renewable energy expansion • Energy efficiency • Reporting and transparency mechanisms
Avoided areas	• Fossil fuel phase-out • Subsidy reform • Structural economic transformation

The Global Stocktake has established itself as an important element of global climate governance, but its influence remains indirect and uneven, shaping national action through signalling, coordination, and peer comparison. For decision-makers, our preliminary analysis of the comparative data gathered across a sample of 23 cases has three key implications:

- Strengthen the link between GST and NDC cycles by increasing requirements for explicit justification and transparency in how GST 2.0 findings are integrated.
- Address climate finance gaps, as credible financial support is essential for translating GST recommendations into action in developing countries.
- Focus on implementation, not only ambition, ensuring that GST outcomes translate into sector-specific policies and measurable outcomes beyond NDC pledges. The Paris Agreement referred to enhancing Party "actions" – not the promises made on the UNFCCC forum. As such, a more stringent form of modalities does not go against the grain of the 2015 Agreement – on the contrary, it seeks to fulfil its promise.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of future GST cycles will depend on whether they can move beyond signalling and catalyse more uniform and substantive integration into national climate governance systems, particularly in politically sensitive areas such as fossil fuel transitions and economic restructuring.

Further reading:

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