

## Opinion – How Could COP30 Put Climate Back at the Top of the Global Agenda?

Written by Daniel Drury

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DANIEL DRURY, OCT 13 2025

If 50,000 world leaders, journalists, NGO representatives, politicians, business leaders, lobbyists, and diplomats all gather for a conference in the middle of the Amazon Rainforest but no one hears them, did they even have the Conference? It is a philosophical thought experiment worth asking as delegates gear up to do exactly that in one month's time. The 30<sup>th</sup> iteration of the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC will be taking place between 10<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> November in Belem, Brazil, a city with a poignant location in the context of this conference. The Amazon Rainforest is one of, if not, the most significant global ecosystem that needs international protection and preservation in the interests of climate mitigation. This would appear to be the right place for the gathering at COP30 to put climate back at the top of the global agenda and to provide strong clear leadership on the future of climate policy which is so badly needed.

However, this year's COP will also take place against a backdrop of arguably the strongest and most vocal political opposition to climate action that we have seen since the establishment of the conference in 1995. While the avalanche of electoral successes that climate sceptic populist parties are enjoying around the democratic world can no longer be called a new phenomenon, this is the first COP since the return of President Donald Trump to the White House. And it was his claim that climate change is the 'the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world', stated at a speech in the UN itself at the end of September, that will embolden climate sceptics the world over. The rhetoric means that the job of COP30 to make itself heard in an increasingly fractured international landscape has now been made doubly difficult as it is set to be drowned out by deafening noises of derision made by the US President and his acolytes. Meanwhile, with so many other critically important concerns regarding multiple international conflicts, will there really be the bandwidth required for COP30 to put climate change at the top of the 24-hour news cycle for more than the duration of the conference? Not to mention the to-do lists of the world's most powerful leaders.

The UNFCCC faces an uphill struggle coming into this conference but there are some key things that can be done to ensure that this conference is indeed heard loud and clear and can be a catalyst for significant progress without being drowned out within the very forest it aims to save.

Firstly, rather than this conference focusing on climate-sceptic countries, the countries willing to stand up and demonstrate their commitment to climate mitigation on the world stage must dominate the agenda. None are more important than Brazil, which not only hosts this year's conference but in doing so is signalling its return as a country which takes climate action seriously. The years of the Bolsonaro presidency saw despairing and dejected climate activists in Brazil and around the world watch on as plans to curtail the degradation of the Amazon were halted in favour of deforestation practices which grew unabated in the name of economic growth. The policies in these years did untold damage to the forest and took Brazil out of global leadership on climate, with trust in its government seriously undermined. However, since the return of Lula to the presidency in 2023, rhetoric has been far more positive with his stated goal being 'zero deforestation in the Amazon' by 2030. He has called on all countries to attend COP30 with ambitious climate targets and will use the location of the Amazon to demonstrate the impacts of not committing to these goals. Brazil's status as one of the world's foremost powers in terms of population, area, and economy as well as a majority guardianship of one of the most precious climate mitigating ecosystems means that its voice can make a noisy case for global climate action.

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Secondly, there is a particular climate-sceptic narrative that needs to be countered. In a time of economic instability and of uncertain energy security, the temptation of many national governments is to conclude that coal, oil, and gas resources that go unutilised are a wasted resource. The 'drill baby, drill' discourse becomes tempting to embrace. The aim of this conference should be to make renewable energy even more tempting to embrace. Quite apart from the strong environmental arguments (that are well-known but often dismissed) about the dangers of exploiting the global environment for non-renewable sources of energy, COP30 must bellow the economic case for renewable energy such that it cannot be missed by anyone paying attention. The upfront costs for renewable infrastructure such as solar panels are now highly competitive with non-renewable alternatives so that it becomes more a question of changing habits than taking an economic hit. Meanwhile, the sun and wind have zero fuel costs and are both predictable and stable. This means any household or business who invests now will have increasingly lower fuel costs into the future. The renewable energy industry is a growth area which will provide new employment and opportunities for working people. It will also provide much stronger energy security around the world with countries no longer vulnerable to market shocks in the price of oil and gas or reliant on non-renewable resources from abroad. Nothing can make a stronger case for this than the impact the Ukraine War has had on Europe's energy security. If business leaders, economists, and politicians can provide the springboard for these arguments to become mainstream in global discourse then the conference will indeed have made a resounding impact.

Thirdly, the success of COP conferences has tended to be measured by the level of ambition shown in each country's greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. While this is one important way of making progress this has very often led to disappointing outcomes as countries continually fail to implement effective domestic policies to reach these targets. The system of relying on national governments to implement the agreements made at COP must only be one strand of this global effort. A focus on the other levels of government will widen the scope and possibility of the impact international agreements can make. An example relevant to this conference can be an evaluation of the success of the UNFCCC REDD+ framework, formed at the international level as a global initiative to protect the world's forests. While it has made positive policy changes to the protection of the Amazon, it has also been criticised for its lack of engagement with local communities and indigenous people which means it has not been effective in changing forest conservation habits on the ground. This conference provides an opportunity for the global and the local to come together and collaborate to conceive of, form, and improve policies which combine local knowledge with international resources, and which can work alongside national initiatives. This approach could provide a truly cutting edge and fresh perspective for climate mitigation which would trumpet a new wave of hope on this issue.

There will be many competing agendas and ideas from a plethora of players and interested parties at COP30. The three targets I have set out are some of the many ideas that will be brought to the table. They are three possible ways to elevate this conference and ensure that it does not go unheard despite all the many competing global issues and the climate-sceptic critics. Ultimately, the opportunity must not be passed up to put climate change at the top of the global agenda and to ensure that the cacophony of noise it creates from the Amazon Rainforest will reverberate around the globe for a longtime afterwards.

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## About the author:

**Daniel Drury** works on the Thinking Global podcast team at E-IR. He is a doctoral researcher in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews. His research focuses on the environmental governance of the Amazon region and how effective the partnership of international organisations and local government is in protecting and preserving this ecosystem. He has a professional background working in environmental policy for NGOs in Brussels. He has also written on populism in Central Europe.