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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Can Climate Rankings Tell Us Which Country Is a Good Performer?

 DOWN TO EARTH

14 August 2026 ·

ENVIRONMENT

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GS2

GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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Down to Earth

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GS2

GS3



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The authors argue no climate ranking is a neutral scorecard, each encodes value choices about absolute versus per-capita emissions. If India performs very differently on EPI versus CCPI, which ranking should Indian climate diplomacy cite, and does selectively citing the more favourable index undermine India's broader credibility on climate commitments?"

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

A ranking that tells you a country performed well has already decided, quietly, what “performing well” means, and that decision is where the real debate lives.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

This editorial gives you a precise, transferable methodological literacy tool: understanding that international rankings and indices are not neutral measurements but encode specific value choices, directly useful whenever a GS2/GS3 answer needs to engage with any international index (Ease of Doing Business, Human Development Index, Global Hunger Index, and here, climate-performance indices).

GS Paper 2: International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate; India’s position in global climate governance.

GS Paper 3: Environment and ecology, climate change; conservation.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT IS TESTABLE
Environmental Performance Index (EPI)	Ranking emphasising absolute national emissions	One of the two indices compared
Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)	Ranking emphasising per-capita emissions and equity	The second index, producing divergent results
Absolute vs per-capita emissions	Total national emissions versus emissions per person	The specific methodological choice driving divergent rankings
Value-laden vs neutral metrics	Any ranking encodes choices about what matters, not objective truth	The editorial's core epistemological argument

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Multiple international indices attempt to measure and rank countries' climate and environmental performance, each using different methodologies and weightings. The **Environmental Performance Index (EPI)**, published periodically by research institutions, and the **Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)**, published annually by Germanwatch, NewClimate Institute and the Climate Action Network, are two prominent examples that, despite both purporting to measure climate performance, apply meaningfully different methodological emphases.

THE ANALYSIS

1. The absolute-versus-per-capita distinction is the editorial's central methodological insight.

Absolute emissions measure a country's total atmospheric impact regardless of population size, while per-capita emissions measure impact per individual, and these produce fundamentally different verdicts for large, populous developing countries like India versus smaller, wealthier nations.

2. Neither metric is simply "correct" while the other is "wrong," a point the editorial makes explicitly. Absolute emissions capture genuine atmospheric impact; per-capita emissions capture genuine equity and historical-responsibility considerations central to international climate-justice frameworks like the UNFCCC's Common But Differentiated Responsibilities principle. Both are legitimate lenses, not competing claims to objective truth.

3. The stakes for India specifically are significant and directly relevant to climate diplomacy.

India's large population combined with comparatively low per-capita emissions means the EPI and CCPI can produce quite different pictures of India's climate performance, a divergence with real implications for how Indian climate diplomacy frames its position in international negotiations.

4. This exposes a broader epistemological point about how international rankings function in policy discourse. Rankings are frequently cited as if they were neutral, objective measurements, but the editorial's comparison demonstrates that methodological choices embedded in any ranking's design

substantially shape, and can even reverse, the resulting verdict.

5. The practical recommendation, read multiple indices together, is methodologically sound but politically demanding. Genuinely engaging with multiple, sometimes contradictory indices requires more analytical effort than citing a single favourable ranking, but produces a more honest and complete picture of relative national performance.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

Environmental Performance Index (EPI): emphasises absolute national emissions

Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI): emphasises per-capita emissions and equity, published by Germanwatch, NewClimate Institute and Climate Action Network

Authors: Chirag Dhara, Kamal Murari, Sebastian Block

WATCH THE TRAP: DO NOT TREAT EITHER EPI OR CCPI AS THE SINGLE, OBJECTIVELY CORRECT MEASURE OF CLIMATE PERFORMANCE. THE EDITORIAL'S CENTRAL POINT IS THAT BOTH ENCODE DISTINCT, LEGITIMATE VALUE CHOICES, AND CITING ONLY ONE WITHOUT ACKNOWLEDGING THIS IS METHODOLOGICALLY INCOMPLETE.

THE DEBATE

Argument FOR treating absolute emissions as the primary metric. Atmospheric impact depends on total emissions regardless of population, meaning large emitters bear proportionally greater responsibility for climate outcomes irrespective of their per-person footprint.

Argument FOR treating per-capita emissions and equity as the primary metric. Historical responsibility and fairness considerations, central to international climate-justice principles, mean large, populous developing countries with low per-person emissions should not be penalised in rankings the same way high-per-capita-emission wealthy nations are.

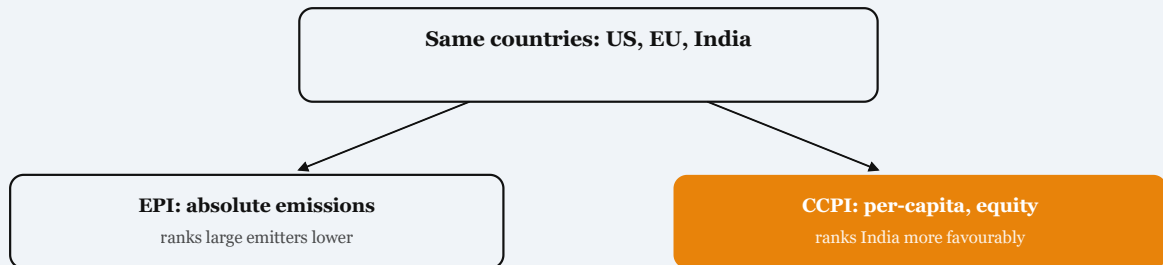
Balanced verdict. Both metrics are legitimate and capture genuinely different dimensions of climate responsibility; the editorial's recommendation to read multiple indices together, rather than treating any single ranking as objectively authoritative, is the methodologically honest approach, particularly for a country like India whose performance varies significantly depending on which metric is applied.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

The transferable pattern: **when citing any international ranking or index in a Mains answer, briefly note what the ranking actually measures and what value choices its methodology embeds, rather than treating the ranking as a neutral, objective fact.** This literacy applies to any

international index, Ease of Doing Business, Human Development Index, Global Hunger Index, Corruption Perceptions Index, not climate rankings alone.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



The same countries receive starkly different climate-performance verdicts depending on whether absolute emissions (EPI) or per-capita, equity-weighted emissions (CCPI) is used.

TAKEAWAY BOX

A ranking that tells you a country performed well has already decided, quietly, what “performing well” means, and that decision is where the real debate lives.

Environmental Performance Index (EPI), absolute emissions; **Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)**, per-capita/equity, published by **Germanwatch**, **NewClimate Institute**, **Climate Action Network**.

should international climate rankings be required to disclose their methodological value choices prominently, given how easily a single favourable ranking can be cited selectively in diplomatic or public discourse?

UPSC has tested India’s position in global climate governance and international indices generally (GS2/GS3); this editorial’s methodological-literacy framework strengthens engagement with any cited international ranking.

“No international ranking is a neutral scorecard; each encodes specific value choices.” Examine this claim with reference to the Environmental Performance Index and the Climate Change Performance Index.

Sources: *Down To Earth*, *Germanwatch*

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• KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Chirag Dhara, Kamal Murari and Sebastian Block, writing in *Down To Earth*, compare the Environmental Performance Index (EPI, emphasising absolute emissions) against the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI, emphasising per-capita emissions and fairness), showing the two indices produce starkly different verdicts on the same countries, and argue no climate ranking is a neutral scorecard since each encodes distinct value choices.



SUPPORTING

- The EPI weights absolute national emissions heavily, which tends to rank large-population, large-economy countries like the United States, the EU and India less favourably regardless of their per-person emissions footprint.
- The CCPI weights per-capita emissions and historical equity considerations, which tends to rank large-population developing countries with lower per-person emissions, including India, more favourably than the EPI would.
- Applying both indices to the same set of countries, the US, the EU and India, produces meaningfully different rankings and narratives about which countries are performing well, demonstrating that ranking outcomes are highly sensitive to underlying methodological choices.



COUNTER

Both metrics, absolute emissions and per-capita emissions, capture genuinely relevant dimensions of climate responsibility, absolute emissions reflect actual atmospheric impact, while per-capita emissions reflect equity and historical responsibility, meaning dismissing either index as simply “wrong” would itself be a value judgment rather than a neutral methodological correction.



WAY FORWARD

The authors’ implicit recommendation is for policymakers and the public to read multiple climate-performance indices together rather than treating any single one as an objective, value-free scorecard, using the divergence between indices as information about the underlying equity and responsibility trade-offs rather than resolving it in favour of one metric.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

Compare the Environmental Performance Index and the Climate Change Performance Index as measures of national climate performance, and examine why the choice between absolute and per-capita emissions metrics produces starkly different rankings for the same countries. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Chirag Dhara, Kamal Murari and Sebastian Block, writing in Down To Earth, compare two prominent climate-performance indices, the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) and the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), showing that their differing methodological emphases, absolute emissions versus per-capita emissions and equity, produce starkly different rankings for the same countries.

BODY

The EPI weights absolute national emissions heavily, a methodological choice that tends to rank large-population, large-economy countries, the United States, the European Union, India, less favourably regardless of how low their per-person emissions footprint might be relative to smaller, wealthier nations. The CCPI, by contrast, weights per-capita emissions and historical equity considerations more heavily, a choice that tends to rank large-population developing countries with comparatively low per-person emissions, India among them, considerably more favourably.

Applying both indices to the same set of countries produces meaningfully different verdicts and narratives about relative climate performance, demonstrating that ranking outcomes are highly sensitive to underlying methodological and value choices rather than reflecting some single, objective measure of climate performance. Both metrics capture genuinely relevant dimensions, absolute emissions reflect actual atmospheric impact regardless of population, while per-capita emissions reflect equity and historical-responsibility considerations central to international climate-justice debates, meaning neither index can be dismissed as simply incorrect without itself making a value judgment about which dimension matters more.

CONCLUSION

A complete answer should treat climate-performance rankings as value-laden methodological choices rather than neutral scorecards, and should note the specific stakes for India, which performs very differently depending on which index is cited, a distinction directly relevant to how Indian climate diplomacy frames its own performance in international forums.

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