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## Recognized but Not Regularly Reported: Journalists' Prioritization of Climate Change in Mainstream Nepali Media

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### ABSTRACT

Climate change has become one of the defining public issues of the twenty-first century, yet its position within everyday journalism remains uneven, especially in politically crowded news environments. This study examines how mainstream Nepali journalists prioritize climate change and what factors shape that prioritization. Using a structured survey of 52 journalists and editors working in print, radio, television, and online media, the article analyzes newsroom attitudes through the combined lenses of agenda-setting and gatekeeping. The findings reveal a striking tension. On the one hand, most respondents recognize climate change as a critical issue for Nepali society (82.7%), believe that it deserves more media attention (84.6%), and agree that media coverage can raise public awareness (84.6%). On the other hand, actual reporting remains inconsistent: climate issues are covered only occasionally by the largest share of respondents (42.3%), and the overall editorial priority of climate reporting is most often rated as merely moderate (57.7%), with nearly one-third rating it low or very low. Data availability (51.9%) and training or expertise (50.0%) emerge as the strongest influences on prioritization, while lack of resources (76.9%) and inadequate editorial backing (84.6%) are widely perceived as major constraints. The study argues that climate change in Nepali media is normatively acknowledged but operationally marginalized. To improve climate journalism, media organizations in Nepal need stronger editorial commitment, specialized training, more accessible expert and data networks, and a shift from episodic disaster coverage toward sustained reporting on climate processes, justice, adaptation, and everyday livelihoods.

### INTRODUCTION

Nepal stands at the frontline of climate vulnerability. Its steep and fragile topography, dependence on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and hydropower, and exposure to floods, landslides, drought, heat stress, and cryospheric change make climate change a development issue as much as an environmental one. Official assessments by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank describe Nepal as highly exposed to rapid-onset and slow-onset climate risks, while the World Bank's Country Climate and Development Report warns that climate impacts are already affecting growth, labor productivity, health, crops, and livestock (Asian Development Bank [ADB] & World Bank Group, 2021; World Bank, 2022). At the wider Asian scale, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) has also underscored the growing health and livelihood burdens associated with heat, floods, and drought across the region.

In response, Nepal has progressively expanded its climate-policy architecture. The country's National Adaptation Plan (NAP) 2021–2050 institutionalized a long-horizon adaptation framework, while more recent government commitments have continued to place climate resilience and low-carbon development on the national agenda (Ministry of Forests and Environment [MoFE], 2021, 2025). Yet policy ambition does not automatically translate into public understanding. In a country marked by geographical unevenness, linguistic diversity,

and unequal access to expert information, journalism remains one of the main channels through which climate knowledge is translated into public conversation. Whether climate change is framed as a scientific risk, a livelihood challenge, a justice issue, or merely another seasonal disaster has consequences for what citizens, institutions, and policymakers take seriously.

That makes media priority a central research problem. Climate change rarely arrives in newsrooms as a single, self-contained "beat." Instead, it competes with elections, cabinet reshuffles, inflation, corruption scandals, diplomatic crises, and breaking disasters. Recent scholarship on climate journalism has shown that reporting on climate change is structurally difficult: it unfolds slowly, cuts across sectors, requires scientific translation, and often lacks the immediate drama of political conflict (Hoegh-Krohn *et al.*, 2025; Schäfer & Painter, 2021). These challenges are likely to be sharper in a country like Nepal, where political developments can dominate the national news cycle for extended periods and where many news organizations still operate with limited resources.

Emerging studies from Nepal reinforce this concern. Research on climate narratives in Nepali media suggests that the press can shape public meanings of climate justice, but that it may also reproduce elite perspectives and unequal power relations (Sharma *et al.*, 2024). A discourse study of selected Nepali media content found

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that climate reporting can foster literacy and hope, but it also highlighted the need to better connect climate communication with meaningful public engagement (Baral *et al.*, 2024). Likewise, qualitative work by Uprety *et al.* (2025) found that climate reporting in Nepal often struggles to distinguish between climate change as an underlying structural process and climate-related events as isolated incidents. More recently, Airi's (2025) study of COP29 coverage in Nepali media concluded that reporting was sparse, irregular, and overshadowed by politics and the economy.

What remains underexplored, however, is the viewpoint of journalists themselves. Much of the existing Nepal-focused literature examines media texts, public discourse, or specific high-profile events. Less is known about how working journalists and editors assess the place of climate change inside mainstream newsrooms, what they see as the main drivers of coverage, and which organizational obstacles prevent climate reporting from becoming more regular and proactive. This gap matters because newsroom priority is not simply a matter of individual goodwill; it is shaped by institutional routines, editorial cultures, and professional capacities.

This article addresses that gap by analyzing survey data from 52 journalists and editors working in mainstream Nepali media. It asks two broad questions: first, how strongly is climate change prioritized within editorial practice relative to other public issues; and second, what professional and institutional conditions shape that prioritization? Drawing on agenda-setting and gatekeeping perspectives, the article argues that climate change in Nepal is widely recognized as socially important but not yet consistently embedded in newsroom routines. The paper contributes to climate communication scholarship by offering an empirically grounded Nepal-focused account of the gap between normative recognition and practical media priority.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Climate journalism scholarship has consistently shown that the media do more than report environmental change; they shape the public salience, interpretive frame, and emotional texture of climate politics. In their widely cited overview, Schäfer and Painter (2021) argue that climate journalism is undergoing significant structural change. Specialist climate reporters are relatively scarce, particularly in the Global South, and are working within increasingly pressured media systems. At the same time, online-born news outlets and niche sites are expanding the forms through which climate reporting reaches the public. This shifting landscape is important for Nepal, where digital journalism has grown rapidly but where newsroom specialization remains uneven.

A second strand of recent literature emphasizes the experiential and narrative difficulty of climate news. Hoegh-Krohn *et al.* (2025) found that audiences often perceive climate change as an “intangible” news topic less integrated into daily media habits, less clearly bounded

than other issues, and harder to locate in time and space. Their argument helps explain why climate reporting can remain socially important yet editorially unstable. Climate change is not a single event but a layered process. It is easier to cover a landslide than to explain how changing rainfall patterns, land-use pressures, weak planning, and warming temperatures interact across time. This distinction between episodic visibility and structural legibility is highly relevant in the Nepali setting.

Recent research also draws attention to how journalistic practice itself shapes coverage. Kirchner *et al.* (2024) show that the production of climate futures in journalism is influenced by newsroom policies, professional routines, and the interpretive frames carried by journalists. Climate coverage does not emerge from neutral pipelines of information; it is filtered through judgments about audience appeal, editorial line, available expertise, and institutional constraints. UNESCO (2024), in framing environmental journalism as a public-interest necessity, similarly notes that climate reporters often face professional and structural barriers when trying to explain complex environmental crises in accessible ways. Nepal-specific scholarship, though still limited, points in the same direction. Sharma *et al.* (2024), using critical discourse analysis of *The Kathmandu Post*, argue that media narratives play an important role in producing meaning around climate change and climate justice in Nepal. Their study shows that journalism can illuminate unequal burdens, but it can also reproduce dominant viewpoints when marginalized communities are not centered. Baral *et al.* (2024), in a positive discourse analysis of selected Nepali media content, found that mass media can build climate literacy by using language that informs, urges, and encourages collective action. This is an important corrective to purely deficit-based accounts of environmental journalism: Nepali media can communicate climate issues constructively when they invest in explanation and public orientation.

At the same time, other Nepal-based studies reveal significant weaknesses in consistency and depth. Uprety *et al.* (2025) found that many climate communication efforts in Nepal suffer from design and innovation limitations and from a weak distinction between climate events and climate structures. Their work recommends better implementation strategies, journalist capacity building, and clearer media guidelines. Airi's (2025) content analysis of coverage surrounding COP29 reaches a related conclusion: climate reporting in major Nepali outlets was limited, fragmented, and often displaced by more immediate political and economic stories. These findings suggest that the issue is not climate invisibility in an absolute sense, but intermittent, event-dependent visibility.

A broader communication perspective also supports the importance of stronger climate reporting in Nepal. Saha *et al.* (2021), in a study of disaster-risk communication through radio after the 2015 Gorkha earthquake, found that audiences who regularly listened

to targeted programming were more likely to report increased knowledge and safer action. Although that study focused on earthquake reconstruction rather than climate journalism per se, it provides compelling evidence that well-designed media communication in Nepal can influence understanding and practice. More recent work on Nepal's early warning systems similarly shows that effective communication depends on appropriate media selection, message design, language, and accessibility (Bhandari, 2025). In other words, communication quality is not secondary; it is part of the adaptive capacity of society itself.

The present study is guided by two complementary theoretical perspectives. Agenda-setting theory holds that media attention influences what the public sees as important. While the media do not fully determine what people think, they help determine what people think about. In the context of climate change, this means that frequency, visibility, and continuity of coverage matter because they shape issue salience. Gatekeeping theory, by contrast, turns attention inside the newsroom. It asks how editors, owners, routines, professional norms, commercial pressures, and institutional filters determine which stories pass through the "gate" and which do not. Used together, these theories illuminate both the outward and inward dynamics of climate journalism in Nepal. Agenda-setting helps explain why inconsistent climate coverage can weaken public attention; gatekeeping helps explain why that inconsistency persists despite widespread recognition of climate change as a major social issue.

The literature therefore points to a clear empirical gap. Existing Nepal-focused studies tell us something about discourse, event-specific coverage, and the communicative promise of media. However, they say less about the everyday editorial status of climate change as perceived by journalists themselves. This article extends the literature by examining precisely that question: how mainstream Nepali journalists evaluate climate change as a newsroom priority, and what they identify as the strongest enablers and constraints of coverage.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a quantitative, descriptive research design based on a structured survey of mainstream Nepali journalists. The underlying dataset consists of responses from 52 working journalists and editors drawn purposively from tier-1 national media organizations representing print, radio, television, and online news platforms. The selection logic was therefore not statistical representativeness in a strict probabilistic sense, but informed coverage of influential mainstream outlets whose editorial decisions help shape national issue agendas.

The survey instrument focused on five broad areas: respondent profile, frequency of climate-related reporting, perceived editorial priority of climate change, normative attitudes toward the social significance of climate reporting, and factors that influence or constrain

newsroom prioritization. The questionnaire also asked respondents to evaluate whether media coverage can influence public awareness, whether journalists help set the climate agenda, and whether resource limitations and editorial backing affect climate reporting. The resulting data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and percentages, in order to map prevailing tendencies rather than test causal relationships.

The demographic profile of the sample suggests that the responses came from experienced practitioners. Men constituted 57.7% of respondents and women 42.3%. Almost half of respondents (48.1%) were aged 26–35, while 38.5% were aged 36–45, indicating a strong concentration of mid-career journalists. In terms of experience, 65.4% had worked in journalism for more than ten years. Nearly half of the respondents were associated with online media (48.1%), followed by print (21.2%), radio (17.3%), and television (13.5%). These patterns are useful for interpretation because they indicate that the survey reflects the views of practitioners who are not only active in the profession but also likely to participate directly in editorial decision-making and content production.

The study is anchored analytically in agenda-setting and gatekeeping. The questionnaire items were interpreted through these two lenses: agenda-setting helped assess whether climate change is granted sufficient public salience through media attention, while gatekeeping helped identify the institutional and professional filters affecting that attention. Because the design is descriptive and the sample is purposive, the findings should be read as a grounded portrait of newsroom tendencies rather than as statistically generalizable claims about every media worker in Nepal.

A few limitations should be acknowledged. First, the data are self-reported, meaning they capture perceptions of practice rather than audited newsroom output. Second, the study does not include content analysis, interviews, or ethnographic observation, so it cannot independently verify how respondents' assessments map onto actual published coverage. Third, the sample size is modest. Even so, the survey remains valuable because it offers a direct view into how journalists themselves understand the place of climate change in mainstream Nepali media a perspective still underrepresented in the literature.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show a pattern of partial recognition: climate change is widely acknowledged as important, yet it has not achieved a consistently high place in routine journalism. This tension appears clearly when one compares normative attitudes with reported editorial practice.

First, the frequency data reveal that climate reporting exists but is uneven. Only 15.4% of respondents said they covered climate change "very frequently," while 30.8% said "frequently." The largest group, 42.3%, reported covering climate issues only "occasionally," and another 11.5% said they did so "rarely" or "never." In

other words, fewer than half of the surveyed journalists described climate change as a frequent area of reporting, whereas a slight majority treated it as intermittent rather

than routine. This is a crucial finding because it suggests that climate change remains vulnerable to disruption by faster-moving stories and breaking news cycles.

**Table 1:** Selected survey findings on climate-change priority in mainstream Nepali media

Indicator	Dominant response	Value
Climate change is critical for Nepali society	Agree/Strongly agree	82.7%
Climate change deserves more coverage	Agree/Strongly agree	84.6%
Media coverage influences public awareness	Agree/Strongly agree	84.6%
Journalists help set the climate agenda	Agree/Strongly agree	88.5%
Frequency of climate reporting	Occasional	42.3%
Overall priority in mainstream media	Moderate	57.7%
Strongest influence on prioritization	Availability of data/sources	51.9%
Major institutional barrier	Editorial support matters	84.6%

Source: Survey data, 2026.

A similar pattern appears when respondents compared climate reporting with other news agendas. While 23.1% rated climate change as a “very high” priority and 30.8% as a “high” priority, 32.7% placed it at a “moderate” level. Another 13.4% rated it low or very low. Taken together, this indicates that climate change is not dismissed outright in mainstream Nepali media; indeed, more than half of respondents placed it in the upper tier of perceived importance. Yet the sizable “moderate” category suggests that climate remains an issue acknowledged in principle but not consistently elevated above other competing beats.

The distinction becomes sharper when respondents were asked about Nepalese society rather than newsroom practice. Fully 82.7% either agreed or strongly agreed that climate change is a critical issue for Nepali society, and none selected a neutral position. Likewise, 84.6% agreed or strongly agreed that climate change deserves more media coverage. These findings matter because they show that the problem is not simple disbelief or denial. Most journalists in the sample appear convinced that climate change matters deeply to Nepal and that current coverage is inadequate. The editorial gap, then, lies less in awareness than in implementation.

Respondents also expressed strong confidence in the communicative power of journalism. A combined 84.6% agreed or strongly agreed that media coverage can influence public awareness of climate change, while 88.5% agreed or strongly agreed that journalists play a key role in setting the climate-change agenda. These responses are theoretically significant. They indicate that journalists understand themselves not merely as passive

transmitters of information but as actors who can shape public attention. Put differently, the respondents largely accept the normative premise of agenda-setting even if their institutions do not always operationalize it in day-to-day coverage.

When asked what influences their decision to prioritize climate stories, respondents identified a cluster of factors related to knowledge infrastructure and professional capacity. Availability of data or sources was mentioned by 51.9% of respondents, making it the most frequently cited influence, followed closely by training and expertise at 50.0%. Editorial policy came next at 42.3%, while audience interest was cited by 32.7%. Time and resource constraints were selected by 26.9%, and only 15.4% identified government or donor agenda as an important influence. This ranking is revealing. It suggests that climate reporting is strongly shaped by whether journalists feel they have credible data, understandable evidence, and sufficient professional competence to work with a technically complex issue. Institutional priorities matter, but they are not the only gate; epistemic access itself is a major filter.

The barriers section reinforces that interpretation. A combined 76.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that lack of resources limits climate-change reporting. An even larger share, 84.6%, agreed or strongly agreed that editorial support affects the extent of climate coverage. These two findings deserve emphasis because they move the discussion beyond individual motivation. Many journalists may want to report on climate change more consistently, but they work in institutions where budgets, time, staffing, and editorial commitment strongly

shape what becomes publishable. Climate reporting is therefore constrained by both material limitations and organizational culture.

Finally, when respondents were asked to rate the overall priority of climate change in mainstream Nepali media, the modal answer was “moderate” (57.7%). Only 11.5% rated it high or very high, while 30.7% rated it low or very low. This is perhaps the clearest summary of the dataset. Climate change is present in Nepali mainstream media, but it has not yet become a defining editorial priority. The issue occupies a middle position: visible enough to be recognized, insufficiently central to be sustained.

Taken together, the results point to a coherent pattern. Journalists broadly recognize climate change as socially urgent and communicatively important. They believe that media attention can raise awareness and that journalists can help shape the public agenda. Yet actual coverage remains intermittent, and the overall institutional priority of climate reporting is still judged as moderate at best. The strongest influences on prioritization are access to data and professional expertise, while the strongest constraints are resource scarcity and weak editorial backing. The findings therefore suggest not a crisis of awareness, but a crisis of newsroom integration.

### Discussion

The most important contribution of this study is the distinction it reveals between recognition and regularization. Climate change is widely accepted by respondents as a major issue for Nepali society, yet it is not routinely treated as a top-tier editorial beat. This is the central paradox of the data. The survey does not depict a newsroom culture that is indifferent to climate change; rather, it depicts one that acknowledges climate urgency but struggles to institutionalize that urgency in everyday reporting. Climate change, in this sense, has achieved moral legitimacy without fully achieving editorial centrality.

Agenda-setting theory helps explain why this matters. Public issues do not gain durable salience merely because journalists believe they are important. They gain salience when they are repeatedly and visibly covered across time, formats, and outlets. The survey shows that such continuity is still missing. When the largest share of respondents report covering climate issues only occasionally, climate change remains vulnerable to being crowded out by the next cabinet crisis, budget conflict, election cycle, or geopolitical controversy. This pattern closely mirrors recent Nepal-focused research showing fragmented and irregular climate coverage, especially around major global climate events (Airi, 2025). It also resonates with broader scholarship arguing that climate news often appears “intangible” when it is not tied to immediate and clearly bounded events (Hoegh-Krohn *et al.*, 2025).

In the Nepali context, this episodic tendency is especially consequential. Climate change is often most visible in headlines after floods, landslides, forest fires, droughts,

or glacial risk alerts. But when reporting becomes overwhelmingly event-driven, the public sees symptoms more often than systems. That can produce what may be called a “disaster lens” rather than a “climate lens.” Disasters generate urgency, but they do not automatically generate understanding of the longer-term processes of warming, vulnerability, maladaptation, inequality, and governance failure. The present findings reinforce Uprety *et al.*'s (2025) observation that Nepali climate reporting often struggles to separate structural climate change from isolated incidents. What is needed is a shift from coverage after impact to coverage before, around, and beyond impact.

The survey's ranking of influences offers a practical clue about how such a shift might occur. Data availability and training or expertise were the two strongest factors shaping whether journalists prioritize climate stories. This suggests that climate journalism in Nepal is hindered not only by editorial competition but by a knowledge bottleneck. Reporters are more likely to pursue climate stories when they have accessible evidence, credible sources, and the confidence to interpret scientific or policy material accurately. This point matters because climate change is not a beat that can rely on surface familiarity. It demands translation between scientific findings, local experiences, and public relevance. Without usable datasets, expert networks, and explanatory confidence, climate reporting is likely to remain thin, reactive, and dependent on external events.

The same logic applies to institutional support. The strong agreement that editorial backing shapes coverage and that resource limitations constrain it illustrates gatekeeping in concrete form. Editors decide what gets space, prominence, follow-up, and time. Owners and managers shape staffing and budget. Organizational routines determine whether a story can be pursued beyond a press release or disaster update. The survey suggests that climate coverage in Nepal is not failing because journalists do not see its importance; it is failing because newsrooms have not fully built the structures needed to support sustained reporting. This interpretation aligns with the wider international literature. Schäfer and Painter (2021) note that climate journalism around the world is affected by shrinking specialist capacity and pressure on newsroom resources, while UNESCO (2024) highlights the broader professional difficulties faced by journalists covering environmental crises.

At the same time, the data offer reasons for cautious optimism. Respondents overwhelmingly believe that media coverage can influence public awareness and that journalists themselves help shape the climate agenda. This perceived agency is important. It suggests that journalists do not see climate reporting as futile. Nepal's communication history gives further support to this optimism. Saha *et al.* (2021) showed that targeted radio communication in post-earthquake Nepal could measurably improve public knowledge and safer practices, while Bhandari (2025) emphasizes that effective risk

communication depends on choosing appropriate media, language, and formats. These studies are not identical to climate journalism, but they demonstrate a larger principle: communication in Nepal can change what people know and do when it is sustained, accessible, and context-sensitive.

This has implications for how climate journalism should be framed. If climate change is treated only as an abstract environmental topic, it will continue to lose ground to politics and the economy. But if it is reported as a livelihood issue, a migration issue, a health issue, an agriculture issue, a hydropower issue, a labor issue, and a justice issue, it becomes harder to sideline. Nepal's own climate-development discourse already points in this direction. The World Bank (2022) notes that climate change is affecting growth, productivity, health, and inequality, while national policy frameworks such as the NAP position adaptation within broad developmental planning (MoFE, 2021). Journalism that connects climate change to everyday questions - food prices, water insecurity, rural outmigration, urban heat, roads, schools, insurance, and public spending may be more likely to sustain audience attention than reporting that treats climate only as a specialized environmental concern.

The sample distribution also hints at a potentially important opportunity in digital journalism. Nearly half of respondents in this survey were associated with online media. This does not prove that online platforms are inherently better at climate reporting, and the study cannot establish medium-based causal differences. Still, it suggests that digital spaces may be increasingly important sites for experimentation. Online platforms can combine breaking updates with explainers, visuals, data stories, short videos, interactive maps, and multilingual formats. In a country where early warning communication already relies on mixed media ecologies including radio, television, phones, and portals (Bhandari, 2025), climate journalism may be most effective when it embraces platform diversity rather than treating mainstream media as a single homogeneous field.

The findings should also be read with appropriate caution. The survey is descriptive, based on a purposive sample, and limited to self-reported perceptions. It cannot tell us which outlets perform better, how climate stories are framed textually, or whether audiences respond differently to specific formats. Nor can it identify statistically significant relationships between experience, media type, and climate priority. These are important directions for future research. Follow-up studies could combine newsroom surveys with content analysis, editor interviews, and comparative analysis of climate coverage across private, public, community, and digital outlets.

Even with these limitations, the article identifies a clear policy and professional agenda. Strengthening climate journalism in Nepal will require more than urging journalists to "care more." It will require structural investment in climate beats, training in data and science reporting, sustained editorial commitment, and

stronger interfaces between newsrooms, researchers, meteorological agencies, local governments, and affected communities. It will also require a narrative shift: from extraordinary disaster to everyday climate reality, from isolated hazard to patterned vulnerability, and from elite conference coverage to grounded reporting on adaptation, accountability, and justice. Until that shift occurs, climate change is likely to remain recognized, but not regularly reported.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how mainstream Nepali journalists prioritize climate change and what conditions shape that prioritization. The findings show that climate change has substantial normative legitimacy inside the profession. Most respondents see it as a critical issue for Nepali society, believe it deserves more coverage, and accept that media attention can influence public awareness. Yet climate reporting still lacks regularity and institutional weight. It is most often covered occasionally, and its overall priority in mainstream Nepali media is judged as moderate rather than high.

The gap between awareness and practice is explained largely by newsroom conditions. Access to data, quality sources, and professional expertise strongly influences whether journalists prioritize climate stories. At the same time, resource shortages and limited editorial support constrain their ability to do so consistently. In theoretical terms, the study shows how agenda-setting potential is curtailed by gatekeeping conditions. Journalists may recognize climate change as urgent, but without supportive editorial structures that urgency does not reliably translate into sustained coverage.

For Nepali media, the implication is straightforward. Climate journalism must move beyond sporadic disaster reporting and become a regular part of public-interest reporting on development, democracy, and social justice. This requires dedicated climate desks or specialist roles where possible, newsroom training on science and data interpretation, closer collaboration with experts and local communities, and editorial policies that treat climate as a cross-cutting national issue rather than a peripheral soft-news topic. For researchers, the study highlights the need for richer mixed-method work that can connect journalists' perceptions with actual newsroom output and audience reception.

Climate change in Nepal is no longer a distant or niche concern. The challenge for journalism is not whether to cover it, but whether to cover it with the consistency, depth, and civic seriousness that the issue demands.

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