

Briefing

Donald Trump and Climate Change

What do Donald Trump's policies mean for climate change?

Friends of the Earth campaigns for a world where all people can live healthy, fulfilled lives on a planet that can sustain usⁱ. We are optimistic that humanity can overcome the huge challenges societies currently face, but doing so will require people working together at unprecedented scale. Division and intolerance is a direct threat to humanity's ability to navigate the next few decades successfully

The election of Donald Trump is a frightening lurch towards intolerance, and Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland stand in solidarity with people who woke up on November 9th feeling fearful for their future. We will work with people in the USA and here to build a far stronger alternative to Mr Trump's inflammatory rhetoric of hate and intolerance.

Many people in the USA rightly feel that politicians have presided over a broken economic system that has left too many people behind. But the answer is not to lurch backwards into intolerance, racism and cutting back on the environmental and social standards that help keep us safe.

During the election Donald Trump targeted many minorities and it's shocking that such attacks have been rewarded by victory. But the rise of extreme intolerance is not just a problem for the USA. Similar developments took place in the Brexit debate in the UK, and are spreading across Europe. Extreme right wing groups are preying on people's fears and spreading division, when we need more solidarity and co-operation to create an economy and society that works for everyone.

People on both sides of the Atlantic need to stand together and build a positive alternative to Mr Trump's divisive and dangerous rhetoric, that puts people, tolerance and a safe environment first.

For more than 40 years we've seen that the wellbeing of people and planet go hand in hand – and it's been the inspiration for our campaigns. Together with thousands of people like you we've secured safer food and water, defended wildlife and natural habitats, championed the move to clean energy and acted to keep our climate stable. Be a Friend of the Earth – see things differently.

“We will have to harness our new energy, join together, and use every strategy possible to fight against hate and greed and environmental destruction. While I wish we had a different fight before us, we must fight the one presented to us. The future of our country and planet depends on it.”ⁱⁱ

Erich Pica, President, Friends of the Earth USA

The election of Mr Trump also has major implications for progress in tackling climate change, at USA and international levels. This briefing looks at four questions for climate change from a Trump presidency

- What does a Trump presidency mean for International climate negotiations?
- What does a Trump presidency mean for action on climate in the USA?
- Does a Trump Presidency mean that we can no longer meet the Paris Agreement goals?
- What can people do?

1. What does a Trump presidency mean for international climate negotiations?

Q: Can the US pull out of the Paris Agreement?

The USA can pull out of the Paris Agreement – but it would take 4 years for the process to be completed.

President Obama used his executive powers to sign the Paris Agreement so a Trump Presidency could use the same powers to start the 4 year process to leave it.

However, the USA can also pull out of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – and thus in effect pull out of Paris Agreement. That process could take just one year. The UNFCCC is the overarching Convention within which the Paris Agreement sits.

The US ratification of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was ratified with a vote through the Senate. Many legal commentators believe that a decision to withdraw from the UNFCCC will also need Senate approval. This will be an opportunity for both Democratic and Republicans to come together to show that the anti-science approach of the Trump Presidency is not shared by everyone.

Whatever Mr Trump decides, it will likely lead to domestic legal challenges which could hold up US withdrawal. This will give all those who care about the future of the USA and the world an opportunity to demonstrate that the decision doesn't have the support of the majority of the American population.

Q: Will US pulling out mean that the threshold of 55% has no longer been met and the Paris Agreement is no longer legally in force?

55.48% of global emissions are covered even if US leaves – so the Agreement remains in force.

The Paris Agreement is international law. It's supported by a wide range of sectors from businesses, investors, faith communities, doctors, and trade unions around the world.

Q: What are the implications of a Trump presidency for developing countries?

Donald Trump has said that all US finance to climate institutions will ceaseⁱⁱⁱ.

That means no US finance to the UNFCCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), or the Global Environment Facility (a hybrid between World Bank and UNFCCC).

But it also means no US finance to the Green Climate Fund – the United Nations fund set up to help developing countries cope with climate impacts, and invest in clean technology. The US has pledged \$3 billion but only disbursed \$500 million so far. The Green Climate Fund currently has just \$10 billion pledged until 2018, against a target of \$100 billion by 2020.

Despite the US being one of the main countries responsible for causing the climate crisis, Mr Trump is saying he will turn his back on the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world, those that are least responsible for causing the climate crisis. It is the poorest people who are losing their homes from floods, who are suffering from hunger because climate change impacts their harvest.

Q: What are the prospects for the international climate negotiations, if either the USA leaves or stays and is obstructive?

Whether the USA leaves or not it seems certain that a Trump presidency will make the USA a more regressive force in international climate politics in the short term. And this is not from a good starting point.

The reason we don't have legally binding targets in the Paris Agreement is because of US pressure. The reason why we don't have strong targets in line with science and fairness has been because of US pressure. The reason that so many countries on the frontline of the climate crisis don't have as much help as they need, is because the US demanded that they not be held accountable for the climate crisis.

It is inevitable in a long-term global agreement for nearly 200 countries that at any time there will be new Governments or leaders who take more or less action. Leaders come and go. But the overall trend over time is towards greater action, and the Paris Agreement commits the global community to take all efforts to limit global temperatures well below 1.5c.

The best and most fitting response to the threat of the USA doing less is for the EU and rich developed countries like Japan, Australia and Canada to show leadership. Now is the time for the rest of the community to make the negotiations work, begin a race to the top and not to the bottom to accommodate the US. These negotiations can give renewed hope to the world if they commit to making 2018 a moment for real global ambitious action, including firm commitments to increase their pre-2020 targets in line with their fair-share of effort. That's the best response to climate deniers in the US administration.

If the USA does choose to leave, this is not new. The USA has been outside of international climate processes before. With the election of President Bush the US decided not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. The response of other developed countries then was important - they did not jump ship. They carried on and told the USA 'to either join or stand aside'. When the US finally decided to rejoin the negotiations – they were accommodated in the Bali Action Plan.

Q Won't weakening give backsliding countries like Japan and Australia further cover to go slow on climate?

Going slow on action to fight off climate change is an economic, social and environmental mistake. It increases the already severe impacts that more extreme weather events will increasingly have on all parts of our society. It means missing out on the exponential opportunities and benefits of investment in clean technologies, which will be the engine of the world's economic development over the next three decades. Those who are leading the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy are investing in the future and creating jobs while making their economies more resilient.

Overall national interest can however often be trumped by the narrow factional interests of fossil fuel companies and lobbyists, and it is likely that some other backward countries on climate are likely to want to drag their heels further, using American backsliding as an excuse. This makes it even more imperative that the more progressive nations strengthen their response, and make it clear that over 100 countries will not be held to ransom by the actions of a renegade minority.

Q Will this mark a turning-away of the US from international forums?

There will be enormous diplomatic pressure on the US to engage, not just from other countries but within the US government itself. The US government has checks and balances for this reason.

2. What will Mr Trump do on climate and energy in the USA?

Mr Trump will be extremely supportive of fossil fuel corporations, and his presidency will lead to many more destructive oil, coal and fracking pipelines, mines and wells right across the USA^{iv}.

There are likely to be very regressive crack-downs on environmental protest. He is likely to put climate change deniers in charge of key departments, and weaken environmental regulations. The one plus is that clean energy will continue to accelerate: he will not be able to stop it.

Action at State and city level in the USA will mean much positive change is inevitable whatever Mr Trump does. Already Governors and Mayors across the US are committing to do more. There is too much business support, innovation, investment and momentum behind the clean energy transformation for Mr Trump to stop it, and it is taking place right across the USA, including many Republican states.

Also, a vote for Mr Trump is not a vote for inaction on climate – 64% of the American people worry a “great deal” or a “fair amount” on climate change^v. Americans see the impacts climate change is already having on their country – from more severe storms and rainfall, to drought and damage to crops. The American people support climate action by large and are highly supportive of clean energy and President Obama’s actions on climate change^{vi}.

It will be critical that American people stand together to resist attacks on environmental standards, protect their environment from fossil fuel companies, and resists attempts to weaken progress on climate. People in other countries should stand with the American people. Mr Trump does not have a mandate to wreck the American or global environment. Slowing action on climate will also be bad for the economy and the rust-belt workers who could be given a lifeline by the opportunities of a low-carbon transition. If the USA goes back to coal and oil it risks being left badly behind in the colossal economic opportunities in the accelerating global transition away from fossil fuels.

Q What should President Obama do?

President Obama is still President until 20th January 2017. The clock is ticking: President Obama should:

- make good the USA promise of \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund before he leaves office.
- stop the Dakota access pipeline and show that he supports Native American communities.
- use all his skills to persuade the incoming president just how grave a threat climate change is to the millions of ordinary Americans Mr Trump claims to represent, and persuade him not to row back on climate action at either USA or international level or put climate deniers and fossil fuel lobbyists in key energy and climate positions.

3. I’m fearful that with this election there’s no chance left on climate, what hope is there?

It is a big ask, made harder by Mr Trump’s election, but there is momentum and hope. The USA is just one country, albeit a large one. Mr Trump is just one man, although a powerful one. Many positive trends are unstoppable now; and ultimately Mr Trump will fail like King

Cnut in stopping the inexorable tide of action on climate change. Countries, businesses and people all across the planet are increasingly acting in ever greater numbers to address the climate crisis. There are signs of momentum and hope everywhere:

- The Paris agreement is the result of the robust international co-operation to address the climate threat – and has 110 nations fully ratified already.
- Global emissions have stalled – they’ve not increased in three years.
- Fossil fuel companies are in trouble worldwide, with multiple coal bankruptcies, and billions wasted in failed attempts to find new sources of oil.
- Renewables have over-taken coal as world’s largest source of power capacity^{vii} and their costs keep plummeting. Onshore wind is already cheaper than new gas in the UK, solar is cheaper than coal in many countries. Global investment in renewables is double that of fossil fuels^{viii}.
- Electric vehicles are the growth segment of the auto industry. Jobs are being created in clean sectors faster than any other. This is the case in the US and every other major economy.
- So many amazing things have been accomplished thanks to growing people power. Across the world people power has stopped pipelines, fracking and Arctic drilling, caused financial institutions to divest hundreds of billions of pounds from fossil fuel companies, sparked international action through marches with hundreds of thousands in the streets, and helped renewables rocket in countries in every continent

It is important to stress though that the situation is urgent - the UN has said that the current targets in the Paris Agreement are not enough - and will lead to a 3.5c warming of the planet. The US reduction target is only a weak 16% below 1990 levels by 2030. This is not a fair share of effort^{ix}. We need to be closer to 80% for rich countries by 2030. With or without Mr Trump, the USA needs to do far more, like all rich countries.

It is not all gloom on the recent international front however. Although the USA looks to be going backwards, others are going forwards. Germany announced last week it would increase its target to a 95% cut by 2050^x. Other developed countries in particular need to announce more action in Marrakesh, especially for the pre-2020 period.

On any journey there will be bumps along the way. Donald Trump is undoubtedly a big bump. And fossil fuel corporations will continue to try to delay progress. But the momentum and finance behind clean energy is so great now. It is accelerating, and it is unstoppable. The move away from fossil fuels will happen far faster than politicians think. And the more people act and demand action, the faster it will happen still.

Q: What can people do on climate change?

Our sister group in the USA is standing side-by-side with communities fighting against injustice in all its forms. Today it is standing alongside with Native American communities saying no to the Dakota Access Pipeline. They will continue to work to change the politics in the US.

As Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland we are committed to help build a powerful movement of people all over the world, which can stop this climate crisis and

create a better world for us all. We will support our colleagues and friends campaigning for a better future, in the USA and other countries.

It is down to all of us, in the USA, here in the UK, and in other countries, to resist Mr Trump and other people's attempts to prop up the fossil fuel industries which are wrecking our climate and security.

We ask people to join us in:

- [Opposing new fossil fuel exploration here in the UK](#) – fracking, opencast coal, North Sea Oil.
- Standing in solidarity with people and communities in the USA and elsewhere fighting fossil fuel projects, and in fighting intolerance and racism
- Supporting renewable energy and energy saving projects
- Calling for [pension funds to move their money out of fossil fuel corporations](#)
- Calling on the UK Government to deliver a strong “emissions reduction plan” to meet its Paris Agreement commitments.

ⁱ https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/mapping_a_route.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://www.foe.org/news/news-releases/2016-11-the-environmental-resistance-will-stand-against-trump>

ⁱⁱⁱ Financial Times, 2016. Seven Donald Trump policies that could change the US.

<https://www.ft.com/content/01a377fa-a63c-11e6-8b69-02899e8bd9d1> . November 9th

^{iv} <https://www.greatagain.gov/policy/energy-independence.html>

^v <http://www.gallup.com/poll/190010/concern-global-warming-eight-year-high.aspx>

^{vi} http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/01/world/americas/us-climate-change-republicans-democrats.html?_r=0

^{vii} <https://www.ft.com/content/09a1f984-9a1d-11e6-8f9b-70e3cabccfae>

^{viii} <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-04-06/wind-and-solar-are-crushing-fossil-fuels>

^{ix} Friends of the Earth, 2010. Reckless Gamblers.

^x <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/nov/11/german-coalition-agrees-to-cut-carbon-emissions-up-to-95-by-2050>