

Talk vs. Action: What does a Trump presidency mean for climate change?

The US election earlier this week shocked the world – with Donald Trump, a known climate denier, elected to the US Presidency. But now that the dust has settled, it's time to ask the important questions:

What does a Trump presidency actually mean for the climate?



It's well-known that Donald Trump and climate change have a tenuous relationship. He not only ignores the need for urgent climate action, but has frequently expressed doubts that climate change exists at all.

If we take Trump at face value, the future certainly doesn't look very bright. **But how many of Trump's proposed policy changes would actually be achievable?**

Let's look at **5 things Trump said he would do after taking office**, and how they stack up to reality.

1. Pull out of the Paris Agreement

Despite **world leaders currently meeting in Marrakech** to progress implementation of the Paris climate agreement, **Donald Trump has promised to "cancel" the United States' ratification.**

Can he do that? The short answer is yes... but how quickly?

To directly withdraw from the Paris Agreement, nations have to wait **three years before giving another year's notice** – the exact length of a **presidential term**. However, Trump could also withdraw from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (the umbrella agreement under which the Paris deal was negotiated) after only one year, **effectively ending US involvement**. But even if Trump didn't formally withdraw – if he follows through on other anti-climate commitments (more on that below) the US will be **far from achieving its Paris pledge anyway**.

What does this all mean? Well the good news is that the **Paris Agreement wouldn't totally implode**. The deal is structured around individual commitments from each country – many of whom are **making great progress** in reducing their emissions. But with current global commitments **already insufficient** to limit global warming to 2°C, the remaining countries would need to **cut their emissions even further to counter inaction from the USA**.

So even if a new president instantly reversed any Paris withdrawal in 4 years time, it's clear that some damage would already be done – from the US going backwards on domestic climate action, but also by slowing momentum on global climate action.

2. End the “war on coal”

On the campaign trail, [Trump said](#) he would “**end the war on coal and the war on miners,**” further clarified in his [America First Energy Plan](#) as “unleashing America’s \$50 trillion in untapped shale, oil, and natural gas reserves, plus hundreds of years in clean coal reserves.” This means ending the current moratorium on new coal mining leases on federal lands, and removing rules that currently protect waterways from coal mining and industry in general.

Can he do it? Yes. But will it have a huge impact? Maybe not.

Coal is already declining in the USA, thanks to the [advance of natural gas](#) – which is cheaper and cleaner than its counterpart. And we can't forget about renewables either – with **wind and solar steadily becoming more affordable, accessible and favourable than fossil fuels**. As Chris Bryant writes for [Bloomberg](#):

“President Trump can't tell producers which power generation technologies to buy. That decision will come down to cost in the end. Right now coal's losing that battle, while renewables are gaining.”

But there's a catch: even if renewables continue to progress around the world, with an extremely limited global carbon budget, **Trump’s promotion of coal would still be extremely problematic for the climate.**

3. Cut funding to clean energy research and climate change

Trump has promised to **completely cut all federal spending on renewables** research and development, and has also [hinted at](#) getting rid of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Can he do it? Yes. But will he?

It's hard to say – because Trump [also promises](#) spending on new infrastructure as part of his energy plan. If scientists and engineers can do enough to convince the administration that it makes economic sense to invest in cleaner energy, **there is [a chance](#) that they would.**

4. Cut funding to UN climate change programs

Trump has [promised](#) to stop US payments to the [UN Green Climate Fund](#) (GCF) – funding from developed countries to support developing countries in tackling and adapting to climate change. Obama previously committed \$3 billion to the fund over four years, and already made a \$500 million payment this March.

Can he do it? Yep.

So what does this mean? As it stands, the climate funds allocated to developing countries are still worryingly inadequate. If the world's largest economy withdraws its assistance, **the burden will fall more heavily on the rest of the world's developed nations.**

5. Remove regulations in the energy industry

In Trump's 100-day "Make America Great Again" action plan, his [major proposal](#) for the energy industry is to remove regulations – making it easier to open up federal lands and offshore areas for oil and gas exploration and production.



Can he do it? In short, yes.

The Trump administration (backed by both chambers of the US congress) could [easily halt](#) **Obama's Clean Power Plan**, which currently calls for power companies to lower their greenhouse gas emissions. He could also, as promised, **remove all roadblocks to "vital" infrastructure projects**, such as the controversial Keystone Pipeline and [Dakota Access pipeline](#). And any last minute actions taken by Obama could be [undone](#) once Trump takes office.

Even though the Clean Power Plan [wasn't ambitious enough](#) to ensure the US would meet its Paris commitments, without this policy – or any other regulations to control emissions – it's evident that **America's emissions would likely continue at current levels.**

Now the real work begins...

In this time of environmental, political, and economic uncertainty – hope and strong collective action are more important than ever.

The election result could even lead to a **rise in local climate action around the US**. [According to UNEP](#), these local initiatives could actually be **just as effective in reducing emissions by 2030**, as a federal climate plan.

And regardless of what anti-climate policies the Trump administration chooses to follow through with, nations around the world can use this event to strengthen their own climate action. **It's certainly time for Australia to step up and become a global leader on climate change.**

Trump has provided us an opportunity to be leaders on this issue. The time to act is now.