



PRESIDENT TRUMP'S CLIMATE POLICIES: DESTROYING DEMOCRACY AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

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About the Author



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Abstract

Since taking office on January 20, 2025, US President Trump has issued a series of executive orders rejecting the decarbonization policies pursued by the Biden administration. His policies, such as withdrawing again from the Paris Agreement and promoting increased fossil fuel production, run counter to the trend toward decarbonization.

The Trump administration's climate policies have run roughshod over democracy and will have a major negative impact on climate action, not only in the United States but throughout the world, such as weakening international cooperation and reducing support for developing countries.

However, regardless of President Trump's policies, other governments must maintain the global trend toward decarbonization, implement effective policies domestically, and rebuild an international partnership framework to complement the U.S. withdrawal, through re-enforcing multilateralism and a coalition of the willing.

Introduction

Since taking office on January 20, 2025, President Trump has issued a series of executive orders rejecting the decarbonization policies pursued by the Biden administration. His policies, such as withdrawing again from the Paris Agreement and promoting increased fossil fuel production, run counter to the trend toward decarbonization.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the first Conference of the Parties (COP1) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Berlin, Germany in 1995, the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, and the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement. In November this year, the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) will be held in Brazil.

President Trump's policy shift would not only delay efforts within the U.S., but could also have significant global consequences, such as weakening international cooperation and reducing support for developing countries.

Regardless of President Trump's policies, other governments including Japan must maintain the global trend toward decarbonization, implement effective policies domestically, and rebuild an international partnership framework to complement the U.S. withdrawal.

What is a decent and democratic climate policy?

What is a “decent and democratic climate policy”? The author believes that the following points are important.

- (1) Free and credible climate science
- (2) International cooperation based on multilateralism to address global climate change
- (3) Climate justice
- (4) Transparent and open policy-making processes
- (5) Emphasis on local autonomy and the role of nongovernmental actors such as businesses and private organizations.

We will examine President Trump's current climate policy from the above perspectives.

ATTACKS ON CLIMATE SCIENCE

Behind President Trump's climate policies is a populist, anti-science and anti-intellectualism founded on distrust of elites and science. Anti-intellectualism is an ideology characterized by distrust and rebellion against intellectual authority and the elite class. Since he took office, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and other agencies have seen their staffs and budgets drastically cut, many scientific observations suspended, official US representatives absent from the IPCC plenary meeting in China in February, funding to the US Global Change Research Program was suspended. In April, all authors of the Sixth National Climate Assessment were dismissed. It is feared that government websites will be shut down in the future, and that the collection and publication of climate-related information in the United States will cease.

The accumulation of scientific knowledge on climate change is an international public good. The negative impact of the events in the United States, the largest contributor in this field, is immeasurable.

In response to this situation, on March 31, over 1,900 scientists, including Nobel laureates, issued an open letter to the U.S. public issuing an SOS, saying that the U.S. is in danger due to the Trump administration's “all-out attack on science”. The open letter states that “the quest for truth—the mission of science—requires that scientists freely explore new questions and report their findings honestly, independent of special interests. The administration is engaging in censorship, destroying this independence.” It added, “A climate of fear has descended on the research community. Researchers, afraid of losing their funding or job security, are removing their names from publications, abandoning studies, and rewriting grant proposals and papers to remove scientifically accurate terms (such as “climate change”) that agencies are flagging as objectionable.”

WITHDRAWAL FROM INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BASED ON MULTILATERALISM

On his first day in office, President Trump announced his re-withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and also suspended funding for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. This will reduce momentum for international cooperation in combating climate change.

Furthermore, the US government is withdrawing its financial support for developing countries, and will suspend and withdraw its support for climate change measures for developing countries, including the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Of the US\$10 billion in the Green Climate Fund, the United States has pledged 30% (Japan 15%). The suspension of U.S. contributions would be a major blow to support for developing countries. It has also returned its post as director of the newly established “Fund to Address Loss and Damage” (the Biden administration has contributed US\$17.5 million to this fund).

The U.S. also withdrew from the Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) with South Africa, Indonesia, and Vietnam, which aim to shift from coal to clean energy.

DENYING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND LIMITING STATE AUTHORITY

President Trump is in total denial of environmental justice. Symbolic of this is the administrative leave of absence of 168 employees of EPA's Office of Environmental Justice[1], which was created in 1992 to “ensure that all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, are treated fairly and meaningfully involved in the development and implementation of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice is achieved when all people have the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, equal access to the decision-making process, and a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.”[2]

U.S. President Trump has also taken a series of steps to combat carbon emission curbs in Democratic-led states, issuing an Executive Order on April 8 aimed at blocking enforcement of state laws passed to reduce fossil fuel use and combat climate change. It directed the U.S. Attorney General to identify state laws addressing climate change, ESG initiatives, environmental justice, and carbon emissions and to take steps to block them. However, the co-chairs of the U.S. Climate Alliance, two Democratic governors of New York, Kathy Hochul and New Mexico, Michelle Lujan Grisham, have stated that states will not be disenfranchised by the Executive Order.

INCREASED PRODUCTION OF FOSSIL FUELS

Under his “Declaration of National Energy Emergency”, President Trump has encouraged the development of fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas, and coal, promoting a policy of “drill, baby, drill”.

To this end, he has eliminated regulations on energy production and introduced measures (e.g., tax breaks) to support fossil fuel operators in mining, marketing, exporting, and other activities. It will increase the number of permits for oil drilling in state-owned and offshore oil fields, and resume plans to develop and export liquefied natural gas (LNG).

RELAXATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS

There is a move to abolish taxes and fines on methane emissions. Methane emissions are high in the production process of oil and natural gas. In order to reduce methane emissions, the EPA under the Biden administration issued a final rule in December 2024 that imposed a \$900 per metric ton penalty on large emitters. If the tax on methane is loosened in the future, oil and gas companies will be more likely to increase their production, which could lead to an increase in methane emissions.

In addition, the government may relax vehicle emission and fuel efficiency standards to discourage the shift to electric vehicles (EVs). Easing of emission regulations for thermal power plants, deregulation of crude oil and natural gas drilling, lifting of the freeze on liquefied natural gas export permits, and expedited approval of related projects are also expected, as well as a review of climate-related disclosure rules and possible introduction of laws and regulations prohibiting ESG investments.

REDUCTION OF CLEAN ENERGY SUPPORT

The President has directed a freeze on spending on climate change subsidies and loans under the Inflation-Reduction Act (IRA). In addition, the President is also reducing tax credits for EV purchases, scaling back subsidies for EV charging stations, and subsidies for renewable energy such as wind power. The government has also ordered a moratorium on the leasing of public land for wind power generation. It is likely that support for renewable energy will be reduced and offshore wind development projects may come to a halt.

[1] Washington Post (2025.2.6) “Trump moves to shutter environmental offices across the government”

[2] Federal Emergency Management Agency (2023) “Executive Order 12898: Environmental Justice” (Release Date: October 13, 2023) <https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/executive-order-12898-environmental-justice>

How the world will unfold in the future?

These abrupt policy shifts are expected to stall the development of emission reduction and decarbonization technologies, delay greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions, stall corporate environmental action, and prolong fossil fuel use within the United States.

However, there remain a large number of environmentally-oriented businesses and citizens within the United States. Although environmental awareness varies widely by party affiliation, at least half of the U.S. public is committed to environmental protection. In addition, state governments have strong authority in the U.S., and states under Democratic control are expected to maintain their previous environmental policies, so the U.S. as a whole has not necessarily turned to decarbonization denial. The U.S. Climate Alliance, comprised of the governors of 24 states, including California and New York, has stated that it will 'continue the U.S. commitment'. The U.S. Climate Alliance represents 54% of the U.S. population and 57% of the economy, and the GDP of these states alone approaches that of China and the EU.

The U.S. policy shift also has negative implications for international climate governance. The U.S. withdrawal from international partnerships may weaken the framework of partnerships and delay developing countries' response to climate change by reducing their support for developing countries. It is hoped that other developed countries will fill the gaps in U.S. support for developing countries.

Under the pessimistic scenario, the prolonged dependence of developing countries on fossil fuels and delays in decarbonization, delays in the development and implementation of international decarbonization technologies, weakening of international corporate partnerships and their spread to companies in other countries, sluggish growth of private sector climate finance support, and a retreat from decarbonization strategies in oil-producing countries, could delay global GHG emission reductions.

On the other hand, trends in countries other than the United States suggest that the major trends toward decarbonization will remain unchanged.

Europe sees the energy transition toward decarbonization as a means to reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports and improve energy security. There is also a strong opinion that the emphasis on ESG investment will remain unchanged and that companies should continue to manage their operations with an emphasis on the environment and diversity. In Japan, the introduction of policies aimed at decarbonization, including emissions trading and mandatory disclosure of sustainability information, will continue.

For private companies as well, there is a growing demand for sustainability throughout the entire value chain and product and service life cycles.

China, the world's largest GHG emitter, is expected to reach its emissions peak five years earlier than its previous 2030 target. Chinese manufacturers of solar panels, electric vehicles, batteries, and other technologies that already dominate the global supply chain will seek to expand regardless of changes in US demand and market access. Rather, they see the U.S. administration's policy shift as a good opportunity to increase their market share in the world, quickly promote their own technologies, and launch a price reduction offensive.

India is currently experiencing significant GHG growth, but sees decarbonization as an economic opportunity and positions fossil fuel de-carbonization as an essential step in improving air pollution, which is among the worst in the world.

Most other emerging markets want to accelerate renewable energy deployment for economic reasons, against a backdrop of rapidly declining prices for renewable energy. More emerging markets will adopt cheap domestic solar, wind, and other forms of renewable energy over unstable imported fossil fuels.

Regardless of the Trump shock, the fight against the climate crisis cannot be set back

The Trump administration's climate policies have run roughshod over democracy and will have a major negative impact on climate action not only in the United States, but throughout the world. And with the collapse of UN-centered multilateralism and the spread of illiberalism in Europe and the United States over immigration, democracy is in retreat worldwide.

Under these circumstances, a dark cloud hangs over multilateral climate cooperation. But to address the ongoing climate crisis and build a sustainable future, the only option is to re-enforce multilateralism and any coalition of the willing, and to move forward with decarbonization.

Governments, including Japan, are required to implement effective policies and rebuild international partnership frameworks to complement the US withdrawal. In particular, Japan's high dependence on fossil fuel imports will require investment in decarbonization and the renewal of its industries to enhance its competitiveness and resilience in terms of both economy and security.



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