

The danger Trump poses to the climate – and our future

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A potential climate catastrophe awaits the world if Donald Trump walks into White House a second time.

Climate change and attendant environmental degradation will affect the quality of life. :
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Authors **Abhiroop Chowdhury**

Editors **Chandan Nandy**
360info Commissioning Editor

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On June 10, the daytime temperature in Phoenix, Arizona, touched 45 degrees Celsius. Addressing voters there that day, Republican Party presidential nominee Donald Trump was reportedly indifferent to the heat-related exhaustion some of his supporters suffered as he dismissed wind turbines and electric vehicles as part of what he calls a “Green New Scam”.

Clearly, Trump was his original self: an extreme climate change sceptic. Trump’s record on the environmental effects of fossil fuels is all too well known.

Less than a week before the Phoenix event, Trump said nuclear weapons constituted a bigger threat than global warming and expressed doubts over rising sea levels.

The previous month, he told some oil industry executives and lobbyists that he would reverse environmental rules and norms and push for oil and gas drilling if they donated \$US1 billion to his election campaign.

Trump’s first presidency revealed to the world that he was unfavourably disposed towards taking any steps to mitigate the impact of climate change, and there is every possibility that he will not change course for the better if given the keys to the White House again.

Paris withdrawal domino effect

In 2017, he withdrew from the Paris Agreement. In the following year’s budget, his administration proposed eliminating US funding for the Green Climate Fund.

On his first day in office in 2021, President Joe Biden re-entered the Paris Agreement but if Trump wins again in November, there is a fear he will pull the US out again.

At least one expert fears that could start a domino effect, destabilising the global climate action landscape.

The immediate impact would be felt in the developing countries – India, Brazil and Indonesia, for instance – which have significant carbon sinks in tropical forests, coastal wetlands and large populations. A Trump presidency might demotivate developing countries to pursue conservation initiatives.

Climate action fund

In 2009, during the UNFCCC in Copenhagen (at the 15th Conference of Parties, or COP15) developed countries committed to mobilise a climate action fund of \$US100 billion annually for developing nations. Later, this target was formalised at COP16 in Cancun and reiterated five years later in Paris. Subsequently, all Paris agreement member states consistently pledged climate financing.

At the 2023 African Climate Summit, the US committed \$US30 million in support under the President's Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE). This was an alarming move, but it was in line with Trump's promise to cease US support for climate action projects.

Biden has been more climate-positive, resulting in policies that increased the US international climate financing by 286 percent in 2021 to \$US5.8 billion in 2022.

This rosy climate action picture is now uncertain in the event Trump enters the White House a second time.

He could overturn the Inflation Reduction Act, which promises \$US369 billion to promote clean energy projects.

One of the themes of Trump's previous campaigns was around revitalising the carbon-negative coal industry across the US.

Trump was previously soft towards the coal lobby, but this time around there has rarely been any mention of coal miners' future. In its earlier term, the Trump administration favoured coal lobbyists by appointing them to key positions of environmental importance. Still, little has been done to salvage the coal industry from the crisis.

The US Department of Energy (DOE) reported a fall in jobs in the coal sector from 350,000 in the 1950s to 43,582 in 2022.

One reason is the US Environmental Protection Agency's 2012 mercury regulations, which resulted in the closure of 40,000 MW coal capacity between 2015 and 2016. The regulation made coal-based power plants costly due to the mandatory compliance of eliminating toxic and carcinogenic mercury as a production output.

Silent on coal

Trump's silence on the coal sector revival may not have a climate silver lining. It could, however, favour the natural gas and petroleum lobby.

The global energy economy has been in turmoil since the Russia-Ukraine war broke out. Between October 1, 2021, and August 25, 2022, the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) and Brent crude prices increased by 52.33 percent and 56.33 percent, respectively.

In the event Trump wins the 2024 presidential campaign, US energy companies could be winners amid the global crisis.

Russia circumvented its sanction-linked losses by selling energy resources cheaply to significant world economies such as India and China. A US-Russia cold war on energy resources might sound the death knell for global climate-negative initiatives.

In 2021, fossil fuel-linked energy dependency was 81 percent of total global energy output, with oil contributing 30 percent followed by coal (27 percent) and natural gas (24 percent). With cheaper oil flooding the market, the path towards a global renewable energy transition can become even steeper.

Environmental degradation is not limited to global warming and climate change alone.

In 2022 alone, 20 million new cancer cases were reported globally, along with 9.7 million deaths. Rising pollution is increasing the global disease burden. About 8 percent of the global disease burden and 34 percent of pre-term births in 2021 were due to particulate matter air pollution.

Lung cancer is a significant contributor, with 12.4 percent of new cancer cases. The connection between lung cancer and air pollution has already been widely researched and accepted. The American Cancer Society reported 234,580 new lung cancer cases in the US in 2024.

Trump does support improving health care services, but with rising cancer and critical disease cases, only the pharmaceutical lobby will benefit. The cost of cancer treatment is projected to rise from \$US190 billion to \$244.6 billion between 2015 and 2030.

Climate change and the attendant environmental degradation present a clear danger to our quality of life. While employment can be generated in the energy sector in the event Trump tramples environmental regulations, continued exploitation of fossil fuels will adversely

impact people across the world.

Trump's narrow focus on immediate economic growth could potentially be catastrophic even as the climate change crisis is nearly at the 'no return' phase; further delays in reversing this phase will only make the conditions worse.

Abhiroop Chowdhury is a Professor and Executive Dean at the Jindal Global School of Environment and Sustainability, O P Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana. His research interests are blue carbon sequestration, mangrove restoration, climate-change ecology, soil pollution assessment and environmental social work. Chowdhury earned a PhD from the Indian Institute of Technology (Indian School of Mines), Dhanbad.

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