



Paris climate agreement

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Paris climate deal thrown into uncertainty by US election result

Many fear Donald Trump will reverse the ambitious course set by Barack Obama, withdraw the US from the accord and increase fossil-fuel spending

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ⓘ The Statue of Liberty among the damage caused by hurricane Sandy, November 2012. The weather event showed the US was already in the grip of significant environmental changes. Photograph: ZUMA/REX/Shutterstock

Just days after the historic Paris agreement officially came into force, climate denier Donald Trump's victory has thrown the global deal into uncertainty and raised fears that the US will reverse the ambitious environmental course charted under Barack Obama.

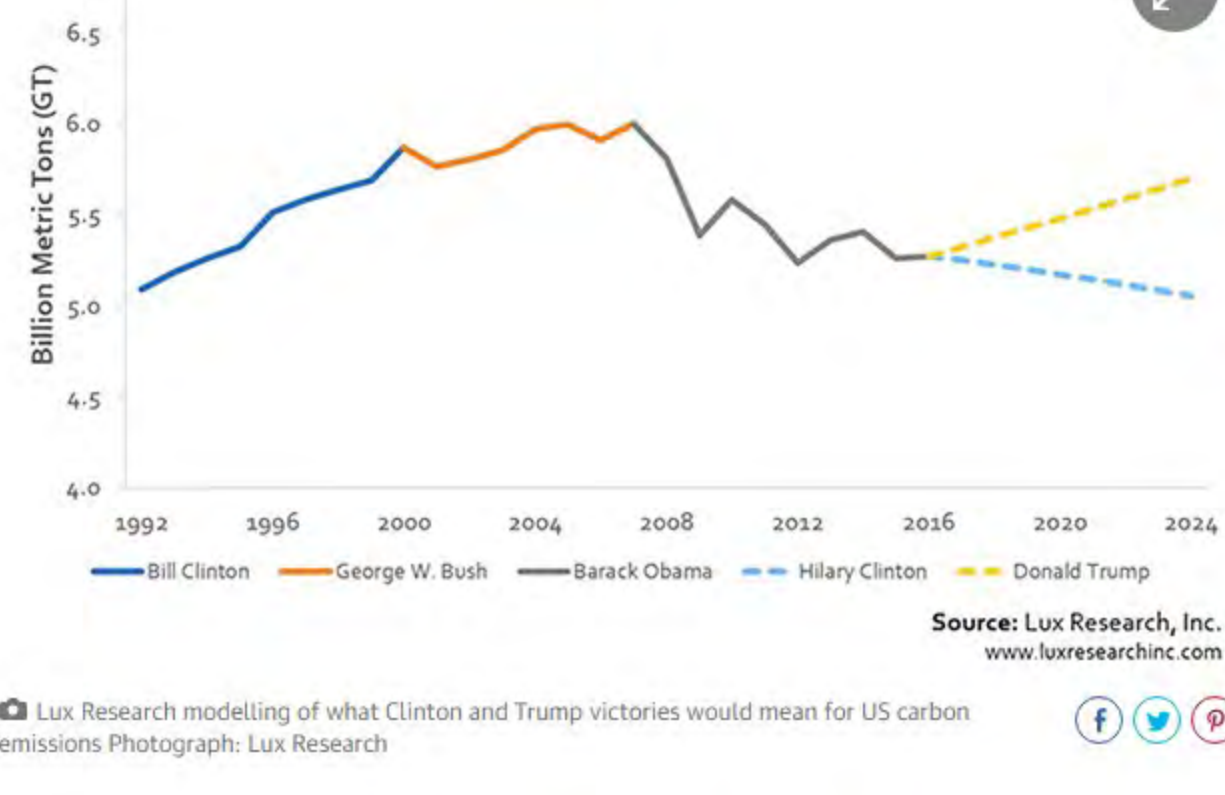
International environmental groups meeting at the UN climate talks in Morocco said it would be a catastrophe if Trump acted on his pledge to withdraw the US from the deal, which took 20 years to negotiate, and to open up public land for coal, oil and gas extraction.

Trump has called climate change a “hoax”, placing him virtually alone among world leaders on the validity of the science. The real estate magnate has promised to embark upon a four-year process of withdrawing the US from the Paris deal and has targeted the “billions and billion and billions” given to UN climate programmes and clean energy development.

Domestically, Trump has promised to reboot America's ailing coal industry, as well as expand gas and oil drilling, despite the fact that the growth of natural gas use has caused the downturn in coal.

He also plans to scrap Obama's signature Clean Power plan, which is the main policy designed to lower US emissions.

Recent analysis by Lux Research estimated that a Trump presidency would raise US greenhouse gas output by 16% by the end of his second term, should he get one, compared to a Hillary Clinton administration. Such a shift could prove key in not only pushing the world towards dangerous climate change but also dissuading other nations from making the required cuts in emissions.



ⓘ Lux Research modelling of what Clinton and Trump victories would mean for US carbon emissions Photograph: Lux Research

Green groups have urged the president-elect, as the leader of the second greatest greenhouse gas emitter, to act in the interests of all the world.

“The new president must protect the people he serves from climate chaos. No personal belief or political affiliation can change the stark truth that every new oil well and pipeline pushes us all closer to catastrophe. The administration has moral and legal obligations to meet international commitments,” said May Boeve, head of climate campaign group 350.org.

Christian Aid warned that any attempts by Trump to ditch the Paris deal would be an act of “economic self-sabotage”.

“The global transition to a zero-carbon economy will not be held up by one man. The rest of the world will not risk a global climate catastrophe because of one man's opposition,” said Mohamed Adow, Christian Aid's international climate lead spokesman.

In the US, shellshocked environmentalists pledged to step up their opposition to Trump. “Greenpeace and millions of people around the world have all the power we need to combat climate change and create a just world for everyone,” said Annie Leonard, executive director of Greenpeace US. “Let's use this moment to reenergize the fight for the climate and the fight for human rights around the world.”

Ségolène Royale, the French environment minister who helped negotiate the Paris accord, told journalists in Marrakech that the US could not withdraw from the treaty easily. “The Paris agreement prohibits any exit for a period of three years, plus a year-long notice period, so there will be four stable years,” she said.

“We must be extremely attentive and responsive to each time there is an attempt made to weaken this agreement,” she said on French radio.

“There is no possible turning back in the negotiation on what was agreed in Paris ... we can only advance,” said Salaheddine Mezouar, foreign minister of Morocco, which is hosting the latest round of climate talks.

Major countries meeting in Marrakech were slow to respond to Trump's win but small island states threatened with annihilation if temperatures are not held to 2C urged him to take responsibility for the whole world.

“I expect [Trump] will realise that climate change is a threat to his people and to whole countries which share seas with the US including my own ... I look forward to watching Mr Trump live up to his responsibility to protect his people, and others around the world,” said Hilda Heine, president of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

“One of the many challenges Trump's administration will now confront is climate change. Last month, for the first time, renewables like wind and solar surpassed fossil fuels in [new] electricity generation globally and that number is expected to climb. America has led this technological transformation and can continue to create jobs and opportunity in this area,” said Thoriq Ibrahim, energy minister for the Maldives and chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (Aosis).

Alden Meyer from the Union of Concerned Scientists was reported to have told a press conference at Marrakech that: “If the US pulls out of this, and is seen as going as a rogue nation on climate change, that will have implications for everything else on President Trump's agenda when he wants to deal with foreign leaders. And I think he will soon come to understand that.”

“The election of President Trump is clearly a major threat to our climate and future wellbeing of generations to come. But thankfully the clean energy revolution is now unstoppable. If Mr Trump chooses to disengage then he will hand the next industrial revolution lock, stock and barrel to the Chinese,” said Friends of the Earth's chief executive officer, Craig Bennett.



ⓘ Coalminers wave signs as Donald Trump speaks at a Republican rally in Charleston, West Virginia. Photograph: Steve Heiler/AP

US human rights and environment groups urged other countries to hold Trump to account. “The Paris agreement was signed and ratified not by a president, but by the United States itself. As a matter of international law, and as a matter of human survival, the nations of the world can, must, and will hold the United States to its climate commitments,” said Maya Golden-Krasner, senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity.

Nathaniel Keohane, vice-president at the Environmental Defense Fund, said: “The world won't wait for the US and neither will the climate. This year the impacts of climate change cost the US hundreds of billions of dollars and put 40 million people in southern Africa alone at risk of hunger.

“The next president needs to work with Congress to go further faster to cut emissions and protect the rights of men and women on the front lines of the climate crisis.”

Businesses also expressed concerns that a Trump presidency would set back climate change action. “We expect Trump's policies to put at risk the decarbonisation and clean energy uptake seen during President Obama's time in office, with potential to slow both the US energy system transition and domestic measures to mitigate climate change,” said analysts at HSBC's Global Research unit.

China earlier this month took the unusual step of criticising Trump's plans to pull out of Paris.

But Zou Ji, deputy director general at China's National Center for Climate Change Strategy and International Cooperation, said: “China's climate strategy and policy is in accordance with China's national interest, and is not dependent on the US presidency.

“The fundamental incentive is China's need to drive growth by escalating the economic transition, improving air quality, boosting growth rate by efficiency improvement, and strengthening energy security. After all, it is a matter of innovation of development path.”

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