

How much can US president-elect Donald Trump derail global climate action?

Trump is a climate change denier who has promised to increase fossil fuel production and withdraw the US from the Paris climate deal, among other worrying pledges.

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Donald Trump is a climate change denier who has promised to increase fossil fuel production and withdraw the US from the Paris climate deal, among other worrying pledges. | Photo Credit: Reuters

If you care about saving Earth from catastrophe, you might be feeling a little down about the re-election of Donald Trump as United States president. Undeniably, his return to the White House is a real setback for climate action.

Trump is a **climate change denier** who has promised to **increase fossil fuel production** and **withdraw the US** from the Paris climate deal, among other worrying pledges.

But beyond Trump and his circle, there remains deep concern about climate change, **especially among younger people**. Support for climate policy remains high in **the US** and around the world. And studies **based on data from 60,000 people** in more than 60 countries suggest individuals' concern about climate change is widely underestimated.

So now is a good time to remember that efforts to tackle the climate crisis – both in Australia and globally – are much bigger than one man. Here are ten reasons to remain hopeful.

The global clean energy transition can't be halted

The global shift to clean energy is accelerating, and Trump can't stop it. Investment in clean energy **has overtaken fossil fuels**, and will be **nearly double investment in coal, oil and gas in 2024**. This is a historic mega-trend and will continue with or without American leadership.

Clean energy momentum is likely to continue in the US

Much of the Biden-era spending on clean energy industries **went to Republican states and Congressional districts**. New factories **for batteries and electric vehicles** will still go ahead under the Trump administration. After all, entrepreneur Elon Musk – who is expected to **join the Trump administration** – makes electric vehicles.

Some of Trump's financial backers are **receiving subsidies for clean energy manufacturing** and 18 Republican Congress members have gone on record to **oppose cuts to clean energy tax credits**.

The US still wants to beat China

There is **bipartisan concern in Washington** about the US losing a technological edge to Beijing. China currently **dominates global production** of electric vehicles, batteries, wind turbines and solar panels. So internal pressure in the US to **counter China's manufacturing might** will continue.

The federal government is not everything in the US

When Trump was last in power, he withdrew the US from some climate commitments, such as the Paris Agreement. But many state and local governments powered ahead with climate policy, and that will happen this time around, too. For example, California – the world's fifth largest economy – plans to **eliminate its greenhouse gas footprint by 2045**. Even Texas, a Republican heartland, is **leading a shift toward wind and solar power**.

The US climate movement will be more energised than ever

During Trump's first presidency, the US climate movement developed policy proposals for a "**Green New Deal**". Many of these proposals were later implemented by the Biden administration. **Initial reactions** to Trump's re-election suggest we can expect similar policy advocacy this time around.

Global climate cooperation is bigger than Trump

If Trump makes good on his promise to leave the Paris Agreement (again), he will only be leaving the room **where the world's future is being shaped**. The US has walked away from global climate agreements before – for example, **refusing to join the Kyoto Protocol** in 2001. But other nations rallied for global action, and will do so again.

The rules-based global order will remain

When a nation walks away from rules that have been **agreed after decades of negotiation**, responsible countries must work together to bolster global cooperation. This applies to trade and security – and climate is no different.

As our Foreign Minister Penny Wong **recently explained**, Australia, as a middle power on the world stage, wants, "a world where disputes are resolved by engagement, negotiation and by reference to rules [and] norms [...] We don't want a world in which disputes are resolved by power alone.

Australian diplomacy matters

Australia is seeking to co-host the United Nations climate talks with Pacific island countries in 2026, and is **emerging as the favourite**. Hosting the conference, known as

COP31, would be a chance for Australia to help broker a new era of international climate action, even if the US opts out under Trump.

Hosting the talks would also help cement Australia's place in the Pacific and assist our Pacific neighbours to deal with the climate threat.

Australia's clean energy shift is accelerating

About 40% of Australia's main national electricity grid is **powered by renewables** and this is set to rise to 80% by 2030. Some states are surging ahead – for example, South Australia is aiming for 100% renewables **by 2027**.

Australians love clean energy at home, too. One in three households have rooftop solar installed, making us **a world-leader** in the technology's uptake. Trump's occupation of the Oval Office cannot stop this momentum.

Trump cannot change the science of climate change

The science is clear – burning coal, oil and gas fuels climate change and increases the **risk of disasters** that are harming communities right now. In Australia, we need look no further than the Black Summer bushfires in 2019-20 and unprecedented Lismore floods in 2022.

And the damage is happening across the globe. In October, twin hurricanes in the US – **made stronger by the warming ocean** – left a damage bill of **more than US\$100 billion**. And hundreds of people died when **a year's worth of rain** fell in one day in Spain last month.

On gloomy days – like, say, the election of a climate denier to the White House – it might feel humanity won't rise to Earth's biggest existential challenge. But there are many reasons for hope. The vast majority of us support policies to tackle climate change, and in many cases, the momentum is virtually unstoppable.

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