

US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement Goals and Objectives

The Paris Agreement (PA) is a landmark international accord adopted in 2015 by 195 governments attending the 21st Conference of Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC in Paris, France. It functions as a subsidiary agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), established in 1992, and aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. By enhancing the implementation of the UNFCCC, the PA seeks to prevent dangerous human interference in the climate system (Haskett, 2025). The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, is a landmark international accord designed to combat climate change by limiting global warming to below 2°C, with an aspirational goal of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (Swain et al., 2025).

United States First Withdrawal

On 8 November 2016, Donald J. Trump won the presidential election in the US. Trump's rhetoric during the campaign, his cabinet appointments and his first acts since taking office have made it abundantly clear that there will be no US climate leadership during his tenure. Most notably, in March 2017, President Trump signed an executive order to reverse his predecessor's policies to reduce US greenhouse gas emissions. Then, on 1 June 2017, he announced the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, a process that (because of stipulations in the treaty) would take four years to complete (Urpelainen & Van De Graaf, 2018).

On June 1, 2017, President Trump announced his intent to withdraw the United States from the PA. The United States notified the UN Secretary General of its decision to withdraw on November 4, 2019. The withdrawal took effect on November 4, 2020, in accordance with Article 28 of the PA, which states that withdrawal takes effect one year after notification of withdrawal. On January 20, 2021, President Biden signed the instrument of acceptance, bringing the United States back into the PA, and on February 19, 2021, the United States rejoined the PA (Haskett, 2025).

United States Second withdrawal

On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued E.O. 14162 directing the withdrawal of the United States from the PA.²² On January 27, 2025, the UN Secretary General issued a depository notification of the withdrawal of the United States from the PA (Haskett, 2025).

Global Implications of the U.S. Withdrawal Impacts

Weakened Global Momentum

As the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases and historically the largest contributor to cumulative emissions, the United States plays a significant role in global climate action. Its exit weakens the collective effort needed to tackle climate change (Swain et al., 2025; Urpelainen & Van De Graaf, 2018). Some observers have expressed concern that other countries may follow the United States in withdrawing from the PA or may fail to maintain their ambition to reduce GHG emissions (Haskett, 2025). This could potentially result in a "domino effect," reducing overall ambition levels in climate mitigation (Swain et al., 2025). Some researchers are concerned that a U.S. withdrawal could delay emissions reductions, making it more difficult to achieve the PA's temperature goals of limiting warming to well below 2°C or 1.5°C. A 2024 study using a multisector structural trade model found that U.S. non-participation in the Paris Agreement lowers the achieved global emission reduction by more than a third (38.2%) (Haskett, 2025).

Reduced Financial Contributions

One of the most significant threats posed by U.S. non-cooperation is to international climate finance. In a continuation of obligations under the UNFCCC, Article 9 of the PA states the obligation for developed country Parties to provide financial assistance to developing countries with respect to both mitigation and adaptation (Haskett, 2025). U.S. withdrawal weakens financial support for developing nations, which are the most affected by climate change despite contributing the least to GHG emissions. The decision to disengage from mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund reduces funding for mitigation and adaptation efforts, further widening global climate inequality. The substantial reductions in bilateral aid, particularly those that had come from the U.S. Agency for International Development, will further reduce overall funding available for mitigation and adaptation. The absence of U.S. involvement could, furthermore, weaken accountability mechanisms within the Paris Agreement, lessening overall compliance rates among participating nations, especially as technological assistance for developing countries to meet their nationally determined commitments diminishes (Swain et al., 2025).

Erosion of Trust

The pernicious effects of US non-cooperation on climate finance reach well beyond the immediate harm that reduced financial support for mitigation and adaptation does. Over time, US absence from climate finance would affirm the suspicion among least developed and emerging economies that the industrialized countries are untrustworthy because there is no firm domestic political consensus in favor of climate action. Thus, although we see no reason to worry about the immediate effects of US non-participation on pledge and review, in the long run the issue of climate finance could derail efforts to increase the ambition level of national mitigation plans so that the increase in global temperatures relative to pre-industrial times would more likely than not remain below two degrees Celsius. Indeed, both least developed and emerging economies tend to condition their ambition on external assistance in their NDCs, meaning that the lack of climate finance could reduce the ambition level of many important emitters (Urpelainen & Van De Graaf, 2018).

More broadly, the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement undermines diplomatic relations and weakens alliances that rely on cooperative climate policies. The consequences of the withdrawal are seen as extending beyond the current administration, potentially causing long-term damage to the international credibility of the United States (Swain et al., 2025).

References

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