

DGAP POLICY BRIEF

Safeguarding International Climate Protection Against the Trump Agenda

What Germany and the EU Can Do Now



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International climate protection is in trouble. A second Trump presidency will derail US climate leadership, leading to a withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and reducing international climate finance. Therefore, the EU and Germany must step up, leading by expanding green tech development and strengthening partnerships with key global players. In the US, local and non-state actors could still drive progress, offering a path forward for climate action despite federal setbacks.

– A second Trump presidency could severely disrupt climate diplomacy, with a potential US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC. While this would hinder US international climate finance and cooperation, it may not halt global momentum due to multilateral commitments.

– Trump’s proposed rollback of climate policies and his plans to expand fossil fuels are likely to slow domestic emissions reduction. However, market forces, such as clean tech investments, may limit the impact, with states and businesses driving continued progress.

– With a likely US retreat, Germany and the EU must strengthen climate leadership. This includes promoting green tech, expanding partnerships, including with Global South nations, and countering disinformation. The EU can also use its influence to bridge gaps with major emitters like China.

INTRODUCTION

The concentration of Republican power in all branches of government as President-elect Donald Trump takes office portends a major setback for national and international climate protection. In particular, the new US administration is certain to scale back spending in international climate finance. It would not be the first time opposition in Congress has hindered climate engagement. Now, what has been a modest US support of the international climate agenda¹ may soon be seriously derailed by obstruction and disengagement. Germany and the EU will need to provide leadership. As Germany heads for elections in February after the break-up of its coalition government, it should reassure the international community that it remains a reliable partner for implementing the Paris Agreement and will expand its bilateral engagement with Global South countries that are key to climate protection.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A SECOND TRUMP PRESIDENCY

Donald Trump already announced a second withdrawal from the Paris Agreement during his election campaign, with potentially far worse fallout than the first time around. Because the Paris Agreement did not allow signatories to withdraw for three years after taking force in 2016, the first Trump administration could only declare an exit in November 2019, effective one year later, just as Joe Biden was elected president. This time, Trump could withdraw immediately after taking office in January 2025, effective already in early 2026. Such an exit and a temporary abstention from negotiations would mean a popular win for Trump's supporters. But in fact, it could be less damaging than a protracted US obstruction of the agreement's implementation, which could impede already slow multilateral progress.

More worrisome would be if Trump pulled out of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the underlying treaty that forms the basis of the international climate regime.² This could alienate the US from climate multilateralism

in the long-run, as re-entry into the treaty by any future president would likely require the consent of two-thirds of the Senate.³ Moreover, because the US is currently a major funder of the UNFCCC process, other countries would need to fill a large gap in the budget. Whatever the legal consequences, the US can be expected to cut international climate finance, both through bilateral channels to Global South countries and through the multilateral climate funds.

Trump's domestic agenda may also undermine climate goals. During his campaign, Trump promised to ramp up fossil fuel extraction and strip away environmental protections. He also expressed opposition to renewable technologies, especially solar and photovoltaics (PV). Project 2025, a policy agenda put forth by the Heritage Foundation, an influential conservative think tank with close ties to Trump's former administration, calls for a drastic shift away from climate concerns and abandonment of the ambitious build-up of renewable energies, for example. Project 2025 also envisions a restructuring of America's institutional landscape, which could effectively impair its system of checks and balances.⁴ It includes weakening the Environmental Protection Agency and dissolving the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) along with a rollback of environmental standards and climate research programs.

This blueprint is likely to have considerable ripple effects. If a second administration were to follow Trump's rhetorical roadmap, domestic emissions could be 25 percent higher by 2030 than they would have been under Biden's policies.⁵ A large share would come from expanded oil and gas output. Any delay in action and additional emissions are reason to worry, given a rapidly dwindling global carbon budget. A reversal of the US engagement in climate politics could send a damaging signal at a moment in which more ambition globally is required to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. While the Biden administration will still steer the US delegation in Baku in 2024, the signatories to the Paris Agreement will have to submit updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in 2025.

1 Climate Action Tracker: USA⁺, Climate Action Tracker: <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/usa/> (accessed November 15, 2024)

2 Joe Lo, "Legal experts say Trump could quit Paris pact – but leaving UNFCCC much harder," *Climate Home News* (November 4, 2024): <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2024/11/04/legal-experts-say-trump-could-quit-paris-pact-but-leaving-unfccc-much-harder/> (accessed November 12, 2024).

3 "About Treaties," United States Senate: <https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/treaties.htm#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20Constitution%20provides,become%20part%20of%20international%20law> (accessed November 12, 2024).

4 For general information about the scope and goals of Project 2025, see The Heritage Foundation, "Project 2025": <https://www.project2025.org/> (accessed November 12, 2024). The policy agenda is developed in a dedicated edited volume, see Paul Dans and Steven Groves, eds., *Mandate for Leadership – The Conservative Promise* (2023): <https://www.project2025.org/policy/> (accessed November 12, 2024).

5 Simon Evans and Verner Viisainen, "Analysis: Trump Election Win Could Add 4bn Tonnes to US Emissions by 2030," *Carbon Brief, Analysis* (March 2024): <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-trump-election-win-could-add-4bn-tonnes-to-us-emissions-by-2030/> (accessed November 8, 2024).

In addition to climate policies, the changing view on energy in the current geopolitical context is concerning. The Trump campaign embraced the idea of “energy dominance,” framing American energy exports as a tool to exert dominance in international affairs. The context for this is worse than 2016: American oil and gas production is higher than ever. Geopolitical posturing from the world’s largest energy supplier could lead to instability and serve as a rhetorical cue for revanchist actors to boost production or otherwise erode momentum on climate action.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

A second Trump presidency will undoubtedly disrupt climate diplomacy again, but there are a few reasons to be hopeful.

First, while the expected US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement may be a setback, the diplomatic process does not solely depend on it. In the run-up to the Paris Agreement and throughout its implementation over the past decade, states have invested significant political capital in negotiating a common political process. They have increased ambitions under the NDC system, and (re-)directed billions in government spending toward the implementation of national policies. With its near-universal membership, the Paris Agreement sets incentives to continue cooperation. The agreement proved stable during Trump’s first term, and there is consensus to ramp up implementation, as reflected in the global stocktake – the pact’s five-year progress report.⁶

Experiences from the Kyoto Protocol also showed that multilateral action is possible even in the absence of universal membership. Under the protocol, developed countries for the first time committed to binding emissions mitigation in a coordinated effort. Lacking the necessary Senate majority, the US signed but never ratified the protocol. The absence of the US – then the largest greenhouse gas emitter – raised questions about the treaty’s usefulness and

also had ripple effects, with Canada withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol in 2012, and others like Japan and New Zealand not participating in a second commitment period.⁷ On the other hand, the agreement long maintained its binding force for other countries, and hinged on a coalition of countries assuming obligations even without a global consensus. Some evidence suggests that the protocol still achieved some of its goals – reducing emissions among the ratifying developed countries. Though it must be said that proving this causality is methodologically difficult.⁸

Moreover, in the absence of leadership at the federal level, subnational actors in the US have a strong track record of engagement. Shortly after Trump’s 2017 inauguration, leaders from across the country formed the We Are Still In coalition, and much dynamism persists under the America is All In initiative, a non-federal climate network representing 63 per-

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cent of the American population and 74 percent of national GDP.⁹ This network has a very diverse mix of actors – including 11 states, 12 Tribal Nations, and thousands of businesses and faith groups. States and local governments of large cities in particular have the potential to scale climate action. Some states, such as California, have long led the way on domestic climate regulation, through measures such as carbon cap and trade system. At the same time, cities are responsible for 70 percent of global emissions¹⁰ and some cities have tremendous fiscal capacity. For example, the

6 Decision 1/CMA.5: Outcome of the first global stocktake, in “Report of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement on its fifth session, held in the United Arab Emirates from 30 November to 13 December 2023, UN Document FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/16/Add.1 (March 15, 2024): <https://unfccc.int/documents/637073> (accessed November 12, 2024).

7 Francesco Bassetti, “Success or failure? The Kyoto Protocol’s troubled legacy,” *Foresight* (December 8, 2022): <https://www.climateforesight.eu/articles/success-or-failure-the-kyoto-protocols-troubled-legacy/> (accessed November 12, 2024); NZ won’t commit to second stage of Kyoto Protocol,” RNZ (November 10, 2012): <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/120436/nz-won%27t-commit-to-second-stage-of-kyoto-protocol> (accessed November 15, 2024).

8 Francesco Bassetti, “Success or failure? The Kyoto Protocol’s troubled legacy,” *Foresight* (December 8, 2022): <https://www.climateforesight.eu/articles/success-or-failure-the-kyoto-protocols-troubled-legacy/> (accessed November 12, 2024).

9 America Is All In, “About,” *America Is All In* (2024): <https://www.americaisallin.com/about#about> (accessed November 8, 2024).

10 Susmita Dasgupta, Somik Lall and David Wheeler, “Cutting global carbon emissions: where do cities stand?” *Sustainable Cities* (Blog), World Bank Group (January 5, 2022): <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/sustainablecities/cutting-global-carbon-emissions-where-do-cities-stand#:~:text=Cities%20account%20for%20over%2070,constructed%20with%20carbon-intensive%20materials> (accessed November 8, 2024).

New York City budget for 2025 is roughly €105 billion¹¹ – or roughly a fifth of the German federal budget for the same year.¹² These governments are also well organized through various networks, such as the global C40 network of mayors,¹³ or the climate mayors,¹⁴ a US bipartisan network that reinforced cooperation through the first Trump presidency.

Third, Trump's political agenda is also constrained by popular opinion and market dynamics. In his first term, Trump failed to repeal the Affordable Care Act, despite controlling the House and Senate. Likewise, despite a vigorous campaign for coal and a slashing of environmental protections,¹⁵ Trump failed to slow the demise of American coal. Between Q1 of 2017 and Q3 of 2020, American coal production declined by 31.5 percent, which corresponded to a 23.6 percent decline in employment in the sector.¹⁶ This occurred because natural gas was more competitive. Considering these dynamics, it remains unclear whether Trump would be able to curtail the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Republican-held districts – especially in swing states – have been the largest benefactors. The nearly 108 billion dollars of clean tech investment spurred by this legislation has gone to GOP districts. This represents over 80 percent of the investment and accounts for roughly 70 percent of jobs created.¹⁷ Members of the Republican caucus are aware of this, and some have even urged party leadership to leave energy tax credits untouched.¹⁸ Another open question is the role of Elon Musk, who Trump has proposed to co-lead a new Department of Governmental Efficiency. While Musk has indicated he will aggressively curtail government expenditure, it remains very unclear what his stance will be on industries where he has a conflict of interest – for example, subsidies for electric vehicles and clean energy.

Moreover, the green transformation is a global economic development that does not centrally hinge on the US federal government. The world is undergoing an unprecedented push toward clean energy investments amounting to \$2 trillion in 2024 (about two thirds of all global energy investments).¹⁹ Their significance has steeply increased since the first Trump presidency. Even if Trump delayed the renewables roll-out (e.g., through amendments to the IRA), it would likely only undermine American technology capacity. If the US lags further behind, it would allow China to consolidate its established lead across technologies – an incentive for US regulators to maintain key provisions of the IRA to attract green investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS: WHAT GERMANY AND THE EU CAN DO NOW

Stepping up to Lead

As one of the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases will now likely leave the Paris Agreement, possibly emboldening like-minded countries to do the same, others, like Germany and the EU will have to step up to fill the leadership vacuum. The recent collapse of Germany's coalition government and looming elections in February 2025 will complicate this task. But even before Trump's team takes over the White House, Germany and other countries should urge the Biden administration to at least deliver on prior commitments before leaving office and encourage US subnational actors to commit to action over the next four years.

Limiting global warming to below 2°C as compared to pre-industrial levels will require more stakeholders to contribute meaningfully. One way to assess which countries need to provide climate finance is to look at

- 11 New York City Council, *New York City Council Adopts the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget* (June 30, 2024): [https://council.nyc.gov/press/2024/06/30/2639/#:~:text=City%20Hall%2C%20NY%20%E2%80%93%20Speaker%20Adrienne,Fiscal%20Year%20\(FY\)%202025](https://council.nyc.gov/press/2024/06/30/2639/#:~:text=City%20Hall%2C%20NY%20%E2%80%93%20Speaker%20Adrienne,Fiscal%20Year%20(FY)%202025) (accessed November 8, 2024).
- 12 Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, *Federal Cabinet adopts 2025 draft budget and growth initiative* (July 17, 2024): <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/2025-budget-growth-initiative-2299754> (accessed November 8, 2024).
- 13 See About C40, *C40 Cities* (2024): <https://www.c40.org/about-c40/> (accessed November 8, 2024).
- 14 See Who We Are, *Climate Mayors* (2024): <https://www.climatemayors.org/who-we-are> (accessed November 8, 2024).
- 15 Nadja Popovich, Livia Albeck-Ripka and Kendra Pierre-Louis, "The Trump Administration Rolled Back More Than 100 Environmental Rules. Here's the Full List," *New York Times* (January 20, 2021): <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks-list.html> (accessed November 8, 2024).
- 16 Taylor Kuykendall, "US Coal Jobs Down 24% From the Start of Trump Administration to Latest Quarter," *S&P Global* (November 20, 2020): <https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/latest-news-headlines/us-coal-jobs-down-24-from-the-start-of-trump-administration-to-latest-quarter-61386963> (accessed November 8, 2024).
- 17 E2, "Major Clean Energy Projects Announced Since the Passage of the IRA," *E2* (2024): <https://e2.org/announcements/> (accessed November 8, 2024).
- 18 Andrew R. Garbarino et al., Andrew R. Garbarino et al. to The Honourable Mike Johnson, Washington, DC, August 6, 2024. Congress of the United States (2024): <https://garbarino.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/garbarino.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/FINAL%20Credits%20Letter%202024.08.06.pdf> (accessed November 8, 2024).
- 19 International Energy Agency, *World Energy Investment 2024* (June 2024): <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/60fcd1dd-d112-469b-87de-20d39227df3d/WorldEnergyInvestment2024.pdf> (accessed November 8, 2024).

their (historical) emissions and income levels.²⁰ Given their rising emissions and growing economies, countries such as Singapore and the Gulf States, which have strongly benefitted from fossil fuel extraction, should be encouraged to pay. These efforts can be pursued in multilateral settings such as in COP negotiations or, specifically for this region, in German and EU talks with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Each ton of CO₂ emissions reduced and every fraction of a degree of warming avoided will ease economic, societal and health burdens.

The EU could now position itself as a stable bastion in a sea of political uncertainty

Germany and the EU can step forward to provide leadership on topics such as pricing CO₂-footprints of high net worth individuals and lowering capital costs for climate mitigation and adaptation loans in developing economies. German leadership on climate could also help serve other foreign policy goals, such as securing a non-permanent seat in the Security Council or increasing energy sovereignty within the EU. In order to help close the financing gap, Germany should double down on the G7 commitment to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, in order to free up public finance and counter market distortions. Canada will assume the G7 presidency in 2025 and is set to place climate and green technology issues at the top of the agenda. Germany could seize this opportunity early by engaging Canada to continue building on the G7's Global Resilience Action Plan, for example. It could also emphasize investment projects that align with American interests that even a Trump presidency would likely support, such as efforts to boost supply chain security through the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment.

Doubling Down on Green Technology Development

While the IRA has enabled the US to bolster its manufacturing base of critical green technologies, the EU could now position itself as a stable bastion in a sea of political uncertainty, to draw green investment and skill. Depending on Trump's policy choices, there could be a significant exodus of investment in green manufacturing in the United States. For example, a major Chinese solar plant in Texas was sold only days after it opened on November 1, 2024.²¹ If Germany acts decisively, it can help frame the EU as the alternative destination of choice for green investment by drawing attention to a long-term commitment to policies that build a continental green industry. Beyond this, Germany and Europe can take steps to attract talent needed to fill green jobs. Market uncertainty and a general unappealing political polarity against green industry could push skilled technicians and professionals to look for work outside the United States. The same is true for American or international students looking to study at leading universities – especially if they want a promising career after graduation. For example, the first Trump administration saw international enrollment at American universities decline by 12 percent.²²

Widening the Partnership Base

The EU and Germany can widen and strengthen partnerships with three groups. First, there is room for the EU to better define ambitious targets and overcome divisions. Second, both Germany and the EU must strengthen relations with countries such as the UK, China, India, Brazil (who is hosting COP30), and other Global South nations. Germany and Brazil are working together, for instance, through the International Climate Initiative, on fighting climate change and biodiversity loss. Germany can enhance its cooperation with Brazil while the country is preparing for COP30 in Belém in November 2025.

With respect to China – currently the largest CO₂ emitter, there is a precedence for and also existing structures in both Germany and the EU to strengthen climate cooperation. For instance, Germany's China Strategy calls for cooperation on climate action with China. There are also regular dialogues between the two countries within the framework of Sino-German cooperation on climate change. Similarly, the EU needs to improve climate cooperation with China as

20 Chris Qihan Zou et al., "Which Countries Should Pay for International Climate Finance?" World Resources Institute (September 17, 2024): <https://www.wri.org/insights/international-climate-finance-which-countries-should-pay> (accessed November 12, 2024).

21 Mark Chediak, "Big Chinese Solar-Panel Maker Trina to Sell Plant in Texas," *Bloomberg* (November 6, 2024): <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-11-06/big-chinese-solar-panel-maker-trina-to-sell-plant-in-texas> (accessed November 11, 2024).

22 ICEF Monitor, "What Will a Second Trump Presidency Mean For International Education?" *ICEF Monitor* (November 7, 2024): <https://monitor.icef.com/2024/11/what-will-a-second-trump-presidency-mean-for-international-education/> (accessed November 12, 2024).

it did back in 2017 when the two sides, along with Canada, established a Ministerial for Climate Action (MoCA) to signal their commitment to climate action during Trump's first administration.

Moreover, Germany should deepen its climate cooperation with India, building on the Indo-German Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP).²³ The strategy paper Focus on India, recently adopted by the German government, highlights India's importance to Germany and the EU and defines as one of its priorities the need to "work with India towards achieving the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Biodiversity Framework."²⁴ In addition to bilateral climate cooperation, the two sides should – more than ever before – accelerate and expand their efforts in third countries in Asia and Africa under their Triangular Development Cooperation (TDC) as communicated after intergovernmental consultations in October 2024.²⁵

Third, while the US government under Trump may withdraw from climate treaties and frameworks, there are actors in the US with whom Germany and the EU as well as the rest of the world can work. These include both non-state and state actors such as willing states (e.g., California), civil society organizations, and the private sector. Widening and improving partnerships should also include engaging and building strong relations with the private sector, civil society, and academia in Germany, the EU, and beyond.

Countering Disinformation and Foreign-led Polarization Internally

Russian bots are significantly influencing public opinion by systematically reposting polarizing narratives and disinformation, not least on climate. This was evidenced when an internet outage in Russia temporarily reduced the number of reposts of US right-wing extremist commentators.²⁶ Germany and the EU should continue their leadership on democratic social media governance and legislate against foreign interference in the lead-up to elections. This also includes online hate speech, which is shrinking the space for public debate as fears spread over harassment for political positioning on issues such as climate protection.

23 Abdullah Fahimi et al., "Toward an Indo-German Green Strategic Partnership," DGAP Policy Brief 8. *German Council on Foreign Relations* (June 2024): <https://doi.org/10.60823/DGAP-24-40768-en> (accessed November 13, 2024).

24 Federal Foreign Office, "Focus on India," (October 2024): <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2680288/8909ac2c501ab85d55defff7d1b8b75d/241016-fokus-indien-data.pdf> (accessed November 13, 2024).

25 Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, *Joint Statement: 7th India-Germany Inter-Governmental Consultations (IGC)* (October 25, 2024): <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/joint-statement-7th-india-germany-inter-governmental-consultations-igc--2317664> (accessed November 13, 2024).

26 Michal Krystyanczuk, Francesco Nicoli and Kamil Sekut, "First Glance Russian Internet Outage Offers Clues About Online Goblin Army," *Bruegel*, First Glance (October 30, 2024): <https://www.bruegel.org/first-glance/russian-internet-outage-offers-clues-about-online-goblin-army> (accessed November 10, 2024).



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