

Growing inequality in the US is bad news for climate change

Written by David Holmes, Senior Lecturer, Communications and Media Studies, Monash University

This week's US Presidential election will likely be more important for climate change action than the [United Nations \(UN\) Climate Change Conference](#) which started in Marrakech yesterday. Whichever candidate makes it to the White House, progressive action on climate change in America, and therefore globally, is going to take a hit.

We have already seen stagnation on climate change action in the lead up to the US election. The mudslinging and controversy of the campaign has taken climate change off the front pages. Climate change has had even less visibility in the US election campaign than it did in the [Australian election](#) in July.

It was telling that Hillary Clinton, who had talked up climate policy in the primaries when competing against Bernie Sanders, [dropped the climate ball](#) as soon as she had the Democratic party's nomination.

It wasn't simply that there was no longer any point taking on climate change in order to win more Sanders supporters, but that climate change was so far down the list of ways Clinton could differentiate herself from the Republican candidate Donald Trump that it seemed pointless to insert it into the election campaign at all.

Trump's worldview projects a complete [abnegation of climate change](#), as shown by his [intention to undo](#) America's commitment to the [Paris climate agreement](#) should he get to the White House.

Trump's [negative attitude](#) towards climate change is another example of his belief in [conspiracy theories](#). But his neglect of climate change is not to be found in deploying [denier myths](#), but his abandonment of a policy stance about anything in favour of filling the airwaves with insults more suited to a bar room brawl.

Growing inequality in the US is bad news for climate change

Written by David Holmes, Senior Lecturer, Communications and Media Studies, Monash University

For many Americans, its 240 year old system of democracy is in great danger. Because so many unemployed and dispossessed Americans feel that neither capitalism nor the two great parties can meet their needs, they are rejecting the political elites and the establishment politics that keep the [unequal distribution of wealth](#) in check.

Of course, such a system has always been part of American life. It's just that it is now at breaking point. It is of no consequence that Trump is himself part of the US economic elite. It is enough that he has himself been a "loser" many times over, and that he speaks the reality-TV language of those who want America to be "great again" both at rallies and on [social media](#) .

Ironically, America is a greater power now than it has been in the past. But due to the automation of the increased manufacturing output in heavy industries and the reliance on China for consumer goods, unemployment and income inequality have risen to unacceptable levels. It's now the turn of working class Americans to be the "losers of globalisation".

This has given rise to a loss of faith in American institutions, and the celebration of Trump as a bad boy who should be able to do whatever he wants to rail against the establishment.

Many analysts have [drawn the comparison](#) between Trump's version of America and fascism — military isolationism, the ridiculing of "others" (including Muslims, Hispanics, women, Chinese and Mexicans), high levels of paranoia (the media is "[rigged](#)", the election is "[rigged](#)"), and the fairy tale conviction that one person alone can save America.

But the real danger for the US is in [four years from now](#) . If Trump doesn't win the presidency, a smarter Republican candidate – one who is actually supported by the floor of the Grand Old Party, actually has policies and appeals to the disaffected – will take US politics to a climate inactive isolationist extreme.

However, a moderating force for climate change is the success of the Paris agreement, which is [now in full force](#) . The Paris agreement, which replaces the Kyoto framework, has been ratified extremely quickly by UN standards. It now has almost 100 countries signed up – needing only

Growing inequality in the US is bad news for climate change

Written by David Holmes, Senior Lecturer, Communications and Media Studies, Monash University

the 55 countries that account for 55% of global emissions.

This is impressive progress given the scale and complexity of the UN's framework convention on climate change. The momentum of the Paris agreement provides a kind of political guardrail for achieving stronger action on climate change, leaving no country with an excuse not to join in.

The only counter-force that could reverse this momentum would be the rise of populist support for isolationism within the states signed up to the treaty. And a Trumpist America, whether it eventuates this week or in the future, offers an archetypal case.

Authors: David Holmes, Senior Lecturer, Communications and Media Studies, Monash University

Read more <http://theconversation.com/growing-inequality-in-the-us-is-bad-news-for-climate-change-68323>