

Election day arrives and the stakes are high, not just for the US but the world

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After a gruelling and often highly antagonist election, Americans will vote today for the next US President. There are several key policy areas that will require leadership that is thoughtful, creative and aimed at uniting a divided country. But it is not just domestic policy that will be shaped by the next president.

Whether it is Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump, the president will have a fundamental role in shaping global affairs for the foreseeable future. For this reason, it's worth examining what is at stake for America and the world.

Climate change

Climate change ranks as one of the most complex and challenging problems the next president will face. As the [Paris Climate Agreement](#) comes into force, many states will be looking to America to lead the way in reducing carbon emissions. The agreement is the first to have unanimous support from every member of the United Nations.

Clinton and Trump have vastly different positions on the issue. Trump is a climate denier who believes it is a conspiracy created by the Chinese government to harm the American economy. This claim is patently ridiculous and the damage he could do to global efforts to address climate change if elected is significant.

Trump has promised to withdraw from the Paris Agreement and invest heavily in American coal, natural gas fracking, and offshore oil drilling and exploration. This would be an unmitigated disaster for anyone who cares about keeping global temperatures below the two degrees warming threshold. It would also most likely increase inequality within the US, as the effects of a changing climate have been shown to have a disproportionate impact on poorer communities.

It's impossible to predict exactly what effect America's withdrawal would have on other countries' commitment to cutting carbon emissions. It is highly likely though that it would seriously undermine what is already a fragile global effort.

[Clinton's policy in this area](#) has focused on pushing the country towards a greater use

of renewable energy. She would also continue the work of President Obama's Clean Energy Bill by placing a price on carbon emissions. Yet these efforts have so far received strong resistance from the oil and gas industries. Indeed, Clinton's own record when it comes to these industries, particularly early support for fracking, paints a more complicated and problematic picture. Navigating the competing interests of the oil and gas companies and their supporters in Congress on the one hand, and the global need to significantly reduce carbon emissions on the other, will require strong and committed leadership.

Jobs and the economy

Trump's most successful narrative has been to promote his outsider status, claiming the mantle of saviour of the working American. He has expertly channelled much of the anger at the loss of manufacturing jobs in rust belt states towards the political class. This in turn has exacerbated the pervasive feeling that free trade deals like NAFTA have left America's working and middle classes struggling to make ends meet.

[His economic policies](#) are a bizarre blend of the very neo-liberal ideas that have been responsible for multiple financial crises, combined with protectionist grandstanding. His proposal to impose tariffs on Chinese imports like steel, and to fine American manufacturers who send jobs offshore, would likely do more to hurt the US economy than strengthen it. His tax cuts for corporations and businesses would do very little to address the lopsided distribution of wealth in the country.

[Clinton's approach to fixing economic inequality](#) relies heavily on extensive investment in public infrastructure and expanding the renewable energy sector. While this could certainly create millions of jobs and boost productivity, Clinton plans to fund the increase in government spending through corporate tax reform. While necessary, it is not a given that either a Republican or Democratic Congress would support aggressively going after Wall Street and Corporate America. Without this revenue it is not clear what Clinton will be able to do to solve unemployment or boost economic growth.

The Supreme Court

While it hasn't dominated the media the way various political and personal scandals have, the fact that the next president will appoint at [least one Supreme Court justice, probably more](#), is perhaps one of the most important issues in this election. Whoever is elected will thus shape the culture and ideology of the court for decades to come. This will have a huge impact on some of the most divisive issues in American politics, from women's reproductive rights to climate change and health care.

Foreign policy

The stakes are high for those of us outside the US as well. Despite its domestic fracturing, it is still the most powerful state in the world. Its military and economic power undoubtedly influence world events, and uncertainty about the future trajectory of American foreign policy has the potential to be deeply destabilising for the international system.

Trump's statements on foreign policy issues have caused serious alarm among America's allies. [His questions about NATO's usefulness](#) alongside his pro-Putin rhetoric, his irresponsible statements about nuclear proliferation, and his complete unwillingness to redress his ignorance about the crises in the Middle East, indicate a troubling disregard for the complexities of world affairs.

Clinton's foreign policy record [is also problematic](#). It's no secret that her hawkish approach to global conflict was responsible for her support of the 2003 Iraq war and her push for intervention in Libya. This style of muscular foreign policy could lead the US to take a more aggressive stance towards China in its regional disputes with Vietnam and Japan. It could also potentially see a more assertive military approach to Middle East conflicts. Despite this, it is clear that leaders around the world see a Clinton presidency as far less destabilising for global affairs.

There is an awful lot riding on the outcome of this election, which is why millions around the world today will be watching with keen interest to see which way America votes.

Kumuda Simpson does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

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