Global Climate Politics after the Return of President Trump

Jeff Colgan[a]* and Federica Genovese[b]

[a]Department of Political Science and Watson School of International and Public Affairs, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA
[b]Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, UK
*Corresponding author. Email: jeff_colgan@brown.edu

Abstract The second Trump administration has disrupted global climate politics, turning the United States away from the clean energy and environmental policies of the Biden administration. Consequently, analytical attention is turning, inside and outside of the United States, to a family of concepts referred to as "Climate Realism" (CR), which favors long-run investments in technology and adaptation over near-term climate mitigation efforts. We critically engage with CR and argue that political science identifies four key features of climate politics that shed light on CR's strengths and weaknesses, and which will persist even in the second Trump era. Despite CR's flaws, we contend that its emergence in reaction to the second Trump administration highlights some important dimensions of climate politics that deserve greater attention going forward. We highlight three topics for research: the political and practical strategies of the anti-green coalition; the heterogeneity in viable national economic strategies; and the implications for IR of a turn away from meaningful climate mitigation in powerful nations.

The second Trump administration has disrupted climate politics, turning the United States away from the clean energy and environmental policies of the Biden administration. Trump's policy actions, along with a systematic effort to undermine the institutions of climate science, have had significant global ripple effects, including by eliciting responses from China, Europe, and elsewhere. Collectively, these shifts have amplified analysts' interest in finding ways to reconcile the objective threat of climate change with a new era of international politics.

Largely as a consequence of Trump's new presidency, attention is turning, inside and outside of the United States, to a family of concepts referred to as "Climate Realism" (CR). Different analysts are using different versions, but at heart, Climate Realism acknowledges the risks that climate change poses while advocating for a pullback from the type of green policies pursued by the Biden administration. Specifically, it: (1) expects the world to miss the 2015 Paris targets for climate mitigation, (2) argues that reducing US greenhouse gas emissions will not make a meaningful difference on a global scale, (3) focuses on different long-term solutions,

International Organization 79, Supplement 2025, pp. S88–S102
 doi:10.1017/S002081832510115X

often involving new technologies and adaptation, (4) proposes US leadership on geoengineering, and (5) contemplates coercive action toward countries with rapidly rising emissions.[1] In the United Kingdom, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change,[2] the Bank of England,[3] and some influential scholars[4] are similarly rethinking the topic based on CR. In Europe, right-leaning actors see CR as gaining ground.[5] However, this view has not come unchallenged. The American version of CR has already attracted critics who point to the absence of a plausible path to bipartisan support and the pitfalls for US diplomatic credibility of gutting domestic efforts to reduce emissions.[6] We extend this critique more globally, substantiate it by situating the debates in existing research on climate politics, and evaluate how scholarly perspectives on CR may influence future International Relations research on climate change.

We contend that political science literature—much of it published in *International Organization*—provides the intellectual scaffolding to understand the advantages and disadvantages of this evident shift toward CR. The literature highlights four enduring features of climate politics that inform how much CR can help navigate it after the return of President Trump. First, there is the perpetual relevance of domestic politics for understanding the "two-level game" of global climate politics. Second, distributional conflicts stay central to climate politics: it is political economy all the way down. Third, ideational frames—involving narratives, worldviews, and perceptions—continue to be important modifications to a strictly materialist understanding of climate politics. And fourth, the problem of global climate change remains characterized by high severity and high uncertainty. These four insights from the latest generation of climate politics research not only endure in the new era of US climate politics, but also collectively point to a tension between the CR framework and the evidence-based mechanics of climate politics that we label the Climate Politics Dilemma.

While we argue that the Climate Politics Dilemma will not be solved by CR and that this family of concepts is therefore deeply flawed, the emergence of CR nonetheless highlights some important dimensions of climate politics that deserve greater attention going forward. Those dimensions are perhaps overlooked by a field of scholars in which pro-climate normative commitments are common. Many researchers predicted that political contestation over climate change would intensify over time as the physical effects manifested more strongly,[7] but most of the scholarly attention to date has been on the causes, strategies, and effects of the green side of the

1. Sivaram 2025.
2. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change 2025.
3. *Financial Times*, 2 June 2025. Kenza Bryan and Martin Arnold, Bank of England Staff Depart after Downgrade of Climate Risk. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/c9919c02-8328-4fa0-af4d-a108770a9f73>.
4. Helm 2025.
5. Watts et al. 2025.
6. Wallace 2025.
7. Colgan, Green, and Hale 2021.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

contestation.[8] Far less attention has been to three other topics that the new era of climate politics in the United States is illustrating with force: the political and practical strategies of the anti-green coalition; the heterogeneity in viable national economic strategies; and the implications for International Relations (IR) of a turn away from meaningful climate mitigation in powerful nations. The turn to CR can help the literature refocus on these factors, though we caution that uncritically following CR risks falling into analytical traps and potential fallacies.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. The next section shows why climate change is not going to disappear from IR debates by reviewing the fundamentals of climate politics highlighted in recently published climate politics literature. The third section describes what is changing with the new Trump administration. The fourth engages with Climate Realism more precisely and identifies its pitfalls. The fifth section describes the three key topics for future research, and the final section concludes.

The Unchanged Fundamentals of Climate Politics

Until late in the last decade, prominent political scientists were accusing their own discipline of mostly ignoring the problem of global climate change.[9] Since then, there has been something like a Cambrian explosion of political science research on climate change.[10] The literature identifies four fundamental features of climate change politics. We quickly review them to establish why climate change is unlikely to retreat from global politics despite a moment of green backlash.

First, climate change is a direct externality of industrialization that will not leave any section of society unaffected, which means it will remain a domestic politics problem regardless of the extent of international cooperation. The critical relevance of domestic politics is made clear by the "two-level game" literature of international climate politics.[11] While international negotiations like the United Nation's COP meetings grab headlines, any (national or international) promises governments make are tightly constrained by the domestic opposition that such promises engender. Constraints are also shaped and generated by domestic institutions[12] and social movements.[13] This is true of mitigation commitments but also adaptation plans, which CR emphasizes and which the literature has so far mostly neglected.[14]

8. Prakash 2000; Harrison and Sundstrom 2007; Hadden 2015; Bechtel, Genovese, and Scheve 2019; Bernstein and Hoffmann 2019; Gaikwad, Genovese, and Tingley 2022; Bolet, Green, and Gonzalez-Eguino 2024; Rowan 2025.

9. Keohane 2015; Green and Hale 2017.

10. For recent reviews, see Ross 2025; Colgan and Hinthorn 2023; Gazmararian and Tingley forthcoming.

11. Harrison and Sundstrom 2007; Hovi, Sprinz, and Bang 2010; Keohane and Victor 2016; Falkner 2016; Genovese 2019; Kennard 2020; Cory, Lerner, and Osgood 2021.

12. Dubash 2021; Meckling and Nahm 2022.

13. Hadden 2015.

14. Javeline 2014; Grossman, Sacks, and Xu 2025.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

Second, the research suggests an understanding of climate politics as political economy all the way down, in which distributional politics plays a central role.[15] Actors concerned about climate vulnerabilities—including coastal real estate, farming, and anything that involves outdoor activity—have incentives to push for decarbonization. Some of those actors, like pension funds or homeowners, hold climate-vulnerable assets—which could take many forms, including capital, labor skills, natural resources—but other pro-climate actors see themselves as stewards, like politicians or environmental NGOs. They face opposition from those who hold climate-forcing (polluting) assets, who have strong material incentives to resist policies that support decarbonization and climate mitigation. In as much as the goal of decarbonization requires fewer fossil fuels to be consumed, it implies a historically unprecedented energy transition. Previous energy transitions have only ever increased the consumption of existing fuels; for example, the shift to oil led to more, not less, coal consumption.[16] In short, the battle between different climate politics coalitions will map onto other political economy battles and continue to intensify.

Third, climate change has now entered the level of mass politics that is hard to repress or, for that matter, push back to purely technocratic spheres. Recent research has shown that ideational politics—involving narratives, worldviews, and perceptions—provide important modifications to a purely materialist understanding of climate politics.[17] The intermingling of individual material considerations and collective social identity makes for a complex political issue both at home[18] and internationally.[19]

Fourth, the problem of unmitigated global climate change is characterized by high severity and high uncertainty. In terms of severity, the probable consequences of failing to decarbonize the global economy include increased social unrest;[20] amplified civil wars;[21] internal and cross-border migration;[22] and food and water systems failures.[23] Their manifestations are uncertain, though the floor for the overall magnitude of damages grows more certain over time as states and firms offer more evidence about their emissions trajectories. There is also considerable uncertainty about how to support technological change,[24] how markets should value risks,[25] how physical harms translate into social consequences,[26] and a host of other factors related to climate mitigation and adaptation.

15. Meckling 2011; Aklin and Mildenberger 2020; Colgan, Green, and Hale 2021.
16. Colgan and Hinthorn 2023.
17. Blondeel, Colgan, and Van de Graaf 2019; Bechtel, Genovese, and Scheve 2019; Guenther 2024.
18. Bayer and Genovese 2020; Gaikwad, Genovese, and Tingley 2022.
19. Tingley and Tomz 2022; Gaikwad, Genovese, and Tingley 2025.
20. Hendrix and Glaser 2007; Hendrix and Salehyan 2012.
21. Mach et al. 2019.
22. Greenhill 2010; Koubi et al. 2018; Mitchell and Pizzi 2021; Benveniste, Oppenheimer, and Fleurbaey 2022.
23. Dabelko and Conca 2019.
24. Dauvergne and Neville 2009; Breetz, Mildenberger, and Stokes 2018; Jinnah, Nicholson, and Flegal 2018; Biermann et al. 2022; Sabel and Victor 2024.
25. Colgan 2018.
26. Busby 2022.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

We see these four features as enduring aspects of climate politics. They underpin what we call the Climate Politics Dilemma, which consists of two core truths: (1) in the worst scenarios, climate change creates existential risks for our species, and even without the worst scenarios, it is likely to be highly damaging; and yet (2) the international politics of global public good provision are nationally selfish, riddled with distributional challenges down to the most local level, and routinely focused more on the crisis *du jour* than long-term problems. These four features, and the Climate Politics Dilemma they produce, are analytically essential to explain climate politics since the 1990s and are unlikely to change in the near term. CR fails to resolve these four features or the Dilemma, despite CR's effort to alter the approach to climate policy and politics. That does not mean, however, that climate politics is entirely unchanging, as we discuss in the next section.

Three New Disruptive Forces for Climate Politics

Three genuinely new shifts due to the 2024 US elections make the road to address climate change much harder and a critical engagement with CR necessary. First, there are the Trump administration's policy actions, which undermine the United States' transition to clean energy and related technologies. In its first 100 days the Trump administration rolled back more than 140 environmental rules, started rewriting regulations that limit pollution from cars and power plants, and accelerated environmental reviews of drilling projects to just a few weeks.[27] Trump also signed executive orders to ease restrictions on fossil fuel extraction and offered the fossil fuel industry an exemption from the tariffs he presented in April 2025. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act passed on 3 July 2025 mostly gutted the Inflation Reduction Act and significantly increases projected US greenhouse gas emissions.[28] The federal government's stop-work order in August 2025 on the mostly built Revolution Wind project, among others, indicates that further efforts to cancel or hinder renewable energy projects are likely. The United States has seen fluctuations in climate positions across the past decades[29] but never has US climate policy shifted so radically in such a short period of time.

Second, these actions coincided with an attack on the administrative state and the role of science in policymaking. Very early on the administration pushed for sweeping cuts to federal agencies on the forefront of the climate crisis, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Department of Agriculture, and widespread firings of climate scientists and regulation experts. There have been cancellations of climate science grants, censorship of climate-related works from official contracts and documents, and suspension of funding for regional climate centers. The president's executive orders have been challenged in court but, at a minimum, this administration

27. Canon et al. 2025.
28. Jenkins et al. 2025.
29. Mildenberger 2021.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

puts American climate institutions and the environmentally minded civil society to a test. While some theorists have controversially suggested that autocratic institutions might be legitimate in the face of climate change,[30] empirical research suggests that robust democratic institutions support environmental ambition.[31]

Third, there are the international ripple effects of the second Trump administration. These have been heterogenous, consistent with the mixed evidence in the literature on elections' effects on climate policymaking.[32] In some countries, far-right leaders have modeled themselves as local versions of the MAGA movement. Consequently, in places like Germany (with AfD) and the United Kingdom (Reform), far-right parties have embedded climate-skeptic positions in their core electoral agendas, putting pressure on center-right parties to do the same. At the same time, Trump's actions have reinvigorated some center-left parties elsewhere. The Liberals in Canada and the Labour party in Australia won elections in 2025 partly based on fears of a Trump effect at home. Still, these centrist victories have not necessarily led to climate agenda: Prime Minister Mark Carney removed the consumer carbon tax two weeks before the Canadian national elections, and the Australian Labour cabinet approved a fifty-year extension of one of the largest gas projects in the world just after the elections.

The global political landscape therefore remains patchy and uncertain, and this triggers important questions for future climate politics research. The European Union sees material and soft-power opportunities of the United States retreating from climate action, but also the challenges of conducting a smooth transition as far-right parties exert power domestically.[33] For example, Hungary has allocated foreign direct investments, including EU resources, to build a powerful EV battery manufacturing hub, but then uses its industry opportunistically, as a geopolitical weapon against Brussels. China, meanwhile, provides a model for clean energy growth, but aligning with China comes with the risks of exposure to the Chinese Communist Party's monopoly of global supply chains. As the new Trump administration withdraws the United States from being a fulcrum of innovations around renewable energy and a participant in the climate change battle, these countries—and those in the Global South—may have to reposition themselves on climate change, either by further linking their economies to green transition, or downscaling their green energy markets.

The Pitfalls of Climate Realism

Despite the disruptive forces the new Trump administration has unleashed, climate politics is here to stay because climate change itself is unavoidable. The inter- and sub-national tensions over the responsibility for climate change outlined earlier will

30. Mittiga 2022.
31. Dubash 2021; Von Stein 2022; Tørstad and Wiborg 2024.
32. Finnegan 2023; Von Stein 2022.
33. Voeten 2025; Bayer, Crippa, and Genovese 2025.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

intensify as the impacts grow in severity and scope. To address this conundrum, CR is an attempt to find a compromise between the reality of climate change and the political opposition to decarbonization. Its three imperatives are preparing for a world that fails its climate targets, investing in market-competitive clean technology and industries, and leading efforts to avert truly catastrophic climate change. Crucially, the CFR manifesto treats as a fallacy the idea that "reducing US domestic greenhouse gas emissions can make a meaningful difference."[34]

CR is only loosely related to Realism in IR.[35] CR is not an explanatory theory; it is a partly descriptive, partly normative analysis of contemporary climate politics with powerful indications for policymakers. CR shares with Realism its acceptance of national self-interest as a primary driver of international behavior, its skepticism toward the capacity of international institutions to meaningfully constrain state actions, and its unflinching acknowledgment that climate governance will inevitably produce winners and losers, with some actors facing substantial costs. It appears to be more than mere a pragmatic description of the current moment because CR implicitly rests on a claim that states and other actors define, and will continue to define, their interests quite selfishly and narrowly in the face of a collective challenge like climate change. However, CR departs fundamentally from Realism in some critical respects, as we describe next.

CR offers no easy way around the four features of climate politics we identified in the second section of this essay, especially the high severity and complicated uncertainty of unmitigated climate change. The Faustian bargain CR proposes is the negative consequences of failing to meet decarbonization goals in the short- and medium-term in exchange for the potential benefit of a stronger or larger political coalition for long-term climate mitigation and adaptation. CR advocates only hint at this tradeoff without ever really engaging with its full costs, benefits, or probabilities.[36] This bargain proposed by CR implies a slower mitigation trajectory that simultaneously creates (1) higher certainty about the (large) magnitude of future climate damages given current technology, but also (2) less certainty about exactly what damages would occur, what effects future technology might have, and how actors will respond to the hotter, more volatile climate of the future.

A key example of the hidden assumptions and tradeoffs imbedded in CR is the idea that some horrific consequences of climate change would be acceptable so long as it happens to unspecified Other People. CR is curiously content with the unexamined vagueness about the word *catastrophe*, and who exactly it affects. Worse still is CR's assumption that the privileged "Us"—whether that is the United States, the West, or the Global North—would be able to isolate ourselves from spillover of problems and instability in the rest of the world. Given the unprecedentedness of the expected climate impacts, scholars are struggling to estimate how civil wars, human migration, and humanitarian disasters will affect the world, but the best estimates suggest high

34. Sivaram 2025.
35. Realist texts include Waltz 1979; Walt 1987; Art and Greenhill 2015; Kirshner 2022.
36. Sivaram 2025.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

magnitude costs.[37] In short, it is much easier to use the term Realism to signal tough-minded thinking than it is to come to grips with the attendant inequality, racialized harm, and high likelihood of spillover effects to wealthy countries that come with this framework.

Another weakness in CR is the unexamined uncertainty about future technologies and future political coalitions. CR places a big bet that climate "catastrophe" can be averted by developing and deploying new technologies like carbon capture and storage (CCS) or solar geoengineering, but that outcome is far from certain. Indeed, some prominent scientists are now warning that CCS is unlikely to play a major role in mitigating climate change,[38] which means that it might act primarily as an expensive subsidy to the fossil fuel industry. Similarly, CR recognizes the two-level game of climate politics and is explicitly designed to "rise above" partisan disagreement but it does not examine the probability of success of building a future bipartisan political coalition in the United States or elsewhere. This view does not offer any detailed political strategy to appeal to a Republican Party or other right-wing parties that are hostile to clean energy and view climate science as exaggerated or a hoax.[39]

Varieties of Climate Contestation and Strategies

While CR is deeply flawed, its emergence highlights the three key topics we noted in the introduction to this essay: the political strategies of the anti-green coalition, the heterogeneity in national economic strategies, and the implications for IR.

The first of these topics is essentially about domestic politics, ripe for comparative analyses of anti-green coalitions.[40] Scholars observe that pro- and anti-carbon coalitions now form a major cleavage in US politics[41] and that one side pursues *recarbonization* rather than decarbonization.[42] Under what conditions, how much, and how effectively are those opposed to decarbonization prosecuting their campaign against clean energy and other green technologies? These questions deserve significantly more focus.[43] Since the Biden administration's clean energy policy efforts, the United States has experienced an upsurge in local community resistance to solar and wind energy projects. One report indicates that now roughly 20 percent of all US counties have some form of ban or restrictive ordinance against solar and/or wind energy.[44] Moreover, anti-green politics is hardly unique to the United States. For instance, protests against energy infrastructure projects are common around the world. Scholarly work in progress suggests, for instance, that about one in eight wind

37. Mach et al. 2019; Busby 2022; Benveniste, Oppenheimer, and Fleurbaey 2022.
38. Gidden et al. 2025.
39. Wallace 2025.
40. Though opposition can be transnational, not entirely domestic; see Cory, Lerner, and Osgood 2021
41. Oatley 2024.
42. Driscoll and Blyth 2025.
43. Stokes et al. 2023
44. Meyer and Clynes 2025.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

projects in the Global South face opposition involving collective action like protests,[45] but at present we still know little about the causes and consequences of such opposition.

The second topic that CR shines a new light upon is the heterogeneity in national economic strategies. The striking contrast between the United States' and China's national economic strategies vividly illustrates the wide range of possibilities. Remarkably, Chinese electric vehicle companies' outward foreign direct investment surpassed domestic manufacturing investment levels ($15 billion) for the first time in 2024.[46] Then, after Trump took office, China's Belt and Road Initiative experienced an unprecedented surge in the first half of 2025 after years of post-COVID decline, reaching $124 billion in total engagement—the highest level ever recorded for a six-month period and exceeding the entire 2024 total.[47] This revival encompasses record-breaking energy engagement of $42 billion, including green energy initiatives totaling $9.7 billion in wind, solar, and waste-to-energy projects. Some analysts now refer to China as an "electrostate" based on its dominance in clean energy technologies, manufacturing, and infrastructure deployment.[48] Political scientists have mapped the ways in which oil dependence has allowed petrostates to weaponize the international order in their favor.[49] It remains to be seen whether the electrostate strategy will allow China to exert geopolitical influence in ways that mirror, yet invert, the petroleum-based power structures of the twentieth century. Note, however, that *both* the United States and Chinese strategies appear to be compatible with the "Realist" label in the sense that they match each country's national interest as perceived in a given moment—which creates indeterminacy that further undermines CR's utility for analysis.

Any given state's choice of national economic strategy in the face of climate change is uncertain and depends on the state's circumstances. Scholars have usefully called attention to the variety of "strategies of green industrial policy"[50] but paid less attention to the full range of national economic strategies that a country might adopt, including those that intensify the production or consumption of fossil fuels.[51] Multiple country-level explanatory variables are worthy of investigation, including: its natural resources; its sources of international comparative advantage; the domestic political coalition that supports its incumbent government; the state's long-term growth model, if a coherent one exists; its political culture, ideology, and cleavages; time horizons; and its domestic political institutions.[52] Possibly there are multiple strategies that could maximize a state's economic prosperity, even if they do different amounts of damage to the global climate.

45. Biygautane et al. 2025.
46. Wang 2025.
47. Ibid.
48. Tauschinski and Stylianou 2025.
49. Ross and Voeten 2016; Colgan 2021.
50. Allan and Nahm 2025.
51. Driscoll and Blyth 2025.
52. Dubash 2021; Hale 2024.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

The third topic is the host of IR implications of the United States' turn away from meaningful climate mitigation and the global spread of CR. One implication is that global energy markets, and adjacent ones such as the automobile markets, which have been dominated by the OECD for roughly a century, are now being contested by China and others. In a telling May 2025 episode, China delayed approval of BYD's Mexico EV manufacturing plant amid fears that its technology could leak to the United States—a reversal of the OECD's concerns in the early 2000s about China stealing its industrial technology. India, Indonesia, and Turkey accounted for 75 percent of China's exports of silicon cells in 2025, which they are then using as inputs for solar panels built by their own rapidly accelerating domestic manufacturing industries. And even the European Union is beginning to demand technology transfers from Chinese companies that seek to invest and manufacture clean technology in Europe like batteries.

Finally, a second implication of the policy emphasis on CR is the impact it would have on the liberal international order.[53] In a world in which the United States retreats into a petrol-fueled economy and China pursues green tech for national goals while minimizing its international climate commitments, the European Union remains the only international pole nominally advocating for global public goods in the fashion of climate protection. Whether Europe will decide to retreat from its own climate pledges or perhaps instead forge a green partnership with China depends largely on the internal domestic coalitions with power in European institutions such as the Parliament and the Commission.[54] It will also depend on how the rest of the world positions itself toward China and the United States. While the scenario of alignment with China seems unlikely for some Global North countries such as Japan and the United Kingdom, some US-exposed countries such as South Africa, Indonesia, Brazil, and even Canada and Australia could update their priors about which transactional partners to choose on the matters of natural resource trade and green energy markets.[55] Further, in a feedback effect, the repositioning of middle- and small-powers countries could even create competition between China and the United States for relationships with these middle-power countries in separate spheres of interest, just as we have seen during the Cold War and European imperial periods.[56]

Conclusion

The current moment in international politics presents many unknowns for climate politics, but one certainty is that climate change is not decelerating, and societies around the globe will face the geopolitical and institutional challenges that a warming planet presents. The most realistic thing about the Climate Realism framework is the acknowledgment that the world is very unlikely to achieve the Paris target of global

53. Lake, Martin, and Risse 2021.
54. Bayer, Crippa, and Genovese 2025.
55. Deberdt, Letourneau, and Le Billon 2025.
56. Colgan and Miller 2019, 2022.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

warming "well below 2 degrees Celsius." That acknowledgment is necessary, but wildly insufficient, as a guide to either climate policy or foreign policy. Political science research identifies four features of climate politics that collectively point to serious flaws in CR. We synthesized those four features into what we called the Climate Politics Dilemma: the serious risks of climate change versus the very challenging politics of climate mitigation. Far from grappling with the hard tradeoffs, CR reifies and hardens the two sides of the Dilemma, which are, in reality, co-produced by risk perception and political constraint. As the research literature suggests, political systems shape how risks are seen and prioritized; meanwhile, evolving climate damages reshape the boundaries of what is politically possible.

The analytical turn to CR might nonetheless be intellectually generative because it points to the need for better explanations of anti-green politics and its consequences. We highlighted three such topics: the political strategies of the anti-green coalition, the heterogeneity in viable national economic strategies, and the implications for IR of a turn away from meaningful climate mitigation by the United States and others. There may be more. What we can say with some certainty is that, in the absence of some shocking technological breakthrough(s), climate politics will continue to shape International Relations.

References

Aklin, Michael, and Matto Mildenberger. 2020. Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, Not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change. *Global Environmental Politics*, 20 (4):4–27.

Allan, Bentley B., and Jonas Nahm. 2025. Strategies of Green Industrial Policy: How States Position Firms in Global Supply Chains. *American Political Science Review* 19 (1):420–34.

Art, R.J., and Greenhill, K.M. eds. 2015. *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*. Bloomsbury.

Bayer, Patrick, Lorenzo Crippa, and Federica Genovese. 2025. Energy Transition, Financial Markets and EU Interventionism: Evidence from the Ukraine Crisis. *Political Science Research and Methods.*

Bayer, Patrick, and Federica Genovese. 2020. Beliefs about Consequences from Climate Action under Weak Climate Institutions: Sectors, Home Bias, and International Embeddedness. *Global Environmental Politics* 20 (4):28–50.

Bechtel, Michael M., Federica Genovese, and Kenneth F. Scheve. 2019. Interests, Norms and Support for the Provision of Global Public Goods: The Case of Climate Co-operation. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49 (4):1333–55.

Benveniste, Hélène, Michael Oppenheimer, and Marc Fleurbaey. 2022. Climate Change Increases Resource-Constrained International Immobility. *Nature Climate Change* 12 (7):634–41.

Bernstein, Steven, and Matthew Hoffmann. 2019. Climate Politics, Metaphors and the Fractal Carbon Trap. *Nature Climate Change* 9 (12):919–25. Available at <doi:10.1038/s41558-019-0618-2>.

Biermann, Frank, Jeroen Oomen, Aarti Gupta, Saleem H. Ali, Ken Conca, Maarten A. Hajer, Prakash Kashwan, Louis J. Kotzé, Melissa Leach, Dirk Messner, Chukwumerije Okereke, Åsa Persson, Janez Potočnik, David Schlosberg, Michelle Scobie, and Stacy D. VanDeveer. 2022. Solar Geoengineering: The Case for an International Non-use Agreement. *WIREs Climate Change* 13 (3):e754.

Biygautane, Taib, Jennifer Hadden, Ahana Raina, and Sebastian Suarez. 2025. Tracking Opposition to New Wind Infrastructurein the Developing World. Climate Solutions Lab Working Paper.

Blondeel, Mathieu, Jeff Colgan, and Thijs Van de Graaf. 2019. What Drives Norm Success? Evidence from Anti–Fossil Fuel Campaigns. *Global Environmental Politics* 19 (4):63–84.

Bolet, Diane, Fergus Green, and Mikel Gonzalez-Eguino. 2024. How to Get Coal Country to Vote for Climate Policy: The Effect of a "Just Transition Agreement" on Spanish Election Results. *American Political Science Review* 118 (3):1344–59.

Breetz, Hanna, Matto Mildenberger, and Leah Stokes. 2018. The Political Logics of Clean Energy Transitions. *Business and Politics* 20 (4):492–522.

Busby, Joshua W. 2022. *States and Nature: The Effects of Climate Change on Security.* Cambridge University Press.

Canon, Gabrielle, Nina Lakhani, Oliver Milman, and Dharna Noor. 2025. "A Ruthless Agenda": Charting 100 Days of Trump's Onslaught on the Environment. *The Guardian*, 1 May. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/01/trump-100-days-climate-environment>.

Colgan, Jeff D. 2018. The Market Is Valuing Climate Risk All Wrong. *Global Policy*, 2 August. Available at <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/06/07/2018/market-valuing-climate-risk-all-wrong≥. Accessed 12 September 2025.

Colgan, Jeff D. 2021. *Partial Hegemony: Oil Politics and International Order.* Oxford University Press.

Colgan, Jeff D., Jessica F. Green, and Thomas N. Hale. 2021. Asset Revaluation and the Existential Politics of Climate Change. *International Organization* 75 (2):586–610.

Colgan, Jeff D., and Miriam Hinthorn. 2023. International Energy Politics in an Age of Climate Change. *Annual Review of Political Science* 26:79–96.

Colgan, Jeff D., and Nicholas L. Miller. 2019. Rival Hierarchies and the Origins of Nuclear Technology Sharing. *International Studies Quarterly* 63 (2):310–21.

Colgan, Jeff D., and Nicholas L. Miller. 2022. The Rewards of Rivalry: US–Chinese Competition Can Spur Climate Progress. *Foreign Affairs* 101:108.

Cory, Jared, Michael Lerner, and Iain Osgood. 2021. Supply Chain Linkages and the Extended Carbon Coalition. *American Journal of Political Science* 65 (1):69–87. Available at <doi:10.1111/ajps.12525>.

Dabelko, Geoffrey D., and Ken Conca. 2019. *Green Planet Blues: Critical Perspectives on Global Environmental Politics.* Routledge.

Dauvergne, Peter, and Kate J. Neville. 2009. The Changing North–South and South–South Political Economy of Biofuels. *Third World Quarterly* 30 (6):1087–1102. Available at <doi:10.1080/01436590903037341>.

Deberdt, Raphael, Angeline Letourneau, and Philippe Le Billon. 2025. Unleashing American Energy? Uncertainties in Energy Transition Developments Under a New Trump Administration. *Energy Research and Social Science* 126:104169.

Driscoll, Daniel, and Mark Blyth. 2025. Decarbonising National Growth Models: Derisking, "Hobbled States," and the Decarbonisation Possibility Frontier. *Review of International Political Economy* 32 (3):617–42.

Dubash, Navroz K. 2021. Varieties of Climate Governance: The Emergence and Functioning of Climate Institutions. *Environmental Politics* 30 (1):1–25.

Falkner, Robert. 2016. A Minilateral Solution for Global Climate Change? On Bargaining Efficiency, Club Benefits, and International Legitimacy. *Perspectives on Politics* 14 (1):87–101.

Finnegan, Jared J. 2023. Changing Prices in a Changing Climate: Electoral Competition and Fossil Fuel Taxation. *Comparative Political Studies*, 56 (8):1257–90.

Gaikwad, N., Federica Genovese, and Dustin Tingley. 2022. Creating Climate Coalitions: Mass Preferences for Compensating Vulnerability in the World's Two Largest Democracies. *American Political Science Review*, 116 (4):1165–83.

Gaikwad, N., Federica Genovese, and Dustin Tingley. 2025. Climate Action from Abroad: Assessing Mass Support for Cross-Border Climate Compensation. *International Organization* 79 (1):146–72.

Gazmararian, Alexander F., and Dustin Tingley. Forthcoming. Unifying Comparative and International Theories of Energy Transitions around Credibility. *American Review of Political Science.*

Genovese, Federica. 2019. Sectors, Pollution, and Trade: How Industrial Interests Shape Domestic Positions on Global Climate Agreements. *International Studies Quarterly* 63 (4):819–36.

Gidden, Matthew J., Siddharth Joshi, John J. Armitage, Alina-Berenice Christ, Miranda Boettcher, et al. 2025. A Prudent Planetary Limit for Geologic Carbon Storage. *Nature* 645 (8079):124–32.
Green, Jessica F., and Thomas N. Hale. 2017. Reversing the Marginalization of Global Environmental Politics in International Relations: An Opportunity for the Discipline. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50 (2):473–79.
Greenhill, Kelly M. 2010. *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy.* Cornell University Press.
Grossman, Guy, Audrey Sacks, and Alice Xu. 2025. The Politics of Climate Change in the Developing World. Working Paper.
Guenther, Genevieve. 2024. *The Language of Climate Politics: Fossil-Fuel Propaganda and How to Fight It*. Oxford University Press.
Hadden, Jennifer. 2015. *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press.
Hale, Thomas. 2024. *Long Problems: Climate Change and the Challenge of Governing Across Time*. Princeton University Press.
Harrison, Kathryn, and Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom. 2007. The Comparative Politics of Climate Change. *Global Environmental Politics* 7 (4):1–18.
Helm, Dieter. 2025. Climate Realism: Time for a Reset. 2025 Humphrey Battcock Lecture, 7 May. University of Oxford.
Hendrix, Cullen S., and Sarah M. Glaser. 2007. Trends and Triggers: Climate, Climate Change and Civil Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Political Geography* 26 (6):695–715.
Hendrix, Cullen S., and Idean Salehyan. 2012. Climate Change, Rainfall, and Social Conflict in Africa. *Journal of Peace Research* 49 (1):35–50.
Hovi, Jon, Detlef F. Sprinz, and Guri Bang. 2010. Why the United States did not Become a Party to the Kyoto Protocol: German, Norwegian, and US Perspectives. *European Journal of International Relations*, 18 (1):129–50.
Javeline, D. 2014. The Most Important Topic Political Scientists Are Not Studying: Adapting to Climate Change. *Perspectives on Politics* 12 (2):420–34.
Jenkins, Jesse, Jamil Farbes, Ryan Jones, Abigail Cheng, Qian Luo, and Benjamin Haley. 2025. A Fork in The Road: Impacts of Federal Policy Repeal on the US Energy Transition. REPEAT Project.
Jinnah, Sikina, Simon Nicholson, and Jane Flegal. 2018. Toward Legitimate Governance of Solar Geoengineering Research: A Role for Sub-State Actors. *Ethics, Policy and Environment* 21 (3):362–81.
Kennard, Amanda. 2020. The Enemy of My Enemy: When Firms Support Climate Change Regulation. *International Organization*, 74 (2):187–221.
Keohane, Robert O. 2015. The Global Politics of Climate Change: Challenge for Political Science. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 48 (1):19–26.
Keohane, Robert O., and David G. Victor. 2016. Cooperation and Discord in Global Climate Policy. *Nature Climate Change* 6 (6):570–75.
Kirshner, J., 2022. *An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics*. Princeton University Press.
Koubi, Vally, Tobias Böhmelt, Gabriele Spilker, and Lena Schaffer. 2018. The Determinants of Environmental Migrants' Conflict Perception. *International Organization* 72 (4):905–36.
Lake, David A., Lisa Martin, and Thomas Risse. 2021. Challenges to the Liberal Order: Reflections on International Organization. *International Organization* 75 (2):225–57.
Mach, Katharine J., Caroline M. Kraan, W. Neil Adger, Halvard Buhaug, Marshall Burke, James D. Fearon, Christopher B. Field, Cullen S. Hendrix, Jean-Francois Maystadt, John O'Loughlin, Philip Roessler, Jürgen Scheffran, Kenneth A. Schultz and Nina von Uexkull. 2019. Climate as a Risk Factor for Armed Conflict. *Nature* 571 (7764):193–97.
Meckling, Jonas. 2011. *Carbon Coalitions: Business, Climate Politics, and the Rise of Emissions Trading*. MIT Press.
Meckling, Jonas, and Jonas Nahm. 2022. Strategic State Capacity: How States Counter Opposition to Climate Policy. *Comparative Political Studies* 55 (3):493–523.

Meyer, Robinson, and Charlie Clynes. 2025. The Permitting Crisis for Renewables. Heatmap News, 7 July. Available at <https://heatmap.news/politics/laws-restricting-renewable-energy>.

Mildenberger, Matto. 2021. The Development of Climate Institutions in the United States. *Environmental Politics* 30 (1):71–92.

Mitchell, Sara McLaughlin, and Elise Pizzi. 2021. Natural Disasters, Forced Migration, and Conflict: The Importance of Government Policy Responses. *International Studies Review* 23 (3):580–604.

Mittiga, Ross. 2022. Political Legitimacy, Authoritarianism, and Climate Change. *American Political Science Review* 116 (3):998–1011.

Oatley, Thomas. 2024. The Dual Economy, Climate Change, and the Polarization of American Politics. *Socio-Economic Review* 22 (3):1355–80.

Prakash, Aseem. 2000. *Greening the Firm: The Politics of Corporate Environmentalism*. Cambridge University Press.

Ross, Michael. 2025. The New Political Economy of Climate Change. *World Politics* 77 (1):155–94.

Ross, Michael L., and Erik Voeten. 2016. Oil and International Cooperation. *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (1):85–97.

Rowan, Sam S. 2025. From Gridlock to Ratchet: Conditional Cooperation on Climate Change. *International Organization*:1–24.

Sabel, Charles F., and David G. Victor. 2024. *Fixing the Climate: Strategies for an Uncertain World*. Princeton University Press.

Sivaram, Varun. 2025. We Need a Fresh Approach to Climate Policy. It's Time for Climate Realism. Council on Foreign Relations. Available at <https://www.cfr.org/article/we-need-fresh-approach-climate-policy-its-time-climate-realism>.

Stokes, Leah C., Emma Franzblau, Jessica R. Lovering, and Chris Miljanich. 2023. Prevalence and Predictors of Wind Energy Opposition in North America. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120 (40):e2302313120.

Tauschinski, Jana, and Nassos Stylianou. 2025. How We Made It: Will China Be The First Electrostate? *Financial Times.* Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/e1a232c7-52a0-44dd-a13b-c4af54e74282>.

Tingley, Dustin, and Michael Tomz. 2022. The Effects of Naming and Shaming on Public Support for Compliance with International Agreements: An Experimental Analysis of the Paris Agreement. *International Organization* 76 (2):445–68.

Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. 2025. The Climate Paradox: Why We Need to Reset Action on Climate Change. Working Paper. Available at <https://institute.global/insights/climate-and-energy/the-climate-paradox-why-we-need-to-reset-action-on-climate-change>.

Tørstad, Vegard, and Vegard Wiborg. 2024. Commitment Ambiguity and Ambition in Climate Pledges. *The Review of International Organizations*:1–28.

Voeten, Erik. 2025. The Energy Transition and Support for the Radical Right: Evidence from the Netherlands. *Comparative Political Studies* 58 (2):394–428.

Von Stein, Jana. 2022. Democracy, Autocracy, and Everything in Between: How Domestic Institutions Affect Environmental Protection. *British Journal of Political Science* 52 (1):339–57.

Wallace, Jeremy. 2025. The Real Problem With "Climate Realism." Heatmap News, 12 May. Available at <https://heatmap.news/ideas/climate-realism-initiative>.

Walt, Stephen. 1987. *The Origins of Alliances*. Cornell University Press.

Waltz, Kenneth. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. McGraw-Hill.

Wang, Christopher. 2025. China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2025: H1. Green Finance and Development Center, 17 July. Available at <https://greenfdc.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-investment-report-2025-h1/>.

Watts, Anthony, Linnea Lueken, H. Sterling Burnett, and Jim Lakely. 2025. Climate Realism Gains Ground in Europe—Live from Budapest! The Heartland Institute. Podcast. Available at <https://heartland.org/podcasts/climate-realism-gains-ground-in-europe-live-from-budapest-the-climate-realism-show-159/>.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832510115X

Authors

Jeff Colgan is the Richard Holbrooke Professor of Political Science and the founding director of the Climate Solutions Lab in the Watson School of International and Public Affairs at Brown University. He can be reached at jeff_colgan@brown.edu.

Federica Genovese is Professor of Politics and International Relations and Fellow at St Antony's College at the University of Oxford. She can be reached at federica.genovese@politics.ox.ac.uk.

Acknowledgments

We thank Max Bradley, Sarah Colbourn, Robert Keohane, Tyler Pratt, Hayley Pring, and three anonymous reviewers for helpful feedback.

Key Words

Climate Change; International Relations theory; Trump presidency; international cooperation; United States; environmental politics; China

Date received: June 12, 2025; Date revised: September 17, 2025; Date accepted: September 24, 2025