

Introduction

Scope of Work

“Climate change is the defining issue of our time – and we are at a defining moment.”

António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, 2018

The phenomenon of global climate change has garnered a great deal of international attention in recent times, perhaps because of its uniqueness as a truly global issue that can only be solved by multilateral efforts. It is not new; scientists have known for decades that the climate is changing.¹ It was less than a decade ago, however, that researchers announced with confidence that humans were responsible for much of the change observed. In 2013, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its Fifth Assessment Report, which concluded “with 95 percent certainty” that human action has been the main driver of the climate change recorded since the middle of the 20th century.² Since that time, worldwide climate activism has increased, and many governments have pledged to take part in the fight against global climate change.

When awareness of climate change began to spread in the 1970s, the United States posited itself at the forefront of global environmental efforts – both on a national and international scale.³ Defended by the public choice theory of the *Race to the Bottom*, Washington has tended to favor national environmental regulation to avoid the total prioritization of economic gain over environmental preservation.⁴ Internationally, the United States was fundamental in early climate change efforts, such as the Montreal Protocol and the creation of the IPCC.⁵

Although its environmental track record has fluctuated depending on the administration, the U.S. entered an era of renewed commitment to climate change efforts with the arrival of Barack Obama to the White House.⁶ Eight years later, however, Donald Trump took Washington by storm, promising to undo much of the Obama legacy – especially in the area of environmental policy. Trump’s denial of climate change and preference for nonrenewable forms of energy have guided his climate policy⁷; his nationalist rhetoric and aversion to multilateralism have meant a scaling-back of many of the U.S.’s international environmental compromises.

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- 1 RAMSEUR, J. L. Climate Change: Action by States to Address Greenhouse Gas Emissions [online]. *CRS Report for Congress, Order Code RL33812*. 27 April 2007, p. CRS-1. Retrieved from: <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc822485/>; LE TREUT, H. and SOMERVILLE, R. Historical Overview of Climate Change Science. In SOLOMON, S. *et al.*, ed. *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 95. ISBN: 978 0521 88009-1.
 - 2 STOCKER, T. E., *et al.* *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. v. ISBN: 978-1-107-05799-1.
 - 3 FALKNER, R. American Hegemony and the Global Environment. *International Studies Review* [online]. December 2005, Vol. 7 (4), p. 585 [Consulted 2 March 2019]. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3699676?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents; BUSBY, J. W. A Green Giant? Inconsistency and American Environmental Diplomacy. In: Ikenberry *et al.* (eds.) *America, China, and the Struggle for World Order*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 245. ISBN 978-1-349-55327-3
 - 4 KONISKY, D. Public Preferences for Environmental Policy Responsibility. *The Journal of Federalism*, 2010, 41 (1). p. 76 [Consulted May 25, 2019]. DOI: 10.1093/publius/pjp044; LUDWISZEWSKI, R. B. and HAAKE, C. H. Cars, Carbon and Climate Change. *Northwestern University Law Review*. 2008, Vol. 102 (2). p. 668 [Consulted 20 January 2019]. Retrieved from: <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.illr102.38&lang=es&site=eds-live>
 - 5 AGRAWALA, S. Interim Report IR-97-032: Explaining the Evolution of the IPCC Structure and Process [online]. *Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University*, August 1997, p. 3 [Consulted 23 May 2019]. Retrieved from: <http://pure.iiasa.ac.at/id/eprint/5259/1/IR-97-032.pdf>; VILLAR EZCURRA, M. *Cambio Climático, Fiscalidad y Energía en los Estados Unidos: Una Batería de Ejemplos a Considerar*. 1^a ed. Navarra: Aranzadi, SA, 2012, pp. 15-16 ISBN 978-84-470-4124-4.
 - 6 IER. Obama Subsidizes U.S. Solar Energy and Promises to Do the Same in India [online]. *Institute for Energy Research*, 20 February 2015 [Consulted 23 May 2019]. Retrieved from: <https://www.instituteforenergyresearch.org/renewable/solar/obama-subsidizes-u-s-solar-energy-promises-india/>
 - 7 MATTHEWS, D. Donald Trump Has Tweeted Climate Change Skepticism 115 Times. Here’s All of It [online]. *Vox*, 2017, June 1 [Consulted 21 April 2019]. Retrieved from: <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/1/15726472/trump-tweets-global-warming-paris-climate-agreement>; TRUMP, D. J. Economic Report of the President, Together with the Annual Report of the Council of Economic Advisers [online]. *The White House*, 2019, p. 18 [Consulted 23 May 2019]. Retrieved from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ERP-2019.pdf>

It is impossible to predict the long-term ramifications of Trump's decisions regarding environmental protection, but it is possible to begin to analyze the impact he is having on the United States and its commitment to climate change efforts, at both national and international levels.

Although various authors had made predictions about Trump's impact on the environment at the beginning of his presidency,⁸ more recent analyses have not yet been published – potentially owing to the lengthy nature of the publication process. Furthermore, the limited literature which does consider the impact of Trump's climate policy at national and international levels typically focuses on what has been lost, such as funding or environmental protection, rather than on what has been gained – in other words, new or renewed commitments to environmental defense.

We seek to fill this gap with an analysis of the commitments made to fighting climate change by U.S. national and subnational governments and by the private sector since Trump took office on January 20, 2017. More specifically, considering the international nature of global climate change and the President's push to reduce the country's international engagement, the current study attempts to compare the administration's impact on national and international commitments to climate change efforts. This report, then, intends to address the following question:

What has been the impact of Donald Trump's climate policy on the United States' national and international commitments to fighting global climate change?

In response to this question, we propose four hypotheses:

1. Donald Trump's climate change policy has greatly decreased national and international commitments to climate protection by the federal government, but not by states or by the private sector.
2. In response to the federal government's retreat from climate change action, subnational governments and private companies, organizations, and citizens have increased their commitments, especially with other countries.
3. The President's effect on America's climate commitments has been limited by a public increasingly at odds with his climate beliefs.
4. The rollback of environmental regulations has not produced a *Race to the Bottom*, but rather a *Race to Desirability*.

Methodology

This study will analyze the United States' national and international commitments to climate action made before and after January 20, 2017. Given that the White House has not declared an official policy on climate action, we will analyze official texts to identify key themes of Trump's climate policy. In order to determine the President's effect on the country's commitments, the deductive method will be employed. By analyzing what Trump wanted to achieve – as well as the limitations he encountered – and by comparing the federal, state, and private commitments post-2017 to those before Trump took office, we will be able to deduce where his effect was the greatest.

Sources Used

For this study, it was necessary to analyze a variety of sources, including books, reports, legislation, official texts, academic articles, journalistic articles, and websites. It is important to note that the ongoing nature of the topic of study greatly complicated the search for academic, peer-reviewed sources, especially those describing the most recent climate action taken. For this reason, we were obligated to resort to non-academic sources, such as periodicals and webpages, for information regarding current environmental

8 DECOTIS, P. A. What We Might Expect from Changes in the Nation's Capital. *Natural Gas and Electricity* [online]. February 2017, Vol. 33 (7). pp. 25-27 [Consulted 22 April 2019]. DOI: 10.1002/gas.21963; BOMBERG, E. Environmental Politics in the Trump Era: An Early Assessment. *Environmental Politics* [online]. 2017, Vol. 26 (5). 956-963 [Consulted 17 May 2019]. DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2017.1332543

action and initiatives. Often, the most up-to-date information regarding a new organization or alliance was the group's website; other times, a quote from the administration or from a climate activist was only available from a journalistic source.

The following section presents an overview of the most important resources used, arranged into primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.

Primary Sources

Legislation and executive action were consulted from the current and previous administrations, as well as two court sentences, in order to evaluate the evolution of environmental regulation in the United States. International official documents, such as the Montreal Protocol and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2007 and 2013 reports were reviewed for background information about climate change and previous international agreements. Official documents from past and current presidencies, such as budget proposals and reports from federal agencies, along with official remarks by the President were analyzed to extract themes of climate change policies. A number of websites for environmental non-government organizations, alliances, organizations, and initiatives – pages about America's Pledge, The Sierra Club, and the Western Climate Initiative, to name a few – were consulted in order to obtain information about current action against climate change. Finally, various press releases are included in the bibliography, as they were occasionally the only resource available that spoke of recent climate action.

Secondary Sources

A variety of books and academic articles were used to gain historical context regarding the issue of climate change in the United States and the action that had been taken before the Trump presidency. Although most articles and books are in English, several are in Spanish, in an attempt to gain a broader analytical perspective, including works by Fernández Liesa, Rodríguez Vindel, Vallejo and Villar Ezcurra, who analyze international and U.S.-based climate change efforts. Authors such as Adler, Brunell, McKinstry, Konisky and Woods provide context to the issue of environmental federalism, the division of regulatory responsibilities between the federal and state governments. Articles by Bergeson, Bomberg, Crews, DeCotis, García Encina and Krupp, among others, comment on the Trump presidency and the potential consequences for environmental regulation.

We were obligated to consult various journalistic articles, as these news outlets were sometimes the only source that spoke of current events and climate initiatives. Reputable online periodicals such as *Time*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *NPR*, and *The Washington Post* were prioritized.

Tertiary

Few tertiary sources were consulted in this investigation. The majority were indexes of regulatory rollbacks attempted by the Trump administration – for example, the Regulatory Rollback Tracker by the Harvard Law and Energy Program and the Roundup by the Institute for Policy Integrity – used to identify legislation and other official documents to be analyzed. The Federal Register's list of Executive Orders facilitated the localization of orders related to climate change in order to better understand Trump's climate policy.

Structure

The present study seeks to analyze the impact of the Trump administration's climate change policy on American national and international climate commitments. To do this, it will begin Chapter I with an overview of the energy tax policy and public choice theory related to environmental regulation, followed by the history of the United States' national and international action addressing climate change. Each type of action will be broken down into the actor behind it: the federal government, state governments, or the private sector.