

Elections do matter. We need to look no further back than the last presidential election to confirm this. If Trump, rather than Biden had won, the impact on climate and energy policy would have been profound.

We know a lot about Trump's views because he had already had four years to implement them. Among other things, he rolled back nearly all of Obama's climate regulations, and he did his best to promote fossil fuel production and use. Trump's approach is based on three premises:

- Climate change is not a problem.
- Oil, gas, and coal are the key to our national wealth.
- Wind, solar, and EVs are nearly useless if not harmful.

With that in mind, how would things be different if Trump, rather than Biden, had been the one taking the oath of office in January 2021?

We can start with what would NOT have happened. Biden has diligently repealed many of Trump's regulatory rollbacks and has put in place even stronger regulations than Obama's. That obviously would not have happened if Trump had been reelected. The Trump rollbacks would have stuck. Biden has also supported some big legislative initiatives, with massive spending for clean transportation in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and for clean energy in the Inflation Reduction Act. Under a Trump presidency, those laws would never have happened either. Nor would Biden's reentry into the Paris Agreement.

In short, Trump's end point from his first term — zero federal climate action — would have been his starting point after reelection. The next step would have been an effort to end state-level and private climate action.

In his first term, Trump made efforts to block state clean energy policies, such as California's clean car program and to hamper market trends toward cleaner energy. Those efforts were derailed by the Biden Administration but would have had more running room in a second Trump Administration. A reelected Trump would also have packed the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission with fossil-fuel enthusiasts. Trump also would surely have pursued at the national level the same kinds of anti-ESG efforts that states like Texas have championed. Because of his vision of fossil fuel exports as a source of national wealth, Trump might also have put pressure on our trading partners to reduce their own clean energy efforts.

Thus, having eliminated the federal government's support for clean energy in his first term,

Trump would have moved on to an active campaign to suppress clean energy. On a parallel course, he would have escalated efforts to promote fossil-fuel production and use. We would go from having no climate limits under Trump I to a pro-carbon policy under Trump II. Having taken the government's foot off the break, he would have jammed it on the accelerator.

Trump could also have tried some more radical steps. One measure that was discussed in his first Administration was to repeal EPA's finding that greenhouse gases endanger human welfare, which is the basis for EPA's power to regulate carbon emissions. Trump might also have tried to withhold funding from EPA and from clean energy programs elsewhere in the Administration, and to use executive powers to fire as many workers in those programs as possible. Another step would be to withdraw from the U.N. framework agreement on climate change, which was the legal basis for the Paris Agreement. That would be a more decisive end to U.S. participation in international climate negotiations.

Of course, Trump wasn't reelected in 2020, and there was no second Trump term that year. Yet, this has been more than a hypothetical exploration of "might have beens," given the very real possibility of a second Trump term next January. But 2024 isn't 2020. There are differences in where Trump would find himself after taking office.

In one way, Trump would start off at a disadvantage after a 2024 victory compared with a 2020 reelection, because of Biden's intervening presidency. As a result, Trump would have to invest a lot of time and energy in unwinding as much of that legacy as possible rather than starting with a clean slate.

In other ways, though, the risk to climate policy would be even greater than it would have been four years earlier. Trump's grasp over the GOP is much more complete, and the MAGA wing in Congress is bigger. And Trump seems if anything angrier and more radicalized than he was four years ago. So the downside risks relating to climate change could be that much more severe. And of course, the urgency of climate action has only been growing in the meantime, making setbacks that much more damaging.