

We're now at a tipping point for climate policy. Tomorrow's election will send us down one of two very different paths for years to come.

The political system lends itself to such tipping points in policy. Linear systems don't have tipping points: small changes have small effects that can be reversed. Tipping points are a feature of complex, non-linear systems like global climate. The political system is also prone to tipping: a few hundred votes in Florida, a tiny fraction of the number cast, ultimately paved the way to a large-scale war in Iraq, with consequences that cannot be easily reversed.

In terms of climate policy, this election also represents a tipping point. President Obama has set in motion a series of climate policies, both international and domestic, which Hillary Clinton would consolidate and extend. As I discussed in a [previous post](#), the world as a whole seems to be developing some momentum in terms of climate policy. A Clinton election would reinforce that trend.

Not so if Trump wins. As a result of a convergence of circumstances, the election of Donald Trump would send the United States, and probably the world, down a dramatically different path. Just last Tuesday, he vowed to end all U.S. climate programs. Sadly, Trump's opposition to action on climate change is far from unique among Republicans. But for three reasons, the effect of his election would have unusually large consequences;

1. Trump is less temperamentally less prone to compromise or less to counter-arguments than someone like Mitt Romney and is more likely to pursue his preferred outcome at all costs. He is also less likely to respect established norms like the Senate filibuster rule.
2. A Trump victory would almost inevitably come with solid control of both Houses of Congress. The only hope of halting anti-regulatory legislation would be the Senate filibuster, but there are a variety of ways of evading or abolishing that procedure.
3. If Trump were able to fill the current vacancy on the Supreme Court, it would be extremely likely that the Court would strike down current EPA efforts and restrict any such efforts by future administrations.

Some of these effects could be reversed by a future President, but at best valuable time would be lost and hitting climate targets would be much more expensive. Other effects are not easily reversed, such as appointment of anti-regulatory judges with lifetime tenure.

Moreover, a U.S. defection from the international climate effort could have ripple effects with other nations, creating distrust for cooperative efforts that could long outlive a Trump presidency. Good news if you're climate denialist or a coal company, but terrible news

otherwise.

According to NASA, this July, August, and September each holds the record for high temperature in those months, with July being the hottest month globally on record. The stakes in tomorrow's election could hardly be higher.