

This might sound crazy, but Donald Trump's presidency could actually have a temporarily positive impact on climate change. How? Nothing reduces emissions like a recession, and [according to economists](#), Trump's stated policies are likely to cause one.

Specifically, if Trump follows through on his promise to start a trade war with countries like China, he could end up reducing the U.S. carbon footprint significantly. Imagine higher tariffs on goods from China, U.S. cars manufactured in Mexico, and stuff from the myriad other places that export items we buy. The result will be higher prices on those goods, which will mean less consumption. Less consumption means fewer carbon emissions.

Then think of the result on those producing countries. We could see a slowdown in the economy of places like China, where growth is in large part due to sales of cheap stuff to the U.S. market. Because China itself is now a major emitter of greenhouse gases, a slowdown there will also reduce global emissions.

This isn't just theoretical: we have experience on this issue from the Great Recession. That slowdown caused a dip in the nation's carbon footprint, [according](#) to a UC Irvine study. The recession also made it easier for California to meet its 2020 emissions goals, as E&E News [reported](#):

“California had a pretty soft economy for many years after its goal was set,” said Severin Borenstein, an economics professor at UC Berkeley and a member of a committee that the California Air Resources Board (ARB) set up in 2012-13 to advise it on the design of its cap-and-trade market. “Although it's heating up now, we will easily make the 2020 goal, and that will in large part be due to the weak economy for many years.”

Now to be clear, an economic downturn is not something to root for, and it would cause all sorts of hardship and potentially more political instability. To avoid that outcome, California regulators have been meticulous and careful about making the transition to a clean economy without shocking the economy. Indeed, the state is instead focused on ways to *benefit* economically from clean technology, contrary to the usual conservative complaints about environmental action costing jobs and economic growth.

But Trump's policies on trade, immigration and other economic issues may lead us to a recession regardless of what California does. And if that happens, the one silver lining for those concerned about climate change is that it will likely offer a temporary pause to the

emission of heat-trapping gases. And that could buy the world more time to emerge from a post-Trump era with still a fighting chance to limit climate change.