



(This post is cross-posted at <https://takecareblog.com/blog/what-do-we-really-gain-if-the-u-s-stays-in-the-paris-agreement>.)

The Trump Administration will apparently decide soon whether to keep the United States as a party to the Paris Agreement. Although I understand why so many observers have argued that the U.S. should remain in Paris, I have already [expressed](#) my view that remaining in Paris is at best a symbolic gesture. At worst, I fear that Trump will gain valuable public credibility – both globally and domestically – by using that fairly insubstantial gesture as a fig leaf to obfuscate the tremendous damage his policies are doing to overall climate progress. If he withdraws, by contrast, his actions may galvanize a public response far more powerful and influential than any small gain the global community will experience if the U.S. remains in. As a result, the U.S. might be better off if Trump withdraws.

Most of the arguments in favor of remaining in Paris are really just arguments that climate change is a hugely important issue that requires urgent action and U.S. leadership (see, for example, the arguments of a number of large [U.S. corporations](#) and a recent *Washington Post* [editorial](#) by Obama climate envoy Todd Stern). I wholeheartedly agree that climate change is hugely important and needs U.S. leadership.

But the Trump Administration has made amply clear that it disagrees with this fundamental proposition. It is [rolling](#) back climate regulations, proposing funding cuts that decimate EPA and the Green Climate Fund, and cutting the entire U.S. contribution to the international

climate negotiations budget. Over the last week, the Administration has [fired](#) a dozen scientific advisors to EPA and systematically [dismantled](#) EPA websites that contain information about climate change.

What, exactly, do we gain if Trump stays in? Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner will feel empowered. Diplomatically, however, it's hard to see how remaining in the agreement improves our global standing. By rolling back our commitments under Paris even while remaining in, as many observers are urging, the U.S. would have zero credibility to urge other countries to maintain or strengthen their commitment to cutting greenhouse gases. In or out, Trump has made clear that climate change is not a U.S. priority. So what does a seat at the table provide us? At least one [commentator](#) has argued that the U.S. might use its seat at the table under the Trump regime to *weaken* transparency rules. And given the proposed budget cuts at the State Department, our representation would be skeletal at best, as it is this week in [Bonn](#), where we have 7 U.S. representatives while Algeria has 14.

I should be clear, however, that my argument does not extend to withdrawing from the overarching treaty that governs climate change, the [U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change](#). The UNFCCC was enacted in 1992 and [ratified](#) by the U.S. Senate the same year. It is the treaty under which the Paris Agreement was negotiated. Unlike the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement was neither submitted to nor ratified by the U.S. Senate. Instead, the Obama Administration joined it under its executive authority. If Trump attempts to withdraw the U.S. from the UNFCCC entirely (something that would raise [complex legal questions](#) about whether he needs Senate agreement to do so), then once he leaves office, the U.S. would need to rejoin the UNFCCC and the Senate would need to re-ratify it. It is not at all clear that the Senate would do so since treaty ratification takes a 2/3s vote. If, by contrast, Trump withdraws only from Paris, the U.S. can likely re-join the agreement by a relatively straightforward process known as accession. Unfortunately, [withdrawal](#) from the UNFCCC takes only a year whereas withdrawal from Paris takes three years. A third alternative is that Trump could simply announce his intention not to comply with the commitments the Obama Administration made under Paris but avoid formally withdrawing from either treaty.

If Trump chooses to withdraw from Paris, either formally or not, imagine the public response. Our allies will be furious. Domestic reaction from environmentalists, many in the

business community, Democrats and even some prominent Republicans will be fierce and negative. Voters who care about climate change will be galvanized. The pressure to acknowledge and actually *do something* about climate change will increase. If we remain in the agreement, by contrast, the international community and domestic constituencies will breathe a huge sigh of relief. And Trump will continue to decimate policies to reduce emissions and funding for climate and global assistance while using the fig leaf of Paris to cover his actions.