

Climate change has surfaced as an issue in the Democratic primaries much more than it has in past elections. What's likely to happen in the general election?

Start with Trump. Given his freeform speaking style, he's likely to at least touch on climate change and fossil fuels from time to time. The question is how much time he devotes to the subject and what tack he takes. At present, it looks the election will be fought out in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Trump flipped all three states in 2016 and can probably win again if he replicates the feat. Pennsylvania has a significant fossil fuel industry, and Trump might decide to go after those voters in a big way. If so, you can expect to hear more about the climate "hoax" and the glories of coal and fracking. But this risks alienating suburban voters (especially women), who could hold the balance of power in those states. So Trump *might* keep relatively quiet about climate or try to moderate his stance. Though neither moderation or silence appear to come easily to him, admittedly.

In some ways, the calculus for Biden is the opposite of Trump's — try to attract more suburban voters or risk driving up turnout of Trump voters in Pennsylvania? But another factor is in play for him. He doesn't have super-strong support among young voters, who are both a key part of the Democratic voting block and prone to low turnout. Anything he can do to get those voters fired up would be a big plus for him, climate change is an issue that young voters care deeply about. Biden seems to be taking heed of this need. Just last week, he appointed [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#), a young progressive icon, to co-chair his climate change task force.

Biden's seeming new openness to "going big" on climate policy may not be entirely strategic. Many Democrats are [convinced](#) that the COVID-19 pandemic has made bolder, more transformative policies politically realistic. Trillion-dollar price tags certainly don't seem as shocking as they did three or four months ago. A Green New Deal-like melding of economic reforms with climate policy might be particularly appealing to many members of the public right now.

Don't expect climate change to be the core election issue. A lot of people care about the issue, but there aren't enough people for whom it would determine their vote. Unless something changes drastically between now and then, the coronavirus outbreak and its economic fallout will surely be the focal point. But climate change could still end up getting more airplay than it has in the past. It's a good issue for the Democrats because their base cares strongly about it, and because Trump's stonewalling the issue isn't very popular.