

With Biden two-thirds of the way through his term in office, he seems to be catching a lot of flack from climate activists. On Sunday, thousands of angry demonstrators [gathered](#) to protest Biden's U.N. visit. "If you want our vote if you don't want the blood of our generations to be on your hands, end fossil fuels." Another said the president "is in a unique position to be a leader to end the fossil fuel movement globally." Echoing the protesters, an op-ed in yesterday's [NY Times](#) called America "the colossus that stands in the way of a planetary crackdown on emissions," and demanded that Biden take unilateral action "with urgency and strength" against fossil fuels.

The illusion that Presidents are all-powerful is one that they themselves have cultivated. But the demonstrators are fooling themselves if they think that Biden, acting alone, could be the solution. There are three big reasons why his options are very limited.

The first reason is the Supreme Court. Yes, Biden could declare a climate emergency and issue orders banning fossil fuel exports, canceling oil leases, and stopping fossil fuel investing abroad. These orders would remain in effect for only a few hours before district judges appointed by Trump issued temporary restraining orders.

And it's no secret what the Supreme Court would do. Remember this is the same Supreme Court that overturned efforts during the COVID emergency to require nationwide vaccination, halt evictions, and cancel student loans. It's also the Supreme Court that tossed out Obama's very moderate climate regulation, the Clean Power Plan, because it was aimed at reducing the use of coal. If Biden did take the kind of emergency measures advocates want, those measures would be doomed to go down in flames on 6-3 votes.

The second reason is politics. Don't forget that Biden is now virtually tied with Donald Trump. He can't afford to do anything to lose votes in swing states like Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. And there's a real risk of another Republican trifecta that would give Trump unified control of the government. Those outcomes would be devastating for climate policy. It's often said that the Perfect is the enemy of the Good. In this case, the Perfect might be the best friend of the Really, Really Bad.

The third reason is that the U.S. is no longer the global hegemon, if it ever was. It is delusional to think that the U.S. is the "colossus" preventing a global crackdown on emissions. Eighty-five percent of the world's carbon emissions come from other countries. China, not the US, is the world's largest carbon emitter. And while the U.S. is the biggest single oil producer, it has less than a fifth of the global market, and would have even less if OPEC+ weren't cutting production to boost prices. In short, the U.S., while still a very powerful player in geopolitics, is far from being the kingpin.

What we need is not attacks on leaders who are supporting climate action. What we need instead are challenges to the forces fighting climate action, and campaigns to change the hearts and minds of Americans who aren't yet convinced of the need for climate action.