

Trump's rejection of science reflects worrying global trend

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It is no surprise that the upcoming US election has received an enormous amount of coverage in the world's media, as the outcome will have a bearing on many of the world's citizens – from agreements on international trade to US foreign policy.

The latter is a source of particular anxiety because many of the statements on foreign policy by Republican contender Donald Trump raise the spectre of irrational policy decisions with global consequences.

However, there is another alarming aspect of Trump's bid for the [White House](#) that has received relatively little attention in the world's media – namely, his attitude to the problem of climate change.

While almost all the world's leaders now accept, at least in principle, the verdict of science that global warming is strongly linked with a rising concentration of greenhouse gases caused by human activity, Trump shows no sign of such acceptance.

On the contrary, he has publicly dismissed the findings of climate scientists as “bullshit”, “nonsense” and “the greatest hoax”.

Such statements should come as no surprise.

Many commentators have noted that Trump's pronouncements on various issues are characterised by a close connection with populist myths, rather than any connection with established facts.

“Such is politics”, we are told; but politics can have serious consequences and there are few issues as serious as global climate change.

To be fair, Trump is not America's only climate sceptic; a striking feature of the US election primaries was the near-universal dismissal of climate science by almost all of the Republican candidates.

Accusations of fraud

Indeed, the official 2016 [Republican Party](#) platform includes proposals to prohibit the regulation of carbon dioxide emissions, and a boycotting of international climate agreements such as the recent Paris Agreement.

Lamar Smith, the Republican congressman who chairs the US House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, has recently accused scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of fraud, and demanded that they turn over all records and internal communications, because he disliked their recent findings on upward trends in global surface temperatures.

How did we reach a situation where a significant portion of elected representatives of the world's most powerful economy flatly reject the findings of science?

The Harvard historian [Naomi Oreskes](#) suggests that the outlook of American conservatives on climate “simply reflects what they have been told”.

Certainly, a glance at conservative media outlets such as Fox News, Breitbart and the *Wall Street Journal* reveals a systematic rejection of the findings of mainstream climate science.

Robert Crease, a philosopher at Stony Brook University, suggests a societal explanation – namely that a society that is strongly capitalist in nature will inevitably tend to favour the short-term profit of the individual over the long-term common good.

Noting a recent bill passed by the State of [Louisiana](#) that prohibits a warning of sea-level rise associated with climate change, Crease recalls a famous scene in the film *Jaws* where the town mayor refuses to allow the sheriff to warn the populace of a potential shark attack.

As portrayed in the film, the mayor cannot accept the verdict of science because the economic consequences are unthinkable.

Scepticism

Certainly, there is little question that the fossil fuel industry in the US has done its best to block action on climate change, via highly-placed friends in politics and well-funded lobbyists in Washington.

However, things may be slowly changing.

The recent discovery that the findings of ExxonMobil-sponsored studies into the effects of greenhouse gases were quietly buried by the company have triggered fraud investigations in at least two US states – one can anticipate a new version of the tobacco trials of the past.

Of course, climate scepticism is not confined to the United States.

In the UK, the recent dominance of the Conservatives has resulted in severe cutbacks to investment in renewable energy and it is unlikely that this trend will change under Brexit.

In France, presidential candidate Nicholas Sarkozy has asserted that global warming cannot be man-made because the earth's climate changed many times in the distant past – a view that mirrors that of Kerry Independent TD Danny Healy-Rae.

It is disappointing that few journalists (here or abroad) feel capable of challenging the obvious logical fallacy of this viewpoint.

Indeed, surprisingly few journalists seem willing to engage with the topic of climate change, a strange situation given that the subject shows every sign of becoming the defining issue of our time.

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