

Science

An ominous year: the climate change omens for 2025 look very dark indeed

The problem boils down to one of politics versus populism, as politicians who promote unpopular but crucial policies struggle to be re-elected

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Anyone concerned about [climate change](#) will view 2025 with some trepidation, for two reasons.

First, global warming continues unabated. [Record after record](#) was broken in 2024, from rising surface temperatures to unprecedented melting of land ice in the Arctic, from rising sea levels to loss of sea ice in the Antarctic. Most notable was the increased frequency of extreme weather events, from uncontrollable wildfires to devastating storms and floods. Close to home, damage inflicted on the port of Holyhead by Storm Darragh created huge disruption in supply chains and deliveries at Christmas.

None of these events came as a surprise to climate scientists, as global emissions of greenhouse gases continued unabated during the year. Indeed, carbon emissions linked to fossil fuels rose to an all-time record of 37.4 billion tonnes, up almost 1 per cent from 2023.

Secondly, where one might have hoped for an increased awareness of the climate crisis, a strong anti-Green tide swept through the political landscape at national and international levels.

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In June 2024, elections to the European Parliament saw many Green Party politicians lose their seats, an upset that may have a serious effect on attempts to curb emissions among EU nations. In November the Green Party was decimated in the Irish election, with a new government being formed that is strongly dependent on Independents. Given the staunch resistance of many of the latter to climate initiatives in the past, one can expect little

progress on reducing emissions at national level. Yet we are already on course to breach our legal targets; an outcome that may result in heavy fines from the EU.

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Worst of all, elections in the US saw the re-election of Donald Trump to the White House. A businessman turned politician who refuses to accept the reality of global warming, Trump is implacably opposed to any action to combat climate change.

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Given the chaotic nature of his first presidency, one might hope that the new US administration will have little effect on climate action. However, this time around, Trump has closely aligned himself with corporate figures such as Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, powerful American oligarchs who are determined to reduce regulations on industries such as the fossil fuel industry.

At home or abroad, the problem boils down to one of politics versus populism. The transition from a society powered by fossil fuels to a society founded on renewable energy is no easy task and politicians who promote unpopular policies struggle to be re-elected.

This conundrum is exacerbated by the influence of vested interests, from oil barons to airline bosses, who seek to protect their profits at all costs. In this context the concentration of extremely rich industrialists in the new US administration is of great concern as it can only lead to a significant

weakening of legislation designed to protect the public from the avarice of large corporations.

[Donald Trump's biggest danger to the world could be his dismissiveness about climate change]

A similar situation pertains in the media. Like many scientists, I am continually astonished by the lack of meaningful coverage of the climate crisis in most newspapers and TV channels, and by the reluctance of journalists to link the increased frequency of extreme weather events with a warming world. For example, in the many discussions of problems caused by events at Holyhead, I did not hear a single journalist ask what would happen to supply lines if more than one port were to be damaged in the next big storm.

One reason for this silence is the ownership of large sections of the media by a small number of powerful media tycoons such as Rupert Murdoch; individuals who use their considerable influence to sow doubt and discord on the entire issue of climate change.

The same applies to social media. While some media commentators were surprised by Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter, now X, the social media channel soon proved a highly effective vehicle for disinformation and political propaganda. Indeed, some believe Trump owes his electoral success at least in part to Musk's activities. The removal of basic fact-checking from both X and Meta will undoubtedly exacerbate this problem.

Meanwhile, greenhouse gas emissions continue unabated and the world continues to warm. As the desertification of hot regions increases, we can expect an increased migration of peoples from the global South to an unwelcoming North.

Not everyone will have a happy new year.

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