

Quo Vadis U.S. Climate and Energy Policy?

Developments under Trump 2.0

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Potsdam
July 2025

RIFS Discussion Paper

Summary

Joe Biden gave momentum to national and international climate policy and created a milestone with the first US climate legislation, the Inflation Reduction Act. Donald Trump is now turning his back on climate protection in his second term of office. He is supporting fossil fuels with his policies, declaring war on renewable energies and scrapping climate protection targets and the major parts of the IRA. His new administration, staffed with loyal supporters, is implementing his motto 'Drill baby, drill' and reducing (climate) research budgets to a minimum. At the foreign policy level, Trump is withdrawing from international commitments such as the Paris Climate Agreement and stopping funding for climate protection and development aid. His concept of US energy dominance is underpinned by threatening gestures and tariffs.

Disclaimer

An earlier version of this study was published in: Weltenergierat – Deutschland e.V., Energie für Deutschland. Fakten, Perspektiven und Positionen im globalen Kontext | 2025, Berlin 2025 https://www.weltenergierat.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Weltenergierat-Deutschland_Energie-fuer-Deutschland-2025.pdf

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1 U.S. climate and energy policy: a roller coaster

Over the past 25 years, climate and energy policy has been a roller coaster ride in the USA. Different presidencies have been associated with considerable ups and downs. After the climate change sceptical presidency of George W. Bush (2001-2009), who was known for his rejection of the Kyoto Protocol, Barack Obama (2009-2017) appeared much more progressive in climate policy. U.S. climate policy then suffered severe setbacks under the first presidency of Donald Trump (2017-2021). With Joe Biden (2021-2025), the USA's climate policy efforts gained momentum again. Donald Trump's second term in office (2025-) is now causing renewed headwinds for global climate policy. His government has ceased all climate policy efforts and focuses on a policy of energy dominance based on fossil fuels.

1.1 Biden's legacy

During his term in office, Joe Biden issued a series of climate targets in executive orders. As part of the USA's re-entry into the Paris Agreement in 2021, he set a goal of reducing U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 50% to 52% below 2005 levels by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. The Biden Administration also established additional sectoral targets. For example, half of all new car sales were to be zero-emission vehicles by 2030, and the decarbonization of the electricity sector was scheduled for completion by 2035. Just one month before leaving office, President Biden announced a new U.S. GHG reduction target of 61% to 66% by 2035 under the Paris Agreement.

To achieve his goals, Biden relied on the purchasing power of the U.S. federal government, for example in the procurement of clean steel or low-carbon building materials. In addition, he introduced regulations through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to reduce emissions from coal and gas-fired power plants, strict efficiency standards for vehicles, and limits on methane emissions from oil and gas production. For the first time in U.S. history, he created a legal basis for climate protection in Congress. The most prominent legislation is the *Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA). The law originally provided for USD 370 billion in funding for the energy transition and climate transformation, but the overall costs were temporarily estimated at up to USD 1.2 trillion due to the success of elements such as tax credits for electric vehicles (Levinson et al., 2024). The IRA aimed at promoting renewable energies, clean hydrogen, electric vehicles, carbon capture and storage (CCS) and carbon capture and utilisation (CCU), among other purposes. Other important climate and energy-related laws include the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, which supports the decarbonisation of the electricity sector and the expansion of the charging infrastructure for electric mobility, and the *CHIPS and Science Act*, which aims to promote semiconductor production and research. During Biden's term in office, the electricity sector was successful in reducing CO₂ emissions due to the substitution of coal with renewable energies and natural gas. Renewable energy production rose steadily, but at the same time also U.S. oil and gas production reached new record levels. The IRA's provisions were not unreservedly welcomed by international partners, especially because of the IRA's new domestic content requirements that favour U.S. companies. This caused considerable discontent among European trading partners.

1.2 Trump 2.0

During his 2024 election campaign, Republican President Donald Trump made it clear that his administration would strongly oppose climate policy and the use of green technologies such as renewable energies and electric cars. These announcements began to take shape in the first days of his new term in office. During his first presidency, Trump had already shown himself to be sceptical about climate change. He turned his back on climate policy and removed it from the list of national security threats. He relaxed or completely repealed the climate regulations introduced by his predecessor Barack Obama and focused primarily on energy policy with an emphasis on fossil fuel production. Under his presidency, the USA withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement. Trump, furthermore, restricted the EPA's powers by dissolving its climate protection departments. This anti-

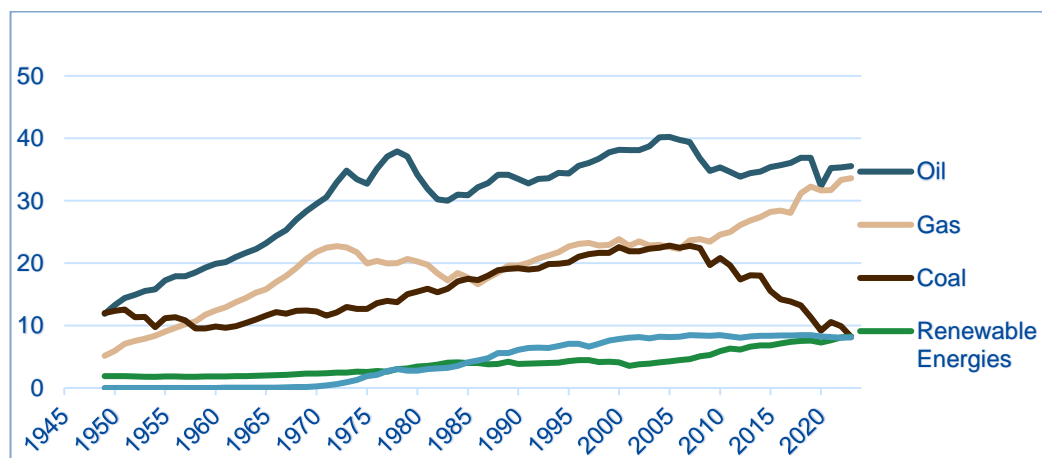
climate policy stance is even more pronounced in 2025 – partly because Donald Trump is better prepared this time, but also because Biden left behind many more climate protection measures that could be abolished in the first place. The Republican majority in both houses of Congress lends further support to Trump's plans. For example, it enabled him to use the *Congressional Review Act* to repeal regulations such as the methane fee on oil and gas production emissions, which was introduced in the final months of Biden's term, by means of a resolution (Thielges, 2024; United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2025b). Conservative majorities in the Supreme Court and many circuit courts are also sympathetic to Donald Trump – a situation that could benefit him in lawsuits against his policies (Guillén, 2025).

1.2.1 Repeal and weakening of targets, laws and regulations

On his first day in office, Donald Trump signed a series of executive orders marking a dramatic departure from previous energy and climate policy. He repealed Biden's climate targets and announced that he would seek to abolish the IRA (The White House, 2025g). For that purpose, he started to instruct the U.S. authorities to suspend the allocation of all IRA funds. This led to lawsuits from various IRA recipient groups, resulting in payments partially being resumed.

At the beginning of July 2025, Congress passed the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, a law that, in addition to tax cuts and restrictions on immigration, initiates severe budget cuts in the environmental and climate areas. The Republican majority succeeded in passing major IRA revisions and cuts - despite the fact that most of the IRA-related funding benefited the Republican states. (E2, 2024). For example, all tax credits for electric vehicles were eliminated. Wind and solar energy projects that are put into operation after 2027 are no longer eligible for funding. Originally, the IRA was designed to grant tax credits for clean technologies over a period of 10 years. The majority of the remaining credits are subject to restrictive conditions regarding Chinese components and companies. It is certain that the USA will miss its (former) climate protection targets for 2030 (Evans and Viisainen, 2024; King et al., 2024).

IMAGE 1: U.S. PRIMARY ENERGY CONSUMPTION, PRODUCTION, IMPORTS AND EXPORTS, 1949–2023, IN BRITISH THERMAL UNIT (BTU)

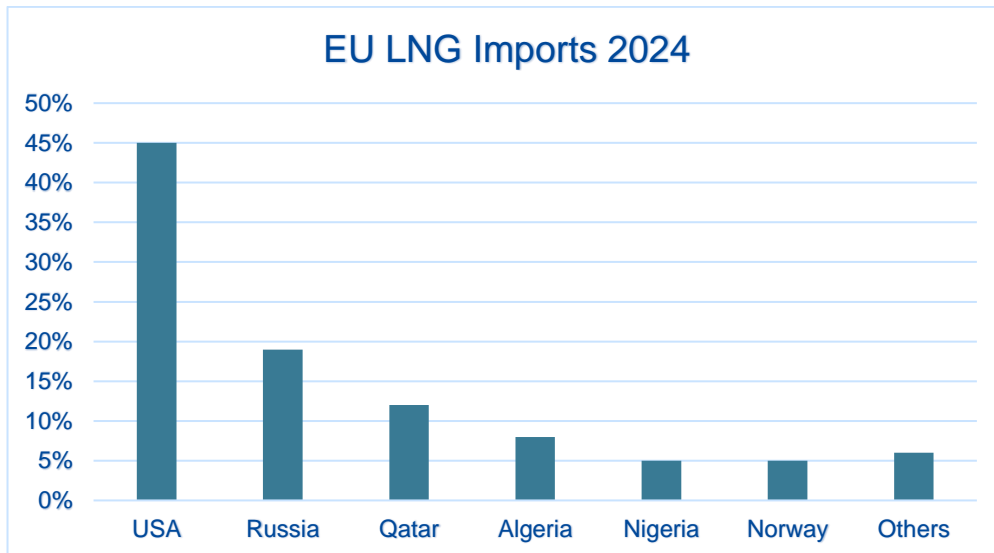


Source: Authors, based on data from U.S. Energy Information Administration

1.2.2 Energy policy: green light for fossil fuels

President Trump once again focuses his policy on fossil fuels, promoting a narrative of energy dominance, import independence and expansion of American (fossil) energy production. The slogan 'Drill, baby, drill' (Republican Party Platform), already proclaimed during his election campaign, now directs his policy efforts. Wind and solar power are explicitly excluded from his seemingly technology-neutral approach to promoting U.S. resources and energy. In particular, the production of natural gas, crude oil and oil products is to be increased in order to lower domestic energy prices and boost exports. However, the energy dominance narrative ignores that the USA is already the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and ranked fourth among the largest oil exporters in 2024 (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, n.d.; U.S. Energy Information Administration, n.d.a; U.S. Energy Information Administration, n.d.b). The European Union (EU) imported 45% of its LNG from the USA in 2024 (see image 2) (Jaller-Makarewicz, 2025). For the USA, on the other hand, Europe, including Turkiye and the United Kingdom, is the largest target market for LNG exports.

IMAGE 2: COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR EU LNG IMPORTS 2024

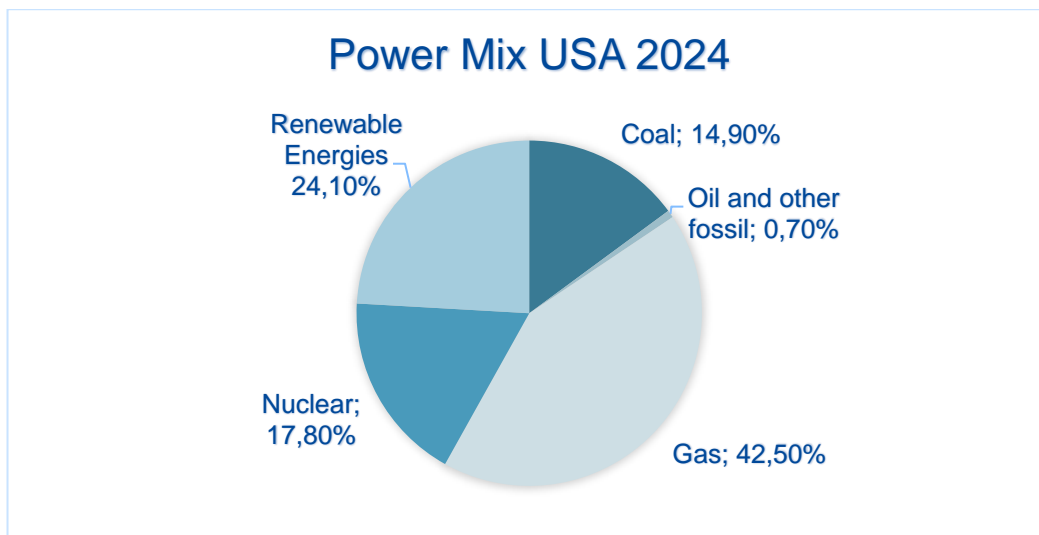


Source: Authors, based on European LNG Tracker

Trump declared a national energy emergency under the National Emergencies Act on his first day in office. With this move, he sought to facilitate the use of emergency powers from various existing laws to, for example, open up federal lands for drilling projects and mining and to accelerate the approval procedures for (fossil) energy projects. He is thus making the expansion of energy production a matter of national and economic security for the USA (The White House, 2025a). Deregulation measures and the opening up of previously protected areas (e.g., in Alaska) for potential oil and gas drilling are a central part of his policy approach.

The U.S. Department of Energy has revised a moratorium on new LNG export licences imposed by Biden and has already approved further LNG projects at record speed since taking office (Department of Energy, 2025). Economic efficiency is to be the main guiding principle for infrastructure and public procurement projects, while environmental and climate protection no longer play a role. President Trump also plans to repeal his predecessor's fleet and vehicle emission limits and methane regulations for the oil and gas industry. The EPA has already begun to abolish emission limits for power plants. Finally, he plans to install more nuclear power capacity, an endeavour that enjoys bipartisan support in the United States (The White House, 2025f). Unlike during his first term, President Trump now explicitly opposes renewable energies. One of his first executive orders stops the licensing of new wind energy projects on public land and waters until further notice. Only geothermal energy and biofuels are mentioned in his energy dominance policy (The White House, 2025e). At the time of writing, it is still uncertain, how Trump's plans will ultimately affect the U.S. energy mix.

IMAGE 3: U.S. ELECTRICITY GENERATION BY ENERGY SOURCES 2024



Source: Authors, based on data by Jones et al. (2025)

1.2.3 Backpedalling on clean tech

The *One Big Beautiful Bill Act* has largely repealed incentives for green technologies. Only nuclear energy, geothermal energy, battery storage and CO₂ capture and storage will continue to receive some support. It can be expected that the announced changes will have a negative impact on green investment and the market ramp-up of green technologies: Subsidies for the purchase of electric cars and tax breaks for car manufacturers, for example, were an important driver of rising sales figures for electric vehicles in the USA. A slowdown in the momentum of electromobility would also have negative consequences for the battery market – an industry that has experienced explosive growth since the IRA was passed (Bermel et al., 2025).

1.2.4 Authorities and personnel changes

President Trump's fundamental aim is to remove climate protection from the remit of all executive agencies. He is implementing this by placing loyal supporters in key executive positions and by restructuring and realigning the executive agencies. The new head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is former Republican New York Congressman Lee Zeldin. Zeldin seeks to focus the agency solely on environmental protection and public health, not on climate protection. Zeldin has initiated a comprehensive deregulatory campaign. Further, he has kicked off a formal reconsideration of the so-called '*Endangerment Finding*', which forms the legal basis for regulating greenhouse gas emissions (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2025a). Trump has, furthermore ordered the suspension of scientific advisory committees for climate policy and has cut funding for climate research drastically.

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is now headed by Chris Wright, former CEO of Liberty Energy. He has been tasked with advancing President Trump's 'drill, baby, drill' agenda. The DOE is also responsible for LNG export licences, basic research, demonstration projects for industrial decarbonisation and support for technology ramp-ups such as hydrogen. Doug Burgum, former governor of North Dakota, heads the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the newly created National Energy Dominance Council. His agency is also responsible for ensuring that more public land, such as nature reserves and offshore waters, can be used for mining and drilling. As part of the National Energy Dominance Council, he will work across agencies to remove barriers to fossil fuels, such as lengthy permitting processes (Daly, 2024).

The new Secretary of State is Marco Rubio, former Senator from Florida. Although he does not deny climate change, he wants policy to focus exclusively on adapting to the effects of climate change and abandon efforts on reducing emissions. Howard Lutnick has been appointed the new Secretary of Commerce. More than half of the Department of Commerce's budget goes to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which, in addition to the national weather service, provides data on climate change and extreme weather events. It has considerable influence on U.S. climate and energy policy. Trump has reduced NOAA to a minimum size, cut funding significantly, and stopped the collection of scientific data, such as the National Weather Database (Freedman, 2025).

1.2.5 Foreign policy

Trump's renewed withdrawal from the Paris Agreement will be effective in January 2026. On the one hand, this has symbolic relevance for international climate policy and could lead to withdrawals from other countries. On the other hand, the president has also ordered the cancellation of all promised international climate funding and finances for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (The White House, 2025c). Philanthropist Michael Bloomberg has announced that he will cover the USA's outstanding contributions to the UNFCCC (Kleer et al., 2025). Trump also suspended all development aid from U.S. authorities (The White House, 2025d) and has almost completely dismantled the U.S. development agency USAID (Shao and Wu, 2025). U.S. funding for climate and sustainable energy policy projects worldwide, especially in developing countries, has been halted and will likely remain unavailable in the near future. This is particularly alarming because many climate pledges and measures in Global South countries are contingent on funding from industrialised countries such as the USA.

President Trump's energy dominance strategy is increasingly taking shape in foreign policy and is characterised by threats. Trump has repeatedly called on the EU to compensate its trade surplus with the USA by ramping up oil and gas imports (Sheftalovich, 2025). He has imposed tariffs in various sectors and on all trading partners, e.g., 50% on steel and aluminium, and on cars manufactured abroad. A trade conflict escalated in spring 2025 with China when Trump temporarily sought to impose tariffs of up to 145%

on Chinese goods. He is also arguing with the EU over the level and scope of his planned so-called reciprocal tariffs. Although at present, their final introduction, level and impact are still unclear, it can be assumed that these measures will have a significant impact on the manufacturing sector, for example on clean technologies and electromobility within the USA. They will also have a negative impact on the EU economy as a whole – and thus also on climate and energy policy. At the same time, President Trump's trade policy has also created uncertainty for exporters of fossil fuels. Other elements of Trump's foreign policy could also have an indirect impact on the EU's climate and energy policy. For example, he pushed members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to increase their defence spending to 5% of gross domestic product (GDP) (Hesse, 2025) and repeatedly threatened to reduce U.S. support for the Ukraine, when negotiating with Russia to end the war. This could also have negative consequences, as it would further limit the available EU budgetary resources for climate policy.

2 Overall assessment

The first 100 days of Trump's presidency have seen a drastic reversal of U.S. climate and energy policies. Above all, since taking office in early 2025, President Trump has created more uncertainty. He is drastically slowing down the USA's previous climate and energy policy course and leaving a leadership vacuum on the international stage. Germany and the EU have lost a partner with mutual interests. Donald Trump's leadership and communication style show how difficult it is to predict what he will actually implement as president, whose interests will prevail, and what effect his policies will ultimately have. Nevertheless, it is already clear that Trump's policies will have serious consequences for global warming, but also for the research landscape and political institutions in the USA. Certainly, President Trump is causing an even stronger polarization within U.S. society.

However, the international context this time differs from his first term as president. On the one hand, enormous investments in clean technologies have been made worldwide in recent years. These developments are linked to strong economic interests, and the competitive pressure (e.g., through technological leadership in China) is high. Renewable energies have seen further price reductions, making the production of fossil fuels financially less attractive (Tollefson, 2025). Many experts are also sceptical, as to how much markets for fossil fuels will allow for even greater production. On the other hand, the EU's ability to fill the vacuum and assume leadership in climate policy is limited, at this moment. At the time of writing the EU is weakening its Green Deal, (e.g., through watering down the rules on corporate sustainability reporting or accepting international certificates to fulfil the 2040 reduction target), which shows how much the EU member states' views of climate policy measures differ. In Germany, for example, some members of the new government have already questioned the country's climate neutrality targets and the rapid expansion of renewable energies.

Finally, in assessing the state of U.S. climate and energy policy, the climate policy ambitions of many U.S. states should not be overlooked. For example, almost half of the states have specific greenhouse gas reduction targets (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, n.d.). Many decisions, such as those on planning and approval procedures for production facilities, energy efficiency standards for buildings and renewable energy quotas for local energy producers, are made at the state level. California, for example, plans to achieve a 100% CO₂-neutral electricity supply and CO₂ neutrality by 2045. Illinois, Minnesota and Michigan recently passed progressive energy laws. And even in Republican states, there is a commitment to cleaner technologies. Texas, for example, has the largest installed capacity of renewable energy and batteries in the United States (Maguire, 2025). Georgia has developed into a hub for electric car and battery technologies in recent years. President Trump is trying to restrict the activities of the states, which he regards as an overreach of power. He has already revoked the waiver which enabled California to set its own vehicle efficiency standards (The White House, 2025b). But so far, the progressive U.S. states have provided an anchor of stability for climate policy in times when the presidency lacked climate ambition...

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RIFS Discussion Paper

July 2025

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DOI: [10.48481/rifs.2025.027](https://doi.org/10.48481/rifs.2025.027)

