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Research in Greater Depth: Climate Change

Instructions: Read the following news article excerpts and poll data and complete the “Source Analysis” handout.

Excerpts of News Articles

Source 1

Wall Street Journal: “Where Trump and Biden Stand on Climate and Energy Policy” by Timothy Puko, October 4, 2020. <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/where-trump-and-biden-stand-on-climate-and-energy-policy-11601809200>>

Environmental policy is one of the biggest contrasts between Mr. Trump and Mr. Biden. Energy companies, auto makers and unions all may see major changes if there is turnover at the White House.

Mr. Biden calls climate change an urgent crisis and has proposed the most aggressive climate agenda of any major presidential finalist ever, analysts say. He proposes to marshal vast government resources, with \$2 trillion in spending and plans to make environmental policy and climate change a driving force in decisions on the economy, infrastructure, transportation, social justice, foreign relations and more.

Mr. Trump has challenged the science documenting global warming and cast Mr. Biden’s strategy as a threat to U.S. businesses. He vows to restrain the government influence Mr. Biden wants to expand. His campaign’s second-term agenda doesn’t mention climate, listing clean air and water broadly as priorities.

Diplomacy

The candidates’ contrasting environmental policies start with international relations, primarily the 2015 Paris climate accord to cut global greenhouse-gas emissions. Mr. Trump wants no part of it, while Mr. Biden and his party have promised to keep the U.S. in the pact

The Trump administration has begun the process of withdrawing from the pact at the earliest possible date, Nov. 4, a day after the presidential election. In a Sept. 22 speech to the United Na-

tions General Assembly, Mr. Trump criticized the deal as one-sided and said even without it the U.S. is a world leader in reducing the greenhouse-gas emissions that cause climate change. U.S. emissions have fallen sharply during the past 15 years as the country shifted from coal-fired power to burning natural gas, which releases less carbon dioxide.

Mr. Biden last month, in the second of two major climate speeches he gave this summer, said it is important for the U.S. to show international leadership on climate. As part of a recommitment he would make to the Paris pact, he would push other countries to further cut emissions....

Regulation

Mr. Biden’s target is to move the U.S. toward eliminating U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050. The power sector would go first and end its emissions by 2035, with the government’s help. In contrast to Mr. Trump’s skepticism of climate science, Mr. Biden’s goals mirror the emissions-reduction path recommended by a U.N. scientific panel in 2018....

Mr. Biden also wants to revamp regulatory enforcement as a way to promote social justice. He wants to give communities hurt by pollution—often poor and minority communities—more direct involvement with Justice Department officials pursuing cleanups, reversing some of the Trump administration’s moves....

The Trump campaign has criticized Mr. Biden’s strategy. Mr. Trump says deregulation is the way to help companies create jobs, and his appointees have spent years making industry-friendly changes

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to rules governing coal, oil and natural-gas production.

A second term would give the Trump administration time to cement that work, especially in court. Dozens of Trump-backed rule changes face lawsuits filed by Democratic-led states and environmental groups. Mr. Trump's appointees are defending those cases. A Biden administration would likely vacate or settle many of them.

The Trump administration would also likely continue efforts to give greater weight to cost when developing regulations and to limit the expansion of climate regulations under the Clean Air Act. These efforts are already under way but unfinished at the Environmental Protection Agency....

Infrastructure and Investment

Mr. Biden has tried to counter charges of overregulation by making his climate policy largely about infrastructure and investment. His proposal to spend \$2 trillion over four years aims to ease

Source 2

New York Times: "A Field Guide to the Election and Climate Change" by Brad Plumer, October 14, 2020. <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/10/14/climate/biden-trump-climate-change-questions.html>>

The presidential election is just weeks away, and climate change has broken through as a defining issue for Americans this year, even amid a historic pandemic and deep economic uncertainty weighing upon the nation....

[T]he two presidential candidates' approaches couldn't be further apart. President Trump has often dismissed global warming as a hoax; his rival, Joseph R. Biden Jr., calls climate change an "emergency" that requires rapidly overhauling the nation's energy system.

Their differences raise profound questions about the government's role in shaping the United States economy and America's place on the world stage.

What Price is America Willing to Pay?

This is the most common question asked of any politician who proposes to fight climate change: How much will it cost?

But there is another equally important question: How much will it cost to not fight climate

global warming and harden infrastructure for what extreme weather can't be avoided, but also to help revive the economy.

Those efforts focus on renewable energy and efficiency. The infrastructure proposals include rebuilding the country's electric grid, and roads and bridges. They promise a nationwide expansion of mass transit in every city of more than 100,000 people, with an emphasis on emissions-free systems. They would upgrade more than four million buildings to improve efficiency, and boost research and development on clean-energy technology, including commercial battery storage and advanced nuclear power.

Mr. Trump would likely make another effort of his own at speeding up infrastructure development, said Mike McKenna, a lobbyist who led the energy transition team for Mr. Trump following his 2016 election. Mr. Trump favors oil, gas and coal interests, and they need more interstate pipelines and export terminals to keep growing, Mr. McKenna said.

change? It makes no sense to look only at the cost of action and ignore the cost of inaction, climate experts point out.

Rising temperatures, after all, carry their own price, including deadlier heat waves, crop failures, more destructive wildfires and higher sea levels. The federal government's National Climate Assessment warns that even moderate warming could cost the American economy hundreds of billions of dollars each year by century's end....

Mr. Trump has consistently downplayed the dangers of global warming and has focused instead on the immediate costs of climate policies. His administration has rolled back emissions rules on cars and power plants to ease burdens on industry, while developing calculations that suggest climate change won't harm the economy much (a view the government's own scientists have rejected).

Mr. Biden, for his part, says the United States needs to zero out greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050 to help avoid the worst consequences of warming and has proposed spending \$2 trillion

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over four years as a starting point. He has focused on the health and economic benefits — cleaner air, the creation of new industries — but has faced pressure to ease the blow for industries reliant on fossil fuels.

Are Fossil Fuels Part of the Future?

There is broad scientific consensus on what the world must do to halt global warming: Stop burning fossil fuels like coal, natural gas and oil....

Mr. Trump has long vowed to protect the fossil fuel industry in the name of preserving jobs and enhancing America's "energy dominance." His administration tried hard to try to rescue the coal industry (though that effort has largely failed) and has opened new public lands in places like Alaska for oil and gas development....

Mr. Biden envisions a much faster shift away from fossil fuels, saying that new cars should eventually be required to run on electricity instead of gasoline and that emissions from power plants should be zeroed out by 2035. Mr. Trump has sought to turn this into a campaign issue by claiming Mr. Biden would ban fracking, a controversial technique for extracting oil and natural gas, even though Mr. Biden has said he would not. Mr. Biden has vowed to end new drilling permits on federal lands and waters....

How Quickly Must Things Change?

[S]cientists warn that governments aren't acting nearly fast enough to avoid severe global warming. And every year of delay makes the problem harder to solve.

The clock is ticking. Global temperatures have already risen 1 degree Celsius from preindustrial times. For that increase to stay well below 2 degrees Celsius, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says that global carbon dioxide emissions need to get down to zero by around mid-century. Blowing past that limit, the panel warned, could bring about a world of worsening food and water shortages, collapsing polar ice sheets, and a mass die-off of coral reefs.

Getting emissions all the way down to zero would entail a staggeringly rapid transformation of the world economy.

In the United States, climate activists have rallied around the Green New Deal, which envisions getting the United States to net zero emissions as quickly as possible in order to give less-wealthy nations more time to make their own transitions. Mr. Biden has called the Green New Deal a "crucial framework" but has distanced himself from its particulars, instead aiming to zero out America's emissions by 2050.

Doing so would require doubling or tripling the pace at which clean electricity sources like wind or solar get installed, one recent study found, all while slashing pollution from cars, trucks, buildings, industry and agriculture.

Mr. Trump hasn't committed to any climate targets. One analysis by Wood Mackenzie, an energy research firm, suggested that another four years of delay would "dramatically reduce the possibility" of the nation meeting the 2050 goal for eliminating carbon emissions.

Who is Hurt the Most by Warming?

This has been a year — and an election — where racial and economic inequality has leapt to the forefront of the national conversation.

Climate change is an essential part of that dialogue, because its effects are profoundly unequal. Recently, researchers have shown how Black and Hispanic neighborhoods suffer worse heat today than other parts of town, a legacy of racist housing policies. Hotter days threaten to widen the racial achievement gap in schools. Fossil fuel pollution often poses the greatest health hazard to low-income communities.

Solutions can be unequal, too. Subsidies for rooftop solar panels or electric cars often flow to wealthier households. Programs to help people move from flood-prone areas have historically focused on richer neighborhoods.

Mr. Biden says he would make inequality a core part of his climate plan by, for instance, prioritizing low-income communities for clean energy funding. Mr. Trump has said very little on the subject, although his E.P.A. has highlighted its cleanups of Superfund sites as a form of environmental justice.

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Polling Data

Poll 1

Pew Research Center: “How important is climate change to voters in the 2020 election?” by Alec Tyson, October 6, 2020. <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/06/how-important-is-climate-change-to-voters-in-the-2020-election/>>

As Election Day nears, a majority of registered voters in the United States say climate change will be a very (42%) or somewhat (26%) important issue in making their decision about whom to vote for in the presidential election, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted July 27-Aug. 2.

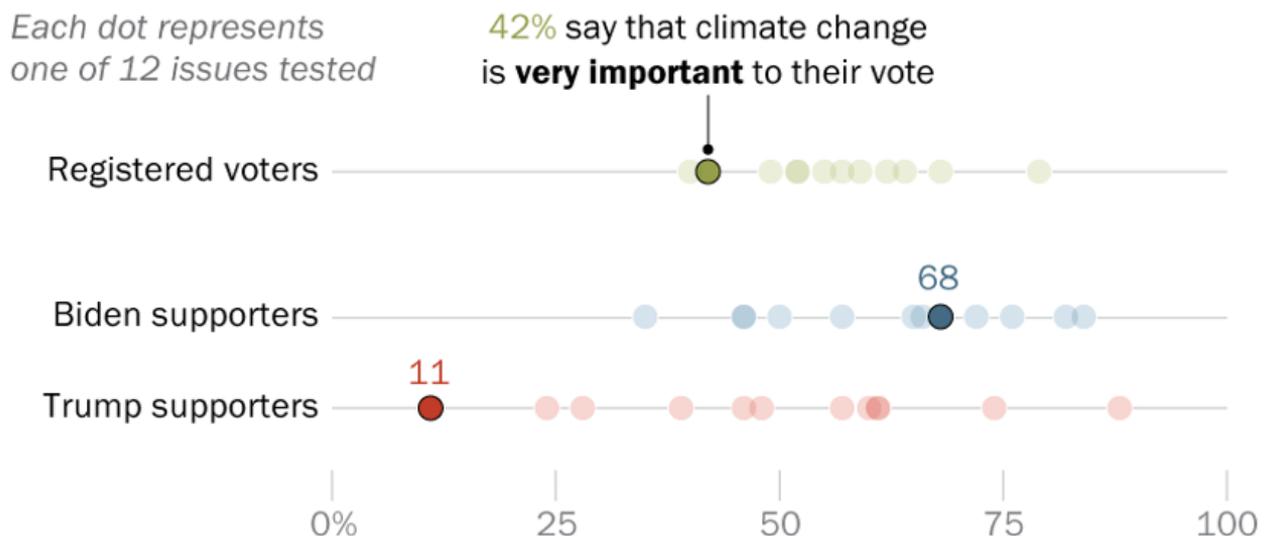
Registered voters supporting Democratic candidate Joe Biden and Republican President Donald Trump have very different perspectives on the issue. Nearly seven-in-ten Biden voters (68%) say climate change is very important to their vote. By contrast, only 11% of Trump supporters say the same. In fact, climate change ranks last in importance (out of 12 issues tested in a recent survey) for Trump supporters.

The issue of climate change has been growing in importance for Americans over time. Six-in-ten adults now view climate change as a major threat to the well-being of the U.S. – up from 44% who said this in 2009....

Still, the share of all voters who say climate change will be very important to their vote (42%) trails behind other leading issues such as the economy (79%), health care (68%) and the coronavirus outbreak (62%).

Climate change ranks near the top of issue priorities to Biden voters, low on list to Trump voters

% of registered voters saying each issue is ‘very important’ to their vote in the 2020 presidential election



Note: Based on registered voters. Supporters of each candidate are based on those who say they are planning on or are leaning toward voting for that candidate in 2020.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 27-Aug. 2, 2020.

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