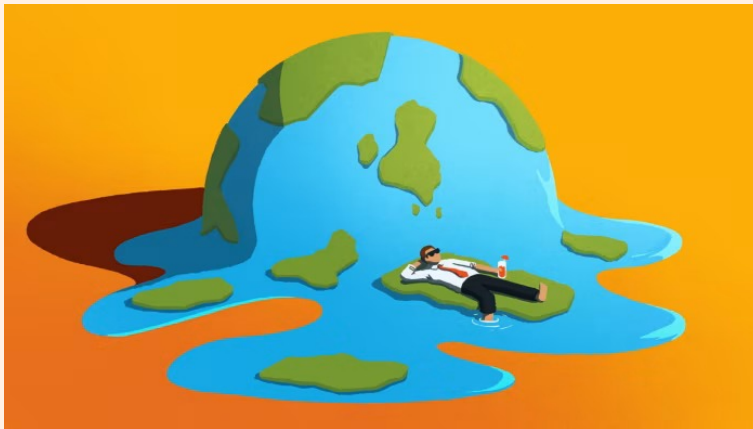
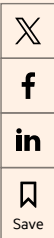
Opinion **Climate change**

# The great climate disconnect

New attempts to prolong the fossil fuel era have come at precisely the wrong time

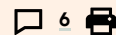
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What a world to live in. Never before has the danger of climate change been so evident and the response so cavalier. If you doubt this, consider the events of last week.

As the Trump administration was [freezing](#) funding for electric car charging programmes, [gutting](#) the USAID agency that helps countries deal with weather extremes, and [scrubbing](#) mentions of climate change from government websites, scientists unveiled some [dismaying](#) data.

It showed last month was the hottest January on [record](#), despite the arrival of cooling La Niña ocean conditions that had been expected to lower the average global temperature.

Yes, it's just one month and, yes, February could be cooler. But it is also possible that the greenhouse gases humans keep pouring into

the atmosphere are sapping the planet's ability to naturally cool itself, as some [scientists](#) fear. The unusually intense Los Angeles wildfires and the biblical floods in Valencia three months earlier could be signs of a shift in the climate system we don't yet understand.

Either way, the gap between climate risk and response has grown alarmingly wide, and not just because of what Donald Trump is doing in the world's largest economy.

In Europe's largest economy, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party is polling second in the run-up to this month's election having vowed to out-Trump Trump by [tearing down](#) wind farms and their "windmills of shame". (Trump is only trying to [stop new](#) wind parks being built — so far.)

The turbines are probably safe: Germany's other parties have ruled out working with the AfD in a coalition. But next door in Austria, the far-right Freedom Party is set to become the senior partner in a coalition government, having won the most seats in September's election after campaigning to [reverse](#) climate measures. It belongs to Patriots for Europe, the third biggest group in the European parliament, whose far-right leaders lashed out at "green deal ideology" at [a rally](#) in Madrid on the weekend.

Their message that green policies are costly burdens on ordinary workers is resonating in ever more countries.

Canada's Conservative leader, Pierre Poilievre, has made a similar case against Justin Trudeau's carbon tax ahead of Canada's [forthcoming election](#). Mark Carney, the climate champion running to replace Trudeau as Liberal Party leader, has said he [would scrap](#) parts of the tax and replace it with less "divisive" green policies.

Meanwhile in the business world, the list of companies scaling back their green efforts keeps growing. Even [Norway's Equinor](#) energy group, which changed its name from Statoil seven years ago as it pushed into green energy, now plans to boost fossil fuel production and halve spending on renewables.

Such is the backdrop to the 10th anniversary of the 2015 Paris climate agreement, the global pact that is supposed to be accelerating moves to slow global warming.

So far, no country has followed Trump and decided to quit the agreement, though Argentina is [weighing](#) a departure and Indonesia has [asked](#) why it should comply with an agreement the US is about to ignore.

Why is all this happening now? What has changed since 2020, when companies and countries alike were scrambling to support net zero policies? There is no single answer but it is no coincidence that

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the green backlash has emerged as countries stop merely setting net zero goals and start launching policies to meet them. This was always going to be fraught, especially during a cost of living crunch. Support for Germany's AfD surged in 2023 after it exploited contentious government efforts to decarbonise home heating.

Thoughtful leaders acknowledge the need for a rethink. "The climate movement must reflect on young Germans who switched their votes last summer from Greens to the AfD because they thought green was elite," UK climate envoy, Rachel Kyte, said in a memorial lecture last week for the late climate diplomat, Pete Betts. "We have much to do to win back a narrative."

The UK government is pursuing an ambitious climate agenda that includes a clean power system by 2030. That sets it apart from a US bent on prolonging the fossil fuel era, even as its rivals in Beijing edge closer to making China the world's first green-powered electrostate.

The direction of travel is in China's favour. The energy transition has begun. But it is hard to see it happening fast enough to contain an ever more unpredictable and disturbing climate.

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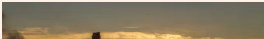
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