

Options in Brief

Option 1: Past Emitters Must Pay

Wealthy, industrialized countries have long histories of using fossil fuels, histories that are now affecting the wellbeing of poorer countries. After over a century of irresponsibly using fossil fuels and spewing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the global North has not yet faced significant consequences of its actions. Instead, poorer countries that are not responsible for the harmful emissions causing climate change are now suffering first and worst. A fair global system must hold past emitters accountable and demand that they bear the expense of both mitigation and adaptation. Poorer countries should not have to pay for the devastation wrought by climate change and should be allowed to industrialize without emissions restrictions, just as wealthier countries have. Justice demands that historic emitters be held responsible for their past actions.

Option 2: Responsibility Must be Shared by All

Rising industrial powers in the global South are already contributing large proportions of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. As more countries begin to industrialize, their use of fossil fuels and the effects they have on the environment will become disastrous. There cannot be justice without the prevention of future wrongs, and everyone must do their part. A fair international system should create mandatory restrictions on the use of fossil fuels by all countries based on their current emissions rates. Poorer countries should "grow green" by investing in renewable energy and taking the lead in sustainable development. The effects of climate change (which are already being felt) should be fought with adaptation strategies funded through voluntary contributions from wealthier countries. This global problem requires a global solution where everyone takes responsibility.

Option 3: Economic Growth and Development Must Come First

The use of fossil fuels is vitally important to economic growth. Creating mandatory emissions limits will make industry expensive, restricting the ability of poor countries to develop and weakening the economies of countries in the global North. Only an international system that assures the right of all people to pursue prosperity and improve economically is rooted in justice. As long as people around the world remain poor, they remain highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. There should be no mandatory emissions restrictions or financial contributions included in an international climate change agreement. Mitigation efforts should be taken on voluntarily at a local level where communities are able and willing to enact them. Climate change adaptation will be less necessary with the reduction of poverty, and it should remain a domestic rather than an international issue. Countries with growing economies will be able to develop technological solutions to counteract the worst effects of climate change.

Option 1: Past Emitters Must Pay

It is time that the countries with long histories of greenhouse gas emissions take responsibility for their harmful effects on the environment. Over a century of fossil-fuel driven industry in the global North has resulted in unprecedented spewing of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Throughout history, the United States has dumped more than three times the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the

atmosphere than newly industrializing countries like China and well over one hundred times the amount emitted by many poorer countries like Nigeria and Bangladesh. We are already seeing the impact of these past emissions on our climate, and we must demand that industrialized countries pay for histories of pumping CO₂ into the atmosphere.

Climate change is a global problem, but its effects are most intensely felt by countries in the global South that have not contributed to the world's greenhouse gas emissions. The effects of climate change are costly—both financially and in human suffering—and preventing further damage requires large investments in adaptation projects. Why should people in the poorest countries pay the greatest price when industrialized countries created the problem? Many countries in the global South have long histories of being economically and politically oppressed by countries in the global North. This means that they are usually poor, do not have substantial industries, and cannot afford to adapt to a changing climate.

In order for our international system to be fair, countries with histories of high emissions must accept strict limitations on their use of fossil fuels and provide funding to help those who are already facing the effects of climate change. Countries in the global South should not have to face emissions restrictions that limit their development or bear the costs of adaptation. They should have the opportunity to industrialize and enjoy the prosperity experienced by wealthier countries. Furthermore, promoting the economic development of poorer countries in this way will help reduce their vulnerability to climate change's effects. Justice requires that we hold historic emitters accountable. These wealthier countries must bear the expenses of climate change mitigation and adaptation, acknowledge their responsibility, and allow poorer countries to gain an even footing in the global economy. Any alternative would not be fair to the people in the global South who are suffering first and worst from climate change.

//Climate justice endorses that polluters must pay. We must have a system that those who use SUVs, not the one[s] who use bicycles, pay."

—Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, 2014

Option 1 is based on the following beliefs

- Justice requires accountability for past wrongs.
- Those most responsible for creating the problem of climate change must bear the costs of solving it.
- Major reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by historic emitters will be enough to prevent dangerous climate change.
- International agreements about climate change should prioritize addressing the needs of countries that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

What policies should we pursue?

- Historic emitters must accept mandatory emissions restrictions and pursue sustainable development.
- Historic emitters must pay for adaptation efforts—including agricultural assistance, disaster preparedness, and

Arguments for

1. The countries that have created the problem of global warming must be held responsible for fixing it. As a global community, we cannot ignore the past emissions that have brought us to the edge of catastrophic climate change. For an international system to be grounded in justice, it must hold countries accountable for historical emissions.
2. Countries with low emissions records are already suffering the consequences of global climate change and do not have the ability to mitigate or adapt. These countries are entitled to assistance from those responsible for causing the problem.
3. Poor countries trying to reduce the small amounts of greenhouse gases they emit will not make a significant difference. For climate change mitigation to be effective on a global scale, the countries that have emitted the most over time must take the lead.
4. Historically responsible countries have reaped the benefits of decades of industrial growth with little regulation; they can afford to pay for mitigation and adaptation (both on their own soil and in other countries that need it most).
5. Poor countries need a chance to develop economically and must be either allowed to increase their greenhouse gas emissions or helped by industrialized countries to pursue sustainable development. Economic development will also reduce poorer countries' vulnerability to climate change.
6. International negotiations that result in mandatory rules and restrictions are the only way we will make any meaningful progress in preventing and dealing with climate change.

health care improvements—in countries most vulnerable to climate change.

- The global South should be allowed to develop without emissions restrictions, just as the global North was in the past.

Arguments against

1. The United States will not agree to any international treaties with binding emissions cuts that do not restrict future emissions from countries in the global South. This was made clear by its decision not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Without the United States' participation, any large-scale attempts at mitigation will not be effective in curbing emissions.
2. China currently has the largest total emissions of any country, and its use of fossil fuels will only increase in the future. Without restrictions on rapidly industrializing countries like China and India, an international system would not prevent future dangerous climate change.
3. Restricting the emissions of some countries but not others will give the latter an advantage in the global market. This is unfair to citizens of countries facing restrictions, which will almost certainly lose jobs to other countries that will take the lead in industry.
4. The citizens of historically high-emitting countries are not as directly or immediately vulnerable to climate change's effects. Leaders of these countries will not be able to justify sweeping emissions restrictions to their citizens. As these countries are also the most powerful in the international community, it is unlikely that an effective agreement will be reached without their political support.

Option 2: Responsibility Must be Shared by All

Climate change is a serious global problem, and it demands a global solution. Yet international negotiations so far have failed to produce any meaningful action. We need to be practical about the types of emissions reductions the most powerful, highest emitting countries will realistically agree to in order to make any progress in preventing the dangerous effects of climate change. The Kyoto Protocol was the closest we have come to requiring binding emissions reductions from countries around the world. Yet because it did not restrict emissions for rapidly industrializing countries—like China and India—the United States, among other countries, refused to ratify it.

China currently emits more greenhouse gases than any country in the world. Many other countries are poised to greatly increase their greenhouse gas emissions as they, too, continue to industrialize. Why should these countries be given free rein to continue damaging the environment? To be most fair, we should establish across-the-board emissions restrictions according to all countries' current emissions levels. We are all in this problem together, and we must all do our part in reducing emissions. This approach will be most effective in preventing future greenhouse gas emissions and will also make countries like the United States more likely to sign on. In addition, wealthier countries will not feel that they are at risk of falling behind in the international market and, as a result, will be more likely to voluntarily contribute funding to help the countries most affected by climate change to adapt.

At the same time, we cannot deny the importance of development to support economic growth and increase climate change resilience around the world. Reducing the use of fossil fuels will shift international attention to sustainable development as wealthy and poor countries alike look towards more efficient renewable energy sources like solar and wind power. Sustainable development will allow countries around the world to meet the immediate economic and social needs of their citizens without compromising the future state of the planet. National governments, independent business owners, and large corporations could all contribute to making sustainability a central part of the economy by investing in sustainable projects. We cannot let the short-term economic costs of establishing new energy infrastructure outweigh the long-term benefits of sustainable development in mitigating a global climate crisis.

“Emissions are rising fastest in emerging economies and in the interest of their poorest citizens on the front line of climate change, they must play a bigger role than in the past.”

—Jan Kowalzig, *Oxfam's climate expert, 2014*

Option 2 is based on the following beliefs

- Justice requires that we stop current wrongs and prevent future harm.
- A situation that is global in nature requires that everyone takes responsibility, with those who are most able to pay giving financial support to others.
- Mandatory emissions restrictions for all countries is the only way to reach an agreement that will involve the entire global community and prevent dangerous climate change.
- All countries and organizations should have equal participation in negotiating an agreement on global climate change.

What policies should we pursue?

- There must be across-the-board emissions restrictions proportional to countries' current emissions levels, and emissions caps should be established to prevent both the global North and the global South from emitting large amounts of greenhouse gases in the future.

Arguments for

1. U.S. or European cuts would be pointless if China, India, and other countries in the global South continue to increase emissions, particularly as China is currently responsible for the most CO₂ emissions of any country.

2. Until now, the United States has refused to ratify international treaties because these agreements have not dealt with current or future emitters. Demanding reductions from other countries will make the United States more open to an international agreement. Reducing the focus of blame on the global North will also make wealthier countries more likely to contribute funds for adaptation efforts.

3. Emissions restrictions for all countries provide the most realistic chance of reaching an international agreement and will be the quickest route to concrete action at a global scale. This practical approach is essential, for the longer we wait, the more expensive mitigation and adaptation will be.

4. Across-the-board emissions restrictions will encourage sustainable development, allowing countries to improve economically without endangering future climatic conditions.

5. To protect the future state of the environment, we must prevent future greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change poses a dire threat to life as we know it, and we must do all we can to prevent catastrophe.

6. We cannot stop striving for mandatory regulation from the international system. Though international negotiations have failed to produce meaningful agreements so far, they provide the only chance to prevent dangerous climate change and realize justice on a global scale.

- We should encourage all countries to focus on sustainable development and environmentally friendly means of production.

- Wealthier countries should be encouraged to voluntarily provide funding for adaptation efforts in the countries most affected by climate change.

Arguments against

1. Poor countries deserve the chance to industrialize the way that the United States and other wealthier countries did. Restricting their use of fossil fuels would prevent this.

2. The greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that are currently causing climate change are from the past. It is unfair not to hold industrialized countries accountable for this accumulation of greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Some countries already need to pursue expensive adaptation efforts in the face of their vulnerability to climate change. They should receive financial assistance from the countries whose past actions are causing the changes in climate that are affecting them today. This funding should be mandatory, for voluntary contributions will not be enough.

4. Limiting the economic development of countries in the global South by regulating their emissions will slow poverty reduction. Continued poverty will keep these countries vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Option 3: Economic Growth and Development Must Come First

Climate change is not our most immediate problem. Billions of people around the world struggle with poverty and hunger every day. How can we justify an international focus on expensive climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies when this is the case? In order for the health and education of people in the global South to improve, international attention must turn towards economic development and poverty reduction. Most importantly, all countries should be able to grow their economies by increasing their industrial activity.

It is not fair for countries in the global North, which have already reaped the benefits of cheap industrialization, to prevent countries in the global South from doing the same. There should be no mandatory restrictions on fossil fuel use, for all countries should have the right to industrialize cheaply and pursue prosperity. Individual countries, as well as local organizations, can choose to take on voluntary emissions restrictions and adaptation measures where they are able and their populations are willing. This may indeed be faster than holding out for a comprehensive global agreement on climate change. With internationally funded economic development increasing poorer countries' resilience to climate change, additional adaptation measures should not be the concern of the international community. Furthermore, any attempts by the United Nations (UN) to barge in and tell people how to adapt to climate change will fail. The UN is a giant bureaucracy that is out of touch with local needs. It tramples on local governments and ignores citizens' input.

Continuing to hope for global climate change mitigation is unrealistic—it is just too expensive and no one wants to give up a higher quality of life for the sake of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This makes reaching an international agreement on mitigation essentially impossible. Wealthier countries should instead encourage private businesses and organizations to focus their efforts on scientific research to develop new technologies that can help us deal with the effects of climate change. If countries each pursue their own economic growth, the market will generate solutions to the problem of global warming.

“It is prudent to do what we reasonably can to reduce carbon emissions. But...we don't believe in harming economic growth.... For many decades at least, [fossil fuels] will continue to fuel human progress as an affordable energy source for wealthy and developing countries alike.”

—Prime Minister Tony Abbott of Australia, 2014

Option 3 is based on the following beliefs

- Justice is allowing everyone the opportunity to pursue prosperity and economic improvement.
- The international community is not responsible for funding and promoting mitigation and adaptation. These are domestic concerns that should be dealt with by national governments of individual countries according to the interests of their populations.
- Businesses should have a key voice in considerations of climate change policies. In a thriving economy, technological solutions will be developed that can eliminate the harmful effects of climate change.
- Policies generated by local people will be more successful than those forced upon them by international leaders who are not engaged with local concerns.

What policies should we pursue?

- There should be no mandatory restrictions on the use of fossil fuels, which are currently the cheapest energy sources. Local and national governments as well as businesses and other non-governmental groups can choose to take on voluntary emissions reductions.

- The international community should encourage individual countries to pursue economic growth so they have money

Arguments for

1. The most catastrophic effects of climate change are not as immediate or important as the economic needs of people. Economic development will give governments more money to fund public health initiatives, education improvements, and poverty reduction efforts. Expensive attempts at climate change mitigation would cripple countries' economies, making less funding available to deal with these pressing issues.

2. Climate change prevention is just too expensive. Realistically, it will never happen.

3. Countries have a right to develop, and people have a right to pursue prosperity. This requires the use of fossil fuels. It is unfair to deny more than half the world the benefits of industrial development.

4. Restricting countries' development increases their vulnerability to climate change by preventing both poverty reduction and the creation of diverse job opportunities.

5. Technology has the potential to prevent the most dangerous effects of climate change. We should make sure we have the money to pursue innovative technologies that can counteract these effects.

6. International climate change talks have failed to produce any meaningful agreements, and international laws restrict the ability of countries to develop in ways that are suited to their unique local contexts. It is unrealistic to rely on the international community to effectively protect the interests of all peoples.

available to research and develop new technologies—both renewable energy options that could reduce emissions and geoengineering techniques that could help deal with the effects of climate change.

- Monetary aid from wealthier countries should continue to focus on the economic development of poorer countries, not on climate change adaptation.

Arguments against

1. Pursuing sustainable development would allow countries to prioritize the economic needs of their peoples and address issues like health, education, and poverty while also limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

2. We cannot rely on mere hopes of developing new technology as a silver bullet to “solve” the issue of climate change. People are already suffering as a result of global warming. We cannot wait any longer to take action. Furthermore, geoengineering and other technologies that aim to reverse the effects of climate change are dangerous and cannot be tested. They do not address the source of the problem.

3. Pursuing efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is essential. Unchecked industrialization could have disastrous environmental effects, potentially resulting in many parts of the world becoming uninhabitable. These long-term human costs outweigh any short-term economic expense. In addition, proactive mitigation strategies will save money in the long run by preventing future damages and lessening the need for expensive adaptation efforts.

4. Because climate change is a global problem, solving it will require a coordinated, international effort. Voluntary action will not be enough because the people and groups that are motivated to act often are not the ones who have caused the problem.