CLIMATE • 6 MIN READ

It’s been a dangerous decade since the Paris Climate Agreement, but there’s still reason for hope

NOV 9, 2025

Analysis by John D. Sutter



In an aerial view, sunset glow lights up wind turbines and rows of solar panels at a wind farm in Qingyang, Gansu Province of China, on October 28, 2025. *(Chen Kun/VCG/Getty Images)*

30

FOLLOW

Climate change + Green energy + Oil & gas + Sustainability +

See all topics >

A decade ago, the world got together and decided to fix the climate crisis by adopting the Paris Agreement.

I remember it like yesterday. This was December 2015 at the UN climate talks in Paris. I was standing in front of a CNN camera as the news came through an earpiece: Nearly every country on Earth agrees to cut emissions to net zero by 2050 — holding warming short of catastrophic levels. A hilariously on-the-nose green gavel hit a desk. The convention center erupted in applause. Diplomats wept and hugged. Even Al Gore managed to not look all that wooden.

My column the next morning trumpeted this headline: “**This is the end of fossil fuels**.”

Advertisement

Somehow, it doesn’t feel like 10 years and some 300 gigatons of carbon have floated by since then.

Paris was not the end of fossil fuels, of course. From the perspective of the atmosphere, the last decade could accurately be described as a slow-moving fever dream — one in which pollution from fossil fuels has continued to rise year after year. All those emissions drive global heating and make the planet more dangerous.

And in this dangerous decade climate disasters have continued to intensify — from the massive hurricane that **walloped Puerto Rico in 2017**, to Jamaica this October where **the most powerful Atlantic storm** on record came aground.



Residents gather amid debris in the aftermath of IIurricane Melissa on a street in Black River, Jamaica, Thursday, Oct. 30, 2025. *(Matias Delacroix/AP)*

It's a decade in which **new fossil fuel projects continued to be approved** by the very governments that had promised to slash emissions; and one in which the United States twice elected a climate-denier to the nation's highest office. This fall, US President Donald Trump, after **cancelling billions toward clean energy projects** and **moving to open a swath of the Arctic for oil extraction**, bucked the scientific consensus on global warming again by falsely stating that climate change is the "**greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world.**"

RELATED ARTICLE



How the US could shape the COP30 climate summit without even being there

Ironic, then, that this has also been a decade during which scientists realized that, if anything, **they underestimated some of the threats of climate change**.

Advertisement

Just last month, for example, researchers reported that Earth had crossed one of **its first climate tipping points**, with such a massive percentage of coral reefs struggling amid warming that we're entering a "new reality" in which those reefs won't be able to recover.

One key goal of the Paris Agreement was to prevent this sort of thing, by limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. A group of especially climate-vulnerable countries, calling themselves the **High Ambition Coalition**, banded together to push for that target. In Paris, delegates carried the rhyming theme over to wearing buttons that said, "1.5 to stay alive," a reference to the existential threat warming poses, especially to low-lying areas that are flooding as ice melts and oceans rise.





Two tourists face the melting Rhone Glacier on September 12, 2025. Switzerland's glaciers are disproportionately impacted by climate change and have shed a quarter of their mass in the past decade alone. *(Fabrice Coffrini/AFP/Getty Images)*

That "1.5 to stay alive" target, we now know, is almost certainly out of reach. Either **we've crossed that line already** or **we're well on the way**. Does that mean we're "dead"? That we've failed to "stay alive"?

No — thankfully, the world doesn't burst into flames at 1.51 degrees of warming.

Advertisement

We do know that every ton of heat-trapping pollution makes the world more dangerous. But, conversely, every ton of it we save makes the world safer for future generations. Yes, by many metrics, we've backslid in the years since Paris. Jamie Henn, co-founder of 350.org and director of Fossil Free Media, told me that if climate action is *Star Wars* then "I think we're in the *Empire Strikes Back* episode of the trilogy" — where it all falls apart.

But it's still possible to adjust the lens and bring other storylines into focus.

"We've come an incredibly long way since Paris," said Jean Su, energy justice director and senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. Of note, Su told me, is the fact that world leaders in 2023, at the COP meeting in Dubai, **added language to the Paris Agreement** that calls for moving away from fossil fuels. At that meeting, "we really reached a pinnacle in terms of addressing the root causes of the climate emergency," she said.



Workers install solar panels near Marburg, in western Germany, on August 6, 2025. *(Hannes P. Albert/AFP/Getty Images)*

Just because Trump thinks climate change is a scam, doesn't mean the rest of the world agrees.

Henn, the climate activist, pointed to renewable energy as a bright spot. In the first half of 2025, **renewables overtook coal** as the world's top energy source for the first time. Wind and solar power — which don't produce the heat-trapping pollution of coal and gas — are **expected to meet 90% of new electricity demand** this year.

RELATED ARTICLE



The surprising countries pulling off stunningly fast clean energy transitions

"The transition is moving **even faster than people predicted back in 2015**," Henn said. **Fifteen times faster**, in fact, if you're looking at solar power installations, according to the non-profit Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit.

Advertisement

Likewise, it continues to be crystal clear how the public feels about this issue: 89% of the global public **surveyed in a 2024 study** favored stronger political action on climate change.

"That is a supermajority," said Mark Hertsgaard, executive director of Covering Climate Now, the group behind a media collaboration called the **89 Percent Project**. "And it's a [super]majority that doesn't know that it's a majority. People in that majority think that they're 29% of the population. They think they're a minority."

But even in the United States, positive trends hold: 79% of registered voters **surveyed in May 2025** said they support the US being part of the Paris Agreement and 75% support regulating carbon dioxide as a pollutant.

Climate advocates are planning new efforts to make use of this supermajority. Among them is a push for a **Fossil Fuel Nonproliferation Treaty**. Alex Rafalowicz, executive director of that initiative, told me the idea for a treaty builds on an **International Court of Justice decision earlier this year** that held nations legally responsible for curbing climate-heating pollution.

Advertisement

"The economics do demonstrate that the transition [to clean energy sources] has an inevitability about it," Rafalowicz said. "But the question is whether it is fast enough, and whether it is fair enough. That is part of the problem we're trying to solve."

A meeting about that treaty is likely to happen next spring in Colombia, he said. Meanwhile, the UN is prepping for COP30, in Brazil, which begins November 10. Plenty of the delegates there will remember that green gavel moment from Paris. I'll be thinking of it as I watch news from the summit, too.



The main entrance of the COP30 UN Climate Change Conference at night in Belem, Para State, Brazil on November 7, 2025. *(Mauro Pimentel/AFP/Getty Images)*

On the day the Paris Agreement was adopted, I spent hours with the delegation from the Marshall Islands, a nation of low-lying islands in the Pacific that fears being subsumed by rising seas. I'd visited the country earlier in 2015 for a CNN article. I'll never forget a woman telling me that the sound of the ocean, which used to lull her to sleep, had become threatening after waves crashed through her home and flooded it. Her family had decided to move to Arkansas to get far away from the water and that sound.

The Marshallese delegation in Paris gave me a palm frond ribbon to remember them by. I kept it in my pocket as I relayed news of the agreement to viewers around the world.

Advertisement

It's sitting on my desk as I type this, 10 years later.

It reminds me that the optimism and the urgency of that moment have not been forgotten.

30

FOLLOW Climate change + Green energy + Oil & gas + Sustai See all topics >

Up next



New reports paint picture of an 'extremely dangerous' future with warming expected to blow past key limit

5 MIN READ



Welcome to the planet's newest oil frontier

9 MIN READ



Congo and Rwanda-backed rebels sign framework for peace deal in latest bid to end decades-long conflict

2 MIN READ



What are US aims toward Venezuela? The historical parallel is Panama – not Iraq

8 MIN READ



Bill Gates makes a stunning claim about climate change

3 MIN READ



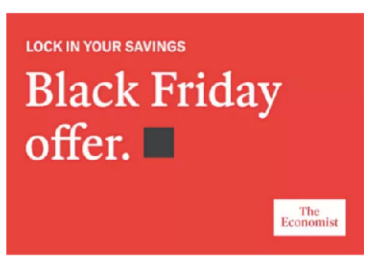
Trump's plan for Gaza endorsed by UN Security Council

5 MIN READ

Most popular

1. Larry Summers says he is 'deeply ashamed' after new Jeffrey Epstein emails and will pause public engagements
2. Trump snaps at reporter's Epstein questions: 'Quiet, piggy' 1:11
3. The prospect of an embarrassing defeat convinced Trump to reverse course on Epstein files
4. Entertainment duo the Kessler twins die by assisted suicide, aged 89
5. Why crypto is melting down and stocks keep falling
6. Cambridge Dictionary's 2025 word of the year captures an 'unhealthy' modern phenomenon
7. Treasury secretary says 'we will see' about $2,000 rebate checks to Americans as Supreme Court weighs Trump's tariffs
8. Justin Trudeau's ex-wife Sophie Grégoire breaks silence on his romance with Katy Perry
9. Trump claims slain journalist Khashoggi was 'extremely controversial,' defends Saudi crown prince
10. Home Depot's business is stuck. That's a bad sign for the economy

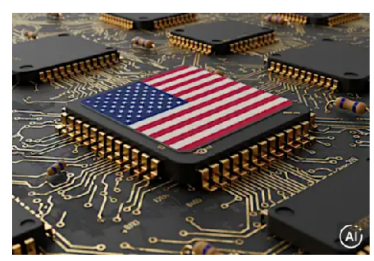
PAID CONTENT RECOMMENDATIONS



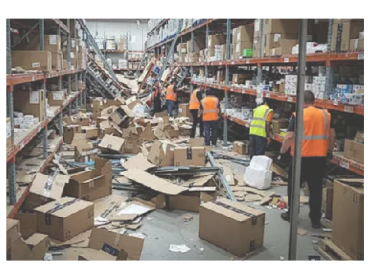
Lock in your savings: complete the picture with The Economist
Sponsored: The Economist



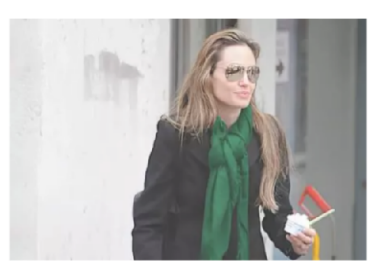
Flight Attendant Reveals How Seniors Can Fly Business Class F...
Sponsored: Airlines



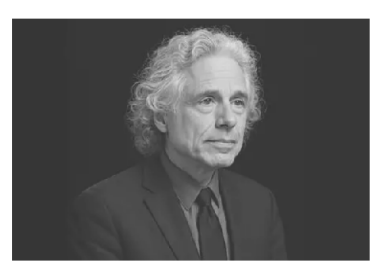
Experts think this could be like buying Amazon at $0.77
Sponsored: The Motley Fool



Amazon's Worst Nightmare: Clever Trick Causing Many to Cancel Pri...
Sponsored: Online Shopping Tools

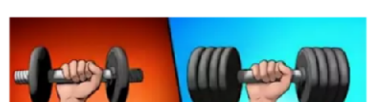


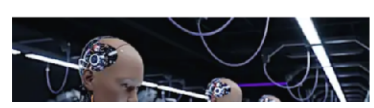
The Scarf Everyone's Calling the Perfect Gift of 2025
Sponsored: fashioninusa.com



Harvard Professor Steven Pinker Recommends: "These 5 Books Wi..."
Cognitive scientist Steven Pinker shares the books that prove the world is gettin...
Sponsored: Blinkist: Celebrity Reading List





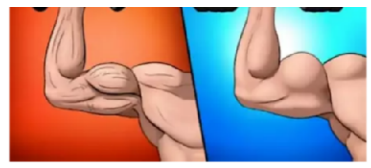




Here Are 29 of the Coolest Gifts for This 2025

29 Insanely Cool Gadgets You'll Regret Not Getting Before They Sell Out

Sponsored: Consumerbags



Cardiologist: Strong Arms After 60 Comes Down To This

Sponsored: Ultra Health Findings



Buy the Dip: 5 AI Stocks With Strong Growth Potential

Discover 5 AI stocks with strong ratings and growth potential. See the picks now.

Sponsored: Seeking Alpha

Conversation

Conversations are moderated for civility. We ask that you please stay on topic. For more info, see our Community Guidelines.



AdChoices

Sponsored

Search CNN...

US
Crime + Justice

World
Africa
Americas
Asia
Australia
China
Europe
India
Middle East
United Kingdom

Politics
Trump
Facts First
CNN Polls
2025 Elections

Business
Tech
Media
Calculators
Videos

Markets
Pre-markets
After-Hours
Fear & Greed
Investing
Markets Now
Nightcap

Health
Life, But Better
Fitness
Food
Sleep
Mindfulness
Relationships

CNN Underscored
Electronics
Fashion
Beauty
Health & Fitness
Home
Reviews
Deals
Gifts
Travel
Outdoors
Pets

Entertainment
Movies
Television
Celebrity

Tech
Innovate
Foreseeable Future
Mission: Ahead
Work Transformed
Innovative Cities

Style
Arts
Design
Fashion
Architecture
Luxury
Beauty
Video

Travel
Destinations
Food & Drink
Stay
News
Videos

Sports
Pro Football
College Football
Basketball
Baseball
Soccer
Olympics
Hockey

Science
Space
Life
Unearthed

Climate
Solutions
Weather

Weather
Video
Climate

Ukraine-Russia War

Israel-Hamas War

Watch
Featured
Shows & Films
Network TV
Clips
CNN Headlines
CNN Shorts
TV Shows A-Z
CNN 10
CNN Max
TV Schedule

Listen
CNN 5 Things
Chasing Life with Dr. Sanjay Gupta
The Assignment with Audie Cornish
One Thing
Tug of War
CNN Political Briefing
The Axe Files
All There Is with Anderson Cooper
All CNN Audio podcasts

Games
Daily Crossword
Jumble Crossword
Photo Shuffle
Sudoblock
Sudoku
5 Things Quiz

About CNN
Subscribe
Photos
Investigations
CNN Profiles
CNN Leadership
CNN Newsletters
Work for CNN

CNN Climate

Watch Listen | FOLLOW CNN Subscribe