

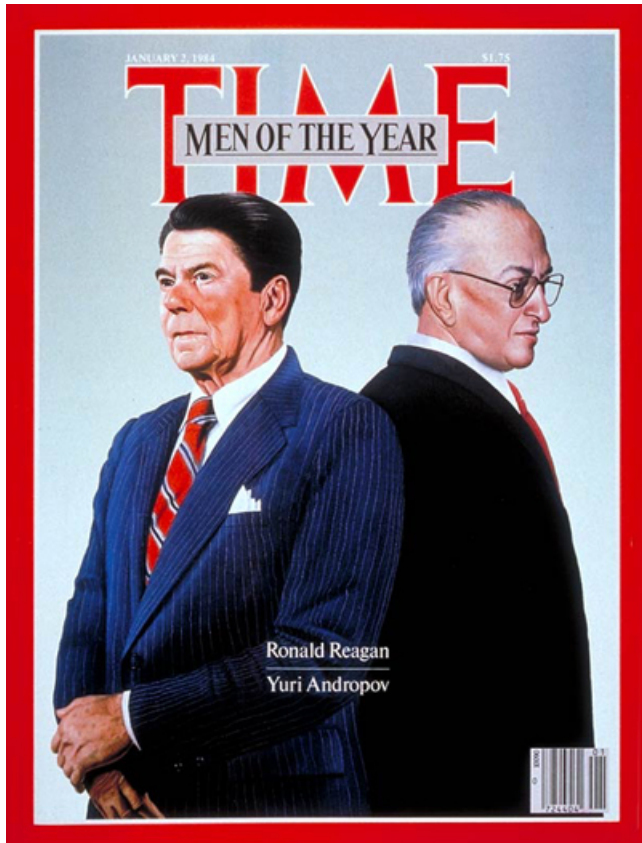
How Climate Change Politics have changed over Time

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by Joel Roeber

In August 2015, Rwandan scientists warned the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that "[world] leaders must act now to prevent climate change impacts which could be "catastrophic" for human health"[\[1\]](#). In order to enact upon this statement, they proposed a plan that would involve strengthening Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions taken by countries around the world to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This plan aims to kick start action against Climate change by the 2020s[\[1\]](#) to get a head start on minimizing the impact humanity has on Earth's climate before it is too late for anything to be done. The importance of Climate change as a major issue facing Mankind has spiked up significantly in recent years due to an increase in scientific data supporting its legitimacy and an increase in political and social awareness that has been directed towards it. But the new political platform it has created has undergone massive change in the years following its establishment into political ideology almost four decades ago. At its inception in the early 1980's, the political viewpoint towards Climate change was that it could've been a potential consequence of nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union rather than a consequence of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, whereas the political viewpoint towards it now is that Man has had a large impact on Earth's Climate, as supported by scientific evidence.

The point in time that Climate change was seen as an underlying possibility occurred around 1983 in the United States[\[2\]](#), a time during which "science and technology were recognized as extremely important to society"[\[2\]](#). The threat of nuclear war began to boil over as the Reagan administration found itself locked in a nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union. In what



was known as the "War scare" of 1983, the Soviets used propaganda to create fear of United States intentions within their own populations[3]. From this, mass hysteria was created surrounding the threat of a nuclear winter, that could result from such an engagement. A little bit after this period is when scientific efforts expended towards researching climate change began to really take off, as organizations such as the National Research Council Staff (NRCS) began publishing their findings that were gathered from their experiments. In NRCS' case, they stated within their report entitled *Effects on the Atmosphere of a Major Nuclear Exchange* that nuclear particulate matter possessed the ability to "cause severe drops in surface air temperatures" as well as have "other major climatic effects in areas that are far removed from target zones"[4]. This resulted in a shift towards viewing Climate change not just as the outcome of Nuclear Warfare but also Mankind's own inefficient waste and pollution management systems came to be in the late 1980's and early 1990's. A meeting was

The developing trend of rising annual temperatures worldwide was well **Figure 1: TIME Magazine cover, 1983** documented, and much evidence was collected to support the theory that greenhouse gases were the primary contributors to change in climate, which subsequently would have negative impacts on ecosystems all across the world[5]. During the 90's a meeting was held between diplomats of the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States to discuss a potential solution to the problem of Global Warming and Climate Change[6]. However, there was also the presence of political opposition that denounced the legitimacy of Climate change as well. Author

Erik M. Conway stated in his work *Atmospheric Science at NASA* that NASA's Earth Observing system (EOS) had its budget cut from \$17 billion to \$7 billion during the 90's due to this opposition[7], and this perspective towards Climate change continued on throughout the decade into the new Millennium.



Political interest in Climate change started back up in the 2000's, however, it had experienced great turmoil in trying to gain any ground amongst the populations of both industrialized and unindustrialized countries. According to Frederik von Paepcke, one of the primary difficulties that governments have had in trying to establish Climate laws is related to the fact that "most Political Leaders" are elected for "a few years only", while it would take "decades" to determine whether certain Climate change policies were successful or not[8]. This was also further complicated by economic recessions during the late 2000's that made budgeting for a sector of United States and European economies to be devoted to Climate research impossible. However, at the same time, countries in Asia such as China were continuing to make rapid industrialization efforts that were kick started in the late 1990's, but without any regulation on their pollution output or a system of environmental standards being put in place. All of a sudden, a new threat to Climate change was seen by Western countries developing in China, and very quickly negotiations were established in order to **Figure 2: Political cartoon, 1983** make sure that China and other Asian countries

weren't worsening the efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions[9].

Interestingly enough though, moving on into the 2010's, China's industrial capabilities have rendered it able to produce highly sophisticated solutions to Climate change. Dubbed the "green economy", China's government aims to establish an economic system that cooperates with environmentally-friendly technology going into the near future[10]. Should they succeed, Western governments will most likely adapt their economies similarly and follow suit. The measures that China has taken to accommodate their economy to reduce emissions shows that Climate change is not an unsolvable problem. This brightens the outlook for politicians towards the future regarding how Climate change can be dealt with.

Figure 3:

Book Cover, 2011

Overall, as evidenced above, it can be understood how the relationship between Politics and Climate change has gotten drastically more serious in a mere span of over 30 years. The change

needed and still needs to occur, however, in order for humanity to be able to progress forwards in numerous fields of technology, infrastructure, etc. and ensure that succeeding generations will possess the ability to live on as well. Going into the near future, the relationship shared between Earth's Climate and various forms of politics will remain always changing and ever-complex, but it is arguably the most important issue facing mankind currently, and for most likely what will be a significant time to come.

Endnotes

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Illustrations

Figure 1. TIME magazine cover, 1983, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB426/>

Figure 2. Ronald Reagan political cartoon, 1983,
<http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/herblock/Reagan.html>

Figure 3. Book on China's new "green" economic system, 2011,
<http://ntserver1.wsulibs.wsu.edu:2362/lib/wsu/detail.action?docID=3238185>