

Why *Nature* supports Joe Biden for US President

Joe Biden's trust in truth, evidence, science and democracy make him the only choice in the US election.

On 9 November 2016, the world awoke to an unexpected result: Donald Trump had been elected president of the United States.

This journal did not hide its disappointment. But, *Nature* observed, US democracy has safeguards built in to protect against excesses. It is founded on a system of checks and balances that makes it difficult for a president to exercise absolute power. We were hopeful that this would help to curb the damage that might result from Trump's disregard for evidence, disrespect for those he disagrees with and toxic attitude to women.

How wrong we turned out to be.

No US president in recent history has so relentlessly attacked and undermined so many valuable institutions, from science agencies to the media, the courts, the Department of Justice – and even the electoral system. Trump claims to put 'America First'. But in his response to the pandemic, Trump has put himself first, not America.

His administration has picked fights with the country's long-standing friends and allies, and walked away from crucial international scientific and environmental agreements and organizations: notably, the 2015 Paris climate accord; the Iran nuclear deal; the United Nations' science and education agency UNESCO; and even, unthinkable in the middle of a pandemic, the World Health Organization.

Challenges such as ending the COVID-19 pandemic, tackling global warming and halting the proliferation and threat of nuclear weapons are global, and urgent. They will not be overcome without the collective efforts of the nation states and international institutions that the Trump administration has sought to undermine. On the domestic front, one of this administration's most dangerous legacies will be its shameful record of interference in health and science agencies – thus undermining public trust in the very institutions that are essential to keeping people safe.

Joe Biden, Trump's opponent in next month's presidential election, is the nation's best hope to begin to repair this damage to science and the truth – by virtue of his policies, which aim to do so, and his leadership record in office, as a former vice-president and as a senator.

The Trump administration's disregard for rules, government, science, institutions of democracy and, ultimately, facts and the truth have been on full display in its disastrous response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its actions have had

devastating consequences. With the nation's death toll now exceeding 215,000, the coronavirus has killed more people in the United States than anywhere else.

This undermining of research advice has been accompanied by the systematic dismantling of scientific capacity in regulatory science agencies.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has helped many nations to better understand the dangers of pollution, and has pioneered regulations that have cleaned up the environment and saved millions of lives. But under the Trump administration, the EPA has withered as its scientists have been ignored by the senior leadership of Trump appointees. Those at the top have worked to roll back or weaken more than 80 rules and regulations controlling a spectrum of pollutants, from greenhouse gases to mercury and sulfur dioxide.

Likewise, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia, which should have led the nation's coronavirus response, has been made subordinate to a task force whose leaders include vice-president Mike Pence and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner – neither of whom has expertise in infectious diseases.

Biden must lead

Biden, by contrast, respects the values of research and has vowed to work to restore the United States' fractured global relationships. For these reasons, *Nature* is endorsing Biden and urging voters to cast a ballot for him on 3 November.

Biden's campaign has worked with researchers on plans for COVID-19 and climate change. He has pledged that decisions on the pandemic response will be made by public-health professionals and not by politicians; and he is rightly committing to restoring the ability of these professionals to communicate directly with the public.

In addition, Biden is promising to ramp up test-and-trace programmes and to provide more support to people hit hardest by the coronavirus. Combined with vaccines and medicines, these are the kinds of policies that will be essential to ending the pandemic.

On climate change, Biden would return the United States to the Paris agreement, and is proposing the most ambitious domestic climate policies ever advocated by nominees from the country's major parties. A US\$2-trillion plan would invest in clean energy and low-carbon infrastructure, with the ambition of weaning the United States off fossil-fuel-generated electricity by 2035.

If elected, Biden would have the chance to reinstate and strengthen the climate and environmental regulations rolled back under Trump; restore the EPA's depleted scientific capacity; and return the CDC's leadership role in the pandemic. He should also move to reverse egregious policies on immigration and student visas, and hold the United States to its international commitments – not least its membership of the WHO and UNESCO.

Joe Biden must be given an opportunity to restore trust in truth, in evidence, in science and in other institutions of democracy, heal a divided nation, and begin the urgent task of rebuilding the United States' reputation in the world.

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