

## Research Paper

Topic: Climate Change as a Human Rights Crisis in the United States: Evaluating Government Response and Accountability

Yenting Lin

### Abstract

Climate change is not just an environmental crisis; it is a fundamental human rights violation issue. This paper examines the impact of climate change on the communities in the United States, highlighting violations of essential human rights such as the right to life, health, and an adequate standard of living. Through case studies of extreme weather events, including the 2025 LA wildfires and the 2024 hurricanes in Florida, the research underscores how climate-induced disasters harm low-income and minority populations. It critiques the U.S. government's climate policies and disaster response mechanisms, exposing systemic inequalities in resource distribution and emergency assistance (UN Human Rights Council, 2023).

Drawing from international human rights frameworks, this paper argues for stronger legal protections and climate policies that prioritize social equity and environmental justice. The discussion includes an analysis of the Inflation Reduction Act, EPA climate initiatives, and FEMA's role in disaster relief, assessing their effectiveness in mitigating human rights violations (Environmental Protection Agency, 2025). Additionally, the paper aligns policy recommendations with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to advocate for a more inclusive, rights-based approach to climate action (United Nations, 2025).

This paper is both an academic analysis and a personal commitment to advancing environmental justice, ensuring that climate policies serve all communities equitably, rather than exacerbating existing social injustices.

## **Introduction**

The United States, despite being a global economic and military superpower, faces significant human rights challenges due to growing wealth disparities and systemic inequality (U.S. News & World Report, 2025). As the wealthiest families continue to accumulate unprecedented resources, many Americans still lack access to basic necessities like clean water (Urban Institute, 2025). In 2022, wealthiest families held 71 times the wealth of families in the middle class, while racial inequality persists—with white families possessing six times the wealth of Black families (Urban Institute, 2025). These inequities intersect with climate change, further threatening human rights for vulnerable populations.

Climate change makes existing inequalities worse, impacting communities that already face systemic barriers. Including inadequate housing, limited access to healthcare, and exposure to environmental hazards (OHCHR, 2015). As natural disasters like wildfires and hurricanes increase in frequency and severity, they expose a great challenge of human rights protection in one of the world's most developed nations.

### **Case study: LA wildfire and the hurricane in Florida show the United States is also a victim of climate change.**

Extreme weather events such as wildfires in Los Angeles and hurricanes in Florida illustrate how climate change increasingly infringes on fundamental human rights, from access to clean water to safe housing and public health (NBC News, 2025). For instance, the 2025 LA wildfire destroyed over 15,000 structures, forcing more than 170,000 people into long-term displacement and exposing them to risks like contaminated water and landslides. These disasters disproportionately affect low-income communities, where limited access to healthcare and other resources exacerbates vulnerabilities (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, 2025).

Similarly, hurricanes like Helene and Milton left hundreds of thousands without power or clean water for weeks, highlighting the devastating impact of climate-induced crises on basic rights to health, safety, and adequate living conditions (USA Today, 2024). The intersection of socio-economic inequality and climate vulnerability reveals a critical gap in disaster response (Environmental Protection Agency, 2025). Federal and state governments must ensure equitable resource allocation and comprehensive recovery plans to protect the rights of marginalized communities.

Furthermore, climate migration is becoming an increasing concern, as many displaced families struggle to find stable housing, employment, and social services in the wake of environmental disasters (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,

2025). The right to a safe and healthy environment, recognized in various international human rights frameworks, is routinely violated when climate disasters render communities uninhabitable. Those displaced by climate-related events often struggle with displacement, lack of adequate shelter, and minimal governmental assistance, highlighting the gap between U.S. climate policies and human rights obligations.

### **Human Rights Framework: How Climate Change Affects Rights**

Climate change is emerging as one of the most human rights challenges of the 21st century even in the wealthiest country in the world. It directly threatens fundamental freedoms and principles of dignity, equality, and security, particularly for marginalized populations (UN General Assembly, 2025). Universal human rights are universal rights of all human beings, regardless of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status. But climate change threatens the effective enjoyment of a range of human rights, including those to life, water and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination, culture, and development. (OHCHR, 2024)

As the following below (United Nations, 2025), those rights will be affected when the climate change is coming. Mother Nature is equal; no one can escape the nature crisis from climate change.

1. Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
2. Article 3: right to life, liberty, and security of person.
3. Article 25
  1. right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
  2. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

With the threat of climate change and the expansion of human rights, the newly human rights call environmental rights, which means any proclamation of a human right to environmental conditions of a specified quality (United Nations Environment Program, 2025).

1. Substantive Rights: in which the environment has a direct effect on the existence or the enjoyment of the right itself.
2. Procedural Rights: include 3 fundamental access rights: access to information, public participation, and access to justice.

The U.S. must take stronger action to integrate human rights protections into its climate policies and ensure that environmental justice remains a priority in legislative and regulatory frameworks.

### **Climate Change Responses by the United States Government**

The U.S. government has introduced several initiatives aimed at combating climate change, but its response remains inconsistent, particularly in addressing the human rights dimensions of environmental crises. The U.S. government's climate change response focuses on transitioning to clean energy, implementing regulatory reforms, and addressing environmental justice, though significant challenges remain in bridging policy and action (Center for American Progress, 2025).

1. **The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (H.R. 5376):** Marking the largest investment in clean energy in U.S. history, this legislation allocated billions to renewable energy, electric vehicles, and carbon capture technologies (Congress.gov, 2025).
2. **EPA Climate Initiatives:** The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has introduced measures such as methane emission fees, stricter water quality standards, and robust enforcement of clean air regulations. For instance, new drinking water standards for PFAS chemicals aim to reduce contaminants to near-zero levels within three years (Environmental Protection Agency, 2025).
3. **National Climate Goals:** The U.S. has committed to reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by 61-66% below 2005 levels by 2035, aiming for net-zero emissions by 2050 (Environmental Protection Agency, 2025).
4. **Disaster Relief and Climate Adaptation Efforts:** Federal agencies like FEMA provide disaster relief, yet response times and resource distribution often fail to adequately support low-income and minority communities affected by climate-related disasters.
5. **International Climate Commitments:** The U.S. has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition to cleaner energy sources, but disparities in policy implementation raise concerns about the effectiveness of these commitments in protecting vulnerable populations (Environmental Protection Agency, 2025).
6. **The 2025 Presidential Climate Plan:** The new administration is expected to launch a comprehensive climate policy that prioritizes renewable energy expansion, enforces stricter carbon emission standards, and integrates environmental justice into national policy frameworks. This initiative aims to strengthen federal accountability and ensure climate resilience efforts are equitably distributed across communities (Center for American Progress, 2025).

Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain in addressing systemic vulnerabilities and ensuring equitable outcomes for all communities. Comparing these policies with international benchmarks could provide valuable insights into their effectiveness.

### **Recommendations: follow up the SDGs**

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for integrating human rights considerations into climate policies. The U.S. must align its strategies with the following goals to ensure a fair and just response to climate change (United Nations, 2025):

1. Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; every person, in every country on every continent, will be impacted in some shape or form by climate change.
2. GOAL 7: Affordable and clean energy: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.

As for the nature disaster caused by climate change, the government shall focus on improving the universal human rights and those goals (United Nations, 2025).

1. Goal 11 is about making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
2. Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
3. Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

The next U.S. administration must move beyond rhetoric and implement concrete climate policies that respect and protect human rights. By incorporating equitable environmental policies and enforcing stricter accountability measures, the U.S. can serve as a global leader in climate action while safeguarding the rights of its most vulnerable populations. Only through a holistic and inclusive approach can climate justice be realized.

### **Conclusion and future challenge**

The withdrawal from the Paris Agreement under the Trump Administration marked a setback in U.S. global climate leadership, posing ongoing challenges for regaining credibility and addressing climate-related human rights issues. However, recent advancements in clean energy policies and international collaboration signal renewed potential for progress.

To ensure a sustainable future, the U.S. must prioritize integrating human rights into climate policies, fostering innovation in renewable energy, and engaging diverse stakeholders to address systemic inequalities (Center for American Progress ,2025).

Grassroots movements and younger generations play a critical role in holding leaders accountable and shaping a resilient, equitable response to the climate crisis.

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