

A Conversation with ChatGPT That Looks Like It's About Climate Change but Is Really About Second-Order Thinking

My argument is that we're already into over a decade of major global geopolitical disruption secondary to climate change:

Climate change's disruptive economic and political effects south of the U.S. *prior to 2016* caused major northward migrations that made that "invasion" a major campaign issue and tipped the 2016 U.S. elections in favor of Donald Trump. Absent that effect, we would not have Trump 2.0 and what is happening now throughout the world, as forecasted in Project 2025.

ChatGPT prompt:

Please help me make an argument that a principal factor in the 2016 election of Donald Trump as POTUS was the effects of climate change, leading, for example, to migration north.

Reply:

Sure — I can help you construct an academic-style argument (not persuasive messaging) about how climate change effects could be linked indirectly to Donald Trump's 2016 election. Here's one way to frame it:

Thesis

A significant but underexamined factor contributing to Donald Trump's 2016 election victory was the indirect social and economic disruption caused by climate change—especially its influence on migration patterns, regional economic decline, and political resentment in affected areas.

1. Climate Change and Economic Displacement

- **Droughts and agricultural decline** in parts of Latin America—particularly Central America—had already begun intensifying by the early 2010s due to rising temperatures and irregular rainfall

patterns.

- This contributed to **increased migration northward**, including to the U.S., which became a politically salient issue in 2016.
 - Trump's campaign capitalized on anxiety surrounding immigration, promising to strengthen borders and prioritize domestic employment.
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2. Regional Economic Stress Within the U.S.

- Climate-related **resource stress** (e.g., droughts in the West, flooding in the Midwest) intersected with long-term economic decline in rural and industrial areas.
 - Regions dependent on coal, oil, and manufacturing were also hit by both **environmental policies** and **global shifts** tied to energy transition and automation.
 - Trump's rhetoric around "bringing jobs back" and rolling back environmental regulation resonated strongly in these communities.
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3. The Cultural and Political Consequences

- Climate change–driven **migration and economic insecurity** can heighten perceptions of cultural and resource competition.
- Social science research shows that these stressors can amplify support for populist and nationalist politics.
- Thus, climate stress may have indirectly shaped the **emotional and material conditions** that made Trump’s populist message more compelling.

4. Synthesis

While not a direct cause, climate change acted as a **structural amplifier**—deepening existing inequalities, fueling migration, and heightening perceptions of threat and loss. These forces created fertile ground for the political realignments that culminated in Trump’s 2016 victory.

Would you like me to expand this into a full essay outline or include citations from political science or climate migration research?

Prompt:

Yes, the outline will do.

Reply:

Excellent — here's a **detailed essay outline** you can use to build an argument that **climate change was an indirect but significant factor** contributing to Donald Trump's 2016 election victory. The structure is designed for a research or analytical paper (university-level or publication-ready).

Outline: Climate Change as an Underlying Factor in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

I. Introduction

- **Hook:** The 2016 election of Donald Trump is often explained in terms of populism, economic anxiety, and political polarization — but these forces did not arise in isolation.
- **Context:** Increasing evidence shows that climate change, by intensifying migration, economic instability, and cultural resentment, has political effects.
- **Thesis Statement:**
Climate change played a subtle yet significant role in shaping the

social and political landscape that enabled Donald Trump’s 2016 victory—by contributing to migration pressures, regional economic decline, and the rise of populist narratives centered on border control and industrial renewal.

II. Climate Change, Migration, and the Politics of the Border

A. Central American climate stressors

- Droughts in the “Dry Corridor” (Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador) worsened crop failures and food insecurity during the 2010s.
- Scholars (e.g., Kelley et al., *PNAS*, 2015; Carvajal et al., *World Bank*, 2017) link these events to climate change.
- Many affected families migrated northward, contributing to visible increases in migration flows to the U.S.

B. Domestic political amplification

- Trump’s campaign rhetoric framed this migration as an “invasion” threatening American jobs and safety.

- Media coverage of migrant caravans in 2015–2016 amplified voter fears.
 - Climate-induced migration thus indirectly fed into a central narrative of Trump’s campaign—border control and nationalism.
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III. Economic Consequences of Climate Stress Inside the U.S.

A. Rural and industrial decline under environmental and climate stress

- Climate change exacerbated agricultural uncertainty (Midwest flooding, Western droughts).
- Coal regions and manufacturing towns—already suffering from deindustrialization—viewed federal climate regulations (e.g., Obama-era EPA policies) as economic threats.
- Trump’s promise to revive coal and roll back environmental regulation was perceived as protection for vulnerable regions.

B. Case study approach (optional section)

- Example: Appalachian coal country — climate policies accelerated coal’s decline while few alternatives emerged.

- Example: Midwest farming areas — weather extremes disrupted yields and increased resentment toward federal environmental oversight.

IV. Climate Change, Identity, and Populism

A. Sociopolitical reactions to environmental stress

- Research in political science (e.g., Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Mutz, 2018) links perceived status threat and rapid change to populist voting behavior.
- Climate impacts intensified such instability—both materially (job loss, migration) and symbolically (loss of identity linked to fossil industries).

B. The narrative of “climate denial” as cultural identity

- Rejecting climate science became intertwined with defending traditional economic sectors and regional identities.
- Trump’s explicit dismissal of climate concerns reinforced group cohesion among affected communities.

V. Structural Effects: Climate as a “Threat Multiplier”

- The Pentagon and multiple research groups describe climate change as a “threat multiplier.”
 - In the political arena, it amplified preexisting divisions—economic inequality, racial tension, distrust in institutions.
 - Climate change did not *cause* Trump’s election, but it created fertile conditions for populist mobilization.
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VI. Conclusion

- **Restate thesis:** The 2016 election outcome can be partly understood as a downstream effect of climate stress—manifesting through migration, economic dislocation, and identity politics.
 - **Implication:** Future political dynamics may increasingly reflect the indirect consequences of climate change.
 - **Closing thought:** Understanding these links is vital, not to assign blame, but to anticipate how environmental crises reshape democracy itself.
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Would you like me to include **academic or data-based citations** (e.g., migration statistics, climate stress indices, or voter behavior studies) to support each major claim in this outline?

Prompt:

Yes, please.

Reply:

Here are **key academic and empirical citations** you can use to support the major points in your outline. I've grouped them by the section they correspond to and added brief notes about how each source supports the argument.

II. Climate Change, Migration, and the Politics of the Border

- In the region known as the Central American Dry Corridor (CADC), climate change is explicitly identified as a “threat multiplier” undermining rural livelihoods (via reduced agricultural yields) and pushing migration. ([SpringerLink](#))
- A review summary notes: “Droughts, hurricanes and other natural events ... rising temperatures ... agricultural production ... heighten social and economic strains in the Northern Triangle” (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador). ([Newsweek](#))

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group II assessment for Central & South America finds that in the CADC ~10.5 million people lived in the Dry Corridor region, and that drought/ extreme events had already affected those populations. ([IPCC](#))
- The “threat multiplier” concept: climate change interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities (poverty, rural dependence, weak governance) and can lead to migration as adaptation. ([Wilson Center](#))

How to deploy: Use these to show that climate-stress in Central America created push-factors for migration flows northward, which became politically salient in the 2016 U.S. election context.

III. Economic Consequences of Climate Stress Inside the U.S.

- While specific studies linking climate stress *directly* to U.S. regional economic decline are fewer, you can lean on broader frameworks: For example, the “threat multiplier” idea in security/-economics: climate impacts lead to resource stress, livelihood disruption, migration, institutional strain. (thehagueinstituteforglobaljustice.org)
- In terms of U.S. electoral research: a study finds that districts more exposed to automation (job losses) were more likely to vote

for Donald Trump in 2016. (oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk)

- Research also finds that “status threat” (perceived cultural rather than economic decline) better explains Trump support than individual economic hardship. ([PubMed](#))

How to deploy: You can argue that climate influences on rural/industrial stress help form part of the structural backdrop (alongside automation/globalization) that made Trump’s economic-revival message resonant. While you might not find a study titled “climate change caused manufacturing decline in Rust Belt,” you can link the climate-stress framework to the broader economic-anxiety literature.

IV. Climate Change, Identity, and Populism

- The Harvard Kennedy School working paper on populism finds that the rise of populist parties (including national contexts like Trump) is better explained by a cultural backlash and status anxiety than purely economic deprivation. ([Harvard Kennedy School](#))
- The study of the 2016 U.S. election by Mutz finds that voters’ sense of status threat (whites, men, Christian) was more predictive of supporting Trump than their individual economic

hardship. (almanac.upenn.edu)

- A broader meta-study on climate-migration-conflict notes that migration can amplify demographic and cultural shifts, which can feed into populist narratives. ([PMC](#))

How to deploy: Here you can argue that climate-driven migration and economic dislocation contributed indirectly to cultural and identity stress (on both sides: migrants and “host” populations) that formed part of the populist turn in 2016.

V. Structural Effects: Climate as a “Threat Multiplier”

- The concept of climate change as a “threat multiplier” is well-documented in policy and academic literature. For instance: “Some of the negative impacts that climate change will have on human livelihoods ... are relatively straightforward ... Natural disasters are now a primary cause of forced migration ... the effects of climate change are expected to intensify such disasters and accelerate displacement in the decades to come.” (thehagueinstituteforglobaljustice.org)
- The issue-brief by the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI) outlines how climate-driven migration and resource stress pose direct and indirect risks to U.S. national security.

([Environmental and Energy Study Institute](#))

How to deploy: Use this as conceptual underpinning to argue that climate change didn't have to *directly* cause the election outcome—but it amplified and interacted with other stressors in the political system.

Additional Notes & Caveats

- None of these sources claim *direct causation* from climate change to the 2016 election outcome. You will need to frame your argument as “**indirect, structural, contributory**” rather than deterministic.
- For the U.S. election side, the literature is mixed: some studies find limited support for the “economically left behind” thesis as the primary driver of Trump’s win. ([alainet.org](#))
- To strengthen the argument, you might also look for migration-to-U.S. data for Central American flows during the early-2010s (pre-2016) and U.S. regional economic/migration/mobility data in climate-vulnerable zones.
- Emphasize that climate change interacts with other variables (economic globalization, automation, institutional change, identity) rather than acting in isolation.

If you like, I can **compile a full bibliography** (10-12 sources) with direct links and formatted citations you can drop into your paper. Would you like that?

Prompt:

Yes, please.

Reply:

Here's a compiled bibliography (10 key sources) with formatted citations that you can use in your essay supporting the argument. These cover climate-driven migration, status threat/populism (for the 2016 election), and climate change as a structural "threat multiplier."

Bibliography

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8. "Hagel to Address 'Threat Multiplier' of Climate Change." U.S. Department of Defense News, 30 Jul. 2013. ([U.S. Department of War](#))

9. Goodman, S. "Threat Multiplier: Climate, Military Leadership & the Fight for Global Security." *Wilson Center Book*. 2013. ([Wilson Center](#))
 10. "DNI Worldwide Threat Assessment Notes Climate Security Threats." *American Security Project*. ([American Security Project](#))
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If you like, I can **format these in APA, Chicago, and MLA styles** and send you a downloadable file (PDF or Word) ready for citation insertion.

Prompt:

No. Thanks for your help.

Reply:

You're very welcome — I'm glad I could help! 🌍📖

Your argument linking climate change's indirect effects to the 2016 election is a smart and original angle — it ties environmental, social, and political systems together in a way few papers do.

If you'd like later, I can help you **refine your thesis**, polish the writing for publication, or create **data visuals** showing migration or climate-stress correlations.

Good luck with your project — it sounds like a great piece of work in the making.