

BOILING POINT

As the planet warms, communities, policymakers and students feel the heat to question what responsibility looks like in present society.

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We often view climate change and global warming as issues for future generations, a problem to be solved, and a trend left for hippies and politicians to debate. But it is far closer to us than we realize. Global warming is happening now, emphasizing the need for adaptation and response rather than any single solution, and the responsibility to acknowledge it is collective.

In the United States alone, numerous ecosystems, communities, and individuals are under growing pressure from our present climate conditions. Sea level rise threatening

coastal communities, groundbreaking heat records intensifying disasters from hurricanes to infrastructural failure and severe drought burning through the Amazon rainforest are just a few of the consequences of global warming. Not only do these disasters pose immediate threats to those affected, but they operate as interconnected feedback loops, trickling down into niche ecosystems, economies and food systems.

Even the most environmentally concerned people feel discouraged. Attitudes and conversations we have around global warming often result in further collateral

damage, leading to hopelessness and heated debates. Exhausting right? Yet the complexity of the climate puzzle remains measurable—not apocalyptic just yet. In order to unsubscribe from spirals of doom and despair, dissecting our current stance and raising awareness alone is not enough. We must spotlight communities, individuals, movements and policies that drive meaningful catalysts of change to determine whether or not the future is as catastrophic as it seems—and to understand why environmental responsibility can feel so difficult to grasp.

The Planet At Present

To understand where we are headed, we must first confront where we are standing. Climate change impacts all living systems, extending beyond just natural ecosystems alone. Shifting weather and climate patterns are intensifying a wide range of systemic damage across the globe, compromising numerous essentials like human health and safety, access to resources, and the stability of infrastructure. Climate change is not a distant or remote concern but an ongoing reality altering daily life and normalcy worldwide.

Food systems are also under pressure. Ongoing droughts, heatwaves, disease spread, and weather extremes strain and create new challenges for farmers and agricultural industries. While adaption strategies and management approaches exist, each new challenge requires further technology, energy and investments—assets that are not always accessible or affordable to everyone.

The present moment, then, demands visible transformation and reevaluations beyond these defined, small-level systems. Social interactions with the environment, cultural behaviors and the policy frameworks that shape them must be addressed at higher institutional levels to manage anthropogenic contributions to climate change and pursue mitigation strategies focused on protection and prevention.



Policy in Theory: What Global Agreements Aim to Do

On a global scale, executing effective climate policies depend on multinational cooperations rather than any one immediate solution. One of the most widely recognized—and frequently criticized by the Trump administration—efforts is the Paris Climate Agreement. Adopted by 195 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, France in 2015, this hefty international treaty charted the course for a massive multilateral objective in a response to global warming. It was designed to limit global temperature rise between “1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels,” under an



extensive, long-term policy framework.

Through the joint execution of newly-established emissions targets and reinforced national transparency measures, the Paris Climate Agreement demonstrated global urgency for shared responsibility among nations. While it’s effectiveness and expense to the US has been heavily debated within political and economic dialogue, the Paris Climate Agreement has influenced climate initiatives beyond just the stage of world leaders. It has shaped how policy and action can be dually approached, from national to local levels, as well as acknowledging the wider social and cultural forces that condition environmental decision-making.

Why Policy Feels Slow

Analyzing current responses to emerging and persistent issues, it becomes how action may unfold unevenly. At the local level, efforts such as neighborhood beach clean ups or university waste management systems demonstrate various forms of engagements. The University of Miami operates a comprehensive waste management system, which includes the Sustainability Garden and campus dining hall composting. At a county level, Miami-Dade’s CLEO Institute, an organization driven to foster climate literacy and civic engagement, is driven to support coastal communities and the thousands affected by global warmings numerous outcomes, such as record heat and flash flooding.

City-level advances like these promote environmentally informed and active behaviors among society. However, underlying issues such as perceived individual barriers and social constraints limit these initiatives to reaching their full potential, as the overwhelming scale of global warming can feel undeniably disempowering. Research shows that even the highest environmentally concerned people struggle to feel hope or responsible to act. Many individuals experience low personal efficiency and a majority of individuals struggle to understand the certainty of their role. With the context of societal immobilization, we can consider that perhaps education or concern alone does not always translate into engagement—and can sometimes work reversibly, deepening feelings of defeat or anxiety.

A Local Perspective

Looking closer to home, South Florida paints a clear picture of what global warming impacts look like and what is at stake. From mangrove forests that serve as both nurseries

and storm buffers, to the scenic reefs and beaches that appeal to countless tourists and recreational industries, the region’s coastlines are vital for far more than any single purpose. They play a key role in sustaining the intersectional balance between our ecosystem services, the local economy and stability.

Avery Clarke, a University of Miami sophomore majoring in Ecosystem Science and Policy, acknowledges the stark reality of global warming and its repercussions for South Florida’s coveted ecosystems. Drawing from her own personal experiences and connections to social and environmental atmospheres, Clarke emphasizes that the impacts of global warming are not merely abstract concepts or debate topics but visible changes that unfold within her own community.

“I’ve seen red tide events explode exponentially along the West Coast, particularly around Naples and the Longboat Key–Sarasota area, devastating marine life and disrupting coastal communities.”

Clarke also points to rapid urban development within her own community, where keystone natural landscapes she “once felt deeply connected to” are being transformed into built environments. She describes these personal experiences as indicators of how climate change and weak environmental protections intersect on a local scale, which made “the impacts of global warming impossible to ignore.” Reflecting on these observations, Clarke explains, “Rather than watching the effects of climate change slow or improve, I’ve seen them intensify both locally and statewide, which is extremely worrisome as someone who cares deeply about Florida’s natural ecosystems.”

Yet Clarke’s perspective does not end in despair or discouragement. She recognizes common barriers to environmentally active policies and behaviors, stating that “this concern is also what motivates me.” She adds that she is studying ecosystem science and policy because she wants “to be part of the positive change, to help address and reverse climate impacts locally, one county at a time, and to protect the landscapes and ecosystems that define my home.”

While the future remains uncertain and often overwhelming, climate responsibility is shared and operates across multiple layers. To move forward, we must remain involved and active in order to navigate this complexity effectively. In a world that is shaped by change, social behaviors, and leadership, encouraging participation might be one of the most powerful steps we can take. 🌱