

Post 2020 U.S. Presidential Election  
Realistically, What Can Progressives Expect When It Comes to Key Issues  
Even with a Democratic Party Sweep?  
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**Introduction**

Assuming that the Democrats will big in the 2020 election and control Congress and the White House, what issues can progressives realistically expect to be addressed and at what level in the period that follows – 4 to 8 years. Idealism calls for a great deal to be achieved on many fronts, while realism, unfortunately, greatly reduces these expectations.

Progressive Americans go through relatively short cycles of focusing on different issues/needs at different times. Currently the “hot” issues are the Covid epidemic and health care inequalities; economic recession and unemployment; election and voting rights – access and suppression; and racial inequality – especially in the areas of economy, law enforcement, and criminal justice. But immediately before this “crisis” period, progressives focused on climate change, gun violence, economic inequality, and health care availability. In this volatile context, pervasive social media promotes rumor mongering, disinformation, fake news, and one conspiracy theory after another. Add to this a constantly tweeting, fact challenged President in an extremely polarized citizenry and the result is that the attention of the news cycle shifts every few days, if not every day. Sustaining focus on any issue is very challenging in this presentistic context which is devoted to stressing one glaring national inadequacy or problem after another.

Beyond the national scene, at the global scale grave current concerns involve over population, inadequate pandemic preparation, cyber warfare, weak commitment to treaties, fundamental international financial instability, United Nations incapacity, inequality among developed and underdeveloped nations, the looming negative impact of AI and robotics on jobs of all kinds, severe problems related to potential human genetic engineering, etc.

Complex society today at both the national and global levels faces a huge bundle of critical challenges, each of these requiring a commitment of significant planning and financial resources if it is to be adequately addressed. And at the same time that these challenges are extant, technology keeps advancing at such a pace that society never has a chance to adjust adequately to either the positive or negative consequences of its implementation. That’s the current reality!!

## **Evaluating the Situation**

When we limit our perspective to the U.S., what can progressives really expect – post 2020 and a presumed Democratic election sweep? With so many critical national issues and even more international challenges in which America must participate, the issues have to be prioritized. The main criteria for this prioritization will include:

- 1) Critical Need: How critical is the need to deal with the issue immediately; can it wait?
- 2) Extent of Commitment: Can the objectives be achieved in large measure by making changes at the planning and policy levels, or must changes in policy be followed by actions/programs that must be designed and implemented?
- 3) Level of Funding: What level of funding will be required to develop and implement the proposed changes/programs?
- 4) Time Frame: How long will it take to achieve the desired results of the proposed changes/programs?
- 5) The Beneficiaries: How many citizens from what group[s] will benefit from the proposed policy changes and any implementation of needed programs?
- 6) Power of Beneficiaries: How economically and politically powerful are the citizens who are in line to benefit from the proposed changes/programs?
- 7) The Opposition: What citizens/groups/organizations/communities/states are negatively impacted by the proposed changes/programs?
- 8) Power of The Opposition: How economically and politically powerful are the citizens/groups who will be negatively impacted by the proposed changes/programs?
- 9) Level of International/Global Involvement/Commitment: Do the proposed changes/programs require international or global level agreement, cooperation, and/or commitment to participate and support financially?

If we take any one of our national issues and put it through the above identified 9 step prioritization screening process, it will become apparent how complex the process is, and it will also become apparent how an issue that is currently given considerable emphasis may not be ranked to receive high priority. Moreover, when this singular evaluation of just this one issue goes through the additional prioritization process of being ranked among the other issues in the full list of challenges competing to be addressed and resolved, the situation becomes exponentially that much more complex and difficult.

## **Climate Change – The Test Issue**

Let's take just one issue – climate change – and follow it through a rough draft version of the evaluation process at just the national American scale.

## #1 Critical Need

Climate scientists have been emphasizing this issue for 30 years, and especially for the last 10 to 15 years, as national and international models of both the predicted and emerging consequences of human induced climate change become more and more dire at both the national and global levels. The single greatest weakness for the climate change issue receiving high priority is the fact that the predicted effects are gradual, cumulative, and only become dire in the long term future. And both the average citizen and politicians are consumed with issues that are readily observable as dire NOW. Unfortunately, Americans can plan for the long term, but they tend to be very presentistic. So, on this critical need variable, climate change gets only a moderate level ranking.

## #2 Extent of Commitment

The policy changes and planning required to adequately address this issue are system wide at all scales from communities to the nation as a whole. In addition, designing and implementing the needed programs are equally comprehensive and daunting. And as this issue is a global one, commitment at the national level only makes sense if there is a comparable commitment at the global scale. On this variable of level of commitment required, the ranking is as high as it gets.

## #3 Level of Funding

Funding planning and implementation of the diverse programs that will be needed will be extraordinarily costly at the national level alone, and the U.S. will be obliged to contribute vast resources at the global level. On this variable, the funding level commitment required is as high as it gets – probably at the level that it is likely to consume virtually all available discretionary funds.

## #4 Time Frame

Sustaining both #2 and #3 will be for at least 30 years or a generation with enormous adjustments continuing especially to address the effects of sea level rise on coastal cities and the associated sand plains. On this temporal variable, the ranking for climate change is very high.

## #5 The Beneficiaries

From droughts to fires to floods to various severe storms, the survival of all Americans as well as America as a complex society is at stake since it is the overall terrestrial and surrounding oceanic ecology that is affected. So, the ranking on this variable is as high as it gets – but only if Americans recognize how critical the issue is.

#### #6 Power of Beneficiaries

All Americans will benefit in the long term but if climate scientists and climate progressives are presently the only ones who are strongly committed, the power base is limited. So, on this variable, the ranking is currently only moderate.

#### #7 The Opposition

In the short term, the entire American fossil fuel industry [coal, oil, gas] and its vast global extensions will be negatively impacted, as well as the heavily involved financial industry. On this variable, the ranking is currently high.

#### #8 Power of The Opposition

The current American energy supply is 81% fossil fuel based. These industries and their corporate, financial, and billionaire beneficiaries control enormous wealth which they use to influence political decisions and the election of candidates who support their short term interest. Climate change deniers are promoted by these interests to sow dissent and to support the self-interests of these interests. America, along with the other developed nations, are mostly responsible for creating the climate problem, so bearing the costs of planning and implementing the needed changes will logically fall to these nations. But, Americans are reluctant to commit to the required level of funding as doing so puts at risk their country's continued superior economic welfare. So, on this variable, the ranking is high.

#### #9 Level of International/Global Involvement/Commitment

Even getting sustained agreement in principle by the U.S. and the developed nations of the world to address and plan with respect to the climate change challenge remains difficult. And commitment to financial support for the development of programs and their implementation has not even begun to be seriously pursued. Voluntary participation by nations at the policy and planning level is where the situation rests presently. And without full commitment and participation by all of at least the developed nations, each nation is reluctant to do more than the minimal required – and to do this at a slow pace. So, the ranking on this variable is low.

### **The Results**

Now, what is the overall result of this admittedly impressionistic evaluation? For all of the recent enthusiasm of many “progressives” at the national level for the proposed “Green New Deal,” a realistic evaluation of American commitment to and funding of planning and programs to address climate change is moderate at best. And at the global level – which is essential in this case, the evaluation is even lower. Readers can go through the steps and suggest their own ratings on the individual steps and determine their own overall national result. But

realistically, the likelihood is that America will commit at the policy and planning level on this issue but be reluctant to commit to the high level of financial support needed to make substantial progress on the climate change issue at either the national or global scales. So, the overall national ranking for this issue is moderate at best – even following a Democratic sweep in 2020!

### **Conclusion**

Ideally progressives may want the entire corpus of national and global issues to be fully addressed immediately. But when the extent of this corpus and the difficulty associated with adequately resolving each of the issues are recognized, it becomes apparent that realistically this will not happen – not even close! In fact, adequately addressing and resolving any of the individual issues identified is unlikely to occur over the course of an eight year presidency. More than likely progressives – even with a Democratic sweep in 2020 – will have to be satisfied with limited progress being made on some of the identified national issues and probably less on the issues that require international and global level commitment among nations. The level of cooperation and commitment necessary to achieve adequate resolutions on these many issues simply does not exist presently at the national level, and it definitely does not exist at the international and global levels.

Beyond the concerns of just American progressives, Americans as a whole and global citizens at the present time face so many grave challenges, which collectively require such a great commitment in time, planning, and implementation resources, that realistically it is unlikely that much progress will be made on most of them. This, in spite of the fact that failing in this regard may well put the survival of civilization and the complex society upon which it depends at significant risk.

Humanity: So much potential in its complex society state! But, so little ability to create the overall conditions needed to sustain its opportunity!! In retrospect, in the name of Progress, humans in complex, “developed” societies have acted so irresponsibly in the social, economic, and technological realms at the state, national, and global levels that “the chickens are now coming home to roost.” Thus, the ultimate question arises: are humans no better than beaver – doomed to go through perpetual cycles of boom and bust until their species’ opportunity is exhausted? Will we continue to be led by our short term and competitive self-interests at every social level from communities through nations; or will we commit at all scales to social cooperation and equality as well as to full ecological responsibility? Regarding expectations, whether progressives are realistic in the present or not, at least we can recognize and applaud the fact that they support the cooperative and responsible perspective!