

To be honest, no one really knows what Trump will do. Maybe not even Trump. The obvious is often the safest best. In this post, I'm going to speculate about another, slightly less dire, possibility. He may take the most obvious path - which would mean ripping the heart out of our environmental laws. For instance, he might support major amendments gutting the major federal statutes. But Trump *might* surprise us, as he has done before.

Much of Trump's thinking process is obscure, to say the least. But, assuming he doesn't feel too old for the job by then, it seems likely that he wants to be reelected in 2020 rather than rejected by the electorate. That's going to be a very tricky task. Some of the challenges were illustrated by his simultaneous selection yesterday of Reince Priebus and Steve Bannon, reflecting two very different audiences he needs to reach.

After all, Trump didn't expect to win this time, and the victory margins were very thin in some key states. He also lost the popular vote, perhaps by as much as a million votes. According to the *Washington Post*,

"This election was effectively decided by 107,000 people in these three states [Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin]. Trump won the popular vote there by that combined amount. That amounts to 0.09 percent of all votes cast in this election."

Trump's victory was a surprise, and we should not discount the significance of his support by millions of Americans. But they were not a majority of voters, and a significant number of them voted *against* Clinton as much as they did for Trump. In other words, despite its historic significance, it's vastly premature to say that the election represents the future of American politics.

In 2020, the demographics will have shifted slightly against him, with fewer elderly whites and more minorities and millennials. Next time, he's unlikely to run against anyone with Clinton's degree of unpopularity and ethics criticisms. And after four years in office, he won't be able to claim to be a complete political outsider, particularly if he sides with establishment Republicans on every issue. So he can't count on the same thin majority.

Winning this time required Trump to mobilize working class whites, as everyone knows. It also required holding more suburban white voters than predicted and having low turnout by Democratic voters. According to the National Review (correcting an earlier story), the 2012 turnout for Obama would have beaten

Trump in the Electoral College. Trump also seems to have held on to about the same Latino vote share as Romney. To win again he needs to keep his white nationalist base energized, avoid driving away these other elements of his coalition, and keep down the enthusiasm of Democratic voters. Thus, he faces a different electorate and a much different electoral challenge than Senate Republicans, let alone House Republicans in safe districts. As others have observed, this means that he has to satisfy his populist voters in ways that might be at odds with some traditional conservative dogma.

Some of these political concerns are much more relevant than others to environment and energy issues. He clearly needs to deliver in some form on his promises to undo the Clean Power Plan for CO₂ and the wetland-protection rule. He also needs to open more lands to oil and gas exploration as part of his energy plan. But if he and his political advisors are smart, they may want to avoid appearing too dramatically anti-environmental, particularly on issues that relate to health. Environmental issues haven't been a priority for many voters but big dramatic actions – akin to those in the first years of the Reagan Administration – could increase the political traction of those issues. His populist voters and hardcore conservatives may not care, but he can't afford to lose a lot of white suburban voters. He also has reasons to want to avoid ramping up Democratic turnout any more than he really has to. It was this sort of political calculation that led Reagan to pull back from blatant attacks on environmental protection after the first two years after getting rid of Anne Gorsuch (EPA) and James Watt (Interior).

Of course, we don't know if he or his political advisors are making this kind of calculation. He may fall into the thrall of House Republicans and movement conservatives, but that probably won't get him reelected. The smart move anyway could be to adopt a stance that looks more like George W. Bush and less like current House Republicans – in other words, to tamp down on environmental regulation and enforcement but mostly in ways that aren't radical enough to attract widespread public attention.

There is also talk in Congress of passing a variety of new procedural laws that would hamper the regulatory process and even require congressional approval for new regulations. I can't see why Trump would let congressional Republicans veto whatever regulatory moves he decides to make, or more generally, why he would want them hampering his executive authority. Maybe he'll go along with those or maybe he won't.

George W. Bush took a hard right turn very soon after he came into office, because Karl Rove concluded that they needed to increase GOP turnout rather than attract moderate voters. Even so, without 9/11, Bush probably would have lost in 2004. It's not clear how much more Trump can do to increase GOP turnout, and he can't afford to lose the moderate suburban voters he still has.

All of this makes it hard to judge how much Trump will carry through on all of his electoral promises to abolish EPA, cut regulations massively, etc. He doesn't, after all, have a huge track record of keeping promises in his earlier career. So he may violate expectations. Or he may think none of the political calculations really matter - that he can afford to break all the rules and win again in 2020. Or maybe he really won't be interested in being re-elected. He may follow the course Newt Gingrich seems to be signaling: double down on the positions that got him to the White House, or he may go toward Putin-style authoritarianism.

In other words, maybe I'm over-thinking this. But I'll bet that at least some of his advisors are taking a hard look at how to hold his winning coalition without jolting future Democratic turnout drastically upwards.