We're now a year away from Election Day, but things are already starting to heat up. And the outcome couldn't be more important. The next election could transform U.S. environmental policy, for better or worse.

A GOP trifecta in 2024 would put Trump in the White House with GOP control of Congress. That would be at best a replay of 2017-2019 in terms of environmental policy. There would probably be an even greater impact due to shifts within the GOP. A Democratic trifecta, in contrast, would cement Biden's environmental policy and provide a basis for further advances.

This is an environmental blog, not a political one. Yet, given intense polarization over environmental issues, the line can be blurry. We are still more than a year away from Election Day, but it's not too soon to see how things are shaping up. For guidance, since I'm not a political expert, I'm relying on two respected political websites, Sabato and Cook .

The White House. Let's start with the White House. At present, this looks like a close race, as in 2020., but Democrats seem to be favored at this point. Sabato shows them with a significant electoral college edge, needing only a quarter of the toss-up electoral votes to win. Cook shows a slimmer edge, with the Democrats needing 40% of the toss-ups to win.

The Senate. The Democrats have a lot more Senate seats in play during this electoral cycle than the GOP and will have to fight hard to keep control of the Senate. Their only conceivable pick-up opportunities seem to be Cruz's seat in Texas and Rubio's in Florida, both of which are truly long shots.

Seats currently held by Democrats in Ohio and Arizona are considered toss-ups. Republicans may have a slim edge in flipping West Virginia, while Democrats may have a similar edge in holding Montana. Republicans need only one Senate pick-up if they win the White House, two otherwise.

Democrats can hold the Senate if they win all the toss-ups and win the White House. If they lose the White House, they will need to win the toss-ups and also hold West viVirginia.

The House. According to Sabato, there are 17 toss-up races. However, Sabato also predicts that the North Carolina gerrymander will give Republicans three extra seats, so they will only need to win four of the tossups to keep control of the House.

Without the North Carolina gerrymander, it would be a much closer race. Cook's estimate shows that the Democrats need to win about 60% of the toss-up races.

So the House will be an uphill battle for the Democrats. On the other hand, the dysfunction on the GOP side of the House may give Democrats a boost.

The Upshot. If these analysts are right, the Democrats now have a small edge in terms of electoral votes. In congressional races, however, the Republicans have the edge in the Senate and perhaps the House. Keeping the Senate, in particular, would probably require a very strong Democratic surge nationally.

What to Watch For. We're very far from the election. Here are some of the key factors that swing voters:

1. ***A wild card.*** With over a year to go, there's certainly time for some big, unexpected development in the economy or internationally, or a major health crisis by a leading candidate. We don't know yet how the Gaza crisis might impact voters.
2. ***Trump's criminal law troubles.*** So far those haven't shifted things much politically, but that could change as these cases move toward trial.
3. ***Strengthening economy.*** Inflation is slowing, and the economy is strong. It remains to be seen whether that will eventually take the edge off of voter discontent with Biden. Of course, if the economy turns sour, that would only make things worse for Biden.
4. ***Government shutdown.*** It still seems likely that the Freedom Caucus in the House will force the government into a shutdown. Will the voters blame Republicans?
5. ***Abortion.*** Abortion has been a strong issue for the Democrats in post-*Dodd* elections. We don't know how largely it will figure in this one. The GOP's selection of a pro-life crusader for House Speaker might give Democrats an opening.
6. ***Candidate quality.*** Republicans have been badly hurt in recent Senate elections by inexperienced extremist candidates. GOP leaders have been working hard to prevent that from happening again, with some initial success. The base could prove restive, however, and saddle the party with some weak candidates.

Putting all this together underlines the amount of uncertainty remaining at this point. It would be a serious mistake, however, for anyone to take for granted the

outcome in 2024. Things are much too close for that at this point.