

Like the Count on Sesame Street, “I Like to Count Things.” This post is an example (and illustrates why simply counting things can sometimes be very enlightening.) My impression was that the Administration has already brought out the big guns, putting all its biggest ideas on the table. To see if that was true, I thought it would be useful to count executive orders and see if they were staying on pace. The short answer is that things are slowing down, with far fewer initiatives meriting formal presidential involvement.

My counting exercise involved the number of Trump executive orders by month. I didn’t count other executive actions such as presidential memoranda and proclamations. I also left out tariff and foreign policy actions.

There were some judgment calls. For instance, I left in the TikTok orders, even though theoretically they’re about relations with China. But Trump’s goal is all about keeping US TikTok users happy. The TikTok orders distort the total in a way, because all the TikTok orders are the same: They repeatedly extend the time for companies to freely violate the ban. There are multiple orders only to maintain the pretense that Trump isn’t planning to permanently violate the law.

With that background out of the way, the numbers look like this:

Jan.	40
Feb.	20
March.	24
April	30
May	12
June	6
July	8
Aug.	16
Sept.	7
Oct.	1

Nov. 2

Just eyeballing the list, you can see the overall decline in numbers. January got off to a huge start, especially considering that there were only eleven days where Trump was in office. There've been ups and downs since then, but generally things have trended downward.

You can see this even more clearly if you look at the average per month in each quartile:

Q1	28
Q2	16
Q3	10.3

The monthly average so far in Q4 is 1.5 (3 executive orders in 2 months). Of course, we can't rule out the possibility of a tsunami of executive orders in December. But you'd think there would at least be rumors if that many new initiatives were planned.

That doesn't mean that the Administration has become harmless. On the contrary, it is now at the stage where the minions devote themselves to carrying out the President's actions, wreaking havoc in the process. But appearances matter too. The intimidating scale of the initial actions has now slipped into the routine of ordinary government, allowing the opposition to recover from its initial paralysis.

Assuming the trend continues, a thought I had early in the year will bear out: One downside of "shock and awe" is that you risk a perception of declining momentum later on. It's like starting the fireworks show with the grand finale; after you've shot off all your big rockets, the rest of the show seems dull, and the audience may just wander away.