

Almost eight years ago to the day, I wrote a [post](#) titled “One Year and Counting.” I was writing at the end of Trump’s first year in office. And here we are again, one year into a second Trump Administration. Trump’s basic hatred of environmental protection is unchanged. But this time he has adopted a more radical approach.

Below, I’ll explain the similarities and differences between the headstrong anti-environmentalism of the first term and the harder-edged radicalism of today, along with some of the barriers that still face Trump.

What is the same this time?

Here are some observations about the first Trump Administration from my 2018 post that remain valid today:

- “Trump campaigned on opposition to all things environmental and promised exponential growth in fossil fuels.” *Also true in 2024.*
- “He [Trump] said he would open public lands to more mining and drilling, and he’s doing his best there too.” *Also a continuing theme.*
- “As in other areas, the Administration has refused to pivot to the center in any respect.” *Same as 2018, but Trump’s actions are more extreme, both globally and domestically*

And here are a couple of 2018 observations about barriers to Trump’s actions that also remain pertinent today:

- “If the Democrats manage to retake the House, they’ll be in a good position to protect agency budgets and fight off legislative riders. ... In the meantime, the Democrats will have strengthened their positions in state governments, allowing expansion of renewable energy in a dozen or more states.” *Also true this time, assuming the midterms go the same way as 2018.*
- “Regulatory rollbacks would be harder to achieve than some Trump Administration officials seemed to think because of the need to comply with rule-making procedures and assemble sufficiently strong justifications to survive judicial review.” *They’re doing their very best to short-circuit the repeal process, often relying on emergency declarations and procedural dodges. But rollbacks are often based on novel legal theories that may be hard to defend in court.*

To the extent that these parts of the 2017 experience remain valid this time around, there’s a good chance of limiting Trump’s longterm damage to environmental

protection. But some things have changed, with mixed implications for the future.

What has changed?

2025 wasn't just a replay of 2017. The most glaring difference has been the Administration's willingness to openly violate budget and civil service rules. Trump has slashed thousands of positions and billions of dollars of spending, eliminating some offices entirely (environmental justice) and leaving others as hollow shells (DOJ's environmental section). The term "bloodbath" does not seem inappropriate. This being Martin Luther King Day, it's worth noting that the carnage included abolishing every environmental justice program in the government, firing most of the staff, disowning environmental justice as a goal, and refocusing the civil rights efforts on protecting whites.

Trump had tried to obtain similar cuts from Congress in his first term but was unable to get Congress on board. He resolved the problem by going it alone this time. Although this was likely illegal, he has nevertheless been able to inflict major damage on key government institutions, which will require major rebuilding before they can function effectively again.

Because congressional Republicans have been so servile this time, Trump was also able to flout congressional prerogatives at will and to force Republican moderates to rollback clean energy support even at the expenses of people in their own districts. This was all the more damaging because the previous Administration's major environmental accomplishments had been a dramatic expansion in government support for clean energy.

What barriers does Trump face?

There has been change here compared to 2018 in both directions. Some barriers have been weaker and some stronger.

Besides having a more compliant Congress than in his first term, Trump has also been largely successfully this time in silencing business opposition to his policies and pushing any remaining corporate support for climate action undercover. His open use of government power to reward friends and punish enemies has intimidated the corporate world. Still, many corporate sustainability efforts are quietly continuing.

On the other hand, legal opposition to Trump has dwarfed the level in Trump's first term. More than a hundred injunctions have been [issued](#) against Administration actions. That's well beyond what we saw in Year 1 of Trump's previous term.

I closed my 2017 post with this: "One characteristic of the Trump Administration is a ceaseless stream of controversies and dramas. But generally speaking, the amount of actual legal change has been much more limited, because the system is designed to provide checks on administrative and legislative action." It remains to be seen how well those checks will function this time around.

Beyond these environmental issues, there is the larger question of whether democracy as we have known it will survive. That, too, remains to be seen.