

I published a [post](#) a week ago about prospects for the upcoming 2026 elections. I didn't say much, however, about why the results will matter for the environment. No matter what happens electorally, Trump will still be in the White House and able to use executive powers to favor fossil fuels and bulldoze environmental protections. Nevertheless, the elections could still make a real difference in environmental terms. Even just taking the House would matter, but there are additional potential environmental gains if there are power shifts in the Senate or governorships.

The best way to understand the shifts is probably to look at what Trump has been able to do with the support of Congress and then consider how the situation would shift if Democrats take one or both Houses.

Funding cuts. Trump is eager to cut budgets for environmental agencies, ax their workers, and demolish their funding programs. Even under Republican control, Congress hasn't gone along with this, but it would be much harder to do so if Democrats had a majority. A majority in the House would make a real difference, but Democratic leverage would increase if they had more votes in the Senate or even had control there. In addition, Trump would no longer be able to use the reconciliation process to cut environmental programs, because that requires control of both Houses. Finally, Democrats could use control over funding as a lever to win other concessions from the administration.

Regulatory vetoes. The Congressional Review Act has been used by Trump and his congressional supporters to overturn pro-environmental decisions by the Biden Administration. This allows them to avoid the procedural hassles of repealing actions through the normal administration as well as the Senate filibuster as a barrier to legislative action. One way they've been able to do this is to use the override process against administrative actions that don't really qualify as regulations. None of this will work if they lose control of the House or Senate.

Investigations. Control of Congress has given Trump the luxury of being immune from congressional investigations of even the most egregious conduct. That immunity would be gone if Democrats controlled either the House or the Senate. Trump's anti-environmental actions would be subject to the full glare of publicity, including the numerous conflicts of interests that permeate his Administration.

Judicial appointments. Trump's first-term judicial appointees were a mixed bag: some judges who were very conservative but serious about trying to follow the law;

others who were only motivated by ideology and would vote against environmental protection every single time. In this term, the appointees look even worse: chosen for loyalty to Trump and MAGA with little regard to other factors. The House has no role in judicial appointments, but Democrats could block these appointments if they controlled the Senate.

Agency appointments. The Republican Senate has been more or less a rubber stamp for Trump's agency appointments, no matter how unqualified or extremist they were. Exceptions have been few and far between. Again, a Democratic Senate could block those appointments. While there are various workarounds a president can use to operate with acting agency heads, those have their limits. Not being able to get Senate confirmation can still restrain the President's ability to put terrible people in positions of power. Moreover, control of confirmations is another bargaining chip for getting other kinds of concessions.

State elections. State-level environmental action has been more important than ever with Trump in control of the federal government. Winning gubernatorial races and state legislative seats can make a real difference. So could winning races for state attorney general, since in most cases they decide on what legal positions to take independent of the governor.

It's clear that environmental protection isn't at the top of voters' minds right now, compared with the economy and war. But how the elections come out could mean a real change of course in terms of the environment. Or if nothing else, it could at least apply the brakes to Trump's headlong rush to eliminate environmental safeguards.