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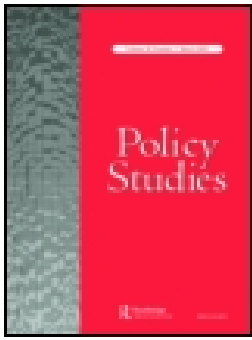
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The environmental legacy of President Trump

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ABSTRACT

President Trump had a profound, largely adverse impact on environmental and climate policy, both domestically and internationally. In addition to rolling back environmental regulations and related policies, Trump sought to undermine the institutions and core values undergirding environmental and climate protection. This article analyses Trump's environmental tenure and legacy, examining key policies and regulations, but also norms, values and discourse. Drawing on insights from new institutionalism, the article explores three different dimensions of Trump's potential environmental legacy – organisational, policy and ideational. For each it identifies the institutional and discursive factors shaping Trump's impact, its "stickiness" and durability. It then analyses attempts by the Biden Administration and others to counter, reshape or chip away at that potential legacy. Re-visiting and adapting core institutionalist assumptions, the analysis suggests a decisive factor determining Trump's legacy is not his own actions and narrative but rather how – and how successfully – other institutional actors support, spread or counter them. The article finds that while Trump's impact on organisations, regulations and even policies can be diluted (and his legacy diminished), Trump's attack on the norms and trust underpinning environmental action may be more long lasting.

Introduction

The Trump Administration's impact on US environmental and climate policy was immediate and unmistakeable. Within weeks of commencing his term Trump began rescinding or weakening a record number of regulations designed to cut emissions, protect wildlife, ban dangerous pesticides, and limit pollution of waters, land and air. Denying the overwhelming scientific consensus on the causes of climate change, he opened new land to oil and gas drilling, and issued permits for controversial oil pipelines. Vowing to "end the war on coal" he attempted to dismantle Obama's Clean Power Plan, which was designed to regulate carbon emission from power plants. He pulled the US out of the major UN Paris Climate Agreement, abdicating US's leadership role in combatting

global climate change. Just as consequential as these policy actions were his attempts to undermine the agencies, institutions and core values undergirding environmental and climate protection in the US and abroad. Now that Trump has left the White House, scholars are turning their attention to what might be his legacy in this area. Did his actions signal a more profound shift in US policy in areas of environment and climate? Will his imprint endure? Or will his legacy in this area be short lived as the Biden Administration – with a radically different set of priorities and positions – serves his term. Drawing on literature from new institutionalism, this article examines the actions of the Trump Administration in the area of environment and climate, and the legacy these actions are likely to leave.

The next section provides an overview of new institutionalism and its key insights, with a specific emphasis on notions of institutional inertia, actor interchange and discursive interaction. The article then examines three different dimensions of Trump's potential environmental legacy: *organisational legacy* examines Trump's impact on federal environmental departments and agencies, with particular emphasis on agency expertise, morale and leadership. *Policy legacy* refers to Trump's possible long term impact on both regulatory and legislative policies. *Ideational legacy* examines the power and durability of the "Trumpian" ideas, values and norms shaping his environmental and climate policy. In each case I examine as well the Biden Administration's attempts to limit or counter Trump's legacy, and the possible success of those attempts. The article argues that while Trump's impact on organisations, regulations and even policies can be diluted (and his legacy diminished), his attack on the core values, norms and trust underpinning environmental action may be more long lasting.

Presidential legacy and institutionalism

Scholars interested in a President's legacy traditionally draw on approaches taken from presidential biography, presidential power, political history, and leadership studies (Cullinane and Ellis 2019; Howell 2003; Kelso 2017). While consulting these approaches, this article instead draws on Institutionalist theories – especially new institutionalism – to examine Trump's legacy. New Institutionalism (NI) is not routinely applied to presidential legacy, but its focus on institutional explanations for policy continuity and change can be well adapted to examine legacy in general, and Trump's legacy in particular. In its broadest sense institutionalism focuses on the role of institutions – formal and informal – and their importance in social, economic, and political life (Ansell 2021). Traditional institutionalists limit their study to "hard" institutions – executives, legislatures, courts. New institutionalism extends its scope to factors beyond these formal roles or legal powers, focusing also on the role of values, norms and informal conventions that govern exchanges between actors. NI itself contains several different variants, emphasising either historical, rational choice, sociological or discursive elements.[1] They are not mutually exclusive and I draw on several different variants to examine the different dimensions of Trump's legacy. Indeed, by combining insights from different variants the interconnections and synergies between these approaches become more apparent.

New Institutionalism is not a theory but a set of ideas that help us derive analytical insights. Of particular relevance to studying legacy are NI's ideas regarding change

and continuity. NI first draws our attention to several institutional dynamics that render permanent change difficult, especially in a multilevel, complex federal system like the US. NI scholars explain how policies require agreement at several points along a "chain of decisions" made in different arenas and at many different levels; there are multiple opportunities for vetoes along this chain, especially when legislative change is required (Immergut 1990). Similarly relevant is the related concept of path dependencies – the idea that once a particular path is taken, it is very difficult to get back on the rejected path (Krasner 1984, 225). This concept helps us ascertain which changes will likely endure and why. NI also helps identify where change *is* likely to occur – the "critical junctures" or crisis points that can spark change in an otherwise inert system (Pierson 2000). New institutionalism – especially its discursive variants – also directs our attention to cognitive and discursive elements of policy interaction – including the role of ideas, norms and narrative. Exploring discursive interaction can help us track how actors seek to bring about change through language and narrative, and whether that change will endure. Finally, NI also stresses the interaction of these many different dynamics and actors. For change to stick or a legacy to endure, it must produce positive feedbacks which make them amenable to other powerful actors, institutions and vested interests (Fioretos 2011). When studying a President's ability to bring about enduring change, for instance, NI would direct our focus away from the President alone, and towards other political actors, their power to veto, interpret and spread new rules or norms (Mahoney and Thelen 2010).

In this article, NI will not be used to *predict* what Trump's legacy will be. Instead, I draw on its insights to identify and discuss the different conditions and dynamics more likely to lead to a permanent "Trump imprint" in certain areas of environment and climate policy, versus those suggesting Trump's legacy will fade – eventually if not immediately. To explore this question the next sections break down his potential environmental legacy into three areas, and examines the durability or "staying power" of each.

Organisational legacy

Organisational legacy refers to Trump's impact on formal institutions (agencies and departments), including their leadership, funding, ethos and procedures. The Trump Administration's immediate impact on federal agencies and institutions was significant. Trump sought to undermine or reshape the mission of agencies charged with protecting the environment, govern energy and transport, and regulate public lands and resources. One of Trump's first moves was to appoint a series of climate denialists and oilmen to his cabinet. His first appointment to head the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – the federal institution charged with upholding, implementing and enforcing environmental legislation – was Scott Pruitt, a fierce critic of the EPA who had sued it several times in his previous role, and openly challenged its entire remit of environmental protection. When Pruitt had to leave office because of ethics scandals his replacement was Anthony Wheeler, a lawyer specialising in defending coal and fossil fuel firms. Both Pruitt and Wheeler attempted to change dramatically the mission and ethos of the EPA, especially its oversite function. According to Justice Department data, the number of pollution

cases referred for criminal prosecution under Trump's EPA was the lowest in over 30 years (Knickmeyer 2019).

Meanwhile, the Trump Administration sought to strip agencies' budgets and resources used to fund science, experts and research. His Administration purged academic scientists from these agencies' scientific advisory boards, replacing them with representatives of private industry (Friedman 2020). Other agency staff, unhappy with the way they were treated, left voluntarily. Trump's proposed budget included huge cuts in funding for the EPA but also scientific agencies (such as National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) critical to reviewing and monitoring climate and environmental degradation.[2] These organisational and budgetary moves were part of a wider effort to dismantle the regulatory state and its organisational apparatus. An agency's reputation depends on robust procedures and adherence to science; these qualities help garner support and deference from other actors including legislators, judges and the public. Tump's actions were attempts to undermine those agencies' core effectiveness and authority.

As dramatic as these moves were, their longer term impact is likely to be less dramatic. First, other actors, including Congress, refused to sanction some of the more drastic cuts (such as the EPA's budget). Secondly, even while denied funding and autonomy, these agencies managed to assert themselves into the regulatory policy process, thereby slowing the impact of Trump's organisational assault. An example of administrative pushback is seen in the failure of Trump's attempt to undermine the influential National Climate Assessment – a multiyear report which pulls together the work of scientists across federal agencies. Despite pressure put on authors to "tone down the findings" the report was released unchanged and its assessment – including an outline of how climate change would damage not just ecosystems but seriously endanger public safety and economic growth – was widely covered. Trump subsequently stated he "didn't believe" the assessment and his Press Secretary claimed – falsely – the report was "not based on facts" (Flavelle 2021). But the report's release underlined the resilience of federal scientists and their ability to counter at least the most blatant of presidential bullying.

Thirdly, the eviscerated federal organisations were assisted by action at state level, with state agencies taking on some of the research, standard setting and monitoring normally carried out by federal level (Bomberg 2017a; Lin 2019). An even more significant counter came with the election of President Biden. The new Administration promised to restore immediately federal departmental and agency funding, leadership and autonomy. One of Biden's first presidential memos announced a "return to science" and restoration of agency prestige and respect (White House 2021c).

Biden's presidential appointments underlined even more starkly a change in the leadership and mission of key agencies and departments. His choice to lead one of the most central environmental agencies – the EPA – illustrated this reversal. Michael S. Regan, a former environmental official from North Carolina, was well known for his strong record on enforcement but also his emphasis on environmental and climate justice. Biden appointed Representative Deb Haaland to head the Department of Interior (which manages millions of acres of federal lands, including national parks, wildlife refuges, and mineral rich deposits). Haaland is the first Native American cabinet member and was a vocal opponent of Trump's handling of land use, mining and policy. Similarly

the Department of Energy's head – Jennifer Granholm – is an enthusiastic clean energy advocate. Her appointment represented a shift in environmental and energy priorities, but also illustrates Biden's view that climate protection and economic recovery are inseparably and positively linked.

An even more powerful "legacy busting" move was Biden's creation of new cabinet level posts designed to prioritise and propel climate policy. A "White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy" was charged with integrating climate into all other domestic policy. Chosen to lead it was eminently qualified Gina McCarthy who had served under President Obama as head of the EPA. To serve as a parallel "climate czar" in security and foreign policy Biden appointed former Secretary of State John Kerry as special "Climate envoy at the National Security Council". Whereas Trump sought to sever the link between climate and security (he removed climate change from a list of national security threats in 2019), the creation of a new post – and its embedding in the National Security Council – illustrated its clear elevation in the new Administration. Moreover, appointing Kerry – who signed the UN Paris Climate Agreement on behalf of the US in 2015 – also underlined the Administration's global engagement and return to the science-based expertise of the Obama administration. Indeed, these and many other environmental related appointments suggested not just an un-doing of Trump legacy but the continuation of Obama's legacy.[3]

One aspect of organisational legacy more challenging for Biden to undo will be the legacy of Trump's judicial appointments. Trump was able to make many federal judicial appointments during his term, including to the Supreme Court. While predicting the behaviour of judges is difficult, the current Supreme Court, with its strong conservative majority,[4] could challenge the Biden Administration's policies and regulations. Particularly relevant is the possible judicial revisiting of the landmark 2007 decision *Massachusetts v EPA* which has enabled the EPA to regulate greenhouse gases. The current Chief Justice John Roberts dissented in the original ruling.

In sum, the Biden Administration signals a clear pivot away from the previous administration's organisational ethos and priorities, replacing it with a respect for agency autonomy and a far more ambitious, science-based embrace of climate and environmental protection. His pivot will be assisted by an experienced, bold leadership team, and support from within agencies themselves. With the possible exception of Trump's court appointments, Trump's organisation legacy in this area – undermining expertise, appointing oilmen to environmental posts, denying climate science – is likely be weak as agencies regain their authority and respect. His imprint is not erased, but it is clearly diluted.

Policy legacy

Policy legacy refers to what impact the Trump Administration had on actual policies and regulations, and what of these is likely to endure. For an analysis of legacy, it is useful to separate regulatory policies and legislative policies.

Regulatory legacy

Trump's regulatory legacy is closely linked to his attempts to emasculate scientific expertise as described above. But his specific regulatory legacy focuses more centrally on his

attempted rollback of regulations designed to protect environment and combat climate change. Presidential attempts to drive environmental deregulation are not new. Under previous Republican Administrations (especially Ronald Reagan and George W Bush), executive actions favouring deregulation constrained federal government's ability to protect environment and address climate change (Harris 2009). But the scale, speed and intensity of Trump's regulatory rollback was breath-taking. A Harvard study tracking rollbacks documented over 100 such attempts, covering a vast range of environmental and climate measures including those designed to limit mercury and methane emissions, reduce carbon emissions from power plants and cars, and protect wildlife and wetlands (Harvard Law School 2019). His Administration also loosened energy efficiency standards, and shrunk the borders of national parks to open up more land for oil and gas leasing.

Despite its scope, Trump's regulatory legacy is already fading. Many of these proposed changes began to unravel even during Trump's term. Institutional scholars remind us how less visible institutional players – civil servants and bureaucrats – can exercise discretion in both the interpretation and enforcement of institutional rules and norms (Mahoney and Thelen 2010 Konisky and Woods 2018). Agencies do not simply follow the cues of their presidential masters, but rather defend their own agencies' interests. During the Trump Administration many bureaucrats used this ability to mitigate or stifle Trump's regulatory changes. For example, staff in the EPA and other federal agencies intentionally included in regulatory documents information or statistics that highlighted the cost to human life Trump's proposed regulatory changes could cause. Conversely, they included in their reports the long term economic *benefits* the previous regulation would bring. Embedding that information enabled subsequent legal challenges, especially by environmental lawyers seeking to chip away at Trump's regulatory rollback. This example underlines the role of institutional actors' own autonomy and preferences. Indeed the actions were described by federal career scientists themselves as "a civic and professional duty, done to ensure that science informs policy outcomes and protects the public" (Davenport 2020).

A second reason Trump's regulatory legacy is likely to fade is that his rollbacks and reversals were primarily implemented through executive orders. Executive orders are signed – and revoked – by presidential action alone. They can be used to bypass Congress, but then enjoy neither the durability nor stability of actual Congressional legislation. That means they can themselves be overturned by subsequent executive action. The inauguration of President Biden brought precisely that reversal. Within his first week Biden signed a flurry of executive orders overturning Trump's regulatory action on a range of issues. Warning that climate change posed an existential threat, Biden reasserted his campaign pledge of immediate climate action to achieve net-zero emissions on the power grid by 2035 and economy-wide by 2050. He announced the cancellation of controversial oil pipelines and a moratorium on all new oil leases on federal land. He introduced ambitious water and land conservation policies (which would override Trump's deregulatory moves) as well as positive job measures linked to renewable energy, electrification of vehicles and other infrastructure projects. These reversals mark a direct attempt to undo Trump's legacy. Of course, precisely because these are executive orders and not embedded in legislation, they, too many be short lived should a Trump Republican or supporter enter the White House in 2024. The result

could be a cycle of impermanence whereby regulations and executive policy shifts, whiplash fashion, from one Administration to the next.

However, institutionalists offer important hints about the durability of Biden's changes in this regard. Regulatory change – even impermanent executive orders – *can* endure if other players support, adopt and embrace them (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Crucial here will thus be the extent to which Biden's executive orders are endorsed by other key actors, including lower level government officials, public and business actors. There are signs that many of them will be. The shift away from coal to lower carbon fuel sources is already well underway. Firms, states and localities had already begun work decarbonising or protecting environment in their own state or localities, even without federal support or regulation (Rabe 2021; Bomberg 2017a). Indeed, working with an array of civil society groups, these government, community and business leaders formed the "We"re Still In' coalition[5] which pledged to meet targets set in the Paris Agreement. These actors have reason to embrace rather than resist the regulatory changes introduced by Biden. The same is true for many larger corporate actors. When tough mileage regulation was introduced by the Obama Administration the auto industry balked; one early move of the Trump administration was to roll them back. Four years later the context has changed. By early 2021 General Motors (GM), Ford and other US auto makers are themselves embracing the very changes (electrification, tougher mileage standards) Biden is proposing. Stating that "Climate change is real, and we want to be part of the solution by putting everyone in an electric vehicle" GM CEO Mary Barra announced in January 2021 that GM would eliminate by 2035 all gasoline and diesel light-duty cars and SUVs. Other manufacturers followed with similar pledges. The shift provides an example of the key role vested interests play in institutional change (Fioretos 2011). For our purposes it suggests that rather then cementing Trump's legacy of support for polluting activities, key actors are likely to allow that legacy to fade, in many case actively supporting Biden's low carbon regulatory agenda.

Legislative legacy

Trump's impact on *legislative policy* will be more difficult to undo. Not because Trump instituted major legislative change in this area; he did not. Instead, what is more likely to survive is Trump's legislative legacy of federal *inaction* on major issues of climate or environment. That inaction is not only a result of Trump, though he contributed to it. The main source of legislative environmental inaction preceded Trump. Institutionalists point to the many veto points in the US federal system – actors in different institutions, different branches of government and at different levels of governance – who can block action at several points in the policymaking process (Immergut 1990). In the US, a plethora of organized interests can further stagnate change and render any major reform – especially the sort required by major initiatives to address climate change – particularly difficult. These veto points and entrenched interests have contributed to the well known path-dependent process of "locking in" fossil fuel based systems, despite the environmental externalities they engender, and the existence of cost-effective alternatives (Unruh 2000, 817). Indeed, Kraft, Vig, and Rage (2021, p.7) recently described US climate change policy as "something of a poster child" for governmental gridlock, divided authority and inertia. Accompanying these structural constraints are informal

norms such as intensified partisanship and entrenched adversarialism. Both norms were exacerbated by Trump whose divisive language served to widen partisan chasms.

These legislative dynamics still remain, which means in the area of major environment or climate action the legacy of inaction is hard to break. The current US Congress shows no appetite for a substantial climate bill and not much bipartisan support to achieve it. Even though Democrats formally hold control of both Houses, most major legislative change requires more than a majority because of institutional rules and norms, especially the Senate filibuster. Some bipartisan support remains necessary. The "shadow of Trump" may explain a reluctance of Republicans to reach across the aisle. But even without that shadow, pre-existing institutional pathologies of the US legislative system make the bipartisan consensus difficult to achieve.

There is, however, an exception to the institutional dynamics set out above. That exception can occur with "critical junctures" – moments of major crisis and uncertainty during which "political actors have much more capacity than usual to fight policy inertia and bring about transformative change" (Béland et al. 2020). The pandemic is certainly one such crisis or "exogenous shock" which could act as a trigger for institutional and policy change (Pierson 2000). Crucial here is the extent to which Biden's climate policies are viewed as a response to the pandemic crisis rather than a "pure" climate or environmental policy. The Biden team have certainly framed these policies as pandemic responses and presented them in this light. Biden has coaxed Congress to go along with his budget, stimulus and infrastructure proposals primarily as a means to address recovery while also – parenthetically – contributing to a decarbonisation agenda needed to address climate change. That bipartisan framing is not just a discursive exercise, it's a way to overcome the inbuilt inertia characterising US climate legislation in last decades.

Biden's success in this bipartisan outreach exercise is still uncertain. In spring 2021, both Houses of Congress passed, and Biden signed, a massive $1.9 trillion American Recovery Plan (ARP) that included significant funding for federal energy and environmental agencies, city and state environmental projects, and energy assistance for low income households.[6] An even more ambitious, climate-infused infrastructure bill – the American Jobs Plan – was proposed later that spring. But Biden's bipartisan messaging has so far fallen flat: the ARP bill was passed by a tiny majority, entirely on partisan lines. The Jobs Plan is unlikely to secure more than than a razor-thin, partisan-based majority. (Proposed as budget measures, these bills are able to circumvent normal Senate filibuster rules that normally require a supermajority.) The bills do not therefore represent the end – or even circumvention – of partisan inertia. Even so, the broad public support for these recovery measures – and their potential to gain "winners" from a host of different constituencies at different levels of governance and society, may result in longer term buy-in for the sort of legislative change seldom witnessed in US environmental policy.

In sum, in the area of *regulation* we will see change and a clear diminution of Trump's legacy. The full removal of Trump's regulatory legacy will take time, but its power is already considerably diminished. In the area of longer-term *legislative* policy change, reversing the Trump – and Republican – legacy of "inaction" is a harder task. While not impossible (especially in terms of recovery) it is less certain, not least because it requires a multitude of actors to break free from entrenched norms and work together.

IV. Ideational Legacy

We now come to ideational legacy – an area where Trump's legacy is arguably most profound. By "ideational legacy" I refer to the ways in which Trump sought to reshape, distort and communicate fundamental ideas, values, norms, and principles undergirding US environmental and climate policy, both domestically and abroad. Here his imprint is deeper and more corrosive, and his legacy will arguably be more difficult to shift.

US environmental policy has always been subject to competing sets of norms and values – those accelerating ambitious policy or action, and those stymieing it. But Trump's discourse was a particularly powerful force, both symbolising and embedding broader cultural shifts.

Institutional scholars offer useful insight here by examining how policy is shaped by values, informal rules, norms and ideas (Olsson 2020). Scholars of *discursive* institutional focus specifically on the role of narrative and how ideas and discourse can produce both institutional continuity and change (Schmidt 2020). In other words, important is not just the actions but narrative devices used to justify them. For instance, Schmidt (2017, 262) outlines how Trump routinely used "slander, lying and verbal bullying" to make his case and blur the lines between "fact and fiction, truth and falsehood", while blatantly violating the rules of political civility. Similarly, McIntosh (2020, 16) demonstrates how Trump altered the role of presidential language, "not just when it comes to style, but also the relationship between words and reality".

Ideas and discourse may take a variety of forms, but especially relevant for examining ideational legacy is "discursive framing" which refers to how actors select and emphasise certain aspects of an issue according to an overarching shared narrative and set of assumptions. Frames can be used to draw attention to a problem or solution, and they are also used to deflect attention away from an issue (Bomberg 2017b). An examination of Trump's discourse helps us identify key frames relevant to environmental and climate policy. Drawing on scholars' analysis of Trump's pronouncements and tweets,[7] I highlight below five major frames comprising Trump's environmental and climate narrative.

(1) Distrust governing institutions

The American value of individualism includes a distrust of the state, and a limited conception of the public good. It has long underlined public attitudes towards the scope of government action on the environment (Bomberg 2015). But the distrust narrative promulgated by Trump distorted significantly this fundamental American value. Trump advanced a peculiar emphasis on anti-statism and distrust of government action, railing against the "deep state" and allowing conspiracy theories about its putative reach to circulate and grow. The cumulative effect of such a narrative affected public trust in agencies, media and government in general, becoming in Rafaty's (2018) words a "decisive factor derailing stringent and foresighted climate policymaking". Of course, that anti-government narrative extended beyond climate and environmental policy. Whipped up to dangerous levels, it threatened the very fabric of US democracy (see Mounk 2018).

(2) Distrust science

Trump's anti-science, fact-twisting climate scepticism was not unique to him, but he spread it far and fast. His pronouncements downplayed not just the danger but the very existence of climate change. His own tweets repeatedly either confused the science ("It's really cold outside …. Man, we could use a big fat dose of global warming!") or made claims to undermine it ("This very expensive GLOBAL WARMING bullshit has got to stop"). He also regularly retweeted other climate denialists who claimed climate change was "fake science". This distrust narrative was picked up by media outlets and others in his party. While direct causal impact is difficult to discern, a series of public opinion polls during Trump's term demonstrate markedly a declining trust in scientists and growing doubts about the science backing climate change, especially amongst Republicans (Pew Research Center 2020a; 2020b; Yale Climate Change on Communication 2019).

(3) Environmental protection is a job killer

Trump embraced and accelerated America's neoliberal principles of deregulation as a way to "free business" from the shackles of state control. Trump's embrace of neoliberalism was selective; he railed against neoliberal ideas of globalization and free trade while pushing neoliberal tax cuts and deregulation. The narrative accompanying this aim was to present environmental and climate action as "job-killing", "economy-destroying" policies, tweeting that: "Any and all weather events are used by the GLOBAL WARMING HOAXSTERS to justify higher taxes to save our planet!" Similarly, his executive orders seeking to unravel environmental regulations were titled "Reducing Regulation and Controlling Regulatory Costs," whereas those allowing drilling in pristine areas were labelled "Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth" (Aldy 2017). Crucial here, as above, is how the narrative was echoed by other actors especially in the Republican party. Indeed opposition to serious action designed to protect the environment and reduce carbon emissions was evident throughout the GOP. As Selby notes (2019): "On climate change, within the Republican Party, Trump is not an outlier."

(4) America First

One of Trump's dominant narratives (which doubled as a campaign slogan) was "America First" and the need to "Make America Great Again", invoking nostalgia of a putative American greatness, and bemoaning its decline (see Norris and Inglehart 2019 chapter 10). This frame was most potently and aggressively seen in his discourse around immigration. But it also spilled over into environmental policy in important ways. Trump's narrative twisted what could be environmentally positive norms. Whereas earlier Presidents (from both parties) evoked national pride as a prompt to protect America's unique natural heritage, or praised America's excellence in innovation and science, Trump transformed national pride into a zero sum America First discourse. When announcing America's withdrawal from the UN Paris Agreement, Trump insisted the Paris agreement was "less about the climate and more about other countries gaining a financial advantage over the United States" … and "simply the latest example of

Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries" (quoted in Mastrangelo 2020, 1). This discourse did not appear to dampen public support for the Paris Agreement; a majority of Americans continued to support US membership of Paris agreement throughout Trump's presidency. But his more general message – America as victim – continued to animate, affecting US climate policy domestically but especially its ability to engage globally.

(5) White male grievance

If not denying environmental and climate problems, Trump's narrative regularly shifted blame to others (climate change was a "Chinese hoax") or shifted attention away from the roots of environmental problems, including issues of inequality and racial injustice. Instead, Trump's narrative on fossil fuels ("coal as king") were part of broader strategy of stoking grievances, especially those of white males longing for the days "when US society was less diverse" and hierarchies clear (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Trump's "love" of mining ("Trump digs coal"), and his "petro-masculine" language of cars and oil rigs (Nelson 2020) combined with a rhetoric of reversing economic decay. Together they fed the prejudices of a predominantly conservative white male railing against lost privileges and hierarchies (see Selby 2019).

President Biden's narrative counter has been systematic and intentional. As a presidential spokesperson noted: "The president has been clear to all of us – words matter, tone matters and civility matters" (quoted in Ogrysko 2021). Although Biden has not yet built a full presidential narrative, his early proclamations, as embedded in White House press releases, briefings, and official websites, all signal a marked refutation of Trumpian frames.

(1) Trust in government

Very early in his term Biden's press secretary noted that "bringing the country together … means turning the page from the actions but also the divisive and far too often xenophobic language of the last administration" (quoted in Shear 2021). Biden's more specific narrative attempt to regain trust in government and its "ability to serve" prioritised the messages of "truth and transparency" (short for expert briefings and regular press conferences), "deliver the goods" (address crises and create jobs) and "bring back the pros." The latter refers to professionals in all policy areas, but especially health, environment and climate, and focuses particularly on the work of government experts. In one of his first presidential memorandum (White House 2021b) he promised to reverse previous administrations' action which had eviscerated environmental protections, undermined the welfare of the nation, contributed to systemic inequities and injustices, and "violate[d] the trust that the public places in government to best serve its collective interests."

(2) Scientific integrity

For the Biden team, the message of "restoring scientific integrity" links directly to building government trust (above). Even the title of one of his first briefings (it was a "fact

sheet" as in "facts not lies") sent a clear signal of a reversed message: "President Biden takes executive actions to address the climate crisis and restore scientific integrity across federal government" (White House 2021b). Biden's subsequent memorandum (2021c) promised further to "protect scientists from political interference and ensure they can think, research, and speak freely to provide valuable information and insights to the American people."

(3) Climate crisis = jobs

Biden's tone and messages make clear that climate change is real and serious. Whereas mention of climate change nearly disappeared from the Trump Administration's websites it is now reinstated across climate agencies' websites and social media (the EPA is now even using hashtag #climatecrisis).[8] Absolutely central to Biden's environment narrative is the link between the climate crisis and jobs. His early executive order announced his "ambitious goals that will ensure America and the world can meet the urgent demands of the climate crisis, while empowering American workers and businesses to lead a clean energy revolution" (White House 2021a). Like Trump, Biden evokes a romantic notion of the American Worker, (Biden's policies are "tapping into the talent, grit, and innovation of American workers") but Biden's worker is engaged with environmentally constructive work, justice-minded, well paid, and – if they so desire – unionized: "Today's actions will create … well-paying jobs with the opportunity to join a union, and delivering justice for communities who have been subjected to environmental harm" (White House 2021a).

(4) America together with the world

Another key Biden narrative is global cooperation: "work together, listen to the science, meet the moment." Announcing the US intention to re-join the Paris Agreement, Biden's language made clear the recognition of a climate crisis but also the "positive sum" outcome of nurturing international cooperation and leadership: "Domestic action must go hand in hand with United States international leadership, aimed at significantly enhancing global action. Together, we must listen to science and meet the moment" (White House 2021a). He repeated the message when announcing the American Leadership Climate Summit hosted by the US in April 2021, again underlining the message of global engagement, leadership and the positive sum results that would bring.

(5) Environmental justice

Whereas Trump's narrative was steeped with white privilege, Biden's language makes explicit the intersection of environment and justice. His message is that tackling the US's "persistent racial and economic disparities" is a central component in his plan to combat climate change. Indeed no other President has emphasised more the message of environmental justice. His executive orders promised to make it a "part of the mission of every agency by directing federal agencies to … address the disproportionate health, environmental, economic, and climate impacts on disadvantaged communities"

(White House 2021b). The power of narrative in this endeavour was well recognised by Biden and his appointees. As a spokesperson in the Department of Interior put it:

> The words we choose are critical and set the tone, whether it's press releases or social media or all-staff messages. … At [the Department of] Interior, that means not just acknowledging the disproportionate impact that the climate crisis is having on communities of color and Indigenous peoples but an embrace of the science and solutions that will help us tackle it. (quoted in Shear 2021)

It is too early to know which discourse will dominate, but Biden's task of overturning Trump's ideational legacy is near-herculean. Despite Biden's messaging, the strong ideational pull of Trump remains. The reason is twofold. First, critical to a Trump frame's "stickiness" or staying power is the role of other actors who have adopted, adapted or disseminated them: fossil fuel firms threated by legislation, media allies, social movements (including the alt right) and leading members of Trump's party. During Trump's tenure many of these actors themselves embraced – or refused to counter – Trump's narrative, even its most outlandish claims. The echo continues today. For instance climate denialism continues on media outlets. The day after Biden's inauguration Fox News featured a series of guests denying the severity of climate change and criticising Biden for re-joining a UN climate agreement which stole away US sovereignty, forced wealth redistribution and had "nothing to do with climate" (Macdonald 2021). Following the devasting snow storms and subsequent electricity blackouts in Texas in early 2021, the Republican governor flouted science, downplaying any link to climate change and instead suggested the blackout was caused by unreliable renewable energy sources. Secondly, changing the narrative on climate means wrestling with linked, complex issues of culture and politics. Climate and environmental narratives are not "just" about the environment: they reflect deep, often divisive, messages concerning race, class, gender and privilege. To that end Trump's rhetoric, his narrative of denial, grievance and conspiracy, is not likely to disappear.

Conclusion

What we (or "history") will remember about a President and his legacy is unpredictable – even more so in the case of an unpredictable President. But this article has provided a first attempt to determine what Trump's legacy might be in the area of environmental and climate policy. To do so it has drawn on new institutionalism and demonstrated how its insights can be combined and applied in areas of presidential legacies. That application helped us tease out (though not answer definitively) where Trump's legacy might endure and why. Ideas of institutional barriers, actor support, critical junctures and discourse dominance were all helpful in analysing the different dimensions of legacy and its durability.

Breaking down legacy into its three different dimensions we can conclude that Trump's environmental legacy will be complex and uneven. The article has outlined the Trump Administration's introduction of dramatic changes in organisation, policies, norms and narrative. In each case I also outlined how the Biden Administration has acted to shift or reverse these Trump changes and thus chip away at the Trump legacy. Throughout, the article has suggested that legacy will depend in part on the "stickiness"

of change introduced. To stick those changes must have buy-in from other actors, institutions and vested interests. The article has therefore suggested the need to examine other political actors' actions – their power to veto, but also their ability to interpret and spread ideas and norms.

In the area of *organisational legacy* the article suggested Trump's attempt to undermine agency expertise and mock science is likely to be side-lined. One exception may be Trump's court appointments which may well continue to reflect Trump's priorities and continue to shape environmental and climate action. Analysing *policy legacy,* I suggested we need to distinguish between regulatory and legislative policy legacy. In the former we can already see displacement of Trump rules with those introduced by Biden. Trump's regulatory legacy is likely to diminish because key actors – bureaucrats, cities, states, business leaders, investors and others – have already begun to embrace many of Biden regulatory changes – especially those linked to decarbonisation. Entrenched adversarialism and partisan polarisation, however, mean that long term, fundamental legislative change is less likely, and Trump's legacy of legislative inaction harder to overcome. The exception here is whether the "critical juncture" sparked by the Covid pandemic provides the Biden Administration with a chance to break through even these stubborn institutional barriers.

In the realm of *Ideational legacy* – or a change in discursive interaction – Trump's legacy is potentially most profound. Trump shaped discourse in unmistakeable ways, testing the strength of democratic norms and undermining trust in science, experts, media and government. Biden is already shifting back some of these, but Trump's hold (and thus potential legacy) is still powerful. While the long-term "ideational take up" of Trump's narrative is still uncertain we know his ideas continue to resonate amongst a very loyal following. Moreover, unlike analyses of most previous Presidents, our examination of legacy must consider the possibility of Trump's return to national politics. Whereas past presidents have traditionally taken a back seat after leaving the White House, perhaps emerging later as an elder statesman, Trump is unlikely to do so. He continues to exert his influence amongst the base but also the Republican party more generally. He has hinted at building a new media empire but also a return to electoral politics. His legacy is amplified by the possibility of his political return. In early 2021 the former majority leader of the Senate, Republican Mitch McConnell, noted he would support Trump should he run for renomination. Support from leading Republicans suggests the continued hold of Trump on the Republican party and thus a potentially re-invigorated legacy. That prospect makes Biden's legacy-busting task a tough one.

In sum, Trump's legacy will depend not only – or even chiefly – on Biden, and not on Trump. Its strength will depend on the extent to which other actors amplify, ignore or counter it. These other actors are found in Congress, courts, state houses, firms, media, movements and the voting public. Trump loyalists may be able to keep his ideas (if not policies) alive, stoking grievance politics and climate denial, allowing environmentally damaging policies to re-emerge. Conversely, the same broad-based and multi-pronged resistance to Trump's action while in office will also help determine the strength and durability of his legacy. In the area of climate and environmental protection, there is a lot at stake – both for the US and globally.

Notes

1. A helpful overview is provided by Ansell 2021
2. Budgets for international bodies were also slashed. Trump cancelled funding for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and the Green Climate Fund which provides financial assistance for developing countries' efforts to address climate change.
3. Biden's climate team is heavily populated with Obama former staffers and appointments. Kerry and McCarthy are joined by, *inter alia*, Brenda Mallory, White House Council on Environmental Quality, David Hayes as special assistant to the president for climate policy, and Ali Zaidi, deputy national climate adviser.
4. In early 2021, the first decision to be signed by the newest Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barret handed down a defeat to the environmental NGO Sierra Club.
5. See www.wearestillin.com. Now that the US has re-joined the Paris agreement, the coalition joined forces with other networks to form 'America Is All In,' 'the most expansive coalition of leaders ever assembled in support of climate action in the United States.' https://www.americaisallin.com/
6. More specifically the American Recovery Plan includes billions of dollars for public transit agencies and projects; it provides billions to states, cities for improving services such as water systems vulnerable to climate change. By providing billions of dollars for home energy and water improvement programmes targeting low income households, it is particularly designed to 'address health outcome disparities from pollution and the COVID-19 pandemic' (White House 2021d),
7. Unless otherwise noted all quoted tweets are taken from Selby 2019; Ott 2017 or Melino 2015.
8. In discourse battles, words matter but so do images. Biden exploited this visual narrative device early on. Within weeks of taking office the Trump-era cover image on the website of the Bureau of Land Management (a photo of massive wall of coal) was replaced with a serene landscape of a winding river.

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