

Opinion **Donald Trump**

The field is now wide open to Trump

Very little stands in the way of the president's goal of remaking America

EDWARD LUCE



President Donald Trump holds up the letter that former President Joe Biden left for him as he signs executive orders in the Oval Office on Monday © Evan Vucci/AP

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“The first term everybody was fighting me,” Donald Trump said before Christmas. “In this term, everybody wants to be my friend.” He has a point. Eight years ago, Trump faced an angry protest movement, which flooded Washington and resisted his shortlived “Muslim ban” in the days after his inauguration. This time there is barely a peep. The opposition’s mood has switched from outraged to depressed.

Democrats are in disarray. In 2017, they had Nancy Pelosi, the party’s most formidable leader in decades. Pelosi’s last significant act was to help force Joe Biden to step down last summer. Before then, however, she impeached Trump twice and maintained an iron grip over her party. This time, Democrats lack a strategy. The default position of co-operating with Trump where they can and opposing him where they must is a recipe for division. Without a helmsman, the party is adrift in a Trumpian sea.

Nor will Republicans act as a check. The most effective block on Trump last time was John McCain, the late senator from Arizona. But for McCain, Trump would have abolished Obamacare. Back then, there was a sizeable coterie of Republicans in the Senate who could face Trump down. Of the seven who voted to convict Trump in early 2021, four — Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Richard Burr of North Carolina and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania — are gone. The other three — Lisa

CAROLINA and the JOURNEY OF PENNSYLVANIA — are gone. THE OTHER THREE — Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine and Bill Cassidy of Louisiana — are not enough to overturn their party's majority.

Today's Supreme Court looks like Maga in robes. In 2017, the court had a 5-4 conservative majority. But one of its Republican-appointed justices, Anthony Kennedy, was often prone to siding with the liberals. With a 6-3 majority this time, the court looks more like a rubber stamp than a check on a rampant executive. Trump has already thrown down the gauntlet. On TikTok, he has ignored a bipartisan ban passed by Congress that was upheld by the court last week. His defiance recalls Andrew Jackson, America's seventh president, who reputedly said "now let him enforce it" of the chief justice after the court had forbidden the seizure of Cherokee land. Jackson won.

Trump is already playing the Jacksonian card. In one of his executive orders on Monday, he ran roughshod over the 14th amendment that gives automatic citizenship to anyone born on US soil. The ball is now in the court's court, so to speak. As it is with TikTok. With whose army would the judges enforce a decision that Trump chose to ignore? The justices gave Trump near carte blanche last summer when they decreed presidential immunity for any "official act" — a category so vaguely defined that Trump can do what he likes.

Would Trump seek the court's permission, or that of Congress, to occupy the Panama Canal? Though he would be in violation of two treaties, the question answers itself. A similar defensiveness has enveloped the media. In 2017, the Washington Post exemplified the industry when it adopted the motto "Democracy Dies in Darkness". Last week it added the mission statement, "Riveting Storytelling for All of America". Its owner, Jeff Bezos, was among the plutocrats at Trump's inauguration. His company, Amazon Prime, is paying Melania Trump, the first lady, \$40mn to help make a documentary about herself. Count me surprised if that pays off commercially.

So who will stand up to Trump? Allies are as resigned today as they were sceptical in Trump's first term. Then Germany's Angela Merkel was Europe's first among equals. Today, Italy's Giorgia Meloni, who was also at Trump's inauguration, is the continent's most secure leader. Britain's prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer, like the others, is falling over himself to get into Trump's good graces. The government of Denmark might have expected some solidarity after Trump declared that he wanted to annex Greenland. So far, though, the protests have been muted. If Trump can covet an ally's territory with impunity, the only check on him would appear to be himself.

He is now at the peak of his power. But power has the tendency to slip away. In 2026.

Republicans could lose control of Congress, at which point Trump would become a lame duck. That, at least, is the story Democrats are invested in. But Trump's opponents should know they would inherit a very different country if they regained the White House next time. Trump is remaking America in his image. You cannot step into the same river twice.

edward.luce@ft.com

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