

Environmental Governance and Geopolitical Tensions in the San Diego-Tijuana Bioregion

Introduction:

At the dawn of a new era of environmental policy under the second Trump administration, the San Diego-Tijuana bioregion sits at a critical juncture. This transboundary region is ecologically interdependent and relies on extensive cooperative and proactive policy collaboration. Executive orders and policy actions within Trump's first 100 days demonstrate an agenda focused on dismantling long-standing environmental protections and rolling back funding for climate resilience and adaptation. In the current situation, it has become increasingly essential in the goal of preserving environmental action to understand the effects of local stakeholders.

Research Question: How are U.S. environmental policies under the Trump administration affecting the capacity of stakeholders in the San Diego-Tijuana bioregion to address climate change and other cross-border environmental crises due to financial and legal restrictions?

Methodology/Approach:

I plan to conduct a multi-method study with multiple deliverables including:

- A Literature review of peer reviewed academic sources, government and think-tank policy reports, and journalist publications
- A "zine" artistically demonstrating the second Trump administration's first 100 days of environmental policy
- Qualitative analysis of the policy implementation through journalistic write-ups published to mediums such as Substack and the UCSD Guardian.
- Ethnographic analysis through stakeholder interviews with policy makers, scientists, and other bioregional stakeholders. These interviews will have accompanying journalistic write ups to give on the ground insight on the localized impacts of the policy changes.
- Integration of key data for visualization and mapping of the stakeholders and key impacts.

Outline for Lit Review:

- 1.) Introduction:**
 - a.) Under the renewed Trump administration, the environmental policy landscape faces aggressive and destructive restructuring. Executive orders and administrative rollbacks threaten to erode decades of progress on climate adaptation, binational environmental cooperation, and ecosystem protection. This tension is particularly evident in border regions like the San Diego-Tijuana bioregion.
 - b.) This literature review examines key environmental domains including border infrastructure, wastewater management, climate resilience, and fossil expansion. In each of these specific domains, intersections with authoritarian governance, divestment in environmentally active institutions, and cross-border tensions pose immediate and long-term effects. The unilateral policies emanating from Washington threatened ecological interference undermining critical wildlife conditions and disaster preparedness. Simultaneously, they strain the already critical US-Mexico relations.
 - c.) This review will evaluate projected policy impact, stakeholder vulnerabilities, and the possibilities for resistance and adaptation at different scales.
- 2.) Reflection on the First term:**
 - a.) Key environmental rollbacks (NEPA, Paris Agreement withdrawal)
 - b.) Precedent for current and projected actions
 - c.) Patterns of regulatory suppression and science politicization
 - d.) Institutional memory loss (demolition of certain initiatives led to loss of federal expertise and higher turnover rate)
- 3.) Key Environmental Policy Areas + Projected Impacts:**
 - a.) Border Infrastructure - Ecological Fragmentation
 - i.) Trump Policy Position: Renewed efforts to expand physical border infrastructure, particularly along the U.S.-Mexico border.
 - (1) Using executive orders
 - (2) Using National Emergencies to bypass environmental protections
 - ii.) Binational / Regional Implications
 - (1) Fragmentation of critical wildlife corridors (certain types of sheep, need to relocate article)
 - (2) Alteration of historic hydrology and erosion of transboundary watersheds
 - (3) Extensive disagreement with U.S. taking unilateral control of situation
 - iii.) GIS mapping will support a visual representation of the fragmented corridors

- iv.) Stakeholder impact
 - (1) Inability to execute cross-border conservation work
 - (2) Militarization of border (no community trust / development)
- b.) Tijuana River Sewage Crisis - Blue Green Infrastructure
 - i.) Trump Policy Position: De-prioritization of binational environmental cooperation.
 - (1) Cuts to the EPA Border 2025 program
 - (2) Defunding the IBWC (International Boundary and Water Commission)
 - ii.) Binational / Regional Implications
 - (1) Escalating sewage crisis in South San Diego
 - (2) Delayed infrastructure improvements
 - iii.) Stakeholder impact
 - (1) Public Health Crisis - Brief dive of water quality reports over time
 - (2) Loss of Tourism revenue
 - (3) Loss of biodiversity
- c.) Climate Adaptation and Disaster Resilience
 - i.) Trump Policy Position: climate resilience is often phrased under DEI initiatives and thus should be defunded. Additionally, defunding of disaster preparedness programs
 - (1) Radical reduction of FEMA's BRIC program
 - (2) Undermining of National Climate Assessment & NOAA
 - ii.) Binational / Regional Implications
 - (1) California's fire vulnerability (ex: recent LA fires, Trump refusal of aid)
 - (2) Inability to participate in shared climate initiatives (backing out of Paris Climate accords on a global scale but also initiatives under the North American Climate Services Partnership, etc.)
 - iii.) Stakeholder Impact
 - (1) Highest exposure on marginalized communities who have been forced into environmentally fragile/vulnerable places
 - iv.) Visualize with FEMA funding charts (reference necessary impact of FEMA in past natural disasters) why are we getting rid of aid that saves average people's lives just to give tax cuts to billionaires???
- d.) Energy & Fossil Fuel Infrastructure
 - i.) Trump Policy Position: Expand the use of fossil fuels to stimulate the economy and assert American energy dominance and independence. Use regulatory rollback on renewables to effectively promote "clean coal".
 - (1) Executive Order 14241
 - (2) Federal leasing on public lands (implications are broad but not well covered in media)
 - (3) Preemption of state pipeline vetoes
 - ii.) Binational / Regional Implications:
 - (1) Harms California's clean energy goals

- (2) Binational air pollution escalation
- (3) Disruption of collaborative energy planning due to America first messaging

- iii.) Stakeholder Impact

- (1) Increase health disparities caused by pollution
- (2) Less investment in renewable energy and transition resources

- e.) Dismantling of Environmental Justice Programs

- i.) Trump Policy Position: Dismantle all programs explicitly designed to address environmental inequality as part of anti-DEI and anti-Woke messaging.

- (1) Defund EPA's Office of Environmental Justice
- (2) Weaken civil rights oversight within environmental decisions

- ii.) Binational / Regional Implications

- (1) Loss of monitoring and advocacy support within frontline communities (especially those by the border)
- (2) With less resource -> more burnout and grant withdrawal for grassroots environmental justice organizers

- f.) Suppression of Scientific Work

- i.) Trump Policy Position: Delegitimize climate science and restrict research that dissuades from fossil-friendly economic policy

- (1) Removal of scientific advisory boards
- (2) Restrict access to federal data sets
- (3) Enhance ability for industry-funded studies to be enacted

- ii.) Binational / Regional Implications

- (1) Breakdown in national and binational science collaboration
- (2) Lack of innovation in renewable energy and other key scientific fields for the US making it less competitive on the global market
- (3) Impaired disaster prediction and risk mapping

- g.) Attacks on Local Governance

- i.) Trump Policy Position: Preemption of more progressive local and state environmental policies with a heavy preference towards the federal bureaucracy under Trump's control.

- (1) Revoke California's autonomy over the Clean Air Act waiver and other environmental legislation
- (2) Budget threats to sanctuary cities
- (3) Block local climate policies based on a variety of grounds

- ii.) Binational / Regional Implications

- (1) Undermines San Diego's County and municipal city Climate Action Plans
- (2) Disempowers localization of environmental infrastructure
- (3) Increase civic disengagement as environmental issues become more federally centralized and less focused on community frontlines

4.) Binational Policy Tensions

a.) Overview

- i.) Define binational environmental governance along the U.S.- Mexico border

- ii.) Overview of historical treaties, important institutions

- (1) La Paz Agreement, Border 2025

- iii.) Explain how U. S. policy disrupts this progressive framework

- iv.) History in Tijuana - maquiladoras

b.) Analysis of Mexico's federal government

- i.) Administrative structure

- ii.) Centralization under AMLO

- iii.) Political priorities

- iv.) Weak enforcement and limited regulatory capacity

c.) Understanding of how policy moves and works there - integrating insight on the w/cartels

- i.) Informal governance

- ii.) Cartel control affects

- (1) Illegal dumping

- (2) Land use violations

- (3) Obstruction of infrastructure

d.) U.S. Unilateralism

- i.) Exclusion of Mexico from decision making

- ii.) EPA withdrawal from binational task forces

- iii.) Border wall construction

- iv.) General breakdown of trust

e.) Regional Friction points

- i.) Failure to hit infrastructure timelines

- ii.) Missed opportunity for joint funding

5.) Reactions / Policy Resistance

a.) California's statewide attempts

- i.) Reinforcement of state-level environmental protections despite federal rollbacks

- ii.) Key legal battles and legislation

- iii.) Role of Governor's Office of Planning and Research

- iv.) Cross Border diplomacy w/ Mexico

b.) Local assessment

- i.) SANDAG

- ii.) San Diego County resilience planning

- (1) CAP updates / CAP consistency program

- iii.) Municipal infrastructure investments.

- iv.) Cross-border collaborations at city level

c.) Academic resistance

- i.) UC system commitment to climate science and resilience

- ii.) Private university differences in ability
 - iii.) Research centers resistance to scientific suppression
 - (1) Ex: Scripps
 - iv.) University led litigation
 - d.) Community resistance
 - i.) Environmental justice organizing
 - ii.) Mutual aid efforts
 - iii.) Artistic and cultural resistance
 - iv.) Indigenous efforts
 - e.) Primary barriers
 - i.) Funding withdrawal
 - ii.) Organization fatigue
 - iii.) Lack of accountability
- 6.) Conclusion:
- a.) Best-Case Scenario: State / local resistance builds; cross-border collaborations persist and are heavily invested into; grassroots power grows
 - b.) Worst-Case Scenario: Federal suppression succeeds; binational governance collapses; communities suffer irreversible environmental and health harms as corporations, particularly fossil fuel companies, prosper.
 - c.) Most Likely Scenario: Mixed outcome with some legal pushback from a state's rights perspective enabling protections for the San Diego region. However, long-term consequences on binational collaboration are extensive due to institutional erosion.

Substack Articles

1. **Strangling Local Climate Action: Trump's Executive Order 14260 and the Fight for Binational Environmentalism**
2. **Smokestacks and Sovereignty: EO 14241's Threat to Public Lands and Regional Resilience**

Stakeholder Analysis:

1. Purpose of the Stakeholder Interviews
 - a. Reaffirms the central question by assessing policies effect on stakeholder capacity
 - b. Emphasizes the need for grounded, localized perspectives to complement and inform system wide policy analysis
 - c. Gain understanding on how key organizations and individuals are navigating the rollback of environmental protections under the Trump administration

- d. Collect first-hand accounts of how Project 2025 and associated executive orders are impacting the issues assessed in the Literature Review
- 2. Role of Stakeholder Perspectives
 - a. Highlight the diversity of stakeholders in the region: policymakers, agency staff, scientists, indigenous leaders, business owners, grassroots activists, and so much more.
 - b. Stress that there is value to qualitative data and narrative depth when assessing impact on people's lives; people are not merely numbers. To truly assess impact research must reflect the emotional and lived experience of the community.
 - c. The approach prioritizes relationship-building, accountability, and respect to ensure an anti-extractive dialogue that makes this research a tool for community organizing
- 3. Goals of the Section
 - a. Map out the effects of environmental policy changes across different sectors and scales
 - b. Identify shared constraints, adaptive strategies, and emerging alliances within environmental justice and policy spaces
 - c. Lay the foundation for the development of a narrative to uplift and center these voices
- 4. Interview Structure and Methodological Framing
 - a. Part of the multi-method approach described in the outline
 - b. Semi-structured interviews to give a sense of consistency while also gaining flexibility

List of Potential Interviewees

*To be expanded

San Diego

- 1. [San Diego Food System Alliance](#)
 - a. A regional coalition and non-profit organization that focuses on food justice, sustainable agriculture and local food systems. Capable of offering insight into land use decisions, federal funding shifts, and climate policy as they affect food access and green infrastructure.
- 2. [City of San Diego Environmental Services, Planning, and Environmental Health](#)
 - a. City departments responsible for implementing climate action planning, waste/resource management, and public health related to the environment. Play a key role in local responses to federal environmental rollbacks and policy preemption.
- 3. [San Pasqual Reservation Individuals](#)

- a. Members of the Kumeyaay Nation who can speak on the impacts of policy on Indigenous climate resilience and sovereignty.
- 4. [SANDAG](#)
 - a. San Diego Association of Governments: the regional planning agency responsible for transportation, land use, and climate strategy. Provide insight into how federal environmental policy interferes with long-term regional infrastructure and climate resilience plans.
- 5. [San Diego Coastkeepers](#)
 - a. A nonprofit organization focused on protecting water quality and coastal ecosystems through science, legal advocacy, and education. Directly involved in binational pollution issues such as the Tijuana River Sewage Crisis.
- 6. [US EPA: Tijuana Rivershed Team](#)
 - a. A federal agency team responsible for monitoring and supporting environmental health in the U.S.-Mexico border watershed. Input will clarify the consequences of EPA funding cuts and binational cooperation breakdowns.
- 7. [Educators for Young People in DEI spaces](#)
 - a. Teachers and education workers integrate environmental justice in their curricula. Their perspective reflects the chilling on the ground reality of anti-DEI rhetoric and the role of censorship on education systems.
- 8. [Tierras Indígenas](#)
 - a. A grassroots advocacy group using land trusts to empower community building.
- 9. Eric: local grower near S&S Friendly Ranch
- 10. [Sunrise Movement San Diego](#)
 - a. Youth-empowered climate justice organizing advocating for a Green New Deal and systemic change. Offer insight into the state of grassroots organizing, political education, and generational shifts in climate activism.
- 11. [Environmental Health Coalition](#)
 - a. A major regional Environmental Justice centered nonprofit focused on air pollution and frontline community health.
- 12. [SanDiego350](#)
 - a. A volunteer-based climate action grassroots organization focused on local policy change. Important perspectives on municipal resistance strategies, activism fatigue, etc.
- 13. [Groundwork San Diego](#)
 - a. An environmental justice and youth education nonprofits working on climate resilience and habitat restoration for and in underserved communities.

UCSD / SDSU / Universities

- 1. [Scripps - Cross-Border Pollution Research - Adam Cooper](#)
 - a. A researcher who has experience in binational pollution dynamics and ocean health. His work will provide key insights into cross-border science collaboration, data suppression, and the academic role in environmental governance.
- 2. [UCSD Student Sustainability Collective](#)

- a. A student-run collective advancing environmental and social justice on the UCSD campus. Involved in political organizing, education campaigns, and environmentally focused community events.
- 3. [USD Changemaker Hub](#)
 - a. A center promoting social innovation through community engagement. Focus on student-led justice initiatives.
- 4. [SDSU Center for Community Energy and Environmental Justice](#)
 - a. An EPA center focused on research and community partnerships connecting organizations with grants. Contribute to policy-informed research and serve as a bridge between academia and frontline communities.
- 5. [SDSU Center for Regional Sustainability](#)
 - a. A multidisciplinary institute engaged in a wide variety of projects including sustainability research, regional planning, and community outreach. Offer insight into university-government- community partnerships and relations.
- 6. [UCSD Climate Justice Action Resilience Scholars](#)
 - a. Interdisciplinary cohort of undergraduate students conducting research and doing community engagement projects on climate justice. The group includes student leaders in social justice space as well as emerging researchers.

Tijuana

- 1. [Colectivo Salud y Justicia Ambiental](#) (Tijuana Environmental Health Coalition, Contacts: Anibal Mendez and Magdalena Cerda) - Social Justice
 - a.
- 2. [Professors at UABC](#)
- 3. Patricia Tovar, Solimar Soluciones - Local business owner (Trash & recycling) - little to no public resources / solutions, which is why people dump and burn in Tijuana)
- 4. [Isla Urbana](#)
- 5. [Border Angels - Tijuana Chapter](#)
 - a. Binational human rights organization focused on migrant support. Intersect with environmental justice through water rights and exploring the impacts of border militarization.
- 6. [Comité Ciudadano de Playas de Tijuana](#)
 - a. Local civic groups engaged in monitoring water pollution affecting coastal Tijuana.
- 7. [Proyecto Fronterizo Educación Ambiental \(PFEA\)](#)
 - a. Environmental education and activism group focusing on marine/coastal protection and binational advocacy in Tijuana. Collaborative ties with San Diego based partners.
- 8. [Fundación Esperanza de México](#)
 - a. Community development and urban infrastructure NGO that works hands-on on housing and urban poverty. Can provide insight into how climate vulnerability is affecting marginalized communities in Tijuana.
- 9. [El Colegio de la Frontera Norte](#)

- a. Premier research institution studying everything from migration to environmental degradation and U.S.-Mexico relations.