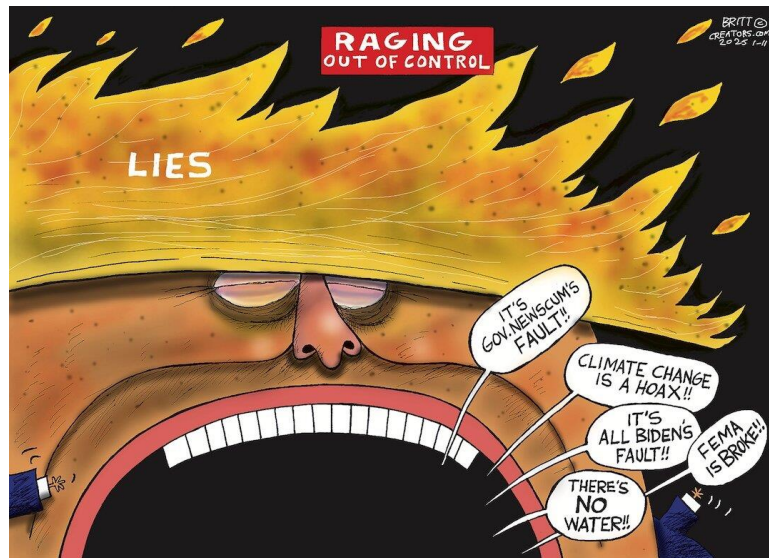


Populist Resistance to Science



Revealed: populists far more likely to believe in conspiracy theories

Largest survey of its kind uncovers suspicion of vaccines in big part of world population

The Guardian, May 2019

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/01/revealed-populists-more-likely-believe-conspiracy-theories-vaccines?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other

The Nexus Between Green Backlash and Democratic Backsliding in Europe

See the long report from the Center for American Progress – December 2023

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-nexus-between-green-backlash-and-democratic-backsliding-in-europe/>

Far-right parties are exploiting discontent with environmental policies, undermining progress on climate change and endangering democracy in Europe and beyond.

About the CAP

Our mission

The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

Populists are Attacking Science to Undermine Global Governance

[University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation](#) _ February 26, 2024 - [Blog](#)

Allison Carnegie, Richard Clark, and Noah Zucker

The election of populist outsider Javier Milei to the Argentine presidency has alarmed the country's scientific community. The firebrand economist has promised deep cuts to government spending, vowing

to eliminate Argentina's Ministry of Science and defund its National Scientific and Technical Research Council, widely considered Latin America's finest scientific research institution.

Milei joins a growing list of populist leaders who have clashed with the scientific community. Populist leaders like Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro spent the pandemic downplaying the severity of COVID-19 and promoting pseudoscientific remedies. Others—including Milei himself—describe the scientific consensus on climate change as a hoax.

Populist antagonism towards science has its roots in a deeper distrust of the elite expert class. Populist leaders claim to view the everyday experience of ordinary people as superior to expertise gleaned from education—and their electoral success is often based on the support of voters with relatively low levels of formal education. Populists may also benefit from associations with interest groups that oppose specific scientific causes—for instance, the agribusiness lobby backed Bolsonaro in Brazil in an effort to speed deforestation of the Amazon, and carbon-intensive industries supported Trump with the goal of slowing the climate transition.

In addition to their anti-elitism, populists strongly oppose constraints on national sovereignty. Populists dislike international organizations (IOs), occasionally leaving or threatening to leave them and using other methods to impede their work, particularly when IOs deal in science. The international implications of this friction, however, remain underexamined.

By withholding or corrupting data necessary for global responses to public health and environmental issues, populism hinders IOs' ability to address areas of international concern.

Our research highlights an underappreciated means by which populists sabotage global governance: distorting scientific information. By withholding or corrupting data necessary for global responses to public health and environmental issues, populism hinders IOs' ability to address areas of international concern.

International efforts—cooperation among states facilitated by IOs—are needed to confront issues that do not respect state boundaries, such as public health crises and environmental disasters. In this fight, scientific information is necessary to inform action and monitor outcomes.

While the World Health Organization has struggled in recent years under tightening budgets and political interference—and has been roundly criticized for its response to the pandemic—when empowered to do its job, the organization has an impressive track record in disease surveillance, eradicating smallpox, and tackling the 2003 SARS outbreak.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) likewise has its faults, but can be commended for inducing accelerated global climate ambitions as its COP process grows in prominence. At the last COP in Dubai, the first Global Stocktake—a

nation-by-nation inventory of climate progress—highlighted the role information sharing plays in combating climate change.

For IOs to succeed, states must act in good faith to provide the scientific information they need to accomplish their mission. However, populist leaders are increasingly inclined to withhold or misreport such data. This compounds their efforts to defund and otherwise interfere with scientific knowledge production domestically.

While populists' ideological opposition to IOs is widely recognized, our research finds that populists fail to provide IOs with accurate scientific data either because of their curtailment of scientific capacity at home or to purposefully weaken global governance.

While populists' ideological opposition to IOs is widely recognized, our research finds that populists fail to provide IOs with accurate scientific data either because of their curtailment of scientific capacity at home or to purposefully weaken global governance.

To better understand how populists undermine IOs, we tested two hypotheses: whether populists report less scientific data than their non-populist peers, and whether the information they report is less accurate than that supplied by others.

In the first case, we investigated whether environmental or public health information supplied to the World Bank is missing more often when populists are in charge. We also sought to find if the relationship is more consistent for types of data provided directly by states rather than by third parties. In the second case, we examined whether populists report less reliable greenhouse gas emission (GHG) data to the UNFCCC.

We evaluated the level of “data missingness” among the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDIs) in types of data which are typically supplied by states. We examined 252 WDI variables between 1990 to 2018, using measures from other social scientists to determine which states' leadership should be coded as populist and comparing against data sourced from third parties. We found that populism produces statistically significant results in measures of missing data. Further, when populists leave office, their successors supply the missing data relatively quickly.

To test our second hypothesis, we measured the quality of emissions data given to the UNFCCC, which is then verified by independent experts. By comparing against independently collected emissions data from the EU's Emissions Database for Global Atmospheric Research (EDGAR), we found that populism produces a 25 percent gap between populists' reported emissions and data from EDGAR. In other words, the quality of data produced domestically under populist leaders deteriorates.

Our research demonstrates that populism presents a significant obstacle to IOs' ability to function in scientific realms. Providing data to IOs cuts against populists' anti-elite and anti-global governance beliefs. Moreover, by eroding the capacity of their bureaucracies to collect data, populism degrades the quality of data available to IOs, regardless of their intent to distort.

Are populist leaders driven primarily by ideological commitment—and does this withholding of data advance the interests of the “populace”? The answer to both is: probably not. The hallmark of modern populism is that populist coalitions include elites who use the language of populism to advance elite interests. The Bolsonaro and Trump examples cited above illustrate this trend: both leaders partnered with interest groups that benefited from the suppression and distortion of scientific information. The public, meanwhile, most

often loses when data is withheld from international bodies since this undermines their ability to combat global health crises and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are sparking record levels of deadly natural disasters, for instance.

Still, populists continue to find electoral success even in countries which have supported—and in turn relied on—IOs, notably Argentina. How the ascent of populism will damage global governance in the long term remains to be seen, but so far, populist leaders are succeeding at chipping away at the ability of IOs to deliver public goods globally.

Allison Carnegie is a professor at Columbia University. Richard Clark is an assistant professor at Cornell University. Noah Zucker is an assistant professor at the London School of Economics. Read their working paper, [Global Governance under Populism: The Challenge of Information Suppression](#).

Regards croisés : les populistes sont-ils fâchés avec la science ?

Radio France, podcast, 31 mars 2025

<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/le-debat-de-midi/le-debat-de-midi-du-vendredi-05-juillet-2024-2411192>

Les populistes, soucieux de flatter l'opinion publique à tout prix, entretiennent un rapport ambivalent avec la science. Notamment quand le fait scientifique vient contredire un discours politique simplificateur qui est désormais amplifié par les réseaux sociaux. Entre méfiance vis-vis du savoir et quête de sensationnalisme, cette relation pose la question de la place de la science dans nos démocraties.

Deux experts nous éclairent sur ces tensions.

Michel Dubois

Sociologue, directeur de recherche au CNRS. Ses travaux au Groupe d'étude des méthodes de l'analyse sociologique de la Sorbonne (GEMASS), un laboratoire CNRS Sorbonne Université, portent sur la confiance dans les institutions scientifiques.

Alain Fischer

médecin et immunologiste, professeur émérite au Collège de France. Il est membre de l'Académie des sciences et de l'Académie de médecine. Il a joué un rôle clé dans la stratégie vaccinale contre la Covid en France.

Michel Dubois

Dans la plupart des pays, la confiance à l'égard de la science, que l'on mesure dans nos enquêtes, témoigne de la relation que les citoyens entretiennent avec leurs institutions, la science étant une institution parmi d'autres. Même si, en France, la confiance accordée à la recherche publique reste élevée (près de huit enquêtés sur dix répondent favorablement), la crise de la Covid-19 a mis en évidence, chez certains experts, une tentation de populisme scientifique. On se souvient, en avril 2020, du promoteur de la chloroquine cherchant un appui dans le sondage d'un quotidien annonçant que près de six Français sur dix croyaient en son efficacité.

À l'heure où Donald Trump et son administration lancent une offensive contre la communauté scientifique, il est utile de rappeler les contours de ce populisme. En tentant de substituer le soutien populaire à la démonstration scientifique, il s'appuie sur l'opinion dominante pour neutraliser ou contourner momentanément le contrôle par les pairs. Ce populisme s'accompagne d'une logique du soupçon : l'institution scientifique porterait un savoir « officiel » au service d'élites technocratiques guidées par leurs intérêts. D'où un air de famille avec certaines mouvances conspirationnistes.

La France est encore relativement épargnée par cette tendance, mais il n'en demeure pas moins essentiel de renforcer la culture scientifique comme composante de la citoyenneté, d'enseigner l'esprit critique notamment chez les plus

jeunes, et de préserver l'indépendance des institutions de recherche. Car une science perçue comme partisane risque de perdre son rôle fondamental dans la construction d'une société éclairée.

Alain Fischer

Les courants populistes gagnent du terrain partout dans le monde, avec un retentissement néfaste sur les questions de santé et de recherche. Les mesures prises récemment à l'encontre du climat ou de la vaccination, aux États-Unis ou en Argentine, en sont la preuve. L'une des caractéristiques du populisme est la simplification extrême des débats. Dans ce contexte, la science, avec sa complexité et son approche nuancée, devient une cible privilégiée puisque toute démarche scientifique qui se respecte exige du temps, de la méthode et une confiance dans les institutions. Les discours populistes jouent sur l'émotion et le rejet d'explications scientifiques considérées comme trop complexes ou éloignées du quotidien des citoyens.

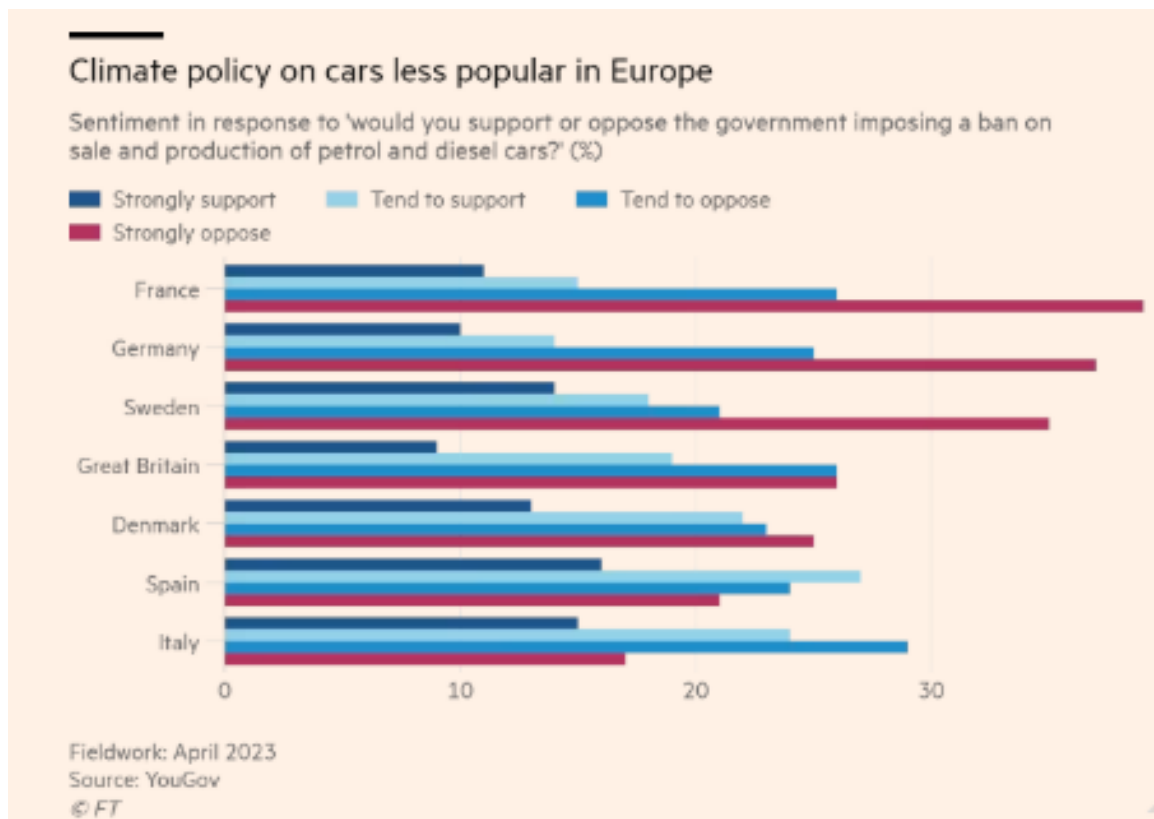
Ce phénomène s'explique en partie par la manière dont l'information est aujourd'hui diffusée. Les réseaux sociaux permettent à des messages simplistes, voire totalement faux, de circuler largement, en reléguant parfois au second plan des travaux scientifiques rigoureux. Certains responsables politiques populistes n'hésitent pas à discréditer les experts lorsque leurs recommandations entravent leurs stratégies électorales ; des enjeux de santé publique deviennent des débats idéologiques.

Face à ces défis, il est urgent de réaffirmer le rôle de la science comme pilier de la démocratie, et de lutter activement contre la désinformation. La solution passe par une meilleure communication sur l'état de la recherche mais aussi par une prise de conscience collective : la vérité scientifique n'est pas une opinion parmi d'autres, elle est le résultat d'un processus méthodique et éprouvé, qui doit rester au cœur des décisions publiques.

Populists seek dividends from a climate change backlash

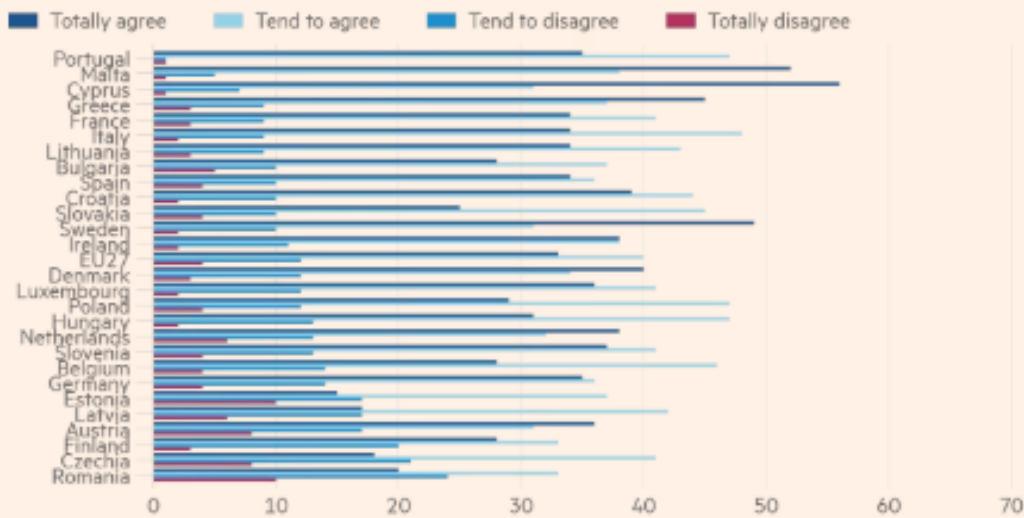
Hard-right parties make gains in Europe by exploiting fears that incomes and ways of life are under threat

The Financial Times, Tony Barber NOV 25 2023



Weighing up costs of the green transition

Sentiment in response to statement: 'Costs of damages due to climate change are much higher than costs of investments needed for a green transition' (% in May-June 2023)



Source: Eurobarometer 538
© FT

Welcome back. At the COP28 climate summit that opens in Dubai next week, Europe will once again present itself as a world leader in efforts to combat climate change and reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Are these ambitions threatened by a rise in public support for populist and hard-right political movements that, to varying degrees, embrace climate scepticism? I'm at tony.barber@ft.com.

Dutch upset By convulsing Dutch politics, climate controversies played a part in the battle for power that culminated on Wednesday in an unexpected parliamentary election victory for Geert Wilders and his far-right Freedom party

Earlier this year, a farmers' protest movement won provincial elections with a campaign against government plans to cut nitrogen-based emissions by encouraging a reduction in livestock herds.

That campaign undermined the ruling Dutch coalition and paved the way for the snap national election won by Wilders. As one Dutch minister told the FT's Sam Fleming in April, the risk is that mainstream political parties fail to carry the public with them as they step up action against climate change.

'Green deal' consensus under strain

Since the EU unveiled its "Green Deal" plans in 2019, the 27-nation bloc has made steady progress in designing and approving dozens of pieces of legislation affecting all areas of the economy from industry to consumer behaviour.

It is a creditable achievement, given strong, unexpected headwinds in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic and the disruption to energy supplies caused by Russia's

full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as Kira Taylor writes for Euractiv.com.

In principle, mainstream European political parties of the right, centre and left, backed by broad sections of public opinion, support a range of measures to fight climate change. However, if we look closely at recent political trends and opinion surveys, we see some evidence that this consensus is coming under strain – and not only in the Netherlands.

In a YouGov poll conducted in April in seven countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK), some 48 per cent of respondents said they "strongly oppose" or "tend to oppose" a ban on the production and sale of petrol and diesel cars. Only 39 per cent strongly supported or tended to support such a ban.

The Guardian's Jon Henley drew the conclusion that voters' enthusiasm for climate change policies weakens as they see potentially undesirable effects on their incomes and lifestyles.

More broadly, the EU's green agenda has come under political pressure as next year's European parliament elections draw nearer, and as some initiatives at national level turn out to be unpopular — such as Germany's attempt to ban new gas boilers.

In May, French president Emmanuel Macron called for a pause in new green regulations at EU level — and, a few months later, dropped a proposal for a gas boiler ban.

Macron made similar concessions in 2019, abandoning a planned rise in fuel taxes after the gilets jaunes ("yellow vests") protests that erupted across France.

In summary, European policymakers face a challenge, at a time of intense pressure on living standards, in trying to persuade voters that the green transition is in their own interests – as Susi Dennison and Mats Engström write for the European Council on Foreign Relations think-tank.

This makes climate change a topic that populist or hard-right parties believe they can exploit to their electoral advantage.

Voting records in the European parliament

A useful way to understand where political parties stand on the climate issue is to look at their votes in the European parliament. Here is a good, colourful guide by Climate Action Network Europe, published in 2019, which classified pan-European party groups as either “defenders”, “delayers” or “dinosaurs” on climate change and broke down the results by country.

As one would expect, Green and left-leaning parties have the strongest record on supporting EU climate policies. But what is really striking is that resistance and rejection are to be found not only on the nationalist, Eurosceptic right, but also from the mainstream centre-right European People’s party (EPP).

Among the EPP parties with the worst records are Poland’s Civic Platform — hailed last month as the nation’s saviour, after defeating the conservative nationalist Law and Justice party in parliamentary elections — and Italy’s Forza Italia, which is part of that country’s ruling coalition.

In other words, some centre-right parties support delays or watered-down measures on climate change, partly to head off electoral threats from farther to the right. It bears comparison with the way these parties are also taking a harder line on migration and asylum issues.

Varieties of climate scepticism

Populist and hard-right parties don’t follow a consistent line on climate change. National differences are important. However, certain similarities of outlook are clear. In this piece for the Peterson Institute of International Economics, Monica de Bolle observes:

These parties and the political leaders associated with them are more likely to favour energy sources from fossil fuels, fewer environmental regulations, and less international co-operation on the fight against climate change.

But climate scepticism takes at least four forms, as Iris Beau Segers and Manès Weisskircher explain in an article for the University of Oslo’s Center for Research on Extremism.

There is “trend scepticism”, which doubts or denies the phenomenon of climate change altogether. There is “attribution scepticism”, which disputes that there’s a link between global warming and human civilisation.

“Impact scepticism” questions whether climate change represents a problem for the world. Finally, “process scepticism” involves opposition to the political and scientific handling of the issue.

National differences to the fore

Along this spectrum of anti-establishment dissent, some hard-right parties are in practice less climate-sceptic than their rhetoric might lead one to suppose.

For example, Austria’s Freedom party (FPÖ) once tended to dismiss the scientific consensus on man-made climate change as a tissue of lies invented by the liberal media.

But when the FPÖ shared power in a coalition government from 2017 to 2019, it acquiesced in the EU’s 2050 net-zero target and agreed that Austria should aim to reach 100 per cent renewable energy use in electricity, as outlined in this article in the *Journal of European Public Policy*.

In France, the far-right Rassemblement National has abandoned outright climate change denial. Jordan Bardella, who became the party’s president last year (though the person truly in charge remains Marine Le Pen), says:

Our political family would be making a big mistake if it behaved as blindly on the environmental issue as the left has done on immigration for the past 30 years. We can no longer afford to deny it.

However, none of this makes the Rassemblement National “green”. The party embraces a form of environmentalism based on trade protectionism, the relocation of industry to France and the defence of national identity and living standards, especially in small towns and rural areas.

The party’s hard-edged patriotism, mixed with a somewhat sentimental defence of traditional ways of life, draws on 20th-century French radical right trends such as the Chemises Vertes (Greenshirts) movement created in the 1930s by Henry Dorgères — on which the authoritative study is the American historian Robert Paxton’s 1997 book *French Peasant Fascism*.

Discontent fuels Germany’s AfD

In my view, the example that deserves closest attention is that of Alternative for Germany, the far-right party that now lies second in national opinion polls.

AfD takes a harder line than many such European parties in rejecting climate change policies, according to Christoph Richter of the Institute for Democracy and Civil Society, a research body based in the east German city of Jena:

The party doubts fundamental scientific findings about human-caused climate change, and considers the corresponding climate protection measures to be pointless.

Migration is usually considered the issue driving up support for the AfD. But after the party made strong

gains last month in elections in the west German states of Bavaria and Hesse, Manfred Güllner of pollsters Forsa said he thought a bigger factor was the government's plans to phase out gas-fired boilers and replace them with heat pumps.

In conclusion, I offer this thought. Tackling climate change is a quintessentially cross-border challenge, requiring co-operation among national governments of

various political persuasions. But populist and far-right parties derive their support from something quite different – the assertion of sovereignty and defence of national identity.

Quite apart from the difficulty of securing global agreement on climate change measures, the political problems associated with this issue are now piling up for Europe at EU and national level.

Nigel Farage Dubbed 'A Con Artist' For Suggesting Climate Change May Not Be Man-Made

The Reform UK leader also said the government's net zero drive "will make no difference" to global warming.
HuffPost, By Kevin Schofield, 23/04/2025

Nigel Farage has been dubbed "a con artist" after he suggested climate change may not be man-made.

The Reform UK leader also called for the government to ditch its net zero policies because they "make no difference whatsoever" to global warming.

Asked on Radio 4's Today programme if he accepted climate change was at least partly man-made, Farage would only say: "It may well be."

He added: "Let's go with the scientists. Let's say that the 3% to 5% of CO2 emissions in the world every year that are man-made, as opposed to natural, are having a detrimental, or at least a warming effect on the world. Let's start from that position."

However, he avoided the question when asked if that was his own position.

Farage also said politicians should not "commit economic hara-kiri" in order to tackle the problem.

"I think we should scrap the net zero targets, yes, absolutely. I think they're going to make zero difference in the world," he said.

Green Party co-leader Adrian Ramsay condemned Farage, and challenged him to a public debate on climate change.

He said: "Nigel Farage is a performer, a con artist. He will say or do anything. He will happily dance to a populist tune regardless of its impact.

"This morning's performance suggested he hasn't got the slightest grasp of even the most basic climate science. But I think it's worse than that. He understands all too well human-made climate change, but he is willing to pretend he doesn't and stand in the way of climate action for his party's populist agenda.

"If he really does believe what he says, let's see if his ridiculous rhetoric stands up to actual scrutiny – let's see if he is prepared to take part in an hour-long TV debate about climate change and the challenge of reaching net zero?"

Le « backlash » contre la transition écologique, un nouveau levier du populisme

Analyse - Matthieu Goar

Le plaidoyer propétre de Donald Trump survient à un moment où la lutte contre le dérèglement climatique est affaiblie en Europe sous l'influence des conservateurs et de l'extrême droite.

Le Monde, 28 janvier 2025

Est-ce le début d'une nouvelle ère mondiale de recul des politiques climatiques ou une parenthèse de quelques années ? Impossible de répondre encore à cette question, mais les mots de Donald Trump, lors de son discours d'investiture, lundi 20 janvier, ont prouvé une nouvelle fois que la lutte contre la transition écologique était un levier du populisme. Alors que des mégafeux détruisaient Los Angeles, le 47^e président des Etats-

Unis a ainsi promis d'utiliser « *l'or liquide sous nos pieds* » pour « *faire baisser les prix* » et « *exporter de l'énergie américaine dans le monde entier* ». « *Nous deviendrons de nouveau une nation riche* », a-t-il lancé avant d'annoncer la fin du Green New Deal et des politiques de Joe Biden en faveur des véhicules électriques qu'il a faussement qualifiées d'« *obligation électrique* ». « *En d'autres termes, vous pourrez acheter la voiture de votre choix.* »

Un discours conforme à ses promesses de campagne et à sa stratégie de coagulation des colères. « *Les populistes s'emparent de tous les problèmes pour les braquer contre les élites*, estime David Djaïz, essayiste, coauteur de *La Révolution obligée* (Allary, 2024). *En ce sens, l'écologie, éclairée par la science et qui nécessite*

des nouvelles normes décidées par des dirigeants, est un magnifique terrain d'opportunités pour eux, surtout si les classes populaires et moyennes s'estiment lésées. »

Ce Donald Trump, à la fois libéral, souverainiste et défenseur très conservateur d'un American way of life fondé sur le pétrole, avait déjà été entrevu en 2016. *« Ça va beaucoup plus loin cette fois-ci avec la réactivation d'un modèle typiquement américain obsédé par le suprémacisme énergétique, avec l'alliance autour de Trump des potentiels perdants de la transition mais aussi des milliardaires des nouvelles technologies, pense le philosophe Pierre Charbonnier, chargé de recherche au CNRS et enseignant à Sciences Po, auteur de Vers l'écologie de guerre (La Découverte, 2024). Pour le climat, la géopolitique change dans le mauvais sens, car si cette stratégie-là réussit, elle devient un modèle pour le reste du monde. »*

« Les catastrophes climatiques se poursuivent »

Va-t-on assister à une diffusion du climatonégationisme trumpiste aux autres zones économiques ? Sur le continent européen, les attaques contre la transition écologique et le pacte vert, un ensemble de textes censé mettre l'Union européenne (UE) sur la voie de la neutralité carbone en 2050, se sont multipliées depuis une semaine.

Au Forum économique mondial de Davos, en Suisse, où le sujet climatique a été quasiment absent des discussions, plusieurs patrons ont lorgné du côté de l'Amérique. *« Ils réduisent rapidement les réglementations aux Etats-Unis, ce qui accroît l'importance de le faire en Europe »,* a ainsi déclaré, à l'Agence France-Presse, Nicolai Tangen, directeur général de Norges Bank Investment Management, l'un des plus grands fonds d'investissement au monde, rejoint par Ilham Kadri, qui dirige Syensqo et le lobby européen de la chimie, cité dans *La Tribune*, dimanche 26 janvier : *« Dans la chimie, la réglementation européenne représente un total de 14 000 pages. (...) Le fardeau est insupportable. »* Dans un entretien au Journal du dimanche, jeudi 23 janvier, le président du Rassemblement national (RN), Jordan Bardella, a demandé, pour sa part, de mettre fin au pacte vert, *« probablement l'un des plus grands plans de décroissance qu'ait connus notre continent ces cinquante dernières années ».*

Ce *backlash*, c'est-à-dire une réaction hostile des franges conservatrices à l'agenda environnemental, n'est pas né avec Donald Trump. *« En 2018, avec les mégafeux, les canicules, les grandes marches, le climat a été mis en haut de l'agenda politique, puis tout a changé, depuis 2022, avec un contexte international*

dominé par l'Ukraine, les tensions commerciales, puis la guerre à Gaza en 2023... Sauf que les catastrophes climatiques se poursuivent, décrypte M. Djaïz. Le backlash monte partout et à un très mauvais moment, car les mesures ne sont pas encore assez engagées pour infléchir durablement les trajectoires. Nous sommes dans une mauvaise passe. »

Critiques des normes et des réglementations

En Europe, la crise énergétique liée à la guerre en Ukraine puis l'inflation ont d'abord mis un coup de frein à l'avancée des textes du pacte vert. La crise agricole du début de l'année 2024 a ouvert une parenthèse non refermée de critiques des normes et des réglementations environnementales.

En France, le RN et, par effet de contamination, une partie de la droite se sont engouffrés dans la brèche. Après avoir tempêté contre le zéro artificialisation nette lorsqu'il était à la tête de la région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Laurent Wauquiez, président des députés Les Républicains, publie des vidéos sur ses réseaux sociaux appelant à supprimer l'Office français de la biodiversité. Et Eric Ciotti, député (Union des droites pour la République) des Alpes-Maritimes et allié de Marine Le Pen, a récemment promis de sortir la tronçonneuse en prenant exemple sur le président argentin, le libertarien Javier Milei.

« Mais on se tromperait si l'on pensait que ce ne sont que quelques responsables politiques qui surfent contre l'écologie et le climat. Au fur et à mesure que l'on entre dans le concret, l'opposition à la transition devient massive avec un Parti populaire européen contaminé par l'extrême droite sur ces sujets-là, une partie du Sénat en France opposée à la transition dans l'agriculture », assure Géraud Guibert, président de La Fabrique écologique.

« Question de souveraineté »

Au cœur de cette période très compliquée, certains chercheurs et spécialistes considèrent que le retour de Trump devrait au contraire pousser l'UE à renforcer sa transition énergétique pour des raisons stratégiques. *« Entre les lignes, Trump nous annonce qu'il veut mettre l'Europe sous perfusion de fossiles américains. C'est justement le moment de relancer un agenda très ambitieux de décarbonation sur l'énergie, sur l'industrie, sur le commerce, car c'est une question de souveraineté »,* analyse M. Charbonnier.

A Davos, jeudi 23 janvier, Patrick Pouyanné, le président-directeur général de TotalEnergies, a plutôt demandé directement au nouveau locataire de la Maison Blanche de *« garantir l'approvisionnement de l'Europe en gaz naturel liquéfié »,* après avoir regretté que *« l'agenda vert de l'UE ne protège clairement pas les*

industries européennes » dans le secteur des énergies renouvelables.

Ursula von der Leyen va-t-elle envoyer un signal le 30 janvier ? La présidente de la Commission européenne s'exprimera à Bruxelles devant les patrons des industries automobiles très inquiets par les amendes contre ceux qui ne respectent pas les normes et par la fin de la vente des voitures à moteur thermique en 2035, alors que la part des voitures électriques dans les nouvelles immatriculations a baissé, pour la première fois, depuis 2020 (13,6 % en 2024 contre 14,6 % en 2023).

Fléchissement de la préoccupation climatique

Alors que plusieurs études d'opinion montrent un fléchissement de la préoccupation climatique, l'autre grand défi est de repenser les politiques publiques pour mieux accompagner les citoyens et ainsi tenter de couper le carburant aux populismes. « *Il faut absolument réussir à sortir du clivage pour ou contre la transition climatique, car c'est un fait qui s'impose à nos sociétés*, affirme Emmanuel Combet, auteur, avec Antonin Pottier, d'*Un nouveau contrat écologique* (PUF, 2024). *Pour cela, les acteurs doivent arriver à dessiner un horizon positif et ne pas seulement évoquer les nouvelles contraintes de façon technocratique. L'action écologique doit s'insérer dans notre contrat*

social avec une juste répartition des droits et des devoirs des uns et des autres. »

Une gageure à un moment où de nombreuses économies européennes connaissent des difficultés budgétaires et où nombre de dirigeants sont affaiblis. Bousculé par le parti d'extrême droite Alternative für Deutschland, le gouvernement allemand a reculé sur l'interdiction des chaudières au gaz en 2023, puis il a coupé toutes les aides pour les véhicules électriques fin 2024. En France, le ministère de la transition écologique, qui avait connu une augmentation de son budget de 7 milliards d'euros, subit, depuis un an, des coupes sur les aides à la rénovation des logements, sur l'électrification des véhicules et sur le fonds vert.

« *Que répond-on à quelqu'un qui s'est endetté pour acheter sa maison à 30 kilomètres de son travail ? C'est la grande question de l'époque. Si les classes moyennes se pensent prisonnières de la transition écologique, nous allons nous diriger droit dans le mur du populisme* », théorise M. Guibert, rejoint par M. Djaïz : « *Il faut arriver à changer le récit pour faire de la transition une opportunité pour tout le monde, ménages comme industries, et sur tous les sujets. Car le populisme est comme l'hydre, si l'on coupe une tête, il y en a deux qui repoussent.* »

« Tout semble en place pour une réinvention du fascisme autour de la question environnementale »

Chronique , Stéphane Foucart

Les fascismes émergents sont les compagnons d'une idéologie libertarienne qui prône le démantèlement de l'Etat, la dérégulation totale de l'industrie, et la poursuite de la destruction de la nature, s'inquiète dans sa chronique Stéphane Foucart, journaliste au « Monde ».

Le Monde, 17 novembre 2024

Cette fois-ci, le fascisme est de retour en Occident, et si la conversation publique a un peu de mal à en prendre acte, c'est sans doute autant par pusillanimité et désir inconscient de conjurer l'évidence que parce qu'il est difficile de définir précisément ce qu'est un dirigeant, un mouvement ou un régime fasciste.

Non content d'avoir suscité l'assaut contre le Capitole en 2021, à Washington, Donald Trump a fait campagne avec des vidéos proclamant la venue d'un « *Reich unifié* », il a promis qu'il conduirait des « *déportations de masse* », comparé les immigrants à une « *vermine* » qui « *empoisonne le sang des Etats-Unis* », déclaré qu'il

suffisait qu'il remporte le scrutin pour que les citoyens américains n'aient plus à voter dans l'avenir, etc.

Il continue pourtant d'être présenté par nombre de commentateurs, implicitement ou non, comme un conservateur un peu radical et fantasque, un simple réactionnaire au verbe décomplexé qui souhaite relancer l'économie américaine, etc.

Cette difficulté à identifier le fascisme, et donc à le nommer, est le sujet d'une conférence donnée à New York en 1995 par Umberto Eco (1932-2016), et rééditée en janvier sous le titre *Reconnaître le fascisme* (Grasset, 64 pages, 7,90 euros, numérique 6 euros). Umberto Eco dit du fascisme qu'il est un ensemble d'archétypes, qu'il est une rhétorique, un style. Par nature, il est « *flou* », selon lui, car il n'est pas adossé à une doctrine, mais fait plutôt office de véhicule pour d'autres idéologies.

« *Enlevez-lui l'impérialisme et vous aurez Franco et Salazar ; enlevez le colonialisme et vous aurez le fascisme balkanique*, dit Umberto Eco. *Ajoutez au fascisme italien un anticapitalisme radical (...) et vous aurez [l'apologue américain d'Hitler] Ezra Pound [1885-1972]. Ajoutez le culte de la mythologie celte et*

le mysticisme du Graal (totalement étranger au fascisme officiel) et vous aurez l'un des gourous fascistes les plus respectés, [le poète et idéologue de l'extrême droite italienne] Julius Evola [1898-1974]. »

Une idéologie libertarienne

A la fin des années 1990, Umberto Eco identifiait quatorze caractéristiques fondamentales du fascisme : nationalisme et xénophobie, virilisme, irrationalisme et anti-intellectualisme, destruction de la complexité de la langue, instrumentalisation de la frustration des classes moyennes, etc. Un quinzième marqueur pourrait y être ajouté aujourd'hui : la guerre à outrance à l'environnement et aux défenseurs de l'environnement.

Contrairement aux fascismes européens du début du XX^e siècle, qui prospéraient sur un Etat fort et valorisaient le terroir, le paysage et la nature comme des éléments précieux de l'identité nationale, les fascismes émergents sont devenus les compagnons d'une idéologie libertarienne qui prône le démantèlement de l'Etat, la dérégulation totale de l'activité industrielle, et la poursuite sans entraves de la destruction de la nature et du climat.

C'est, aujourd'hui, ce qui rassemble le plus sûrement toutes les droites extrêmes, de Donald Trump à Javier Milei en passant par Jair Bolsonaro et leurs alliés en Europe.

Tout semble en place pour une réinvention du vieux fascisme européen autour de la question environnementale. Ce n'est plus tant la complexité de la langue qui est attaquée, comme le dit Umberto Eco, que les sciences qui documentent la dérive climatique et l'effondrement du vivant. De part et d'autre de l'Atlantique, le climatoscepticisme et, de manière générale, tous les « écoscepticismes » sont là encore les postures les mieux partagées par Donald Trump et ses alliés.

Consentir aux catastrophes

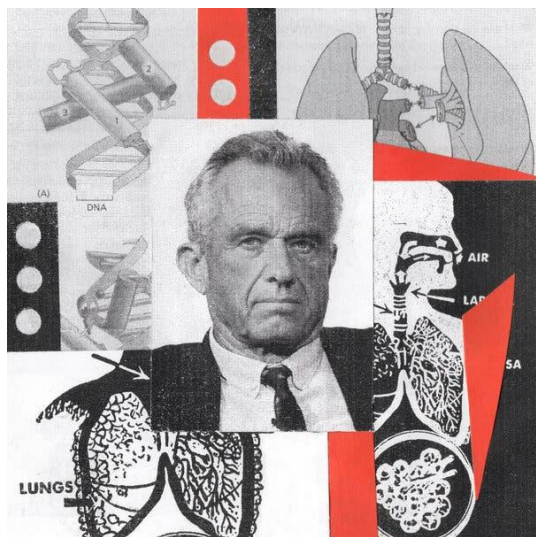
A quelques détails près, car, comme le dit Umberto Eco, le fascisme n'étant après tout qu'une série d'archétypes, il « doit tolérer les contradictions » internes. Celles-ci

ne sont pas un problème puisque le chef a accès à une forme de vérité supérieure qui surplombe la logique même. On peut tout à fait nier la réalité du réchauffement et, en même temps, promouvoir les voitures électriques d'Elon Musk pour lutter contre ce même réchauffement. De la même manière que l'on peut « restaurer la domination énergétique des Etats-Unis » (Lee Zeldin, futur ministre américain de l'environnement) – c'est-à-dire pomper tous les hydrocarbures possibles – tout en garantissant « l'air et l'eau les plus propres sur la planète », comme l'a promis Donald Trump.

Dans une perspective fasciste, dit Umberto Eco, « il n'y a pas de lutte pour la vie, mais plutôt une vie pour la lutte », et c'est là une autre voie possible de réinvention du fascisme. Ce ne sont plus seulement les étrangers ou les gauchistes qu'il faut combattre, mais aussi la nature qui devient l'ennemi. Et si la vie de chacun est envisagée comme un combat au service d'une cause supérieure, alors il devient possible de réclamer des populations qu'elles consentent à s'affronter à toujours plus de catastrophes, à toujours plus d'adversité. Voire de faire bientôt de celles-ci un élément de cohésion et de mobilisation nationales.

En 2017, au début de son premier mandat, les déclarations de Donald Trump sur le climat, la sortie des Etats-Unis de l'accord de Paris, ou encore les entraves à l'activité de l'Agence de protection de l'environnement avaient particulièrement retenu l'attention des commentateurs. Tous n'en avaient pas perçu toute la prémonitoire gravité. Ce n'est que quatre ans plus tard, après l'assaut du Capitole, que l'historien Robert Paxton, spécialiste du régime de Vichy, dit avoir accepté l'idée d'accoler l'adjectif « fasciste » au 45^e (et désormais 47^e) président américain.

A bien des égards, on peut se demander si l'écologie n'est pas aujourd'hui au fascisme ce que le canari dans la mine est au coup de grisou – et s'inquiéter de voir la trajectoire prise par bon nombre d'Etats européens. Comme le rappelait Umberto Eco, le fascisme pourrait revenir sous des habits neufs, et sans annoncer sa venue.



Guest Essay By M. Anthony Mills, *The New York Times*, Nov 27, 2024

Mr. Mills is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and the director of its Center for Technology, Science and Energy.

The leader of the Republican Party and our country's next president has tapped a pro-choice scion of the country's most famous Democratic dynasty to lead the Department of Health and Human Services. In keeping with the bewildering dynamics of today's negative partisanship, conservative groups such as the Heritage Foundation have cheered the selection of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., while liberals have near categorically denounced him.

Mr. Kennedy's transformation from left-wing vaccine skeptic to potential Republican cabinet member overseeing America's vast health apparatus represents a profound shift not only in the character of the American right but also in the politics of science more generally. The emergent MAGA science policy agenda, driven by skepticism and anti-elitism, blends familiar conservative and libertarian ideas with a suspicion of expert power once more associated with the left. The result is a uniquely American brand of populism that has the potential to fundamentally reshape national politics.

In retrospect, the science policy of Donald Trump's first administration was remarkably conventional, at least until Covid struck. He filled many science policy posts with figures highly regarded in the scientific community, even retaining Francis Collins as director of the National Institutes of Health.

There were controversies surrounding environmental policy, including the administration's decision to withdraw from the Paris climate accord. But those were familiar Republican fare, reminiscent of disputes during the Reagan and Bush eras. When it came to health agencies, many of Mr. Trump's picks — Scott Gottlieb for commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration and Alex Azar for secretary of health and human services —

had impeccable reputations in the Republican establishment. The criticism from the left was mostly the tired refrain that they were too cozy with the pharmaceutical industry.

Yet Mr. Trump left office amid a virulent backlash against scientific and medical expertise, marked by sharp declines in public trust, especially among Republicans. The administration that began Operation Warp Speed to develop vaccines to defeat the worst pandemic in a century ended in an epidemic of vaccine skepticism.

While most Americans still support the benefits of vaccination, Republicans today tend to be more vaccine hesitant than Democrats and more distrustful of the pharmaceutical industry generally. Compared with Democrats, Republicans are more likely to believe that the Food and Drug Administration is preventing natural cures from reaching the public because of corporate influence and that genetically modified organisms threaten public health. In short, Republican attitudes toward the scientific and medical establishment increasingly resemble the worldview embodied by Mr. Kennedy.

Far from being an eccentric one-off cabinet pick, then, the choice of Mr. Kennedy for a role in the new administration reflects the discontents, distrust and even paranoia of many within the current G.O.P. Mr. Trump's first administration now looks like a hinge moment, a point of transition between two political paradigms.

The last time the politics of science underwent a similarly striking shift was in the second half of the 20th century. The federal scientific establishment in its modern form dates to the decades after World War II. Inspired by the mobilization of science during the war (exemplified by the Manhattan Project) and further catalyzed by geopolitical competition (including the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957), Congress created or expanded a range of science

agencies, from the N.I.H. to the National Science Foundation to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

But by the late 1960s, the techno-optimism of the postwar years was losing steam. The Vietnam War, the politics of nuclear technology and the nascent environmental movement fueled a backlash against the alliance of science and the state. Student activists protested the co-optation of science by the so-called military-industrial complex. After the economic crisis of the 1970s, the wider public began to lose confidence that lavishly funded scientific institutions could deliver on their promises. By the end of the decade, the private sector overtook the public sector as the nation's principal source of research funding.

Yet the state remained pivotal in shaping America's scientific enterprise, sparking new tensions. Republicans decried the innovation-stifling effects of federal regulations, and Democrats worried about the societal and environmental impacts of unchecked technological development. Amid this push and pull, federal funding of basic science — especially biomedical research — came to occupy the uncontroversial political center. And after briefly stalling in the early 1980s, this funding grew continually, culminating in the doubling of the N.I.H.'s budget over five years around the turn of the millennium. Some historians have identified the Great Recession as marking the end of a neoliberal political order that had predominated since the late 1970s. Historians may come to view the Covid-19 pandemic as marking a similar turning point in the politics of science. And Mr. Trump's nomination of Mr. Kennedy may signal what comes next. Mr. Kennedy has migrated across the political spectrum, but he represents a stance that diverges sharply from that of the old G.O.P. If the center-right view of health policy used to be that the F.D.A. was too cautious, stifling private-sector innovation, his "Make America Healthy Again" plan aims "to dismantle the corporate stranglehold on our government agencies that has led to widespread chronic disease, environmental degradation and rampant public distrust." This language is closer to the leftism of Ralph Nader than to the market-friendly posture of the Chamber of Commerce.

Meanwhile, the onetime bipartisan consensus on biomedical research can no longer be taken for granted, with Republicans on Capitol Hill now poised to tighten the reins on the N.I.H. If Mr. Kennedy succeeds Xavier Becerra as health and human

services secretary, N.I.H. overhaul will probably be a major focus of the new administration. The naming of Covid lockdown critic Dr. Jay Bhattacharya as a potential N.I.H. director suggests as much.

One might be tempted to interpret Republicans' shifting stance on the N.I.H. as an expression of conventional small-government conservatism. But it is better understood as an expression of the right's push for greater oversight of health agencies since the Covid-19 pandemic. Tellingly, the former House speaker Newt Gingrich — who spearheaded the G.O.P.'s rise to power in the 1990s and oversaw the doubling of the N.I.H. budget — has come out in favor of congressional Republicans' proposed cuts to the agency, citing the pandemic as the reason for his volte-face.

To be sure, the MAGA approach to science echoes some traditional Republican concerns. Right-wing disdain for intellectual elites is hardly new. Social conservatives have long expressed unease about appeals to scientific authority that ignore moral and religious values. And fiscal conservatives and libertarians have always resisted the unchecked growth of federal bureaucracies.

But the MAGA science policy agenda represents something novel in our national politics, blending discontents from the right and the left. It remains, at this stage, more a bundle of instincts than a coherent agenda, reflecting a coalition of forces marked by internal tensions and even contradictions.

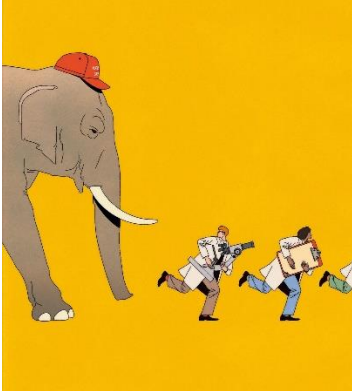
If there's a thread tying this coalition together, it's a suspicion that expert authority hides elite power. This points to a future of science shaped by clashes between the establishment and its challengers. The distrust driving this new politics of science is a response to the technocratic hubris and at times gross incompetence that have too often characterized America's institutions in recent years. Were this animus channeled into constructive policies and reforms, it could offer a needed corrective. In its unvarnished form, however, it is more radical than conservative, more destructive than constructive and more corrosive than restorative.

If this is what winds up driving the science policy agenda of the second Trump administration, then the prescriptions that follow will almost surely be worse than the diseases they are meant to cure. Yet any alternative that dismisses rather than speaks to the concerns that have driven so many Americans away from the expert establishment and toward a figure such as Mr. Kennedy will surely fail

MAGA's assault on science is an act of grievous self-harm

America will pay the price most of all

The Economist, May 24th, 2025



The ATTACKS have been fast and furious. In a matter of months the Trump administration has cancelled thousands of research grants and withheld billions of dollars from scientists. Projects at Harvard and Columbia, among the world's best universities, have been abruptly cut off. A proposed budget measure would slash as much as 50% from America's main research-funding bodies. Because America's technological and scientific prowess is world-beating, the country has long been a magnet for talent. Now some of the world's brightest minds are anxiously looking for the exit.

Why is the administration undermining its own scientific establishment? On May 19th Michael Kratsios, a scientific adviser to President Donald Trump, laid out the logic. Science needs shaking up, he said, because it has become inefficient and sclerotic, and its practitioners have been captured by groupthink, especially on diversity, equity and inclusion (dei). You might find that reasonable enough. Look closely at what is happening, though, and the picture is alarming. The assault on science is unfocused and disingenuous. Far from unshackling scientific endeavour, the administration is doing it grievous damage. The consequences will be bad for the world, but America will pay the biggest price of all.

One problem is that actions are less targeted than the administration claims, as our special Science section this week explains. As Mr Trump's officials seek to stamp out dei, punish universities for incidents of antisemitism and cut overall government spending, science has become collateral damage. A suspicion that scientists are pushing "woke" thinking has led grant-makers to become allergic to words like "trans" and "equity". As a consequence, it is not only inclusive education schemes that are being culled, but an array of orthodox science. Funding has been nixed for studies that seek, say, to assess cancer risk factors by race, or the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases by sex.

The attack on elite universities takes this to an illogical extreme. Because the White House sees colleges as bastions of wokeness and antisemitism, it has withheld funding for research at Harvard and Columbia, no matter in which subject. Overnight, projects on everything from Alzheimer's disease to quantum physics have been stopped. When scientists warn of the harm this does, they risk being seen as part of a scornful anti-MAGA elite that has been protected for too long.

More fundamentally, the claim that Mr Trump will stop groupthink is disingenuous. maga reserves a special hatred for public-health and climate researchers, whom it regards as finger-wagging worrywarts determined to suppress Americans' liberties—as they did in lockdowns and school closures during covid-19. The consequence is that spending on vaccine and climate research will be gutted most viciously of all. With the stroke of a pen, officials are trying to impose new rules that tell scientists what areas of inquiry they may pursue and what is off-limits—a shocking step backwards for a republic founded on the freethinking values of the Enlightenment.

Meanwhile, genuine problems with the way science works in America are being neglected. Mr Kratsios is right that there is too much bureaucracy. America's best researchers say they spend two out of five days on form-filling and other administrative tasks, instead of in the lab. Research is becoming more incremental. New ways of funding, such as

lotteries, are worth trying. So far, however, the White House has not set out plans to make science work better. Indeed, when scientists are uncertain whether their work will still be funded, or if they take to the courts to challenge arbitrary grant terminations, American science becomes less efficient, not more so.

Congress and the courts may yet act to limit the scale and the scope of these anti-science endeavours. Even so, the damage of the past few months will soon be felt. Savage cuts to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration mean worse weather-forecasting, making it harder for farmers to know when to plant their crops, and for local authorities to prepare for natural disasters. Those to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention will make it harder to monitor, and thus curb, outbreaks of disease.

There will also be longer-term harm. Although Mr Trump hopes his tariffs will lure businesses to invest in America, their research spending is unlikely to fill the same gaps as publicly funded basic work, much of which may not be commercialised for years, if ever. As funding is frozen, the danger of a brain drain looms. In the first three months of the year the number of applications for overseas jobs from American scientists rose by a third compared with the same period in 2024; foreign researchers applying to come to America fell by a quarter. The country's reputation for welcoming talent will not be so easily regained. If the belief that academic freedom is curtailed takes hold, the scientists who remain could self-censor their lines of inquiry for years to come.

The consequences will be felt around the world. America is the planet's biggest backer of public research; it is home to half of all science Nobel laureates and four of the ten best scientific-research universities. The knowledge uncovered by American scientists and resulting innovations such as the internet and mRNA vaccines have been a boon to humanity. When America retreats, everyone is robbed of the fruits of this ingenuity.

Exit, pursued by an elephant

It is America, however, that will feel the pain most of all. At the beginning of the 20th century there was no branch of science in which Uncle Sam led the world. At the century's end there was none where it did not. America's triumphs—its economic prowess, and its technological and military might—were interwoven with that scientific success. As America pulls back, it will cede ground to authoritarian China as a scientific superpower, with all the benefits that confers. maga's assault on science is not just about dei, nor is it about universities. It is first and foremost an act of self-harm. ■

The far right is going ... green?

Benji Jones, Vox, January 26 2024

"In my view, climate change is real and it is an existential threat."

"My inclination is to take dams down."

"The toxic chemicals that pollute our air, our water, our soils end up in our own bodies. They ruin our health in the same way that they ruin nature."

Those might sound like comments from a pretty typical environmentalist: a liberal Democrat who probably reveres the outdoors and enjoys hiking, thinks about their carbon footprint, and tries to eat less meat.

Instead, they were spoken by a figure who's now closely allied to President Donald Trump: Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

In recent years, when he's appeared on podcasts and campaign ads, Kennedy — Trump's pick to lead the US Department of Health and Human Services — often brought up environmental concerns, like how pesticides are poisoning Americans, and sang the virtues of healthy

soil. Kennedy is scheduled to appear before a Senate committee for his confirmation hearing on January 29.

"I'm an environmentalist," he told right-wing commentator Ben Shapiro last April.

Kennedy has the credentials. He spent more than two decades working as an environmental attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), a mainstream green group, and later helped found the Waterkeeper Alliance, a nonprofit that advocates for clean water. He fought polluters including the coal industry, chemical companies, and the US Navy.

That's what makes his current political alignment so surprising: Kennedy is now firmly enmeshed in the far right, and part of Team Trump — "the single worst environmental president our country has ever had," according to some of Kennedy's former colleagues. Trump, a climate-science skeptic, rolled back more than 100 environmental rules during his first term. And on his

first day in office, he signed a raft of executive orders to boost oil and gas production and roll back environmental safeguards.

Kennedy was a longtime Democrat, and his migration to the far right has shocked many of those who have known him. But he's not alone in this journey. It's part of a much broader shift in the environmental movement.

For decades, most mainstream green advocacy groups and top environmental scientists have been largely aligned with Democratic policies and leaders. Now, however, many people who are advocating for conservation, including clean water, air, and soil, have fallen into the far right and voted Trump into power. It's not uncommon to hear right-wing influencers talk about regenerative agriculture or Kennedy supporters raising concerns about environmental pollutants. While it's not clear how much power they will ultimately wield in the Trump administration, they represent a new and increasingly visible right-wing environmentalism — or what sociologist Holly Jean Buck has called para-environmentalism.

“Kennedy's rightward trajectory and new position within the MAGA movement are the latest indication that ideas that were once a core part of environmentalism are veering in a strange direction,” Buck, an associate professor at the University of Buffalo, wrote in *Compact* magazine in November. “Call it para-environmentalism. Like other para-phenomena, such as paramilitaries or the paranormal, para-environmentalism exists outside of the realm of official institutions and structures — at least for now.”

Across even the farthest stretches of the political spectrum are shared environmental goals: healthier land and healthier people. Everyone wants that. What stands in the way of a more unified environmental movement is that different political blocs have wildly different approaches to making the planet healthier. People on the far-right tend to distrust institutions including science agencies and big green groups, which form the backbone of the mainstream environmental movement. Members of this group also oppose action that centers on carbon and climate change; their concerns are more local, whether about water quality or immigration and grocery prices.

This leaves the modern green movement in a tough spot as it stares down four more years under Trump. How can its leaders work with a coalition of people who see them, the mainstream, as part of the problem — and should they?

Meet the far-right environmentalist

Conserving nature wasn't always considered at odds with the Republican Party. In fact, the movement to protect wildlife was born from the minds and actions of GOP leaders. More than a century ago, elite, Republican hunters — most famously, Teddy Roosevelt — witnessed the decline of charismatic species like bison and used their power to protect them. They supported, and in some cases

helped create, environmental institutions like the national parks system.

That legacy of conservation lives on to an extent in the modern Republican Party. The waning number of hunters and anglers of today still lean more conservative, partly due to their stance on gun rights. And by and large, they back mainstream conservation policies, such as protecting public access to federal land, said Aaron Weiss, deputy director at the Center for Western Priorities, a group that advocates for public lands. There's also a crop of moderate conservatives, including many youth, who worry about climate change and support conservation and clean energy. This new brand of far-right environmentalism that Kennedy embodies is something different. My reporting, including more than a dozen interviews with sociologists, conservative influencers, and mainstream environmentalists, identified two loose and partly overlapping strains. One consists of those who rail against environmental toxins as part of Kennedy's Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) coalition. Another comprises back-to-the-land libertarians who see salvation in growing one's own food, maintaining healthy soil, and embracing self-sufficiency.

MAHA environmentalism is rooted in a fear that we're all being poisoned — that pesticides, food additives, seed oils, and chemicals in the air are the root of chronic illness in America. The perpetrators, they claim, are Big Agriculture, Big Pharma, and other big corporations. A core belief is that industries have infiltrated federal agencies like the Food and Drug Administration that should be keeping Americans safe.

Many of the most outspoken MAHA figures promote and sell alternatives to conventional foods and health care, such as nutritional supplements. (MAHA figures including Kennedy also frequently assert that vaccines are unsafe and cause autism. Neither claims are supported by decades of scientific research.)

I recently spoke with Reinette Senum, a blogger and former mayor of Nevada City, California, who has spoken out against what she says are covert efforts to manipulate the atmosphere. Senum, who identifies as MAHA, describes herself as a former environmentalist and “recovering climate change believer.”

A number of experiences fueled her distrust of climate science. More than a decade ago, when Senum worked for a building-efficiency organization in California, she raised questions about whether retrofitting buildings is so resource-intensive that it actually offsets the climate benefits, she said. The managing director of the organization, known then as the California Building Performance Contractors Association, told her that those calculations didn't exist, she said. “I believed in alternative energy, and I realized it was a lie,” Senum said.

Senum later had a smart meter installed in her home. Shortly after, she said, she started having trouble sleeping and became extremely sensitive to sound — symptoms that she attributes to the smart meter. (Smart meters, as well as 5G and GMO foods, are all dubious for many in the MAHA movement, some of whom happen to reside in my hometown of Fairfield, Iowa.)

Like many other MAHA followers, Senum said she is worried about the environment, and the dark forces that pollute it, whether or not they're visible. And like some mainstream environmental organizations, she's fighting against geo-engineering, large-scale modifications to the planet's climate to limit warming, a field that is still largely experimental. The problem with left-wing green groups, Senum said, is that they've become too fixated on the climate change "boondoggle" and have ignored what people are actually concerned about.

"Nobody talks about water quality," she said of left-wing environmentalists. "They don't talk about air quality. They don't talk about pollution. They don't talk about heavy metals in the air. Or GMOs. The left environmental movement literally got infiltrated and usurped by climate change. They're so hyperfocused on that that they're no longer focusing on the environment." [...]

The other, overlapping strand of far-right environmentalism is more focused on land and soil. A number of influential figures, including US Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky and farmer Joel Salatin, advocate for locally grown food and farms that are free from the influence of Big Government and Big Business. Pastoral libertarians, as you might call them, glorify an earlier time before industrial agriculture, and are obsessed with the purity of what we eat and drink.

"What we are witnessing in the growing prominence of far-right environmentalism of recent years is a revival of an older kind of ecological and political thinking, a traditional attachment to home, to soil, to blood," Leigh Phillips wrote in *Noema*.

Much of the far right has embraced "regenerative agriculture" — a squishy term that broadly refers to farming practices that are meant to regenerate, or improve, the health of land rather than degrade it. These practices include planting cover crops that can improve soil health and avoiding chemicals that degrade it.

Regenerative agriculture has caught on among far-right figures likely because it enables a person to have a more self-sufficient farm, requiring fewer inputs, such as pesticides made by big companies and subsidized by the federal government. Advocates of the practice say it also produces more nutritious food.

"Regenerative agriculture, it's the truth," said RC Carter, a rancher in Wyoming who sells what he calls nutrient-dense beef. He didn't vote in the recent presidential election, doesn't trust most Democratic or Republican leaders, and

resists being clumped into any one group. "The only way you can get nutrient-dense food is if it comes from healthy soils," Carter told me.

"People are so confused and so lost, and if you're eating healthy food, that is a foundational piece to having clear thoughts."

What unifies this new brand of environmentalism

The most apparent trait that unites these far-right perspectives is distrust — of the government, of large scientific organizations, of big corporations. Distrust is so potent that even quality information produced by these institutions, whether on vaccine safety or climate change, doesn't break through and alter beliefs. I saw this firsthand in East Palestine, Ohio, following the train derailment in early 2023. There were legitimate criticisms of the government response, but government data on air and water quality had little bearing on whether residents, the majority of whom voted for Trump in 2020 and 2024, felt safe.

But there's another, more opaque thread among right-wing environmental beliefs, according to Jesse Bryant, a sociologist at Yale University: a yearning for a religious or pseudo-religious purity. The idea here is that our ecosystems, our soils, our bodies, and our minds are polluted — whether by pesticides or by liberal ideas — and that makes it harder to access God, or spiritual enlightenment.

"It's very clear having spent a lot of time in far-right online spaces that purity and pollution binaries drive a lot of [right-wing] ideologizing," said Bryant, who studies environmental perspectives in far-right communities.

This perspective likely stems from Christian culture and beliefs, a powerful force in right-wing politics. According to Christian teachings, human bodies are made in God's image, and so they are naturally pure. Pollution, or impurity, is akin to sin. And sin can weaken our relationship with God. Similarly, from a New Age spiritual perspective — more common among members of the MAHA coalition — loading our bodies with impurities, which could include pesticide-ridden foods, is considered an impediment to reaching spiritual enlightenment.

That these ideas influence political views are supported by a 2012 study published in *Psychological Science*. It found that people who identify as conservatives tend to be less concerned about the environment than those who identify as liberal, yet they are motivated to protect nature with messaging around purity. "We found that reframing pro-environmental rhetoric in terms of purity, a moral value resonating primarily among conservatives, largely eliminated the difference between liberals' and conservatives' environmental attitudes," the authors wrote. [...]

What's next for the environmental movement?

Trump is back in the White House, and many environmental problems — wildfires, hurricanes, habitat loss — are worse today than ever before. Where does the environmental movement go from here?

Fortunately, there is common ground between far-right and mainstream environmentalists: a desire for clean air, water, and soil, and accountability for big corporations that negatively impact the environment. Among these disparate factions, polluting companies are a common enemy, even though the Republican Party has traditionally, and under Trump, favored polluters.

“We have far more in common than we don’t,” said Ben Jealous, the executive director of the Sierra Club, one of the nation’s oldest and largest environmental organizations. “When you hear Americans of any political stripe express concern about pesticides, express a desire for clean air, clean water, and healthy food, express a preference for anything related to reviving small farms ... what that affirms for me is that our issues, our [environmental] agenda, is more popular than either party.”

The Sierra Club and other big green groups acknowledge that they need to do a better job at talking about these common concerns. “We can’t talk about gigatons of carbon equivalents,” said Tejada of the NRDC. “Like nobody knows or cares. We can talk about the fact, though, that a storm hit West North Carolina a couple months ago that left \$60 billion worth of damage that nobody knows how to pay for.”

As Jealous put it, the problem with the environmental movement “is not what we say, it’s literally how we say it.”

Green groups could adjust their messaging, and perhaps get more of the right behind their cause. This may work in local fights — to protect a city park, for example, or clean up a stream. It is not, however, in the public’s interest to abandon efforts to tackle climate change; lowering carbon and expanding clean energy are integral to those efforts. Plus, ditching carbon from the green vocabulary won’t suddenly dissolve political divides. There are much bigger hurdles to building a more unified environmental movement.

Common among the far right is what Whitney Phillips, a media studies researcher and co-author of a forthcoming book on anti-liberalism, calls anti-liberal demonology: the idea that liberals, a group that is not clearly defined, are an evil force that is polluting the “real America.”

Most mainstream green organizations, Democratic policymakers, and scientists — again, pillars of the modern environmental movement — are seen as liberal and thus deeply mistrusted. To the far right, they are inextricably linked to the very pollutants, the impurities, that they’re trying to get rid of (even though these groups are arguably doing more than any other to clean up pollution).

Without resolving these deeply entrenched trust issues, it’s unlikely that far right and mainstream environmental leaders will be fighting these problems together.

“If you’re trying to work with people who are on the left, but you hate people on the left,” Phillips said, “how the fuck is that supposed to work?”

