

Devina Mehra: Trump as a green warrior? It's not too far-fetched

Devina Mehra | 21 May 2025



Forget what the US president said during his campaign and in his inaugural speech, and look at what happened: his actions and their consequences. (REUTERS)

SUMMARY

Many of the US president's actions stray from his professed ideological moorings. But then, dalliances with the green agenda and leftist ideas may be part of a larger trend among right-wing political parties looking for new voters.

You have heard Donald Trump jeer at 'woke' left wingers, dismiss climate warriors and promise to go all out to promote oil drilling even in the Alaskan wilderness. But what if he's a closet green warrior? So stealthy that he himself may not know it? I'm serious. Hear me out.

Forget what the [US president](#) said during his campaign and in his inaugural speech, and look at what happened: his actions and their consequences.

"Drill, baby, drill," Trump had said to encourage crude oil production and consumption. But then what did he do? He [bought Teslas](#), whose whole reason for existence is the green movement. Whether electric vehicles are actually all that green, given that electricity is often generated from fossil fuels, is a discussion for another day.

Then there was all his talk of more consumption because all this climate change and other ecology-related stuff was bunkum dreamt up by villainous woke liberals and American values were about higher consumption. From there, it has come to Trump saying that American kids can do just fine with two dolls instead of 30 and even those two dolls will cost more! If any one person could make a serious dent on the unsustainable level of consumption in America, it is Trump. So kudos to him from the reviled green gang.

As an aside, I remember reading over 20 years ago that the average American bought four pairs of jeans a year. My jaw dropped, as that was roughly the lifetime purchase level back then even for relatively affluent Indians. What would one do, I wondered, with four new pairs of jeans a year?

But coming back to Trump. Maybe he will go down in history as the first US president to reduce consumption in America. Of course, this will not only push down its GDP, but will have a huge impact on Asian and other exporters to the US, acting as a brake on the ability of these countries to move up the income ladder. Second and third order impacts can be modelled too.

More recently, Trump asked the pharmaceutical industry to cut drug prices steeply. This is as leftist a policy as one can imagine. This behaviour is part of a pattern that a friend who has a formal education in history, [Atul Singh](#) of *The Fair Observer*, had pointed out to me in another context. That right-wing political policies often go hand-in-hand with left-wing economic policies. Who knew?

Since then, I have studied it a little deeper.

Ha-Joon Chang's book, *Edible Economics*, sets out how the Iron Chancellor Bismarck who reunited Germany and made it one of the premier powers of the world and who was officially against the socialist party actually set up the first modern-day welfare state in 19th century Germany. There was accident insurance, old-age insurance and subsidized healthcare. Even Hitler followed the same pattern with his emphasis on public works, including Germany's famous autobahns and self-sufficiency. Hitler actually followed Keynesian economics. And the Nazi party's full name was the National Socialist German Workers' party.

The framework is supposed to be as follows. Most far-right ideologies depend on saying that one's nation, race or group is special, great or superior. Up to this point, it is identity politics that excludes certain ethnicities, religions, etc. But once a group is declared special, its members need to be looked after so that no one in it is left behind.

This tendency has accelerated in the last 10-15 years as working classes in the West have shifted allegiance from what were traditional left-leaning or worker parties to identity-selling right-wing parties (remember the 'Make America Great Again' or MAGA slogan). In turn, rightist parties have adopted certain economic policies that were traditionally seen as leftist in order to please their voting flocks.

What do economic studies show?

"Long-term studies... find far-right parties to be composed of middle-class voters and working-class ones motivated primarily by cultural grievances, not economics," states 'Dazed and Confused? The Far Right's Opaque Economic Policies' (at Illiberalism.org).

"The success of radical right populist parties in the last decades seems to rely on a combination of economically left-wing and culturally conservative attitudes," to cite 'The Macroeconomic Impact of Radical Right Populist Parties in Government' by Montserrat Ferré and Carolina Manzano in [Journal of Macroeconomics](#).

So, the earlier shorthand of right-wing parties being pro-market and only leftist parties vying for working class votes is changing. What Trump is doing is what a number of right-wing parties and leaders have done across the world.

If Trump does manage to bring down the unconscionably high healthcare costs in the US, that will be a paradigm shift. The US has the dubious distinction of spending a lot on healthcare with very poor outcomes relative to its wealth.

The bottom line is that short-hand election slogans and speech rhetoric don't matter beyond a point. Political parties and leaders cannot be classified only on the basis of news headlines. We have to watch not their lips, but their executive actions.

And, as always, there are always consequences to those actions, both intended as well as unintended.

The author is chairperson, managing director and founder of First Global and author of 'Money, Myths and Mantras: The Ultimate Investment Guide'. Her X handle is @devinamehra