

Green nationalism? How the far right could learn to love the environment

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Green politics is associated with the left these days, but that doesn't rule out an eco-friendly turn at the opposite end of the spectrum. After all, nationalist worries over finite resources and talk of "threats to tradition" have been echoed throughout the history of the green movement.

So, is a far right environmentalism possible? And if so, given climate change is hugely disruptive for any form of traditional nationalist idyll, how long before far right groups join the likes of Greenpeace on the frontlines?

Modern forms of green activism emerged in the 1960s in a context of threats like acid rain or increasing pesticide use which [transcended national boundaries](#). The EU in the early 1970s also began to grapple with [environmental problems](#) that could no longer be effectively managed [by individual states](#).

This form of green activism thus showed that the nation state had failed to protect citizens against environmental problems. As such, it drew upon an older tradition that in the 1800s reacted against the perceived attacks on humanity and nature by capitalist interests by calling for a return to the land.

This could give early environmentalism a left-wing flavour, as in the [Winter Hill trespass of 1896](#) when thousands of people in Bolton reclaimed an ancient right of way through private land. But the disruption that modernisation brings also produced a range of responses that could be termed "green nationalism".

The far right feels threatened

The far right respond to threats they perceive to custom, culture, identity and locales [posed by cosmopolitan elites](#). They usually have [settler value systems](#) that express pessimism and victimhood, emphasise threats rather than opportunities and see conspiracies as explanations for the degradation of their personal and group life-chances and local environment.

This leads to a green nationalism of [defensive parochialism](#) in which

degradation of local features are opposed because they negatively affect customs – such as tending allotments, or the retention of the village green – threaten the familiar locale, and represent the effects of distrusted outsiders.

How this plays out in practice seems to depend upon which outsiders they distrust. In the US there are [Tea Party environmentalists](#) who have been mobilised, for instance, by the impact of polluting energy companies. However, a tradition of blaming government not business, along with [diversionary nationalist propaganda](#) (Drill here! Drill now!) funded by wealthy oil barons, has meant these same activists are often vehement [opponents of better environmental regulation](#).

In contrast, right-wing groups in Britain seem simply to ignore the environmental threats posed by extreme energy extraction such as fracking.

Nationalism needs landscape

The [landscape](#) is a key element in national identity throughout the world. A defence of that landscape against perceived threats can so become an environmentalism focused on preserving the distinctive characteristics of a nation's land, from the rolling green fields of England to the snow-capped mountains of Switzerland.

This has often been accompanied by other ways of reasserting identity. Myths of a pagan past in harmony with nature have been a feature of green nationalism, from its beginnings through to the Anastasia ecovillages in contemporary Russia where, unlike their equivalent hippy communes found in the West, sustainable living is combined with a "[reactionary eco-nationalism](#)". Such myths give identity and meaning to some groups attracted to the far right, such as the [skinhead movement](#) that emerged in Britain in the 1960s, while also providing imagined

alternatives to the drudgery associated with modern capitalism or the compromises of democracy.

'They come here, use our finite resources ...'

The other aspect of the green movement that is appropriated by the far right is the concern about the depletion of key resources by unchecked usage. At its most cynical, this can be a far right equivalent of business "greenwashing". However, it also reflects a tendency to see economics and society as [a zero-sum game](#) in which every gain for others is a loss for the victimised groups they see themselves as.

Concerns about finite resources therefore align with anxieties about immigration. Far right groups and their media supporters are swift to exploit fears of [threats to the local animals](#) allegedly posed by immigrants. Such baseless hostility is then compounded by the widespread and equally erroneous view that England's green and pleasant land has already largely [disappeared under concrete](#).

Green causes are not usually the main motivating factor for those attracted to the far right. This does not mean, however, that their espousal is mere greenwashing.

The far right tends to think of green issues differently from their left-wing counterparts. Their approach focuses on the local, not the global, and reflects the centrality of landscape to national identities. Their defensive parochialism means that these threats are usually seen in cultural terms through the [appropriation of victimhood](#), hence the tendency to focus upon immigration as opposed to the emphases of left-wing environmentalists.

Green issues tend to be seen by the far right through the distinct lenses of cultural identity and the land. That does not necessarily prevent,

however, the emergence of a green nationalism.

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