# Anti-environmentalism fractures UK conservatism amid rising climate concerns



Anti-environmentalism is prominently reshaping political landscapes, both in Britain and beyond, as recent election cycles reveal a marked shift towards rejecting established environmental goals such as net zero emissions and conservation measures. This rising hostility towards anti-pollution initiatives is not merely a passing trend; rather, it reflects a deep-rooted ideological diversion that challenges the very essence of traditional conservatism. While populist political factions in the US, UK, and Europe vigorously oppose environmental measures, their rhetoric often stands in stark contradiction to the ever-present realities of climate change, highlighting a significant disconnect between political discourse and public sentiment.

Given the precarious nature of the climate crisis, environmentalists and organisations like the Conservative Environment Network remain perplexed by the mounting resistance among right-leaning voters. This network asserts that many pivotal environmental protections were originally championed by conservative figures. Yet, as the leadership of the UK Conservative Party shifts under Kemi Badenoch, who has openly criticised the net-zero target, the traditional pact between conservatism and environmentalism appears increasingly fragile. The conflict within the Conservative Party exemplifies a broader fracturing of the political consensus surrounding climate issues, as highlighted by the contrasting firm commitments of the Labour Party to climate policies.

Polling data reinforces the notion that public support for environmental action remains robust; approximately 77% of Britons regard climate change as a serious threat, with 65% acknowledging that they are already witnessing its effects. However, the political narrative, particularly among figures like former Reform UK leader Richard Tice, paints a narrow dichotomy between economic stability and environmental protection. By framing environmental initiatives as elite concerns that compromise jobs and economic growth, these politicians cultivate a sentiment that largely dismisses the importance of long-term ecological health for immediate economic gain.

The dialogue around anti-environmentalism is further complicated by its geographical context. While critics of environmental policy often direct their ire towards nations such as China, much of Asia and Africa are experiencing environmental crises that dictate a different form of activism. In these regions, climate-related challenges manifest not as abstract concepts, but as dire necessities that drive public policy and collective action. This "survivalism" is becoming increasingly relevant as extreme weather events dominate, and ecological degradation poses tangible threats to livelihoods.

Moreover, the very narratives constructed by anti-environmentalists reveal inherent contradictions. Figures like Donald Trump profess environmental ideals while simultaneously dismantling crucial protections. His claims, made during a rally in Wisconsin, illustrate an attempt to align with popular environmental sentiments despite actions that very clearly suggest otherwise. This paradox extends across the political spectrum, where populist leaders flirt with climate change denial while simultaneously appealing to constituents' instincts to believe they are "environmentalists."

This ironic landscape of anti-environmentalism reflects a broader cultural phenomenon. Many individuals express affection for nature through a lens of nostalgia, yet their engagement with environmental activism is often superficial. The distinction between "cold" and "hot" environmentalism poses a critical question: can one claim to be an environmentalist while holding an indifferent or antagonistic stance toward actionable policies? This duality complicates the narrative, emphasizing the necessity for a deeper, more integrated understanding of environmentalism that transcends superficial affiliations.

As the political climate continues to evolve, the challenge remains not just in combating anti-environmental rhetoric but also in re-establishing a cohesive environmental ethos that resonates across the political spectrum. The environmental movement increasingly faces an uphill battle against a rhetoric steeped in contradiction and immediate economic rationalism, risking undermining the hard-won gains achieved over decades. The rise of anti-environmentalism in this post-western context is complex and, ultimately, unsustainable, as it frequently contradicts the lived experiences of people across nations grappling with the dire consequences of climate change.

The future of environmental policy hinges on a nuanced comprehension of these contradictions, urging a reclamation of a more enduring commitment to ecological stewardship that harmonises economic and ecological imperatives. In a world where the realities of climate change are unavoidable, the push for genuine environmentalism must not only persist but also adapt, drawing upon the diverse voices globally advocating for a sustainable future.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://theshillongtimes.com/2025/05/25/anti-environmentalism-and-contradictions/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/ab0cb3fc-e45d-454b-83d9-c0284550aafe), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/f9b9b07e-eb8c-455c-aeda-801fd0d30e2d)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://theshillongtimes.com/2025/05/25/anti-environmentalism-and-contradictions/), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/uk-opposition-leader-drops-support-2050-net-zero-climate-target-2025-03-18/), [[6]](https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/one-four-britons-think-climate-change-out-control)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/66bcdded-b4c8-4d3b-9e79-4f8cea24bfd9), [[7]](https://www.mhpgroup.com/uk-public-support-for-net-zero-has-fallen-since-cop26/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://theshillongtimes.com/2025/05/25/anti-environmentalism-and-contradictions/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/ab0cb3fc-e45d-454b-83d9-c0284550aafe), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/uk-opposition-leader-drops-support-2050-net-zero-climate-target-2025-03-18/)
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3. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/uk-opposition-leader-drops-support-2050-net-zero-climate-target-2025-03-18/> - This Reuters report details UK opposition leader Kemi Badenoch's announcement to abandon the 2050 net-zero climate target, citing economic concerns. It discusses the political challenges of moving away from fossil fuels and the reactions from climate advisors and environmental groups.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/f9b9b07e-eb8c-455c-aeda-801fd0d30e2d> - An analysis of the British Conservative Party's evolving stance on climate change. The article examines the shift from substantial emission reduction initiatives to a more 'realistic' approach under leaders like Rishi Sunak and Kemi Badenoch, and the broader political implications of this change.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/66bcdded-b4c8-4d3b-9e79-4f8cea24bfd9> - A critique by Sir Paul Marshall, a media tycoon behind GB News, on the UK's approach to achieving net-zero emissions. He argues that the country risks economic downfall due to high industrial electricity costs and reliance on gas, advocating for the repeal of the Climate Change Act and the use of domestic oil and gas reserves.
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