

On Trump's complete reversal of his predecessor's policies

By Amir Mollae Mozaffari
Staff writer

OPINION

On his first day in office, Donald Trump once again signed a flurry of executive orders. This time, he was even more unapologetic in rolling back a larger number of key policies of his predecessor on issues including immigration, the environment, and diversity initiatives. In a speech on January 20, Trump said he was revoking almost 80 "disruptive, radical executive actions of the previous administration."

Obviously, implementing the president's executive orders would take considerable time as is, not to mention that many of these orders will be challenged in court and may never see the light of day in the end. However, what's done is done. Already, US troops are surging to the country's border with Mexico, refugee flights have been canceled, some scientists are barred from finishing their work and shaping them into policies, and some federal workers are told to stay home from the office while their jobs are being evaluated.

Granted, some of those policies were definitely lacking in vision or efficiency and some others were expected to be reversed by Trump since he explicitly cited them as campaign promises. So, if one goes looking for a wave of outraged Americans, one would find them almost exclusively among Democrats and independents. The Republicans who voted for Trump were expectedly jubilant, but that can hardly be enough criteria for judging a president's attempt at overhauling the system.

To be sure, this isn't an unprecedented practice, but the fact that it was done on a president's first day in office is rather unique to the United States. Most other countries in the world currently lack an equivalent of executive presidential orders, especially one with such extensive powers and implications. So, reversals have to go through their respective parliaments and may very well die there. However, since elections usually end up handing both the keys to the executive branch and the legislative branch to a single party or coalition, the road to achieving such reversals is not so bumpy. So, it bodes well to discuss the likely consequences of such sharp, blanket reversals in policies, wherever they may happen.



Lost time, effort, progress

Abolishing ongoing policies and initiatives in many cases would amount to reinventing the wheel. I would, again, happily contend that the incoming leader of a country has (almost) every right to govern his people as he sees fit; after all, they hopefully voted for such changes. However, there has to be a happy medium where such U-turns don't seem to be out of pure hatred for whatever the predecessor stood for, right or wrong. It's not like most parties stand on the extremes of political spectrums. For example, the Democratic Party of the United States generally sits on the center-left of the American political spectrum, while the Republican Party is moving more and more toward the far-right under Donald Trump but still has a long way to go as evidenced by the fact that Trump has his quarrels with ultra-right parties. Time is precious, especially in these extremely competitive

times, and the energy of the fresh administration can arguably be better spent elsewhere if it's inevitably going to re-introduce some of those policies with little to no changes.

Reason or loyalty?

Next, we have to consider how government employees and contractors must feel about adopting reasonable and scientifically sound policies. Watching all this unfold, there has to be a moment when they would question whether the leadership wants reason or loyalty out of them. It doesn't help that in his inaugural address, Trump said, "We will immediately restore the integrity, competency, and loyalty of America's government." Rumors were already circulating for months following the release of Project 2025 that under Trump, the criteria for evaluating federal workers would be how much they are willing to go against their own common sense to fulfill what the president will ask



US President Donald Trump signs a stack of executive orders in the Oval Office of the White House on his first day in office on January 20, 2025.

● EVAN VUCCI/AP

of them.

Confronted by this dilemma, three scenarios can be imagined: Either, one, the government workers will simply resign, just to be replaced by fresh, possibly inexperienced blood. Or, two, they would continue working but do that unmotivated and without the least amount of creativity as they won't wholeheartedly agree with the general direction. Or finally, three, they will work against the government whenever they can; old and new workers who care more about the end result of policies will find loopholes to work around restrictions and make their preferred policies irreversible, creating a vicious circle that would haunt the system onward.

At cost of people's trust

Most states around the world have already been losing the trust of their people at an alarming rate. Even though the *raison d'être* of the executive branch is to implement the will of the people — whether it is implied in their vote or explicitly declared by their representatives in the parliament — people are feeling more and more like the government wants what is best for its leaders, not for their subjects. Doing an instant 180 on almost every key policy only exacerbates this prevailing feeling. It indicates a new norm, where the world is to be seen in black and white, not shades of grey; correcting course is to be a thing of the past, and petty rivalry is to be the downfall of the nation.

Handicapped in int'l arenas

Finally, one has to consider international partners when the incoming president so sharply revokes his predecessor's orders



Doing an instant 180 on almost every key policy only exacerbates this prevailing feeling of distrust in the government. It indicates a new norm, where the world is to be seen in black and white, not shades of grey; correcting course is to be a thing of the past, and petty rivalry is to be the downfall of the nation.

and achievements. A decline in trust is bound to rear its ugly head again, this time in much more tangible ways. When allies, enemies, and neutral partners see this, they will be well within the realm of reasons to ask for guarantees that you would not renege on your commitments and policies just because you lost an election — especially to an electoral college, of all. Alternatively, they may, again, reasonably ask for more concessions, just so that they would have reaped some reward just before the inevitable volte-face. None of these scenarios would be pleasant or even convenient for either side; both would have very much preferred to not live under the fear of a change of heart in voters, but this is the reality we are all living now.

The US politics, in particular, in recent days was full of such slippery slopes; from the outgoing president Joe Biden pardoning those related to him and anyone who probably had mumbled something against Trump in advance to Trump himself going after 51 former intelligence officials who "falsely suggest[ed]" that an initial news story about Hunter Biden's "improper disclosure of sensitive government information" was a Russian disinformation campaign. Those who would argue that we're blowing stuff out of proportion we would kindly remind that the US president has already slipped down one of those slopes, with a pardoning order of his own that fully exonerated more than 1,500 people for their role in the siege of the US Capitol. Due process be damned; all hail partisanship, I guess.



US President Donald Trump (C) takes in the applause during the January 20, 2025, inauguration ceremonies as his predecessor Joe Biden (R) looks on with discontent in the Rotunda of the US Capitol.

● CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

