

Ecofascism

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REPORT




Photo by Bradley Swenson

How do far-right movements co-opt environmental concerns?

The report explores the intersection of climate change and extremist ideologies, focussing on how far-right movements incorporate environmental issues into their agendas. Ecofascism is an extreme form of environmentalism that embraces violence and perpetuates racialised inequalities.

The report argues that as the impacts of climate change become more apparent, more extremist organisations will take environmentalist positions. It calls for a transformative social project that combines environmental sustainability with social justice and democratic governance to challenge extremism while adapting to climate change.

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Introduction

Ecofascism is any environmentalism that advocates or accepts violence and does so in a way that reinforces existing systems of inequality or targets certain people while leaving others untouched. It is basically environmentalism that suggests that certain people are naturally and exclusively entitled to control and enjoy environmental resources. (Hancock, 2022)

The increasingly dramatic impacts of climate change have put it firmly on the political agenda of political movements, from the mainstream to the extremist, including the extreme right and neo-fascists.

In an earlier report, CORE has discussed the impacts of climate change which are likely to lead to increased violent extremism. In this report, the focus will be upon how far-right and fascist movements have reacted to and adopted environmental concerns into their political agendas and the implications of this move towards ecofascism. Biehl and Straudenmeier (1996) define 'ecofascism' as 'the preoccupation of authentically fascist movements with environmentalist concerns.'

Ecofascism' is 'the preoccupation of authentically fascist movements with environmentalist concerns'

Generally, those activists who express concerns around the environment through direct action are either to the far-left or of the political spectrum or are anarchists (Farinelli & Marinone, 2021) rather than being white supremacists or persons otherwise associated with the far-right. However, many far-right extremists currently express concerns around the environment, including some individuals who have perpetrated terrorist attacks claiming that they are defenders of their native ecology.

The far-right ecofascist tendency occupies a unique position on environmentalism

The far-right ecofascist tendency occupies a unique position on environmentalism, distinct from other movements with an interest in the area. This derives from the tension between fascism's primary emphasis on the nation, which takes a localised and territorially bound perspective, and the inherently global nature of environmental concerns that extend beyond the confines of any single nation and which require coordinated global action to address (Vicenová et al., 2022).

While the term 'ecofascism' is popularly used to express these tendencies, this has been contested, with Lubarda (2020), for instance, using the term 'far-right ecologism' to reflect the distinction between modern far-right movements and traditional fascism. While there have been fascist states in history, and many of these have had environmental concerns, there has never been a purely ecofascist regime (Orton, 2000). Rather, the introduction of ecological themes to neo-fascist thought is likely to become increasingly prominent across far right movements rather than generating discrete ecofascist organisations.

Ecological themes are likely to become increasingly prominent across far right movements in future

Given the increasing, and essential, political focus upon climate change, and the frequency of extreme weather events, and the increasingly prominent adaptations to these, awareness of climate change has filtered into many political groupings. Inevitably, the increasingly politicised sphere in which the discussion of environmental policies occurs means that people at all points on the political spectrum are likely to engage with ideas around the environment and climate change. This is essential for the development of policies which will address and delimit the impacts of climate change upon our planet and its inhabitants. However, this also necessarily means that it will be adopted and co-opted by organisations with extremist ideologies.

In ecofascist ideology, the protection of nature is intertwined with the directive of safeguarding the nation

In ecofascist ideology, the protection of nature is intertwined with the directive of safeguarding the nation, understood in ethnonationalist terms. It may be underpinned by a metaphysical belief that nature and the nation are interconnected, and if nature is harmed or degraded, then this has a spiritual impact upon the nation and its inhabitants. ‘Outsider’ groups are imagined as lacking in the same mystical connection to the land as those considered ‘indigenous’ - who may not be the actual indigenous people, but those who claim to embody the ‘true’ spirit of the land (K. Campion, 2023; Hughes et al., 2022).

Ecofascists frequently find themselves in self-perceived ideological affinity within anarchist, post-leftist, and nihilist milieux

Fascist networks and individuals with extreme-right political positions have also often extended into the left to infiltrate and co-opt the modern green movement. Ecofascists frequently find themselves in self-perceived ideological affinity within anarchist, post-leftist, and nihilist milieux, as well as with the authoritarian left represented by Maoists and Stalinists (Ross & Bevensee, 2020).

Present-day ecofascists hold the view that increasing human population is not only depleting natural resources but that population change poses a potential risk to the stability of their states and cultures. Countries in the global South, which are those most impacted by climate change, are not regarded with sympathy or solidarity, but as the source of dangerous migration which threatens the homeland.

In common with other white nationalists, they argue that permitting migrants into the United States or other predominantly 'white' countries is a perilous decision which they position as an environmental issue as well as a cultural threat. The catchphrase 'Save Trees, not Refugees' can be found in far-right memes and on websites like the 'Daily Stormer.'

Brenton Tarrant, perpetrator of the Christchurch massacre stated in his manifesto 'there is no nationalism without environmentalism...there is no traditionalism without environmentalism.'

Lethal attacks in Christchurch, El Paso and Buffalo, which in total killed 81 people, have been perpetrated by far-right actors who explicitly cited environmental concerns as part of their motivation for their crimes.

Brenton Tarrant, perpetrator of the Christchurch massacre stated in his manifesto 'there is no nationalism without environmentalism...there is no traditionalism without environmentalism' - sentiments echoed by his imitators, such as Payton Gendron, who murdered ten Black people at a convenience store (Phillips, 2022).

Far-right environmentalists, unlike the traditional right and other conservatives, accept the scientific evidence that climate change is impacting human life. The traditional, conservative right, on the other hand, have often understood environmentalism as a cover for government spending and the erosion of civil liberties (Antonio & Brulle, 2011). Many assume that science which demonstrates the impacts of climate change is a scam or a conspiracy theory. As such, populist leaders such as Donald Trump dismiss climate change as 'a con' and a 'hoax perpetrated by China', while tearing up climate agreements and weakening environmental protections (Cheung, 2020).

Far-right environmentalists do accept that climate change is harmful, but rather than focussing upon global solutions, they yoke environmentalism to nationalism, focussing upon their beliefs that overpopulation in the Global South leads to resource depletion, immigration to the West and subsequent environmental harm in 'white' homelands.

Eco-fascist tendencies elide concerns about the pollution of the environment with the perceived 'polluting' nature of the Other

Moore and Roberts (2022) define fascism as 'a political form that seeks to revolutionise and re-harmonise the nation state through expelling a radically separate 'Other' by paramilitary means.' Ideas around 'harmony' can also express an idealised relationship with nature - with the 'Other' characterised as a pollutant to the purity of the nation, including its ecology. This is analogised to the introduction of new species of animals or plant which disrupts the delicate balance of an ecosystem, such as cane toads or grey squirrels.

At a symbolic level, ecofascist tendencies elide concerns about the pollution of the environment with the perceived 'polluting' nature of the 'Other' within the imagined racial and cultural singularity of their own desired political system. According to Sarah Manavis (2018), within ecofascist thought, the idea of race is closely tied to territory: 'Ecofascists believe that living in the original regions a race is meant to have originated in and shunning multiculturalism is the only way to save the planet they prioritise above all else.'

'Deep ecology' can involve the idea that the only way to preserve life on Earth is to dramatically reduce the human population

Lubarda and Forchthner (2022) identify a potential proximity between ecofascism and the misanthropy implicit in 'Deep Ecology' movement's ambivalence towards rationality, science and human development which are seen as responsible for the degradation of the natural world. Orton (2000) writes that 'Deep ecology has as a major and important focus the insight that the ecological crisis demands a basic change of values, the shift from human-centred anthropocentrism to ecocentrism and respect for the natural world.'

However, in some incarnations, it can also involve the idea that the only way to preserve life on Earth is through dramatically reducing the human population which means creating massive demographic change. Philips states that the 'hard truth is that eco-xenophobia does not in fact conflict with many central ideas within mainstream progressive environmentalism.' The far-right has long obsessed over demographics, fearing being outbred by people they consider to be their racial and cultural inferiors.

An understanding of the implications of climate change built upon the basis of a racial hierarchy can take on an eugenic angle: arguing that if the human population is threatened, then those who are assumed to be genetically or culturally superior should be prioritised for preservation; those living in the global South, already the most gravely impacted by climate change, must be disregarded.

While Moore and Roberts (2002) do not identify any specific ecofascist movement, they note that ecofascist themes are gaining greater currency within far-right movements. Indeed, that there is a long history of themes around environmentalism within far-right movements, often positioned around exclusionary dichotomies of purity and pollution. ‘Natives’ are imagined as the natural guardians of the environment (despite the fact that many of those sharing ecofascist positions are not themselves ‘natives’ but the descendents of immigrants themselves).

Within ecofascist thought, concerns about the environment are entwined with notions of race, rather than the mainstream preoccupations of the environmentalist movement with limiting and reversing the impacts of climate change. Their environmentalism may be comparatively shallow due to its localism, limited by its lack of interest in global phenomena.

Far-right environmentalism may be comparatively shallow due to its localism

Shanaah et al (2023) found that

participants who indicated higher levels of support for ecofascist action and ideology seem to have been driven more by the classical ‘fascist’ outlook than concerns about the environment. They tended to score high on right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, national identification, ethnocentrism, but low on identification with environmentalists.

The far-right look towards the selective control of population growth and immigration as a means of protecting the environment

As such, far-right environmental positions are parochial, defined in terms of preserving the purity of the nation state - which includes the homogeneity of its population - and dismissive of the costs of climate change within other territories where it will impact other social, ethnic and religious groups.

In place of international collaboration to reduce further damage to the environment and mandate policies, the far-right instead look towards the selective control of population growth and immigration as a means of protecting the environment: one which allows for the kind of social engineering that prioritises one group's existence over another, congruent with ethno-nationalism.

Colonialist origins

Fascists typically have a human-centred view of nature, in which nature and its resources are essential to sustain a mystically imagined community. (J. Campion, 2022)

Colonialism increased human awareness of the diversity of nature through exposure to new environments

Colonialism increased human awareness of the diversity of nature through exposure to new environments, including coming into contact with the many different ways that various communities and cultures understood nature.

Colonialists found themselves within new environments, facing challenges from unfamiliar wildlife to foreign pathogens. They understood these phenomena as challenges to be overcome in their conquest of the terrain. Their encounters with the natural world they were occupying were transformative, creating an ecological rift between pre- and post-colonial eras, making abrupt changes to existing ecosystems. In America, for instance, bison were systematically slaughtered and the grasslands they had previously grazed were replanted with short grass for cattle farming, completely altering the ecosystem.

This wholesale alteration of nature was accompanied by a nostalgic wish to preserve features of the original landscape

This wholesale alteration of nature was accompanied by a nostalgic wish to preserve features of the original landscape. Lawyer, zoologist and anthropologist Madison Grant was influential upon many recognisable contemporary strains of conservationism, including the development of America's National Parks and the Bronx Zoo (Purdy, 2015). It should be noted that the creation of parkland at the time often involve the removal of indigenous peoples from their own habitat for its 'preservation' (Wapner & Matthew, 2009).

Grant and other 19th century 'racialists' developed a fixation upon the decline of the so-called 'Aryan' race, eroded by demographic change. He is infamous for his 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, which promotes white supremacy, using taxonomies familiar from the life sciences to categorise and rank human beings. In this work, he made the claim that 'Nordics' are a natural aristocracy facing decline due to the impact of 'Alpine' and 'Mediterranean' populations.

His work was historically impactful. It influenced America's restrictive Immigration Act of 1924 (Yuill, 2023) and was cited by Adolf Hitler's writings. This pseudo-science has been influential in far-right circles and remains salient a century later. Anders Breivik, for instance, drew on Grant's theories of race in his 2011 manifesto.

Anders Breivik drew on Grant's 1916 theories of race in his 2011 manifesto

The fascist era

Directly after the first World War, fear of scarcity remained vivid to Germans due to the privations of the recession they had experienced. Within an eugenic framing, this developed into around less productive members of society - so-called 'useless eaters'. Alongside these concerns, the idea of nature took on a complex and contradictory quality within the Nazi mindset, not just as a provider of resources, but also seen through the romantic veneration of the 'homeland'.

Biehl (1996) describes the complex, contradictory role of nature in the Nazi imagination: ‘a volatile admixture of primaeval Teutonic nature mysticism, pseudo-scientific ecology, irrationalist anti-humanism and a mythology of racial salvation through a return to the land’.

This complexity meant that Nazi policies towards the environment comprised ‘a combination of progressive measures to protect natural resources, professional opportunism, and rhetorical appeals to national identity,’ (Closmann, 2018). Under Mussolini, Italian Fascists created national parks and engaged in reforestation (Armiero & Hardenberg, 2017) in order to restore the glory of the nation as Grant had done previously.

Fascism was ‘ecology-minded’
long before socialism was

Coren (1995) states that, in this sense, fascism was ‘ecology-minded’ long before socialism was. Some members of the Nazi Party, such as Richard Walther Darré and Heinrich Himmler, promoted *blut und boden* ideas within the party and in *volkisch* leagues like the Artamanen-Gesellschaft. *Blut und boden* - ‘blood and soil- represents the idea that a racially-defined body of people have a natural connection to the land. This mystical sense of connection underpins fascist thought - meaning that changing demographics impacts the land itself.

After WW2

The post-war boom involved increased production and consumption which involved a fuller industrialisation of the planet's resources, which known as the great acceleration (Dale, 2023). In the final decades of the 20th century, radical environmentalism became a preserve of the left and liberation movements, aligned against the increasing velocity of capitalist expansion.

Awareness of the potential limits of human expansion and consumption grew into the first organised environmental movements in the 1960s and 1970s. This left-wing movement also gained traction within working class communities impacted by pollution and other impacts of industrial development.

Organised right-wing environmentalism remained marginal to the broader environmental movement

Over the same period, organised right-wing environmentalism also developed, following its predecessor movements, but remained marginal to the broader environmental movement which remained within the left-wing fold. Individual sympathisers with fascist movements could certainly be found within the movement. Jorian Jenks, founder of the UK's Soil Association, worked with Oswald Mosley, for instance (Moore-Colyer, 2004).

Further, John Tanton, formerly of the Sierra Club, framed a disingenuous environmental argument against immigration in the late 1970s on the basis that immigrants from the global South would adopt Western patterns of consumption and thereby increase the burden on the planet (Moore & Roberts, 2022). He was also founder of a network of anti-immigration lobbying groups which continue to be politically significant, particularly during Donald Trump's term (O'Connor, 2018).

Ethnocentric approaches to environmentalism gained their most powerful environmentalist analogy from writer Garret Hardin in the early 1990s in his essay *Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor*.

Hardin compares the Earth to a lifeboat with a limited carrying capacity, representing the planet's finite resources

Hardin compares the Earth to a lifeboat with a limited carrying capacity, representing the planet's finite resources. The lifeboat, he argues, has a limited amount of space and resources, and if too many people are allowed into the lifeboat, it will sink, putting everyone at risk. Hardin argues that providing unrestricted assistance to struggling nations or allowing unlimited immigration into the well-managed lifeboats could lead to overpopulation and the depletion of resources (Hardin, 1993).

Some strands of environmentalist rhetoric have even praised war crimes (Cafaro, 2012) and heralded AIDS and famine in Africa (Moore & Roberts, 2022) as a means to decrease the world's population.

Right-wing concerns around demographic change became more salient due to globalisation which increased the international movement of populations. These can also be framed within environmental discourse.

This change was discussed in the book *Le grand remplacement* by Renaud Camus. The ‘Great Replacement’ belief, a conspiracy theory that alleges there is a deliberate and coordinated effort to replace white populations in Western countries with non-white or non-European populations through immigration, higher birth rates among non-white groups, and other demographic changes. Camus warns that immigrants are imported by a global elite in order to create a more compliant society composed of interchangeable, rootless individuals devoid of any national or ethnic identity. (Rueda, 2020).

Overpopulation has been a long-term concern of environmental movements

Overpopulation has been a long-term concern of environmental movements (Kaplan, 2021), although the problem might more accurately be described as overconsumption. Increasingly mobile populations create cultural and social change, challenging conservatives, ethnonationalists and neofascists. Climate change is likely to increase immigration, as people flee regions which have become unliveable: there are estimates of as many as a billion environmental migrants in the next 30 years. More recent projections point to 1.2 billion by 2050, and 1.4 billion by 2060 (Vince, 2022). These rapid changes are likely to create social strain both within their countries of origin and destination, raising further tensions.

Anti-modernism

Rueda (2020) identifies anti-modernity at the heart of ecofascism. He writes:

Ecofascism was first and foremost an offshoot of Romanticism, an intellectual movement whose impact on Germany during the nineteenth century is impossible to exaggerate. In political terms, Romanticism was primarily a reaction against the Enlightenment and its core assumptions. To put it baldly, to reason, individualism, and civic communitarianism the Romantics opposed a celebration of introspection and the emotional, a nostalgia for a lost community (be that ethnic or religious) and an emphasis on rootedness against cosmopolitanism and universalism.

He identifies this romanticism at the heart of the key concepts of racialised environmentalism within the German Nazi movement: a ‘metaphysical symbiosis’ assumed to exist between nature, culture and people. The ‘rootedness’ of German citizens within their nature and culture was positioned against the figure of the Jew in the Nazi imagination as a ‘rootless cosmopolitan’, adrift from both nature and culture, prefiguring Camus's similarly rootless immigrants. In contrast, Nazi green ideology was a nostalgic appeal for the supposedly simpler times before Bismark’s push for German industrialisation.

Nazi green ideology was a nostalgic appeal for the supposedly simpler times before Bismark’s push for German industrialisation

One influential anti-modern strand in radical ecological thought stems from Theodore Kaczynski, the infamous Unabomber. Kaczynski first drew public attention in 1978 when a rudimentary bomb he had made exploded at a university in Chicago. Over the next 17 years, he produced progressively more sophisticated bombs, resulting in the deaths of three Americans, and injuries to nearly two dozen others. Kaczynski targeted those he believed were promoting technology at the expense of what he called 'wild nature.' His targets included computer scientists and engineers, representatives of science.

The 'Unabomber Manifesto' espoused anti-technology and pro-environmental views

In 1995, the New York Times and The Washington Post published his work *Industrial Society and Its Future* which became known as the 'Unabomber Manifesto' - a document which espoused anti-technology and pro-environmental views.

Contemporary groups have increasingly embraced Kaczynski, including the far-right audience. Kaczynski's anti-technology ideologies provide an addition to concerns around immigration and resources within these ecofascist circles. While Kaczynski himself rejected the label of ecofascist and was vehemently opposed to racism, he remains a significant figure in forging a connection between terrorist activities and environmentalism.

Kaczynski has developed his own posthumous following who disregard his positions on, preferring to focus on his radical rejection of modernity (Hanrahan, 2018). One of these influenced by Kaczynski was Anders Breivik, who quoted him in his 'manifesto' (Fleming, 2022).

Ecofascism today

Ecofascism has come under recent scrutiny in light of the recent far-right terrorist incident at a Buffalo, New York supermarket. In his manifesto, the perpetrator cited the 2019 Christchurch attacker as an influential figure, who did himself identify as an ecofascist. The manifesto also featured a section on environmentalism that was directly lifted from the Christchurch attacker's manifesto. This part of the manifesto portrayed immigration as 'environmental warfare'.

A terrorist manifesto portrayed immigration as 'environmental warfare'

Far-right environmentalism has been a burgeoning movement since the 2010s

In the late 2010s, research into far-right environmentalism revealed burgeoning movement, stimulated both by the increasing recognition of the impacts of climate change, and the mainstreaming of the far-right after the economic crisis of 2008 and the refugee crisis of 2015.

However, despite the imagery of rickety refugee boats attempting to traverse the Mediterranean, Forchtner and Lubarda's (2022) analysis of European extremist environmentalist rhetoric suggests that overpopulation is, surprisingly, a comparatively insignificant theme in their environmental agenda.

Sarah Manavis (2018) notes an intersection with the romanticisation of Nordic religion and culture. This is common in some extremist groups, which have often rejected Christianity for its perceived pacifism and 'weakness' and which identify Nordic religions as European and assertively masculine.

Such broad stereotypes typify the lack of nuance found within right-wing extremism. As Ross & Bevenesee (2020) note '...being rooted in a worship of simplicity, eco-fascism fails to address the complex problems posed by climate change which require complex solutions.' Hence the understanding of the environment and the threat posed by climate change is often shallow on the far right.

The far-right understanding of the environment and the threat posed 'by climate change is often shallow

The earlier association of nature with the nation remains strong.

However, activism against climate change is not prioritised in these self-styled right-wing environmentalist movements for various reasons, such as the need for international action to combat it, economic dependence on fossil fuels and scepticism and conspiracy theories about climate change.

Vicenová et al's study (2022), for instance, indicated that most references to environmental issues by the far-right Slovak party 'People's Party - Our Slovakia' were linked to other far-right arguments, effectively fitting environmental issues into their pre-existing political paradigm rather than developing any innovative right-wing positions upon environmental problems.

In the neoliberal era, the political power of both the nation state and civil society have been ravaged by the might of globalised capitalist enterprise. This has limited the influence of environmental campaigners. It has also given rise to populist movements which see scepticism around climate change as a riposte to a suspect cosmopolitan liberal elite who do not share the interests of those who define themselves in terms of their local and ethnic identity.

Racist narratives deny the extent and impacts of climate change in the global South

Racist narratives can be used to deny the extent and impacts of climate change in the global South. The concentration of adverse weather impacts in the global South can be framed in racialised terms: that the causes of the disasters were not related to climate change, but rather to corruption, ineptitude or conflict - which are considered to be intrinsic to societies in the global South.

For a newer generation of far-right organisations, the threat of climate change is vivid. This sense of anxiety around the climate can lead to a sense of apocalypse: which sharpens tensions and creates a sense of crisis which is imagined to be leading to Hobbesian conflicts for dominance and access to resources between competing groups, requiring authoritarian responses.

As climate crisis veers closer to climate catastrophe, and eco-authoritarianism moves from the realm of the potential to the real, the two movements may enjoy a mutually enhancing relationship.
(Hughes, 2019)

Instead of adversity fostering human solidarity, they anticipate the potential for destructive conflict to arise over diminishing resources, including water, fertile land, housing and the financial means required to sustain essential social support systems for survival. This animates in-group preferences, stimulating loyalties within an imagined landscape where a failure to compete is imagined to be fatal to one's group.

Groups such as Atomwaffen, The Base, National Action and other groups have adopted a radical anti-modernity

The confluence of environmentalism and fascism focus on nationalism and a rejection of liberal democracy and use environmentalism as a justification for authoritarian policies (Rueda, 2020). Within some far-right circles, such as within groups such as Atomwaffen, The Base, National Action and other groups have adopted Kaczynski's radical anti-modernity, and make frequent references to a forthcoming apocalypse which involves environmental collapse (Hughes, 2019).

Hughes (2019) noted the diversity of subcultures within Twitter users who were part of the 'Pine Tree' movement, where membership is indicated by a pine tree emoji in the username. He found a diverse ecosystem of 'skullmasks' who were embedded in ecofascist groups; fans of Ted Kaczynski; pagans heathens and/or occultists; traditional Christians and other users connected with 4chan/8chan image board culture.

In Scandinavia, the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) makes claims to environmental protections, calling for the development of a modern society living in harmony with the laws of nature. They state that their animal protection laws will be developed with an emphasis on ethics as opposed to profits, and nature and all its resources will be utilised using common sense and with future generations in mind (Darwish, 2021).

She notes, however, that the NRM's focus upon overpopulation and fertility control combined with their Nazi beliefs, has a natural progression towards eugenic themes common to far-right environmentalism.

The association between ecofascism and the Nordic countries holds significant importance. Finland, in particular, is noteworthy as the home country of Pentti Linkola, a prominent and openly ecofascist intellectual. Linkola's writings promote authoritarianism, population reduction, and the assertion that 'everything developed in the past century must be dismantled.' While Linkola may not be widely recognized outside of Finland, his revival of ecofascist principles is gaining traction within Alt-Right circles (Rueda, 2020). His restatement of the 'lifeboat principle' associates eugenics with 'loving life' - using violent imagery.

He writes:

What to do, when a ship carrying a hundred passengers suddenly capsizes and there is only one lifeboat? When the lifeboat is full, those who hate life will try to load it with more people and sink the lot. Those who love and respect life will take the ship's axe and sever the extra hands that cling to the sides.

It is not only within specifically fascist movements like these named that environmental concerns can coexist with a fascist perspective. Ross and Bevenessee (2020) raise concerns about potential entryism by far-right actors into environmental groups. They caution that environmental groups, being marginal, may be particularly vulnerable to being used in service of hateful and violent ideologies, identifying antisemitism and other conspiracy theories as a particular risk.

They note that:

Environmental groups, being marginal, may be particularly vulnerable to being used in service of hateful and violent ideologies

Conspiracy theories often associated with the green movement, like the notion that vaccinations cause autism or that the U.S. government is spreading “chem trails” in the air, also offer crossover points for fascists.

This turned out to be prescient, since former members of the Labour Party who had been expelled or suspended for antisemitism were welcomed into the UK Green Party (Harpin, 2023; Judah, 2023).

Conclusion

Climate change poses a formidable challenge to the entire political and economic framework. It is poised to underpin the political landscape of the twenty-first century connecting with all of the political, sociological and psychological uncertainties and tensions sparked within a rapidly changing world.

The evidence of a future marked by escalating global temperatures, warming oceans, receding glaciers, rising sea levels and intensified extreme weather events is undeniable. These global threats, with their potential for rapid upheaval, will not only test our socio-political systems but also challenge our core beliefs. The status quo will inevitably face challenges from both the far-right and the far-left ideologies in the event that capitalist and democratic systems fail to address the climate crisis.

The status quo will inevitably face challenges from both the far-right and the far-left ideologies in the event that capitalist and democratic systems fail to address the climate crisis

Shaanah et al (2023) identify the rising prominence of environmentalism within far-right extremism is only one aspect of the increasing salience of climate change to politics.

Environmentalism is becoming relevant to every ideological position, with the far-right and far-left particularly likely to use extremist tactics. Climate change is cited as a concern by many voters - for some, the most significant. The future of environmental politics is not likely to continue as a politically discrete conflict between environmentalists and those who oppose them, but 'competing environmentalisms' nested within various ideologies (Rueda, 2020).

Ecofascist trends are currently a minority perspective within the far-right, but this may not remain the case as demographic trends continue and the impacts of climate change become more apparent and environmental issues become more mainstream. Climate change denialism is likely to become untenable for anyone except those deeply embedded in conspiracy theories. As such, it is likely to emerge more broadly as a theme in far-right discourse in future.

In light of growing concerns about the state of the environment among the general population, we may see environmental issues tethered to the longstanding themes of the far-right such as authoritarianism, illiberalism and anti-immigration, and increasingly prominent within conservative movements (Szenes, 2022). Individuals tend to gravitate towards ethnocentrism and authoritarianism when they are experiencing fear and uncertainty (Fritzsche et al., 2012).

Individuals tend to gravitate towards ethnocentrism and authoritarianism when they are experiencing fear and uncertainty

Many Western countries are experiencing demographic change, with the US on track to become a country in which there are more people in minority groups combined than there are in the majority population.

As Amend (2020) notes:

The U.S. Census estimates that the country will reach that status by 2045, the same decade the atmosphere is projected to reach the 1.5 degree Celsius warming mark (in the 2040s) that will exacerbate food shortages, flooding, droughts, and poverty. As these two trends continue to converge, more acts of violence—state-sanctioned and individual—are likely to be committed in the name of environmentalism by far-right actors.

The conditions that provided fertile ground for the emergence of fascism in the early twentieth century, including the spread of nationalism, polarisation and xenophobia, are still very much present in today's world - and may be exacerbated by the impacts of climate change.

Additionally, the Western world is currently witnessing a series of nationalist shifts that could potentially normalise or lend legitimacy to radical ideas that were considered taboo until recently. The economic and geopolitical outlook for the future is unstable. Ecofascists have a historic opportunity to rejuvenate a set of ideas that resonate with pressing contemporary issues. As such, mainstream environmental organisations need to be prepared for entryism by those with ecofascist positions (Ross & Bevensee, 2020) and to be aware that concern for the environment can drift into anti-human politics.

Ecofascists have a historic opportunity to rejuvenate a set of ideas that resonate with pressing contemporary issues

It needs to be made completely clear that ecofascist ideas are not a productive way of countering the progress of our planet towards uninhabitability. Through eschewing internationalism and focussing upon the narrow interests of the nation state, far-right environmentalists' attention to environmental issues tends to terminate at the borders of an imagined ethnostate, even though the climate crisis has global impacts and demands global, national and local interventions.

In a sense, however, this is just an explicit expression of a political trend which is implicit across many strands mainstream politics: the politics of the lifeboat are not restricted to Garret Hardin's analogy, but also apply to the fortresses of Europe which close their doors to climate change refugees, and those countries which renege on their commitments to meeting climate targets while poor countries disproportionately suffer the impacts of extreme climate events.

The politics of the lifeboat apply to the fortresses of Europe which close their doors to climate change refugees

It might be noted that, given increasing risks of crop failure on a warming planet (Gaupp et al., 2019; Mbow et al., 2019), these anxieties may intrude into extremist ideologies in the contemporary period, particularly in the eventuality that food insecurity and financial crises begin to impact people's ability to thrive. Earlier concerns about was avoided by the so-called 'green revolution': a step change in agricultural productivity which allayed fears of resource shortage (Pingali, 2012). These concerns are likely to reemerge in the modern era.

Concerns around food insecurity are likely to reemerge in the modern era

It is also significant to understand the role of digital technology, including social media, forums, and message boards in the proliferation of fascist ideas and germination of a culture that supports mass shooters, as well as a means of observing violent and extremist beliefs within environmental movements. Collaborative efforts are necessary - and will become increasingly so in the future - to understand the connections between climate change and the global far-right rise as well as other forms of extremism.

An inclusive and politically informed approach to environmentalism that acknowledges not just that the climate crisis is global, but also that social and political issues are part of the phenomenon, and that these will also interact in complex ways. The impacts of climate change are not delimited to the environment and its inhabitants in terms of experiencing harmful impacts, but in the change to our social and political systems.

Climate change's political impacts may be just as unpredictable and dangerous to the environment itself.

Climate change's political impacts may be just as unpredictable and dangerous to the environment itself.

These issues, aligned with climate change itself, as the most challenging issues the human race faces, need to be addressed with considered solutions aligned with the goals of equality and justice along with measures to reduce damage to the climate.

The violent expression of environmental concerns may become visible more broadly across the political spectrum

Finding solutions to the climate crisis will require significant and essential efforts for the benefit of humanity and the planet in ways which do not increase inequality and resentment. It will take the development of a transformative social project with the capacity to mobilise a broad collection of social forces to tackle both the environmental crisis and inequality, placing environmental sustainability within a framework of social justice and democratic governance.

As environmental concerns become more prominent, and as the impacts of climate change upon human flourishing become more visible, violent expression of environmental concerns may lose their association with the right-wing and become visible more broadly across the political spectrum. As the situation becomes ever more grave, performative activism may up the ante to become violent.

The unpredictability of these consequences, both environmentally and politically, presents a formidable challenge, which is in itself another hazard humans face upon this burning planet. The need for counter-extremism programmes to address climate change will only grown more compelling with time.

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