



Building resiliency to ecofascist radicalisation

Preventing an emerging threat

Eszter Szenes



International Centre for
Counter-Terrorism

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ICCT Policy Brief

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**International Centre for
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Contents

About ICCT	iii
Abstract	1
Introduction	2
The evolution of white supremacist environmentalism	3
Ecofascism: An emerging threat	5
Building resilience to ecofascist radicalisation	9
Bibliography	13
About the Author	18

Abstract

Since the 2019 and 2022 terrorist attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, El Paso, Texas, and Buffalo, New York, both mainstream media and scholarly interest in ecofascism have increased significantly. This policy brief will illustrate how the contemporary far- and extreme right are exploiting the climate crisis and reviving white supremacist environmentalism. Specifically, it will identify recurring linguistic patterns, which construct ecofascist grievances that link environmental degradation to 'old' conspiracy theories, such as 'global Zionism' or 'white genocide'. It will also identify the eco-accelerationist solutions white supremacists propose to the climate crisis. The policy brief concludes with a discussion on the implications of these findings for building resiliency to ecofascist radicalisation.

Keywords: climate change, ecofascism, eco-accelerationism, climate disinformation, online radicalisation, P/CVE, climate education, critical digital and media literacies

Introduction

In March 2019 convicted Australian terrorist Brenton Tarrant killed fifty-one people in two separate mosque shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, live-streaming the massacre on Facebook. In his manifesto titled *The Great Replacement*¹ he states that “green nationalism is the only true nationalism” and complains about the “environmental warfare” of continued immigration. He described himself as an ‘eco-fascist’ and claimed that killing ‘the invaders’ will “save the environment.” Inspired by the Christchurch massacre, in August 2019 American mass shooter and self-claimed ecofascist Patrick Crusius killed twenty-two people at a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas. In his manifesto titled *The Inconvenient Truth*² he claimed that his attack was “a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas”. He believed that ‘getting rid’ of “enough people using resources” will make “[the American] way of life more sustainable.” In May 2022, another self-claimed ecofascist, Payton Gendron, gunned down ten people in Buffalo, New York at a supermarket. His 180-page manifesto,³ plagiarised verbatim in parts from Tarrant’s, among well-known white nationalist grievances lists environmental concerns as justification for the killing.

Since these terrorist attacks, both scholarly⁴ and mainstream media interest in ecofascism has increased significantly. Recent media articles have reported on the rise of ecofascist sentiments and rhetoric entering current political discourses. For example, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French National Rally, pledged to protect France from immigrants who she described as “nomadic [who] do not care about the environment; they have no homeland”.⁵ The Hungarian Our Homeland Movement, a far right opposition party, refers to itself as the only ‘green party’ in the country that truly cares about protecting the environment. Their ‘green wing’, called Our Green Homeland,⁶ regularly engages in environmental and animal rights activism. Their 2019 European parliamentary elections program, *The Europe of Our Homeland*,⁷ propose policies for sustainable development and protecting Hungarian land from ‘foreign land grabs’. In Central and Eastern Europe far right parties and extreme-right movements often equate local minority Roma populations with ‘foreign species’ and environmental degradation with ‘invading foreigners’ that the homeland needs protecting from.⁸ In the United States, similar discourses have also entered the political ‘mainstream’, which place the blame on immigrants for environmental degradation and increased pollution levels.⁹

1 Brenton Tarrant, “The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society,” March 2019.

2 Patrick Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth,” August 2019.

3 Payton Gendron, “No title,” May 2022.

4 See, for example, Kristy Campion, “Defining Ecofascism: Historical Foundations and Contemporary Interpretations in the Extreme Right.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 35, No. 4 (2023): 926-944; Alex Roberts and Sam Moore. *The Rise of Ecofascism: Climate Change and the Far Right*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022); Brian Hughes, et al. “Ecofascism: An Examination of the Far-Right/Ecology Nexus in the Online Space.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 5 (2022): 997-1023; Graham Macklin, “The Extreme Right, Climate Change and Terrorism.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 5 (2022): 979-996; Eszter Szenes, “Neo-Nazi Environmentalism: The Linguistic Construction of Ecofascism in a Nordic Resistance Movement Manifesto.” *Journal for Deradicalization* 27 (2021): 146-192.

5 Aude Mazoue, “Le Pen’s National Rally goes green in bid for European election votes”. France 24. 20 April, 2019. <https://www.france24.com/en/20190420-le-pen-national-rally-front-environment-european-elections-france>.

6 Mi Hazánk Mozgalom [Our Homeland Movement]. Megalakult a Zöld Hazánk, a Mi Hazánk Mozgalom természet-, környezet- és állatvédelmi kabinetje [Our Green Homeland, the Our Homeland Movement’s nature and environmental protection and animal rights cabinet has been established] (2019).

7 Ibid.

8 Balša Lubarda, “Polluting Outsiders: Green Nationalism as a Concept-Case Study: Latvia,” *Current Debates in Public Finance Public Administration & Environmental Studies* 13, no. 13 (2018): 435-455.

9 Alexander C. Kaufman, “How Arizona’s Attorney General is Weaponizing Climate Fears to Keep out Immigrants,” *HuffPost Politics*, May 2021. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/arizona-climate-lawsuit_n_60897a42e4b0b9042d8d6ae5; Michelle Kelley, “How the Right-Wing Scapegoats Immigrants for America’s Environmental Problems”. *One Green Planet*, 2021. <https://www.onegreenplanet.org/environment/how-the-right-wing-scapegoats-immigrants-for-americas-environmental-problems/>.

This policy brief focuses on the revival of ecofascist rhetoric in the global North, based on data collected specifically from the Nordic countries, Hungary in Central Europe, and the American alt-right. As the above examples demonstrate, far right political parties and white supremacists increasingly blame non-white minorities and immigrants for overpopulation, pollution, and environmental degradation, which they mask as concern for the environment. However, the weaponisation of climate change and its exploitation by far right populist political parties as well as white supremacist movements in the developed countries of the global North has received a lot less attention at the policy level. First, the policy brief describes the evolution of white supremacist environmentalism, then presents the salient linguistic markers and strategies that construct ecofascist rhetoric, identified in a corpus of extreme-right materials. It concludes by discussing the implications of the emerging threat of transnational ecofascism and highlights recommendations for developing an agenda that focuses specifically on advancing efforts to build resiliency to and prevent ecofascist radicalisation.

The evolution of white supremacist environmentalism

White supremacist environmentalism is not a new phenomenon but one with a long and troubled history, whose roots can be traced back to the 19th century German Völkisch movement, German Romanticism, and anti-Enlightenment nationalism.¹⁰ Protecting the purity of the land and nature was equated with protecting national identity and racial purity; nationalism and white racial superiority were fused with neo-pagan nature mysticism and nostalgia for a lost past. The term ‘ecology’ was coined in 1867 by German zoologist and eugenicist Ernst Haeckel, who, by stressing the connection between the purity of nature and the purity of race, paved the way for German National Socialism.¹¹ The Green Wing of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) embedded in its ideology a desire for a ‘pure’ human existence close to nature and environmental sustainability while rejecting modernity. The notorious Nazi slogan ‘Blood and Soil’, a symbol for the mystical-spiritual connection between race and nature, was coined by Walter Darré, the NSDAP’s Minister for Food and Agriculture. It later became the official doctrine of the Third Reich.¹² This slogan was chanted at the Unite the Right rally in 2017 in Charlottesville, the United States, where alt-right protesters, inspired by neo-völkish ideals and German-Nordic neo-paganism,¹³ marched with torches, wore Nazi clothing and waved Confederate and swastika flags. In his Charlottesville manifesto, Richard Spencer, back then a key leader of the American ‘alt-right’, wrote that “[w]e have the potential to become nature’s steward or its destroyer”.¹⁴ The conflation of nature, ‘the land of opportunity’ for the white race and white supremacy; the myth of ‘the frontier’ and settler colonialist fascination with an empty ‘wilderness’ (as if Indigenous peoples

10 See, for example, Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier. *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995); Jonathan Robert Olsen, *Nature and Nationalism: Right-Wing Ecology and the Politics of Identity in Contemporary Germany* (St. Martin’s Press, 1999); Peter Staudenmaier, “Fascist Ecology: The “Green Wing” of the Nazi Party and its Historical Antecedents.” In *Ecofascism Revisited: Lessons from the German Experience*, eds. Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier (New Compass Press, 2011): 13-42; Bernhard Forchtner, ed., *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication*, (Routledge, 2019); Daniela Rueda, “Neoecofascism: The Example of the United States.” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 14, no. 2 (2020): 95-125; George. L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2021).

11 Staudenmaier, “Fascist Ecology: The “Green Wing” of the Nazi Party and its Historical Antecedents.”

12 Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism*; Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler’s “Green Party”* (Kensal Press, 1985); Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*; Olsen, *Nature and Nationalism*.

13 Rueda, “Neoecofascism: The Example of the United States.”

14 Richard Spencer, “What it Means to be Alt-Right. A Meta-Political Manifesto for the Alt-Right Movement. The Charlottesville Statement.” 2017.

had never existed); and a (neo)Malthusian ‘fixation’ with overpopulation in the developing world¹⁵ have all been identified as precursors to the ‘modern’ ecofascist ideas of the American alt-right.¹⁶

An emerging body of research on far right environmental communication has identified a shift in the discursive strategies of the far right. More recently, climate-sceptic parties have been forced to tone down their climate change denialism due to public pressure: anti-immigration rhetoric in current political discourse is now dressed up as concern for the environment. This rhetoric has shifted from denial¹⁷ and skepticism¹⁸ to acceptance of anthropogenic climate change¹⁹ and acknowledging the importance of environmental protection²⁰ but exhibiting hostility towards environmental policies.²¹ While the far right remains polarised about climate change,²² warnings about the climate crisis and expressing concern about resource scarcity have appeared among white supremacist grievances. Some far- and extreme-right websites and social media pages have started advocating organic and sustainable farming practices²³ and a vegetarian or vegan diet,²⁴ campaign for renewable energy and sustainable development, and engage in environmental activism such as collecting waste from parks or organising hiking trips.

In this policy brief, ecofascism is understood as a distinct phenomenon within wider ‘far right ecologisms’, which Lubarda defines as any “attempt to address the fundamental causes of environmental change through holistic, ideological or value-based underpinnings”²⁵ located

15 Eric Neumayer, “The Environment: One More Reason to Keep Immigrants out?.” *Ecological Economics* 59, no. 2 (2006): 204-207; Rueda, “Neoeconofascism.”; Blair Taylor, “Alt-Right Ecology: Ecofascism and Far-Right Environmentalism in the United States.” In *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication*, ed., Bernhard Forchtner (Routledge, 2019): 275-292.

16 Kyle Boggs, “The Rhetorical Landscapes of the ‘Alt Right’ and the Patriot Movements”. In *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication*, ed., Bernhard Forchtner (Routledge, 2019): 293-309.

17 Martin Hultman, et al. “The Far Right and Climate Change Denial: Denouncing Environmental Challenges via Anti-Establishment Rhetoric, Marketing of Doubts, Industrial/Breadwinner Masculinities Enactments and Ethno-Nationalism.” In *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication*, ed., Bernhard Forchtner (Routledge, 2019): 121-135.

18 Sondre Båtstrand, “Giving Content to New Politics: From Broad Hypothesis to Empirical Analysis Using Norwegian Manifesto Data on Climate Change.” *Party Politics* 20, no. 6 (2014): 930-939; Christoffer Kølvrå, “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing? The Danish Far Right and ‘Wild Nature’.” In *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication*, ed., Bernhard Forchtner (Routledge, 2019): pp. 107-120; Beth Gardiner, “For Europe’s Far-Right Parties, Climate is a New Battleground,” *Yale Environment* 360, October 2019. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/for-europes-far-right-parties-climate-is-a-new-battleground>.

19 Balša Lubarda, et al. “Far-Right Narratives of Climate Change Acceptance and their Role in Addressing Climate Skepticism.” *The Journal of Environmental Education* (2023): 1-11.

20 See e.g. Forchtner, *The Far Right and the Environment*; Lubarda, *Beyond Ecofascism?*; Lockwood, Matthew. “Right-Wing Populism and the Climate Change Agenda: Exploring the Linkages.” *Environmental Politics* 27, no. 4 (2018): 712-732.

21 Bernhard Forchtner and Balša Lubarda, “The Far Right Has Moved from Climate Denial to Obstructing Climate Action”. *Open Democracy*, 1 November, 2021; Bernhard Forchtner, et al. “Scepticisms and Beyond? A Comprehensive Portrait of Climate Change Communication by the Far Right in the European Parliament.” *Environmental Politics* (2022): 1-26; Niko Hatakka, et al. “The Allure of Exploding Bats: The Finns Party’s Populist Environmental Communication and the Media.” In *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication*, ed., Bernhard Forchtner (Routledge, 2019): 136-150.

22 Bernhard Forchtner, et al. “Being Skeptical? Exploring Far-Right Climate-Change Communication in Germany.” *Environmental Communication* 12, no. 5 (2018): 589-604; Forchtner, *The Far Right and the Environment*; Forchtner, Bernhard Forchtner, “Climate Change and the Far Right.” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 10, no. 5 (2019): e604.

23 Balša Lubarda, “Far-Right Agricultural Alternatives to Right-Wing Populism in Hungary: The “Real” Caretakers of the Blood and Soil”. *Culture della Sostenibilità* 24 (2019). www.doi.org/10.7402/CdS.24.02.

24 See Bernhard Forchtner, et al. “Kalashnikov and Cooking-Spoon: Neo-Nazism, Veganism and a Lifestyle Cooking Show on YouTube.” *Food, Culture & Society* 20, no. 3 (2017): 415-441 on Balaclava Küche (Balaklava Kitchen), a group of German neo-Nazis popularising veganism via cooking videos on YouTube.

25 Balša Lubarda, “Beyond Ecofascism?”; Lubarda, Balša. *Far-Right Ecologism: Environmental Politics and the Far Right in Hungary and Poland*. Taylor & Francis, 2023.

on the wider spectrum of the far right. Ecofascism has been defined as “the preoccupation of authentically fascist movements with environmentalist concerns.”²⁶ According to a more recent definition, it is “a reactionary and revolutionary ideology that champions the regeneration of an imagined community through a return to a romanticised, ethnopluralist vision of the natural order.”²⁷ The following section will provide illustrative examples of the linguistic and multimodal construction of ecofascist rhetoric.

Ecofascism: An emerging threat

Violent extremism has become transnational²⁸ in nature due to the fast-paced dissemination of disinformation, conspiracy theories and extremist materials via the internet and digital media. Computer-assisted digital text analyses²⁹ of online right-wing extremist materials conducted for this policy brief were based on data collected for a larger research project on far right radicalisation and extremism that investigated radicalisation strategies in online far right propaganda and disinformation campaigns.³⁰ The dataset for this policy brief was harvested from publicly available far and extreme right English- and Hungarian-language websites comprising more than seven million words, using the corpus linguistics software Sketch Engine.³¹ This corpus is made up of several sub-corpora: Hungarian extreme right websites, the English-language website of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) aimed at an international audience, and two websites of the American alt-right (Table 1). The ideas that link these seemingly separate extreme-right scenes together are an imagined common white homeland (‘White’ or ‘Nordic’ Europe as “our common home”),³² nostalgia for a lost and better past, and a fascination with neo-paganism (i.e. Old Norse and Viking imagery³³ or ‘pan-Turanism’),³⁴ the fantasy of a “united and self-sustaining” Nordic Nation,³⁵ or a “Nordic civilisation which spreads from Kamchatka to Reykjavík”³⁶ and commemorations of Nazi historical events (e.g. ‘Day of Honour’ marches in Budapest attended by the transnational extreme right).³⁷ A more detailed review of the transnational links between the Hungarian extreme right, the NRM, and the American alt-right is beyond the scope of this policy brief.

26 Biehl, Janet, and Peter Staudenmaier. *Ecofascism*; Staudenmaier, Peter. “Fascist Ecology”.

27 Campion, “Defining Ecofascism.”

28 Martha Crenshaw, et al. “Transnational Ties Between Selected U.S. and Foreign Violent Extremist Actors: Evidence from the Mapping Militants Project” (2023). *Reports, Projects, and Research*. 44; Barbara Molas, “Multiculturalism and the transnational threat of far-right extremism.” Orion Policy Institute. March 06, 2023. <https://orionpolicy.org/orionforum/171/barbara-molas-multiculturalism-and-the-transnational-threat-of-far-right-extremi>.

29 Monica Bednarek, et al. “Computer-Assisted Digital Text Analysis for Journalism and Communications Research: Introducing Corpus Linguistic Techniques that Do Not Require Programming,” *Media International Australia* 181, no. 1 (2021): 131-151.

30 Author.

31 Adam Kilgarriff, et al. *The Sketch Engine*, Itri-04-08 (Brighton, UK: Information Technology Research Institute, 2004).

32 Spencer. “The Charlottesville Statement.”; Our Homeland Movement. *The Europe of Our Homeland*.

33 Szenes. “Neo-Nazi Environmentalism.”

34 Katherine Kondor and Mark Littler. “Invented Nostalgia: The Search for Identity Among the Hungarian Far-Right.” In *Nostalgia and Hope: Intersections between Politics of Culture, Welfare, and Migration in Europe*. eds., Ov Cristian Norocel, Anders Hellström, and Martin Bak Jørgensen (Springer Nature, 2020): 119-134.

35 Nordic Resistance Movement. “Our Path: New Politics for a New Time”, 2016.

36 Our Homeland Movement. *The Europe of Our Homeland*.

37 Michael Colborne, “Neo-Nazis from across Europe Rally in Budapest.” *Al Jazeera*, 8 February, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/2/8/neo-nazis-from-across-europe-rally-in-budapest>; Editorial Staff. “The Nordic Resistance Movement Honours Fallen Heroes in Budapest”, Nordic Resistance Movement, 14 February, 2019.

Sub-corpus	Source (website)	Language	Number of words
Hungarian extreme right	Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (Our Homeland) Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom (64 Counties Youth Movement) kuruc.info	Hungarian	2,884,080
Nordic Resistance Movement	Nordic Resistance Movement website	English	154,939
American Alt-Right	Alt-Right.com American Renaissance	English	4,247,031
Total number words			7,286,050

Table 1. Websites analysed by Sketch Engine

Sketch Engine enabled both automated quantitative and qualitative analyses of recurring linguistic patterns in their context. These analyses reveal a number of recurring themes, which can be categorised as ecofascist grievances and ecofascist solutions. Ecofascist grievances link the issue of environmental degradation to white extinction, (mass) immigration, multiculturalism, and ‘global Zionism’. Ecofascist ‘solutions’ offered to mitigate the climate crisis range from stopping immigration and deporting non-white minorities to advocating genocide and eco-accelerationism.

Ecofascist rhetoric typically relies on the linguistic resources of attitude, persuasion, amplification, and obligation. Such rhetoric is persuasive because it aims to align the putative reader with ecofascist grievances and solutions. For example, the NRM, the largest, most active, and most violent militant neo-Nazi group that operates across the Nordic countries, frequently uses statements in its fifty-six-page long English-language manifesto³⁸ constructed through monoglossic bare assertions (underlined) such as “This genocidal ideology [=multiculturalism] constitutes the polar opposite of biological diversity and evolutionary progress. Bare assertions are sometimes used together with lexical metaphors (**bold**), for example, in the following statement: “It is our race and all of mankind that is being threatened by the misanthropic and **parasitical** forces that control and conduct ruthless exploitation of nature and all its populations – man and animal alike. A contributor to the white supremacist website American Renaissance³⁹ argues that “environmentalism and ‘green politics’ are largely white concerns.” He asserts that climate change resulting from overpopulation in the global South is “the single greatest external threat to Western civilization,” assessing it as ‘more serious’ than illegal immigration or Islamic terrorism.⁴⁰ Apart from spreading climate disinformation, the rhetorical effect of such statements is that due to the lack of modality, there is nothing to be debated, they can now be ‘taken-for-granted’ as indisputable facts.

Other linguistic markers of ecofascist rhetoric, constructed through recurring patterns of amplified negative judgement, include branding non-white populations as ‘invading foreigners’ and local minorities as ‘foreign species, who are held exclusively responsible for environmental

38 Nordic Resistance Movement. “Our Path.”

39 The *American Renaissance* website now seems to be blocked by most major browsers.

40 Philip Santoro, “What Does it Mean for Whites if Climate Change is Real?” *American Renaissance*, 2017.

degradation. These findings are in line with previous research on ‘ecobordering’,⁴¹ an emergent discourse that functions to reinforce right-wing populist arguments for stronger border protection and restricting immigration from the Global South. Ecofascist ideas are typically clustered together with familiar Nazi tropes and well-known white supremacist grievances such as multiculturalism and (mass) immigration, liberalism, cultural Marxism and ‘global Zionism’ (among others). In relation to environmental degradation, these are typically constructed as violations of the ‘natural order,’ exploitation of natural resources, and ‘white genocide’. Ecofascist propaganda deploys the linguistic resources of repeated negative attitude to condemn ‘global Zionism’ for ‘ruling’, ‘occupying’, and ‘controlling’ the world. By degrading Jewish people as ‘parasites’ and ‘hostile/destructive forces’ and linking ‘global Zionism’ to other ‘causes of decline’, including environmental destruction, ecofascists are recycling a conspiracy theory founded on the myth that an international Jewish ‘cabal’ aims to destroy local cultures by ‘inventing’ globalisation, multiculturalism, and deliberately flooding white nation states with immigrants and refugees from the global South.⁴²

Ecofascists propose a number of solutions to their grievances: after catastrophising about The Great Replacement⁴³ and the disaster awaiting humanity due to climate change, a range of proposed environmental policies include investment in renewable energy, protection of endangered species, preserving biodiversity, respect for animal rights by enforcing a complete ban on kosher and halal ‘ritual slaughter’ and animal testing, demanding severe punishments for animal torture, and banning GMO, chemical fertilisers and pesticides in order to protect biodiversity. It is important to point out that some of these proposed solutions also appear in contemporary environmental activism, and they cannot be considered ‘ecofascist’ on their own. While climate change deniers often label environmental activists as ‘eco-terrorists’,⁴⁴ it is crucial to clearly dissociate ecofascism from the climate activist movement on the basis of its focus on the white race and incitement to and use of violence as a solution. These significant differences are also demonstrated by ecofascist demands for an immediate halt to immigration, and protecting the land from ‘foreign invasion’ including foreign acquisitions.⁴⁵ More extreme examples include white supremacists inciting violence by repeatedly calling for attacks against non-white immigrants and refugees, preparing for an imminent ‘race war’, and endorsing⁴⁶ ecofascist literature⁴⁷ advocating genocide to protect the planet. As a result of such linguistic violence, the invasion of non-native species that threaten the environment becomes synonymous with the invasion of immigrants, the protection of the environment with the protection of borders, trash with people, and environmental cleansing with ethnic cleansing.

Ecofascist rhetoric has also been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. White supremacist extremists and conspiracy theorists scapegoated non-white populations, minorities, and

41 Joe Turner, et al. “‘Ecobordering’: Casting Immigration Control as Environmental Protection.” *Environmental Politics* (2021). www.doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2021.1916197.

42 See, for example, Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Ivan Kalmar, “Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism: The Case of Hungary and the ‘Soros plot.’” *Patterns of Prejudice* 54, no. 1-2 (2020): 182-198; Plenta, Peter. “Conspiracy Theories as a Political Instrument: Utilization of Anti-Soros Narratives in Central Europe.” *Contemporary Politics* 26, no. 5 (2020): 512-530.

43 Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner. “The Great Replacement: The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism.” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* 7 (2019): 1-36.

44 Lauren Young, “Policing in an Era of Climate Change: The Challenge of ‘Eco-Dissent.’” Royal United Services Institute, 2022. <https://www.rusi.org/events/research-event-recordings/recording-policing-era-climate-change-challenge-eco-dissent>.

45 For example, Nordic Resistance Movement, “Our Path,”; Our Homeland Movement, The Europe of Our Homeland;; Szilárd Csonthegy, A természetvédő nacionalizmus múltja és jelenlegi fontossága [The past and present importance of conservation nationalism] (2019).

46 American Renaissance; Csonthegy. The Past and Present Importance of Conservation Nationalism.

47 Pentti Linkola, *Can Life Prevail?: A Revolutionary Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (Arktos, 2011); Savitri Devi, *Impeachment of Man* (Costa Mesa, CA.: Noontide Press, [1959]1991).

refugees for creating and spreading the virus. Disinformation and conspiracy theories range from accusing China of deliberately inventing the virus in a laboratory to accusing the Hungarian-American Jewish philanthropist George Soros of spreading the virus. Weaponizing the COVID-19 pandemic has provided an opportune moment for white supremacists to recycle ‘old’ conspiracy theories⁴⁸ such as the ‘New World Order’, ‘global Zionism’, and The Great Replacement. In the context of the pandemic, this Jewish conspiracy is not only accused of inventing the virus itself (e.g. via the hashtags #SorosVirus and #NWOVirus) but also of creating vaccines that contain microchips in order to monitor and control populations around the world, and to sterilise and eventually replace white populations.

The rampant spread of such conspiracy theories has led to a spike in violent hate speech against minorities and non-white populations worldwide. Incitement to violence against China and Chinese people is evidenced by the hashtags⁴⁹ #BombChina and #NukeChina on Twitter. In Romania, the local Roma minority has been accused of being super-spreaders; as a result, on social media, this collective blame has escalated into explicit calls for violence to “gas them like the Nazis”.⁵⁰ In the United States, according to an FBI alert sent to local police agencies,⁵¹ neo-Nazis and white supremacists have instructed their followers that intentionally spreading the virus among law enforcement officers and Jews is their ‘obligation’. White supremacist paranoia about white genocide was spread for example by conspiracy theorist and fundamentalist Christian pastor, Rick Wiley,⁵² who called the Covid-19 vaccine a plot for global genocide, celebrating it at the same time as a “mass death campaign”, which will kill off “a lot of stupid people”.

These examples show how current crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic can be exploited by extremists. Ecofascist ideas are rarely isolated from other ideologies such as racism and xenophobia, anti-Semitism, white supremacy, misogyny, and accelerationism. The violent extreme right has appropriated the term accelerationism to mean that current ‘Jewish-controlled’ capitalist systems and liberal democracies must be destroyed in order to build a white nationalist ethno-state. In order to ‘accelerate’ the total and immediate collapse of today’s societies, engaging in ‘lone wolf’ and small-cell terrorist attacks is expected to trigger a ‘race war’ that will exterminate all non-whites and white race traitors.⁵³ Ecofascist appropriations of violent accelerationist ideology are demonstrated by calls⁵⁴ for the accelerated creation of eco-nationalist, pre-industrial, white ethno-states.

48 Byford. *Conspiracy Theories*.

49 Moonshot CVE. “From #CoronaVirusCoverUp to #NukeChina.” 29 April, 2020. https://149736141.v2.pressablecdn.com/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19-on-Twitter_Moonshot.pdf.

50 Ioanida Costache, “‘Until We are Able to Gas them like the Nazis, the Roma will Infect the Nation.’ Roma and the Ethnicization of COVID-19 in Romania,” *Decât o Revistă*, 22 April, 2020. <https://www.dor.ro/roma-and-the-ethnicization-of-covid-19-in-romania/>.

51 Syracuse Media Group. “FBI: White Supremacists Encouraging Members to Infect Cops, Jews with COVID-19,” 24 March, 2020. <https://www.police1.com/coronavirus-covid-19/articles/fbi-white-supremacists-encouraging-members-to-infect-cops-jews-with-covid-19-j2AAfBOa7I2shUJVV/>.

52 Kyles Mantyla, “Rick Wiles Says COVID-19 Vaccines Are a Plot to Carry Out ‘Global Genocide’,” *Right Wing Watch*, 3 May, 2021. <https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/rick-wiles-says-covid-19-vaccines-are-a-plot-to-carry-out-global-genocide/>.

53 Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Samuel Hodgson, and Colin P. Clarke. “The Growing Threat Posed by Accelerationism and Accelerationist Groups Worldwide.” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 20 April, 2020. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/04/the-growing-threat-posed-by-accelerationism-and-accelerationist-groups-worldwide/>; Samantha Walther, et al. “US Extremism on Telegram.” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): 100-124.

54 Alex Amend, “Blood and Vanishing Topsoil: American Ecofascism Past, Present, and in the Coming Climate Crisis,” *Political Research Associates*, 9 July, 2020. <https://politicalresearch.org/2020/07/09/blood-and-vanishing-topsoil>.

Building resilience to ecofascist radicalisation

This policy brief started with examples of ecofascist terrorist attacks, where linguistic violence constructed in terrorist manifestos has translated into terrorist violence. Understanding the relationship between climate change and violent extremist radicalisation is therefore an urgent priority. This policy brief takes a preventive approach to ecofascist radicalisation in order to dissociate ecofascism from the climate justice movement, with regards to three key areas: i) climate education and teaching critical digital and media literacy to fight radicalisation and extremism; ii) local community-building and; iii) the monitoring of and future research on ecofascist discourses.

Climate education and critical digital and media literacy to fight radicalisation and extremism

Ecofascist propaganda has the potential to undermine climate security initiatives by targeting vulnerable populations, especially young people already engaged in environmentalist movements. From a preventing violent extremism (PVE) perspective, the green activism of the far and the extreme right represents a growing threat. White supremacist groups as well as far right populist parties can attract vulnerable young people who have become disillusioned with government inaction on the climate crisis. The so-called ‘digital natives’ knowledge of digital media has been often overrated:⁵⁵ students often lack critical thinking and media literacy skills⁵⁶ and their ability to judge the credibility of information encountered online has been evaluated as “bleak”.⁵⁷ The Institute for Strategic Dialogue notes that “a young person with a grievance who has not been taught critical thinking skills or media literacy is a perfect target”⁵⁸ for extremist recruitment. For this reason, young people or those already sensitised to the climate crisis may be at risk of being radicalised and recruited into emerging ecofascist movements.

This policy brief recommends a preventative educational approach to building resiliency to ecofascist radicalisation rather than a law enforcement and counter-terrorism one. Policy recommendations to tackle the spread of disinformation and extremist content online often focus on stricter regulation of major tech companies. To prevent the spread of ecofascist propaganda and its reinforcing of white supremacist ideologies, it is equally important to focus on education. More specifically, climate and critical digital and media literacies need to be integrated into the school curriculum from an early age. From 2025, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) will test “the degree to which 15-year-olds are knowledgeable of, concerned about, and able to act on environmental issues”. Despite an increasing body of research⁵⁹ about its importance, discussions of climate change and sustainable development are often still confined to the teaching of geography instead of diverse subject areas (if included in the curriculum at all) and most teachers report feeling underprepared to teach climate literacy.⁶⁰ While an increasing number of countries around the world recognise the threat that disinformation, (violent) extremist, and often illegal content pose to young people,⁶¹ many countries still do not have critical digital and

55 Sue Bennett, et al. “Beyond the ‘Digital Natives’ Debate: Towards a More Nuanced Understanding of Students’ Technology Experiences.” *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 26, no. 5 (2010): 321-331.

56 Natalie Sonck, Sonia Livingstone, Els Kuiper, and Jos de Haan. “Digital Literacy and Safety skills.” *EU Kids Online*, London School of Economics & Political Science, London, UK. (2011).

57 Stanford History Education Group. *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning*. (2016). <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:fv751yt5934/SHEG%20Evaluating%20Information%20Online.pdf>.

58 Louis Reynolds and Lucie Parker. “Digital Resilience”.

59 Martha C. Monroe, et al. “Identifying Effective Climate Change Education Strategies: A Systematic Review of the Research.” *Environmental Education Research* 25, no. 6 (2019): 791-812; Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. “Climate Change Education.” Canberra, Australia, 2023.

60 Kim Beasy, et al. “The Burden of Bad News: Educators’ Experiences of Navigating Climate Change Education.” *Environmental Education Research* (2023): 1-14.

61 Sabine Verheyen, “Why Investing in Digital Literacy Now Will Secure the Future of the EU.” *The Parliament*, 2020;

media literacy, fact-checking, and online safety education (e.g. how social media and algorithms work) embedded in their curriculum. This poses significant challenges for teachers who want to implement preventing violent extremism (PVE) initiatives,⁶² which aim to develop critical thinking and media literacy skills, in their classes: most of these initiatives are designed as extra-curricular and isolated interventions,⁶³ many schools lack the necessary resources, teachers have not received any training to recognise the signs of extremist radicalisation, and the general curriculum does not allocate sufficient time to include these topics.⁶⁴ Critical digital and media literacy education should be a compulsory part of formal national school curricula, in order to equip students with 1) critical thinking skills to evaluate the credibility of information encountered online and 2) knowledge about language to identify the functions of linguistic resources in radicalisation strategies and disinformation campaigns, for example, the construction of emotions and attitudes, provocation, othering, manipulation, and persuasion. To counter climate mis- and disinformation and build resiliency to ecofascist propaganda, in order to be effective, media literacy education needs to equip students with the skills to identify how such discourses embed multimodal forms of visual communication, memetic warfare, manipulated images, and deepfakes into propaganda. At the university level, teacher training institutions cannot afford to ignore the lack of training in climate education, information disorder, and radicalisation any longer. Educating resilient future leaders will therefore require that universities move beyond academic tribes and disciplinary silos. Complex interdisciplinary societal and global problems such as radicalisation and climate change require an interdisciplinary solution: an interdisciplinary education that equips students with the ability to approach very complex problems from different angles from the perspectives of multiple disciplines.

Local community-building

Instead of reactive approaches focused on the short-term, long-term investment in local community-building programs is needed to increase communities' resiliency to disinformation, propaganda and radicalisation. Community-building programs can offer young people healthy experiences and sustainable, non-violent pathways for participation in social movements, including climate activism, in order to weaken extremist radicalisation and recruitment efforts. This could be approached from the perspective of positive discourse analysis, whose basic argument is that in order to design positive models aimed at social change, we need to move beyond the critical deconstruction of power and analyse "helpful accounts of inspiring initiatives"⁶⁵ to understand how social change happens for the better. Ecofascist narratives in the public sphere tend to concentrate on the negative aspects of representation of women, non-white minorities, and immigrants, which has led to a spike in anti-immigration discourses as well as violent hate speech. Related to the issue of climate change activism, one notable example of online abuse of women concerns climate change activist Greta Thunberg. Her success has attracted waves

Gianfranco Polizzi and Ros Taylor. "Misinformation, Digital Literacy and the School Curriculum". *Media Policy Briefs* 22. Media Policy Project, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK. (2019).

62 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). "Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism," 2016; UNESCO. "Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: A Guide for Policy Makers," 2017; Josh Phillips, Cooper Gatewood, and Lucie Parker, "Be Internet Legends and Be Internet Citizens: Impact Report." *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. 2020 <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Be-Internet-Legends-and-Citizens-digital-report.pdf> ; Louis Reynolds, and Lucie Parker. "Digital Resilience"

63 Joe Bonnell, et al. "Teaching Approaches that Help to Build Resilience to Extremism among Young People." Department for Education (DFE): Research Report DFE-RR119 (2011); Valery Perry "Countering the Cultivation of Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Case for Comprehensive Education Reform." *DPC Policy Note New Series* 10 (2015).

64 Renee Hobbs, et al. "Teacher Motivations for Digital and Media Literacy: An Examination of Turkish Educators." *British Journal of Educational Technology* 48, no. 1 (2017): 7-22; Alison Jamieson, and Jane Flint. *Talking about Terrorism: Responding to Children's Questions*. Brilliant Publications, 2017.

65 James R. Martin, "Positive Discourse Analysis: Solidarity and Change". *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* no 1. (2004): 179-202.

of criticism and abuse, ranging from insults about her appearance and mental health to violent threats, mainly from the fossil fuel lobby, radical right politicians, journalists, and climate change deniers. To counter such negative representations, positive counter-narratives should be incorporated into climate action initiatives, for example, how climate activists have been able to mobilise masses of protesters around the world and inspire a global climate activist movement, and share results of recent research⁶⁶ that immigrants use less energy, drive less, and generate less waste. Other successful and inspiring models include the Resilient Vermont Network⁶⁷, which is an interdisciplinary initiative that brings together members of the local communities with academics and policymakers to build resilient local communities prepared to deal with the impacts of climate change; and the Kungälv model in Sweden⁶⁸, which successfully countered harassment, bullying, and neo-Nazi recruitment and violence via preventive work at both the school and the local community level. Such initiatives focused on community-building may reduce the sense of alienation that some individuals may feel and decrease the likelihood of their becoming radicalised. The Curious Climate Schools⁶⁹ initiative developed in Australia involves climate experts, local Indigenous people, school communities and teachers, and parents in helping students navigate complex questions related to the climate crisis. Parents of very young children may especially feel that it is challenging to discuss a complex global problem such as climate change. However, the positive role of the family context, which can provide a safe space for age-appropriate climate education, should not be underestimated: joint reading of children's books⁷⁰ on the topic of climate change may help them better understand this difficult subject, reduce climate anxiety, model sustainable behaviours and habits, build resilience and provide helpful strategies for coping with this global challenge in a healthy and productive manner.

Monitoring and research

As previous research has shown, terrorist attacks often inspire further copycat-style terrorist attacks.⁷¹ As white supremacist groups may start amplifying ecofascist messages, it will become increasingly important to monitor the evolution of such discourses and watch for signs of cross-pollination of ideas.⁷² For this reason, future research needs to carefully monitor the evolution of ecofascist discourses and their potential to move from the fringe into the mainstream. In fact, far right populist parties have already started masking white supremacist ideology within their anti-immigration rhetoric by carefully staying within the boundaries of hate speech laws and avoiding overt incitement to violence.⁷³ While ecofascism may still be largely confined the

66 Guizhen Ma, "The Environmental Impact of Immigration in the United States." (PhD diss., Utah State University, 2020).

67 Resilient Vermont Network, 2018. <https://sustain.org/program/resilient-vermont/>.

68 Christer Mattson, "The Kungälv Model – Responding to Social Unrest and Intolerance at School." OSCE (2013). <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/6/105385.pdf>.

69 Curious Climate Schools: <https://curiousclimate.org.au/schools/>.

70 Pauline Jones, Anne Hellwig, and Annette Turney. "6 Books to Help Talk to Your Child about Climate Change" *The Conversation*, 18 October 2023. <https://theconversation.com/6-books-to-help-talk-to-your-child-about-climate-change-215693>.

71 Julia Kupper, et al. "The Contagion and Copycat Effect in Transnational Far-right Terrorism." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 16, no. 4 (2022): 4-26.

72 Daniel C.F. Koehler, *From Traitor to Zealot: Exploring the Phenomenon of Side-Switching in Extremism and Terrorism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

73 Tina Askanius, "'I Just Want to Be the Friendly Face of National Socialism': The Turn to Civility in the Cultural Expressions of Neo-Nazism in Sweden." *Nordic Review* 42, no. s1 (2021): 17-35; Maria Darwish, "Green Neo-Nazism: Examining the Intersection of Masculinity, Far-Right Extremism and Environmentalism in the Nordic Resistance Movement." (Master's Thesis, Centre for Gender Research, University of Oslo, Norway, 2018).

'fringe',⁷⁴ we should be vigilant about monitoring current 'climate culture wars'⁷⁵ in contemporary right-wing populist politics aimed at delaying meaningful climate policy-making and potentially mainstreaming ecofascist ideas. Future research needs to prioritise investigating the link between climate change, violent extremism, and the language of ecofascist propaganda specifically, alongside well-known white supremacist grievances, whether they are authoritarian, anti-democratic and anti-government, and whether proposed solutions evoke eugenics and junk race science, 'purity' discourses and genocidal thinking.

74 Bernhard Forchtner, "Eco-Fascism 'Proper': The Curious Case of Greenline Front". *CARR Insights. Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, 25 June, 2019. <https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2020/06/25/eco-fascism-proper-the-curious-case-of-greenline-front/>.

75 Rosie Frost, "Weaponising the Climate Crisis: How Extremists and Politicians are Polarising the Debate." *EuroNews Green*. August 8, 2023. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/08/20/weaponising-the-climate-crisis-how-extremists-and-politicians-are-polarising-the-debate>.

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About the Author

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