

Green Supremacy: When Far-Right Politics Co-opts Environmentalism

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As the effects of climate change become increasingly difficult to ignore, some factions of the far-right are acknowledging the severity of a warming climate. With mainstream policies proving inadequate in addressing the challenges posed by a warming planet, people may become frustrated and feel powerless, potentially leading to a shift towards harmful ideologies and actions.

The environmental crisis is continuing to approach a point of ecological collapse. Six of the nine planetary boundaries have already been crossed (of the remaining three, two still need to be quantified). As the impacts unfold, some individuals, including those in positions of power, are trying to shift blame for ecological effects onto those who often lack agency and resources, further amplifying inequalities and escalating violence.

In May 2022, an 18-year-old white male armed with a weapon, shot at 13 individuals in a supermarket located in a primarily Black neighbourhood in Buffalo, New York. Eleven of the victims were Black. The US Justice Department investigated the case as a hate crime and an act of “racially motivated violent extremism.”² A few years before, near the US-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas, a 21-year-old white male opened fire in a crowd “to kill Mexicans.” That same year in Christchurch, New Zealand, another white male gunned down 51 Muslim worshippers at two separate mosques. Among the manifestos of all of these perpetrators, a common theme emerged – the seeming concern for the degradation of the environment, mass migration and the need to restore the “natural order.”

According to Federico Finchelstein, “fascism is many things” but can be characterised by four elements. It is 1) dictatorial, 2) enmeshed in violence and the militarisation of politics, 3) rooted in the politics of hatred, racism, antisemitism and the extreme demonisation of others, and 4) based on misinformation and the distortion of reality. Although Italy’s new Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni denounced fascism in her inaugural speech, she has joined a wave of political parties that closely interconnect with (neo)-fascist ideology. Viktor Orbán has also been accused of using “Nazi” rhetoric and pushing for anti-democracy policies. Additionally, anti-immigration agendas continue to spread, most recently in Sweden, and media freedom has been deemed problematic in many European countries, such as in Greece.

One way in which the murders mentioned above and, more generally, fascism intersect with the environmental crisis is through eco-fascism. Ecofascism creates a twisted and corrupted view of environmentalism, where authoritarianism, nationalism, and racial purity become primary tools and solutions. Population control, eugenics, the forced relocation of certain groups from environmentally sensitive areas, and framing racialised people as threats to the environment are all deemed acceptable. Eco-fascism or green nationalism is not solely tied to individuals, but it is also moving to political spaces where far right environmentalism has also been promoted at the wider political level by politicians such as Marine Le Pen.

Eco-fascism recognises the environmental crisis but prefers to focus on demographic arguments propagating coercive and discriminatory population control targeted at communities which contribute little to the environmental crises, rather than addressing the mismanagement of resources and the extreme inequalities in resource consumption. Indeed, ecofascists focus on the argument that there are too many people on the planet to both avoid environmental stress and meet everyone's needs. There are multiple reasons why this simplistic argument is flawed.

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These arguments largely ignore that the global food system has the capacity to feed an astonishing 10 billion people, according to the United Nations. However, this figure is undermined by two major issues that plague the system. Firstly, approximately one-third of all food produced is lost or wasted, leading to unnecessary strain on resources and contributing to global hunger. Secondly, the consumption patterns of affluent countries exacerbate the problem by favouring high-impact foods like meat. These practices not only put undue pressure on the environment but also compromise the food security of vulnerable populations. The current (and sometimes planned) mismanagement of resources creates the illusion of resource scarcity and although there is a correlation between population growth and environmental stress, it is not a direct causal relationship. If we look at consumption rates, high income countries such as most member states of the European Union, United States, Canada, or Japan consume 60 per cent more than the upper-middle-income countries and 13 times more than the low-income groups. Even if the population growth were to peak lower and sooner than expected, the environmental crisis can only be addressed and solved by tackling overconsumption and extreme inequalities.

What follows from the ecofascist argument above is also self-contradictory. Far-right voices concerned by Western Europe having the lowest total fertility rate and asking for measures to incentivise women to have more children, often also advocate for discriminatory forms of population control of specific social groups. As Sophia Siddiqui explains, while the far right in Europe incentivises “native” women’s reproductive capacities for nationalist ends, other social groups are experiencing a rollback in reproductive rights and are being depicted as demographic threats. For example, in Hungary, newly nationalised IVF clinics offer free treatment only to married, heterosexual couples. Roma women have been subject to forced sterilisation in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Political parties like the French National Rally and the Alternative for Germany have defined themselves around the idea that European civilisation is threatened by immigration as well as fears of a growing Muslim birth rate.

It is not that the birth rate is falling that raises alarms for green nationalists, but rather whose birth rates are falling, i.e. that of white Europeans. If population growth was truly the principal worry, easy and free access for all to contraception and abortion rights would be protected. Similarly, if the environmental crisis were truly the focus, proposed policies would tackle environmental causes of infertility, the fact that high-income countries and high-income groups have the highest carbon footprints, and that 20 fossil fuel companies alone represent one-third of greenhouse gas emissions. Lastly, if people’s needs and the protection of (unborn) children were really the concern, then child refugees would not die at Europe’s borders.

Due to a lack of finance for climate mitigation and adaptation as well as historical exploitation, countries in the Global South are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. People are forced to leave their homes and communities due to environmental factors that have made their living conditions uninhabitable. These environmental factors can include climate change, natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, and wildfires, and other environmental problems such as soil degradation, desertification, and water scarcity. Already today, people are twice as likely to be forced to leave their homes because of climate extremes than because of conflict. A report by the World Bank indicates that there may be over 216 million internally displaced climate migrants by 2050.

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While this number may cause alarm from green nationalists fearing that the EU will become the primary destination for migrants, it's important to note that 69 per cent of refugees and other people in need of international protection live in countries neighbouring their countries of origin. Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, only one European country was included in the top 10 list of host countries. The countries with the highest refugee populations, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sudan, are also the same countries that will be most impacted by a changing climate. The alarmist narrative that often dominates the public debate in Europe hides the truth that it is poorer and more vulnerable countries that bear the burden of climate-change-induced migration.

By linking environmental decline to population without questioning the distribution of resources or even power dynamics between the Global North and Global South, green nationalists frame immigration control as environmental protection, or ecobordering. Green nationalists believe climate migrants pose a threat to their environment and must be kept out at all costs. They view migration as a threat to the "natural order" and support "Fortress Europe" policies that build walls and militarise borders. This reinforces dangerous eco-fascist ideology and leads to increased military spending. Already today, wealthy nations spend two times more on arming their borders than they spent on climate action.

The budget for security and defence purposes in the 2021 to 2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) more than doubles the previous budget. The MFF was decided long before the Russian invasion. The largest budgetary increase can be seen in the European Defence Fund, with a massive funding increase of 1256 per cent. The Internal Security Fund's budget will increase by 90 per cent to 1.9 billion euros and the funds for agencies such as Frontex, will increase by 129 per cent to 9.6 billion euros, raising concerns for human rights.

The emphasis on border fortification and military spending diverts resources away from addressing the root causes of climate migration, such as environmental degradation and the exploitation of natural resources. This not only exacerbates the problem of climate migration but also perpetuates the inequalities and power imbalances that led to it in the first place. What is needed is to recognise the complexity of the climate crisis and that this will require complex solutions.

Cassidy Thomas argues that far-right ideologies such as eco-fascism attract young people because they

have grown up with climate change but see that governments have failed to tackle the crisis properly. According to Thomas, eco-fascist narratives can provide people with a “sense of purpose” and a “call to action,” albeit towards harmful solutions. This is where more socially desirable narratives are needed.



Diego Marin is leading the work on raw materials focusing on the circular economy aspects of the raw materials question but mainly analyzing the green and digital transitions from an environmental and global justice perspective. He is also developing political tools and arguments for a raw materials binding target across the EU economy.



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