

**ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG**  
BRUSSELS OFFICE

HILARY A. MOORE

# **BURNING EARTH, CHANGING EUROPE:** HOW THE RACIST RIGHT EXPLOITS THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT



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The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung works toward a more just world and a system based on international solidarity.

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## WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

For ecological activists and anti-fascists alike, the environmental politics of the contemporary far right pose a significant theoretical and practical challenge. Hilary Moore's critical new study provides an informed and up-to-date overview of responses to climate change across the European racist right, along with practical recommendations for confronting the slide toward anti-immigrant hostility in the name of the environment. Everybody committed to emancipatory ecological politics should read this booklet.

**Peter Staudenmaier**

co-author of *Ecofascism Revisited:  
Lessons from the German Experience*

Hilary Moore's exploration of the racist right's attempts to influence the climate change debate is essential reading for environmental activists across Europe. In a rapidly changing political landscape, xenophobic arguments can quickly debase progressive causes. The rejection of neo-colonial, eco-fascist, green nationalist, and eco-Malthusianist approaches to climate conservation is vital, as Moore proves, to forging a dynamic, internationalist, anti-racist, green movement.

**Liz Fekete**

Director of the Institute of Race Relations,  
author of *Europe's Fault Lines:  
Racism and the Rise of the Right*

The world is not only getting hotter, it is also falling to the right at a frightful pace. How can the left fight on both fronts simultaneously? Hilary Moore has produced an indispensable survey of the landscape and a call to activists – in the anti-fascist and climate movements and their allies – to search for paths forward. That call must be heeded.

**Andreas Malm**

editor of *White Skin, Black Fuel:  
On the Dangers of Fossil Fascism*

Moore's booklet is a much-needed addition to the emerging literature on the intersection of far right and climate change politics. It does a superb job of reminding us that climate change is not simply a natural phenomenon, but a deeply political issue and it raises a series of important questions for climate activists.

**Bernhard Forchtner**

editor of *The Far Right and the Environment:  
Politics, Discourse and Communication*

## **HILARY A. MOORE**

Hilary A. Moore is an anti-racist political educator and freelance writer. She co-authored *No Fascist USA! The John Brown Anti-Klan Committee and Lessons for Today's Movements* (City Lights/Open Media, 2020) and *Organizing Cools the Planet: Tools and Reflections to Navigate the Climate Crisis* (PM Press, 2011). She lives in Berlin, Germany.



*The politics of nature offers a way for individuals and communities alike to navigate the precarious terrain of modern life and search for alternatives. This is what gives ecological challenges their powerful potential to spark fundamental social change. But it can also expose an unmistakable sense of political disorientation.*

Peter Staudenmaier, co-author of *Ecofascism Revisited*

## THE POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is more than just emissions targets and collapsing ecosystems. It is political. It offers us opportunities to agitate for a better society. Responding to climate change has become a key arena for political engagement in recent years. From mass student strikes to the Green New Deal, a growing number of people around the world are looking for ways to take collective action to find real solutions that also encourage transnational negotiation. Against this backdrop, it is easy to pinpoint fossil fuel corporations or politicians refusing to take serious action as threats to the prospect of a more just society with a stabilized climate. Yet there exists a lesser known, albeit formidable, threat within the landscape of climate politics: the racist right.

It is no secret that the ecological threshold for stabilizing the climate is quickly approaching, and for some regions the scales have already tipped. For decades, scientists<sup>1</sup> and communities on the frontline of the crisis have sounded this alarm.<sup>2</sup> In Europe, signs of the crisis are seen in Alpine glacier melts, sweeping forest fires, crop failures, the spread of Lyme

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1 Scientists have warned about the impact of climate change since the late 1980s. Millman, O. (2018). Ex-Nasa Scientist: 30 Years On, World Is Failing 'Miserably' To Address Climate Change. Available at: [www.huffpost.com/entry/world-climate-change\\_n\\_5b2a6f5ae4b0f0b9e9a79dac](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/world-climate-change_n_5b2a6f5ae4b0f0b9e9a79dac) (23.12.2019).

2 Drawing from concepts discussed in *Organizing Cools the Planet: Tools and Reflections to Navigate the Climate Crisis*, a frontline community comprises people who are heavily affected by climate change in a myriad of ways, from skyrocketing rates of asthma or leukemia, rare cancers, and other manifestations of toxic dumping, digging, spewing, and pumping, to crop devastation due to record-breaking drought, homes ravaged by wildfires, and water contamination. Frontline communities are hit the hardest by climate change and are organizing or taking collective action to stop the point-source harm as well as putting forward real solutions.

disease, the contamination of the continent's waters, abrupt heatwaves prompting algae blooms, and suffocating fish.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the global rightward shift in political influence is another rapidly growing aspect of this phenomenon, changing what is politically possible in the fight to win more just policies, equitable social norms, or even accessing the most basic of human rights. We can observe this trend with Donald Trump in the United States, Boris Johnson in the United Kingdom, Narendra Modi in India, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines. The threat this poses to justice is stark, as demonstrated by Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's climate-skeptic president, threatening to expand deforestation in the Amazon, a move that will both exacerbate the ecological impact and jeopardize the livelihoods and lives of the indigenous people living there.

According to the European Commission's 2019 Eurobarometer survey, 93% of European citizens consider climate change a serious problem and 92% believe their government should set ambitious targets to increase the amount of renewable energy used.<sup>4</sup> This is one indication that climate change has become a significant political issue. Moreover, in light of the 2019 European election results, where more far right and right-wing populist politicians claimed parliamentary seats than ever before, we can expect the right to exert greater influence within the political terrain of climate change.

The right engages the politics of climate change in a variety of ways, from upholding the corporate power of fossil fuel giants to rejecting international negotiations on climate change. This booklet addresses the potentially racist and xenophobic interpretations of the environment, as well as the distorted narratives of democracy, migration, nationalism, and repression, espoused by the racist right. In other words, the dangerous discourses that often come from far right political tendencies can *also easily permeate*

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3 Knox, P. (2018). On the Boil: Global heatwave sees scores killed in wildfires, crops failing and fish suffocating in rivers as the planet sizzles. Available at: [www.thesun.co.uk/news/6925426/heatwave-2018-europe-august-wildfires-japan-china](http://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6925426/heatwave-2018-europe-august-wildfires-japan-china) (23.12.2019).

4 Eurobarometer survey by the European Commission (2019). Citizen support for climate action. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/citizens/support\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/citizens/support_en) (23.12.2019).



*conservative and center-right groups as well as mainstream political life.* For example, a party on the conservative right may adopt far right narratives to absorb a growing voter base, or a right-wing party may have close or shared membership with anti-democratic, racist groups.

This booklet is therefore largely concerned with how the rhetoric on climate propagated by the “right wing” in general, and the far right in particular, pervades the spectrum of right-wing groups.

The pressing questions are: *what can left-wing actors do to prevent far right ideologies from shaping climate politics and the climate movement? How do far right ideologies influence right-wing understanding of climate change more generally?* The process of formulating answers to these questions will better prepare left-wing and progressive movements to shape what is politically possible.

This booklet is a starting point for those who want to learn more about the connection between climate change and right-wing groups. The first section comprises a broad exploration of how climate politics can swing left and right, as well as the ways in which certain narratives about climate change can prop up racism and fascistic tendencies. The second section investigates how different far right groups (inside and outside parliament) are shaping climate politics in six European countries, namely Hungary, Germany, Poland, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. The booklet analyzes the specific context in each country and what resistance looks like today.

The third section offers lessons and questions for people wanting to forge broad movements for climate justice, while the fourth section suggests a few ways to use this booklet, as well as providing a glossary, suggestions for further reading, and notes about the methodology applied.

## THREE THINGS EVERY CLIMATE ACTIVIST NEEDS TO KNOW

1. Climate change is not an inherently progressive issue
2. How you think and talk about climate change may prop up racist right-wing positions
3. The far right does not need to govern to influence

### CLIMATE CHANGE IS NOT AN INHERENTLY PROGRESSIVE ISSUE

It can be easy for those on the progressive or left side of climate politics to assume that far right groups are either climate denialists or skeptics. Though this assessment is not completely wrong, it unfortunately obscures the problem. The issue, typically encountered in Western Europe, lies in dismissing the role far right groups play as a significant political force. At times, this dismissal is paired with the assumption that “those people” are delusional or even stupid. Writing on how conservatism came to be treated as a mental deficiency, sociologist Frank Furedi said that, at best, this kind of “political insult serves as a substitute for argument and debate.”<sup>5</sup> At worst, it masks a thin veneer of classist notions of intelligence or obscures the impact of well-curated right-wing strategies.

The uncomfortable truth is that there are some far right and environmentally friendly conservative groups that are genuinely committed to ecology and the natural world. It can be tempting to write off this section of the right wing because it is easier to assume it does not care about the climate. Whatever the reason, the choice to downplay these tendencies is a significant misstep. It not only prevents progressive movements from understanding how the right wing formulates its narratives, some of which are effectively mobilizing people on the streets and at the ballot box, but also prevents us from accurately reading the rapidly changing political landscape. More specifically, by downplaying the role of the far right, we are unable to see the nuanced ways it leverages environmental issues and climate change toward its own political ends.

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5 Furedi, F. (2013). You’re right-wing? You must be stupid. Available at: [www.spiked-online.com/2013/08/13/youre-right-wing-you-must-be-stupid](http://www.spiked-online.com/2013/08/13/youre-right-wing-you-must-be-stupid) (26.12.2019).

So, why can the issue of climate change swing both left and right? The politics of nature quickly become tricky because nature cannot speak for itself. In some ways, nature is like a screen onto which people and society project their subjective values, motivations, and aspirations. The result is that nature can mean almost anything depending on who is talking or taking action on its behalf. When nature is something to be protected, who has the right to protect it and from whom? When nature is something to be tamed, who has the right to dominate it and why? This raises the question of whether humans are part of nature, and if we are, how might we organize our economy, governance, and use of natural resources in a way that is socially fair and ecologically sound? The very real limitations of modern capitalist life will raise these questions for any group considering what political alternatives exist beyond extractive capitalism. However, the kinds of answers a group might find greatly depend on their core ideas about what makes up a good society.

A key example of the convergence of fascist movements and the politics of the natural world is the Nazi Party during its time in power in Germany. The “green wing” of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) successfully linked the pursuit of social purity (or militant racist nationalism) with that of environmental purity. They used ideas of the organic, simple living, healthy food, and *Volkskörper*, or the romantic notion of common people who worked the land, to represent a rootedness to place and a national identity. The *völkisch* movement was key to the “Blood and Soil” narrative, which was constructed in opposition to rationalism, urbanization, and globalization and played a crucial role in justifying the Jewish Holocaust. *Lebensraum* (living space) and *Heimat* (homeland) became synonymous with the process of excluding and exterminating those who did not reflect German ideals of a good society.<sup>6</sup>

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6 For more on this, read *Ecofascism Revisited: Lessons from the German Experience* by Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier or *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* by Peter Staudenmaier.



This was not the end of fascist interpretations of the environment in Germany; rather, these are continually evoked and leveraged in new contexts. For example, in March 2019, 51 people were murdered in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The gunman described himself as an eco-fascist, citing the birth rates of non-Europeans and overpopulation as the cause of climate change and the reason for his actions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Forchtner, B. (2019). Eco-fascism: justifications of terrorist violence in the Christchurch mosque shooting and the El Paso shooting. Available at: [www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/eco-fascism-justifications-terrorist-violence-christchurch-mosque-shooting-and-el-paso-shooting](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/eco-fascism-justifications-terrorist-violence-christchurch-mosque-shooting-and-el-paso-shooting) (20.08.2019).

## HOW LEFT-WING CLIMATE CHANGE ARGUMENTS SWING RIGHT

Not all groups on the far right are genuinely committed to ecology. Even if they are, they might not prioritize that in their campaigns. In Europe, and particularly within youth-based movements, far right groups will often address the climate crisis in some manner. Sometimes these arguments sound very similar to the ones put forward by left-wing and progressive climate movements. What similarities should we be aware of? Does that mean left-wing and progressive movements should abandon these arguments?

When progressive movements refer to climate change without firmly rooting their position in a social justice framework – one that prioritizes the safety, dignity, and human rights of all people – messaging and campaigns have a tendency to turn racist and xenophobic. This could mean that your campaign attracts right-leaning people or that your work is co-opted by far right groups or makes use of right-wing arguments. There are a few climate change narratives, often used by progressive movements, that are easily co-opted within right-wing discourse. They are environmental protection, overpopulation, and anti-corporate/anti-elitism.

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### A/ Environmental protection

At face value, demanding environmental protection is a necessary stance for preventing further damage to ecosystems. Protecting a wildlife habitat, for instance, is important work. However, a significant problem arises if progressive movements are *not able to clearly articulate the threat or cause for alarm*. Environmental protection becomes a dangerous argument when a specific group of people is identified as the cause for alarm. A moderate right-wing narrative could blame pollution on outsiders, while a far right narrative might depict intruders or parasites destroying the integrity of the environment, and possibly a society. This kind of nativism, or calls to promote the interest of native inhabitants over that of immigrants, is common in many far right and fascistic groups today and easily pairs with arguments for environmental protection. For example, Der III Weg, a German far right party, calls for the protection of animals and trash pick-up

campaigns under the slogan “Environmental protection is homeland security.”<sup>8</sup> Far from being a solely far right phenomenon, nativism may also come into play when neoliberal globalists – those committed to privatization, competition, and largely individualized solutions – aim to privatize state assets to dismember the welfare state.<sup>9</sup> Environmental protection underpinned by nativism requires exclusionary practices, such as militarized border protection or physical barriers, like walls. The reasoning behind these practices can include negative stereotyping, typecasting, or directly racist ideas about the value of people. For example, in 2019 a group called White Extinction Rebellion emerged in the United Kingdom in an effort to “Save our Planet and Our Race.”<sup>10</sup>

### B/ Overpopulation is the cause of climate change

It may be tempting to argue that overpopulation is the primary cause of climate and environmental degradation, i.e. that there are too many humans and too few natural resources, like fresh water, healthy food, clean air, and energy sources. This argument *raises the question of how society ought to go about reducing the number of people on the planet*. A moderate progressive version of this argument places “humankind” as the cause of the ecological crisis, when in reality corporate power has far greater culpability and far greater agency. Implicitly redistributing responsibility can have dangerous consequences. One unfortunate example was when Roger Hallam, the founder of Extinction Rebellion, downplayed the Holocaust as “just another fuckery in human history”,<sup>11</sup> attempting to generalize blame for climate change. When humans are identified as the cause, rather than the fossil fuel industry or an economy built upon the

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8 Der III Weg. Interview with Greenline Front (2017). Available at: <https://der-dritte-weg.info/2017/11/interview-mit-der-greenline-front> (14.02.2020).

9 Risager, B. 2019. What is Neoliberalism? A Conversation with David Harvey. Available at: <https://scoop.me/neoliberalism-david-harvey-interview/> (10.02.2020).

10 Bird, S. (2019). ‘Environmental patriots’ group linked to far right, investigation finds. Available at: [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/09/28/environmental-patriots-group-linked-far-right-investigation/?WT.mc\\_id=tmg\\_share\\_tw](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/09/28/environmental-patriots-group-linked-far-right-investigation/?WT.mc_id=tmg_share_tw) (30.12.2019).

11 Connolly, K. (2019). Extinction Rebellion founder’s Holocaust remarks spark fury. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/20/extinction-rebellion-founders-holocaust-remarks-spark-fury](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/20/extinction-rebellion-founders-holocaust-remarks-spark-fury) (12.02.2020).

notion of endless growth, arguments for overpopulation open the door to far right ideology. Downplaying the Holocaust may attract particular far right structures. Overpopulation arguments in their extreme form, such as “let the crisis come”, call for those who are already most vulnerable to die. This also reinforces a fascist logic, dangerously couched within the emergency of climate change, that decides which lives matter. An extreme example is the work of Nazi scientists that determined “life unworthy of life.” Overpopulation arguments also evoke racist understandings of Darwinism, or survival of the fittest, based on racial superiority, which was also deployed by the Nazi Party. Most importantly, the people often regarded as disposable within this kind of thinking are the same people least responsible for the governing practices that created this political situation. Today, this narrative most often comes from Northern anti-migration and racist ideology. Careless use of this narrative by Western climate activists unfortunately reinforces the views of the far right. In short, the overpopulation narrative is a dramatically simplified, often racist approach to a complex challenge.

### C/ Corporations are the bad guys!

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Corporations and investment groups are major offenders when it comes to blocking technologies for climate adaptation and transition plans that reduce society’s reliance on fossil fuels. This argument was first put forward by global justice movements in the 1990s and 2000s. However, seeing corporate power as a shadowy conspiracy rather than the outcome of broad systemic logic is a dangerous misstep. First, it does not address the systemic logic. Second, conspiracy theories have historically been fertile ground for anti-Semitic and xenophobic propaganda. Such narratives have the ability to bring far right tactics of scapegoating and conspiracy theories into mainstream society. This is admittedly complex because these resentments may point to legitimate or selfish grievances that at times resonate with sentiments within progressive climate movements. This type of critique must ultimately focus on systemic power, not perceived conspiracies or cabals.

## **THE FAR RIGHT DOES NOT NEED TO GOVERN TO INFLUENCE**

There are more far right and right-wing populist politicians in parliaments across Europe than ever before. This does not mean they are organized within a coherent strategy, but it does mean that they have unprecedented influence when it comes to governance. Still, parliament is not the only place to look when considering the many ways far right ideology shapes what is politically possible regarding climate change.

Far right, even fascist organizations and parties do not need to be in governing positions of power to influence policies, culture, and what is considered common sense. Far right groups can bring fringe topics into mainstream debate, forcing more mainstream organizations and parties to adapt their position or perhaps incorporate the topic, often in an effort to maintain their voting base or possibly attract voters newly mobilized by fringe topics. Nigel Farage and the populist, radical-right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), with its dramatically waning influence, is one such example of how climate change skepticism was brought back into parliamentary debates.<sup>12</sup>

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12 Serhan, Y. (2019). Nigel Farage's Brilliant Failure. Available at: [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/12/nigel-farage-britain-election-brexit-party/603376](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/12/nigel-farage-britain-election-brexit-party/603376) (14.12.2019).



## **FOUR REASONS WHY PROGRESSIVE CLIMATE MOVEMENTS SHOULD CARE ABOUT THE FAR RIGHT:**

- > **Progressive campaigns could be leveraged to further social inequality and oppression.** Conservation, protection, and opposition to corporate control are common stances within climate politics, yet these narratives are often deployed by extreme-right and far right groups.
- > **Real climate solutions will become more difficult to propose and practice under authoritarian or identitarian governments, or governments increasingly susceptible to authoritarian narratives.**
- > **Justice is not inevitable.** The politics of nature – environment, climate, ecology – is a terrain of struggle that opens up a great deal of political possibility because it sparks questions about alternative modes of human organization. Left and progressive movements must ensure that justice is at the core of these negotiations.
- > **Shared root causes.** The root causes of climate change – white supremacy, capitalism, nationalism, and heteropatriarchy – also prop up authoritarian governance.

## THEN COMES MIGRATION

The politics of climate change ask us to consider environmental issues in much broader terms. For example, those of us fighting for climate justice are not only concerned about a coal mine's impact on the environment; we are also concerned about an economic system that was built for endless extraction at the cost of particular lives, labor, and land. If we add history to this context, we know that there are certain regions of the world, particularly in the Global South, that have experienced extractive capitalism for hundreds of years.

It is old news that the richest 10% of the world's population are responsible for 50% of global emissions, and that the wealthiest 20% are responsible for 70% of these emissions.<sup>13</sup> So what does this mean for the people living in places that have long suffered extraction by the Global North? As drought, famine, contamination, and dangerous weather patterns accelerate, it makes sense that one *effect* of climate change includes people moving to find a better life.

And where might people go? Where capital has accumulated. The history of colonialism and extractive capitalism means that many people will follow the flow of global wealth. People will leave the places where natural resources and labor have been extracted, particularly through the means of war. People will move toward the places where that wealth was taken and has accumulated. This transforms migration into an issue of climate change.

At the same time, migration and immigration are galvanizing topics for the racist right. This encompasses increased border security, detention centers and deportations, calls to preserve European culture and natural resources, claims about crimes committed by refugees that justify stricter policing, or possibly incitement to racist action on the streets. This anti-immigration stance sometimes becomes the lens through which to interpret climate change. For example, Viktor Orbán, Hungary's prime minister, has argued in recent years that immigrants and migrants are destroying

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13 AFP (2015). World's richest 10% produce half of global carbon emissions, says Oxfam. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/02/worlds-richest-10-produce-half-of-global-carbon-emissions-says-oxfam](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/02/worlds-richest-10-produce-half-of-global-carbon-emissions-says-oxfam) (01.01.2020).

the environment. This sentiment is echoed by Marine Le Pen and Tony Abbott, the former Australian prime minister.<sup>14</sup>

The people seeking refuge from economic breakdown, climate catastrophe, or violence and war are often seen as the *cause* of the crisis, rather than the crisis being *the context from which they are fleeing*. This clearly shows how narratives of overpopulation or foreigners disrupting an environmental and social balance or purity becomes seductive.

## RIGHT-WING INTERPRETATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

*To be right wing means to support the state in its capacity as enforcer of order and to oppose the state as distributor of wealth and power downward and equitably in society.*

Sara Diamond, author of *Roads to Dominion*

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One of the clearest ways to better comprehend the connections between the right and the climate crisis is to understand that there are a range of right-wing groups, networks, organizations, and political parties.<sup>15</sup> It is easy to think of the right as one homogenous entity, but when we become familiar with the different categories – extreme right, radical right, far right, and fascist – we hone our ability to read the political landscape.

The **extreme right** is made up of electoral parties, positioned to the right of traditional conservatives and working within a constitutional framework, though pushing at the boundaries of legality, particularly in terms of using racist language and rhetoric. The **radical right** that has emerged in Europe in recent years is part of a recalibration of traditional conservatism and a move towards a more authoritarian government.

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14 Walker, S. (2019). Viktor Orbán trumpets Hungary's 'procreation, not immigration' policy. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/06/viktor-orban-trumpets-far-right-procreation-anti-immigration-policy](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/06/viktor-orban-trumpets-far-right-procreation-anti-immigration-policy) (06.01.2020).

15 See *Europe's Fault Lines: Racism and the Rise of the Right* by Liz Fekete for more information on these categories and specific groups.

While the **hard right** may embrace nativism, nationalism, and cultural conservatism in policy terms, it also paradoxically charts, in economic terms, a neoliberal path.

The **far right**, in general, rejects the existing political system and is more willing to associate with a country's ultra-nationalist or fascist past, as well as openly advocate violence. **Fascist** groups reject the existing political system with a clear anti-democratic position, glorifying national, racial or cultural unity and collective rebirth. Groups often seek to purge imagined enemies, at times through extreme acts of violence. Tactics include potential bids for power, day-to-day violence, and influential interactions with other political forces and with the government.<sup>16</sup>

General categories such as these help us draw important distinctions. For example, how does a right-wing group relate to state governance? Are they advocating for the restoration of old institutions and social relations or are they calling for aspects of social change? This information might then indicate how groups engage in political activity and to whom they appeal. At the same time, general categories are a limited tool when it comes to real-life complexity because they fall short when it comes to comprehending the tensions between political groups or the nuances that exist across geographical contexts.

State collusion is another important trend related to, but not represented within, these categories. There are times when the policies pursued by the "law and order" arms of the state (the police, the military, the security services) can foster the growth of fascism, indirectly or directly. Being able to identify when there is a shared logic, tactic, or goal between the arms of the state and far right or fascist structures is another aspect of a more accurate reading of the political landscape.

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16 Fekete, L. (2012). Pedlars of hate: the violent impact of the European far Right. The Institute of Race Relations. Available at: <https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/wpmedia.outlandish.com/irr/2017/04/26155341/PedlarsOfHate.pdf> (10.01.2020).

## NARRATIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE FROM A RIGHT-WING PERSPECTIVE

Just as there is a range of right-wing viewpoints, including conservative and centre-right, different right-wing groups relate to climate change in different ways. Denialism, skepticism, and acceptance are three general climate narratives. Climate denial encompasses positions ranging from rejecting humans' role in causing global warming to denying global warming altogether. More often than not, positions such as these are often related to a commitment to maintaining current economic interests. While outright climate denial is becoming less common in Europe, skepticism covers a wide and complex spectrum. Climate skepticism includes a distrust or general questioning of policy processes, scientific findings, or underlying political motivations. Climate acceptance, or acknowledging that global warming is caused by humans and necessitates swift action, is also often concerned with economic security or independence. Sometimes, amongst more far right or fascist groups, the actions being called for are related to narratives of social and environmental purity.

### EXAMPLES OF RIGHT-WING NARRATIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

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DENIALIST / REJECTION	SKEPTICISM	ACCEPTANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Climate change does not exist</li><li>• Climate change is not caused by humans, but by natural causes</li><li>• No post-industrial warming, or warming has stopped</li><li>• Too early to tell</li><li>• CO<sub>2</sub> has a positive impact on the environment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Skepticism about scientific evidence of trends, causes, or impact</li><li>• Skepticism about scientific, bureaucratic, or political processes behind mainstream climate science</li><li>• Skepticism about public and private responses to the climate issue</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Economy and jobs should not be harmed</li><li>• Better to invest in climate adaptation</li><li>• Deliberating about global processes</li><li>• Economic independence through energy</li><li>• Wanting to keep the social and environmental world pure</li></ul>

Most right-wing groups in Europe practice a version of climate skepticism. Some examples include opposition to European Union processes and policies, opposition to climate activists, accusations that socialists and green parties are driving the climate agenda, accusations that the mainstream media sensationalizes climate change, effectively distorting the issue, or assertions that the cost of mitigating the climate transition outweighs the benefits. For example, Gianluca Pini, President of Lega, Italy's populist, radical-right party, described the Paris agreement as economically unfair: "The agreement reached was a downward compromise on continuing to allow Chinese companies and developing countries to compete unfairly with Italian companies, who fully comply with environmentally friendly production."<sup>17</sup>

## **RIGHT-WING POPULIST PARTIES IN EUROPE**

In 2019, Adelphi, a Berlin-based independent, public policy research group, published a report on the 21 strongest right-wing populist parties across Europe and their positions on climate change. Focusing on public presence – party platforms, public statements, press releases, news sources, and parliamentary activity – Adelphi concluded that most right-wing populist parties oppose climate transition policies, particularly at international or multilateral level. At the same time, many strongly support environmental conservation and more localized measures such as clean air and energy independence.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Lega Nord (2015). Compromise on the downside. Available at: [www.leganord.org/il-movimento/regolamento-congresso-federale-2017/217-notizie/15645-clima-pini-in-compromesso-al-ribasso-limiti-non-imposti-a-cina-india-e-usa](http://www.leganord.org/il-movimento/regolamento-congresso-federale-2017/217-notizie/15645-clima-pini-in-compromesso-al-ribasso-limiti-non-imposti-a-cina-india-e-usa) (08.02.2020).

18 Schaller, S./Carius, A. (2019). Convenient Truths – Mapping climate agendas of right-wing populist parties in Europe. Available at: [www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths](http://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths) (19.11.2019).

## 2019 EUROPEAN RIGHT-WING POPULISTS' POSITIONS ON CLIMATE SCIENCE:

DENIALIST / SKEPTICAL	DISENGAGED / CAUTIOUS	AFFIRMATIVE
Austria *Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)	Czech Republic Tomio Okamura / Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)	Finland Finns Party (PS)
Denmark Danish People's Party (DF)	France National Rally (RN)	Hungary *Fidesz
Estonia Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE)	Greece Golden Dawn (XA)	Latvia *National Alliance (NA)
Germany Alternative for Germany (AfD)	Italy *Lega Nord (Lega)	
UK United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	Lithuania Order and Justice (TT)	
Netherlands Party for Freedom (PVV)	Norway *Progress Party (PP)	
Sweden Sweden Democrats (SD)	Belgium Flemish Interest (VB)	
	Bulgaria *Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO)	
	Poland *Law and Justice (PiS)	
	Slovakia *Slovak National Party (SNS)	
	Switzerland *Swiss People's Party (SVP)	

In spring 2019, when the Adelphi report was published, there were seven right-wing populist parties in government coalitions across Europe; these are marked with an \* above. It is worth noting that the far right parties in power in Poland and Hungary turned populist over the course of their time in government.

According to the Adelphi report, arguments against climate and energy policy are often articulated as an “unbearable burden for the national economy/consumers and have unjust effects”<sup>19</sup> and that the most common reasons for inaction are “economic decline, national independence, scientific dissent, as well as notions of ‘homeland and nature’.”<sup>20</sup> The few right-wing parties that support proactive climate and energy policy argue for energy independence through economic benefits and improved quality of life.

Populist, far right, and anti-European parties in the EU now occupy more parliamentary seats than ever before, although they have as yet been unable to form a unified or coherent bloc.<sup>21</sup> Adelphi concludes that the trend of right-wing parties opposing climate policy will become more widespread in the coming years. This projection mirrors the results of the May 2019 European Union elections, which saw unprecedented voter turnout. For example, the parties of Italy’s populist prime minister Matteo Salvini, Hungary’s anti-immigration prime minister Viktor Orbán, and France’s far right leader Marine Le Pen, increased their presence in the 27-bloc assembly.

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19 Schaller, S./Carius, A. (2019). Convenient Truths – Mapping climate agendas of rightwing populist parties in Europe. Available at: [www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths](http://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths) (19.11.2019).

20 Schaller, S./Carius, A. (2019). Convenient Truths – Mapping climate agendas of right-wing populist parties in Europe. Available at: [www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths](http://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths) (19.11.2019).

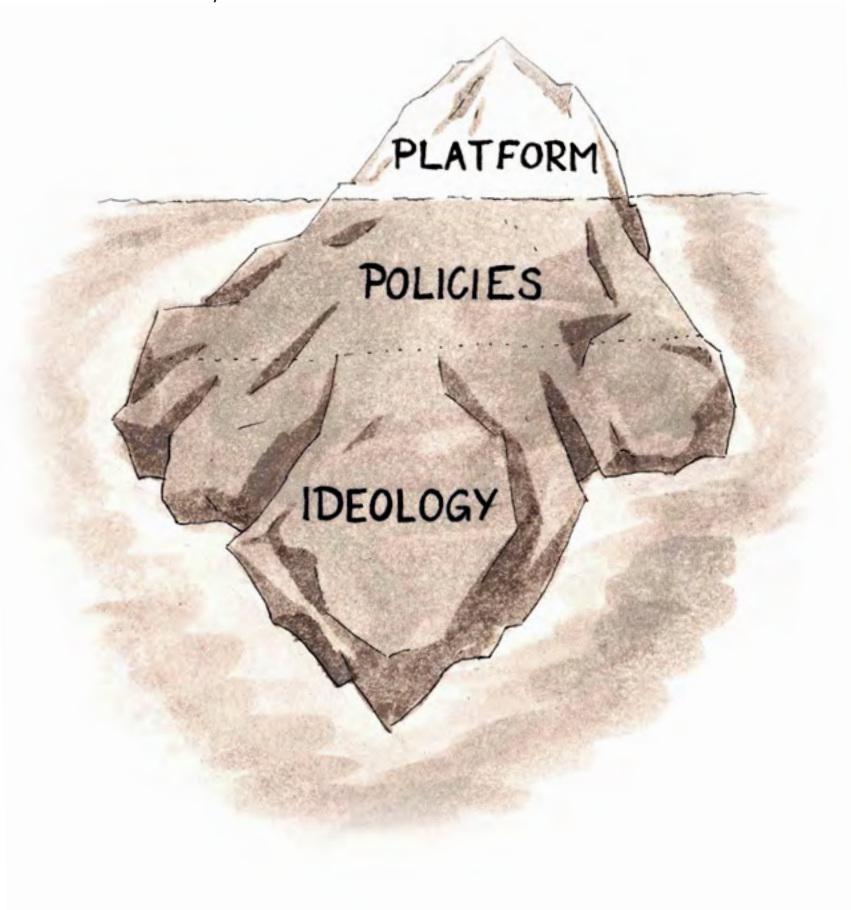
21 Walker, S. (2019). European elections: far-right ‘surge’ ends in a ripple. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/27/european-elections-far-right-surge-ends-in-a-ripple](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/27/european-elections-far-right-surge-ends-in-a-ripple) (23.11.2019).



## IDEOLOGIES UNDERPINNING POLITICAL POSITIONS

A crucial part of understanding right-wing stances on climate change lies in the ability to identify the ideology, or set of normative beliefs, that underpins their political position. Public statements, press releases, or platforms can fluctuate or sometimes bend at any given political moment, but core assumptions held by right-wing groups will likely remain intact over time (e.g. positions on wealth redistribution).

Examples of ideologies that underpin right-wing positions on climate change include anti-globalism, right-wing populism, green nationalism, ethnonationalism, and eco-Malthusianism.



## ANTI-GLOBALISM

Anti-globalism opposes the current global economic and trade system. It emerged from a progressive struggle against international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, for their exploitative practices in developing countries, but in recent years has taken a rightward turn, in large part due to hostility toward migration and economic stagnation or decline for people in the Global North.<sup>22</sup>

### EXPRESSIONS OF ANTI-GLOBALISM

- Opposed to a “global elite,” at times leans toward anti-Semitism
- Opposition to international governing and economic bodies (IPCC, EU, COP, Wall Street)
- Opposition to mainstream aspects of social movements: feminism, anti-racism, LGBTQ rights, multiculturalism
- Often anti-liberal, democratic right

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22 Horner, R. (2018). How anti-globalisation switched from a left to a right-wing issue – and where it will go next. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/how-anti-globalisation-switched-from-a-left-to-a-right-wing-issue-and-where-it-will-go-next-90587> (22.12.2019).

## RIGHT-WING POPULISM

Right-wing populism is characterized by disillusionment with mainstream politics (frequently due to its “untrustworthiness”) and narratives of a conspiring, ruling elite. The right-wing turn in populism revolves around the politics of fear, often formed through a national identity in opposition to the “other”, e.g. fear of the foreigner and “taking back” economic control from transnational organizations.<sup>23</sup>

### EXPRESSIONS OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM

- The people against the corrupt elite, with their sinister activities inciting hysteria against us and our sovereignty (climate change performance populism)
- Claims that climate refugees are a false category or created by multiculturalists to destroy “the people”

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23 Zabala, S. (2017). The difference between right and left-wing populism. Available at: [www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/01/difference-left-wing-populism-170112162814894.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/01/difference-left-wing-populism-170112162814894.html) (05.01.2020).

## **GREEN NATIONALISM OR ECO-NATIONALISM**

Green nationalism is the belief that dependence on outside fuel and energy resources is a threat to the nation state. It relies on notions of preserving land or romantic ideas of landscape as a means of preserving national identity, while harnessing concerns about the use of a nation's limited resources and the well-being of its legal citizens.<sup>24</sup>

### **EXPRESSIONS OF GREEN NATIONALISM OR ECO-NATIONALISM**

- Economic growth and varying levels of environmental protection can be complementary
- Economic independence through control over energy

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24 Ireland, T. (2017). Green nationalism? How the far right could learn to love the environment. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/green-nationalism-how-the-far-right-could-learn-to-love-the-environment-76035> (04.01. 2010).

## **ETHNONATIONALISM**

Ethnonationalism is another ideology built on prioritizing the nation state, yet is primarily concerned with protecting an ethnicity or race.

### EXPRESSIONS OF ETHNONATIONALISM:

- Linking membership of a nation to biological/racial and/or cultural traits
- Efforts, overt or covert, to maintain environmental and social purity
- Overpopulation, and perceived threat of invasive species or intruders, used to argue for border security and racist tropes
- Often anti-democratic extreme right

## **ECO-MALTHUSIANISM**

Named after 18th century English scholar Thomas Malthus, eco-Malthusianism is the belief that population growth tends to outpace our resources. Malthusian theory suggests that this can be regulated either through moral restraint or disaster (such as disease, famine, or war), widespread poverty, and environmental degradation. Malthusianism's core concern is population control. Political actors espousing this theory often position "humanity", rather than capitalists, multinational conglomerates, or international development agencies, as the cause of ecological destruction.

### **EXPRESSIONS OF ECO-MALTHUSIANISM**

- Blaming the "Third World" for consumption patterns
- Equating economic structures and fertility rates in developing countries as problematic and innate to culture or geography rather than hundreds of years of extraction, coercion, and exploitation
- "Love your mother, don't become one!"

In real life, ideologies are not so clear cut. Those described above are distinct, being entrenched in a particular context, yet also borrowing from each other. For instance, though anti-EU sentiment may be rooted in opposition to transnational governance, it can also mobilize the underdog “us”. By necessity, “us” exists in contrast with some other, or other group. This can stoke political fears and antagonism that breeds right-wing populism. Our job then, as activists and organizers in progressive climate movements, is to help foster widespread understanding of how these ideologies shape political debate, across communities and social groups.

## RIGHT-WING REACTIONS TO CLIMATE TRANSITION

*I think the only thing scarier than a far right, racist movement that denies the reality of climate change is a far right, racist movement that doesn't deny the reality of climate change, that actually says this is happening, there are going to be many millions of people on the move, and we are going to use this abhorrent ideology that ranks the relative value of human life, that puts white Christians at the top of the hierarchy, that animalizes and otherizes everyone else, as the justification for allowing those people to die.*

—Naomi Klein, author of *On Fire: The (Burning) Case for the Green New Deal*

Beyond denial, right-wing groups must contend with a transitioning society. Will communities be able to endure and survive? What would it take for societies to adapt and thrive within changing conditions? One significant concern surrounding the climate transition is the inevitable phasing out of extractive industries. This one topic then raises questions, for instance, about the allocation of resources like funding for adaptive technology as well as the role of meaningful work and the well-being of workers. How right-wing groups react to these questions is another aspect for progressive climate movements to study and counteract.

## EXAMPLES OF RIGHT-WING REACTIONS TO CLIMATE TRANSITION

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### CALLS TO REJECT REDISTRIBUTION

- Opposition to proposals for economic redistribution within the climate transition demonstrates a commitment to maintaining the status quo, whether responding to funding for technological support or addressing climate debt and reparations.
- This is seen across the right-wing spectrum, from wealthy countries stalling, blocking, or leaving COP agreements, to the belief that climate financing is a socialist conspiracy to punish those who benefit from capitalism. The latter argument resonates with that of Anders Breivik, the gunman who killed 69 young Labor Party members in Norway in 2011.

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### CALLS FOR PREVENTION THROUGH FORTIFICATION

- Prevention through deterrence policies, strict border control measures to keep people from leaving, and detention centers. For instance, at the Channel Tunnel in Calais, France, or measures targeting people fleeing via the Mediterranean sea.

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### CALLS FOR GREEN NATIONALISM

- The pursuit of national economic sovereignty through energy independence. For example, France's National Rally emphasizes a kind of localism that calls for energy independence and rejects international negotiations on climate change.

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### CALLS FOR TERRORIST ATTACKS IN THE NAME OF ECO-FASCISM

- A number of mass shootings have recently been perpetrated by terrorists attributing their actions to eco-fascism. In March 2019, 51 people were killed and 49 injured at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The terrorist named his manifesto "The Great Replacement", referencing the supposed extinction of the "white race." Similarly, in August 2019 a terrorist killed 22 people in a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, USA. He wrote extensively about environmental protection, calling himself an eco-fascist. He asserted that his actions were to prevent the overpopulation threatening the environment. Both arguments had strong anti-corporate strands within them.



Eco-fascism “can be understood as the radical blend of ethnonationalism and authoritarianism, rooted in a belief that *the land* and *the people* are symbiotically interwoven, and form an organic whole,” according to Bernhard Forchtner.<sup>25</sup> Given the recent series of eco-terrorist attacks – El Paso, Christchurch, Oslo – more attention is being paid to the implications of environmentalist impulses among fascists and fascist organizations. This is not a new phenomenon. Eco-fascism has a long history of interpreting nature to fit its anti-Semitic and, in more recent decades, white supremacist ends. Although eco-fascism is notably not a widely held belief system, prevalence is not the concern here. Rather, the history and practice of eco-fascism illuminates for those in progressive climate movements the way in which *the politics of nature can open the door to fascistic ideas and practices*.

If we understand that racist right-wing influence over climate politics is an insidious political threat, then it is up to those acting for climate justice to become more familiar with the nuances of such a threat. We know that a range of right-wing groups and ideologies exist. We also know that climate skepticism is the most common, albeit multifaceted position within radical right structures in Europe. Still, more extreme ideas have influence in current parliamentary structures and have the potential to align with law-and-order measures of the state. The booklet next explores how these themes play out in six countries across Europe.

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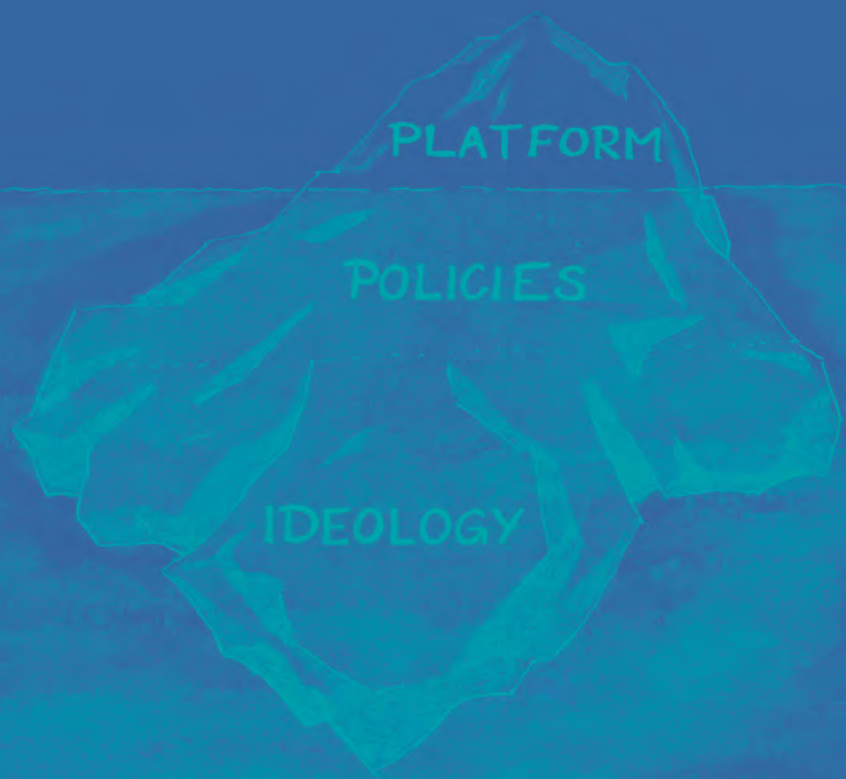
25 Forchtner, B. (2019). Eco-fascism: justifications of terrorist violence in the Christchurch mosque shooting and the El Paso shooting. Available at: [www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/eco-fascism-justifications-terrorist-violence-christchurch-mosque-shooting-and-el-paso-shooting](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/eco-fascism-justifications-terrorist-violence-christchurch-mosque-shooting-and-el-paso-shooting) (01.10.2019).

## GROUP DISCUSSION

The scale of climate change calls on social movements to ask new questions that we would not be asking if time were not short. Because ecological collapse is embedded in all aspects of life on this planet, we need to think about scale in new ways. Politically, we must cooperate and make alliances with groups with whom we would not otherwise be involved. We therefore need a political compass with which to navigate these choices in a strategic, ethically grounded, and principled way. To this end, here are some questions to discuss with your group or organization.

- > HOW does your group talk about nature?
- > WHICH of your actions or campaigns resonate with right-wing narratives about the environment or climate change?
- > WHAT similarities do you find? What are the differences? Where do we need to become more skilled in our use of these narratives, so as not to normalize far right interpretations?
- > HOW obvious is your vision for a more just society in your work?

# II NOTICES SECTION



**CASE  
STUDIES**

When attempting to comprehend how right-wing groups engage the climate crisis, though it is important to understand how they perceive nature and how they imagine society ought to look, our investigation must not end there. Indeed, the way in which Nigel Farage, the former leader of UKIP, mobilized romantic images of the English countryside to stoke nationalistic gains matters a great deal. This booklet asks that those working toward climate justice go farther and look for the ways climate and the environment are being leveraged to circumvent democracy, affirm nationalism, and roll back social gains.

This section looks at six countries in Europe – Hungary, Germany, Poland, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom. Each case study is a brief snapshot of a particular time and place, depicting a range of ways in which climate politics are being used by a number of right-wing groups. These countries were chosen based on their geography<sup>26</sup> as well as influence within European climate debates. The case studies are meant to illustrate the fact that positions, policies, and practices look very different depending on context, and that historical context plays a significant role in shaping what is politically possible in each country.

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26 “Geography” here refers both to location, for instance in relation to migration routes, as well as the political geography of countries with capitalist and communist histories.

## HUNGARY

In Hungary, Fidesz, the right-wing populist party in power since 2010, is the most influential right-wing grouping when it comes to climate. At international level, this government is known for its consistent support for climate action proposals in the European Parliament, for adopting the European Union Adaptation Strategy, and for making history as the first country in the EU to ratify the Paris Agreement in 2016, which was adopted unanimously by lawmakers. In 2016, President János Áder, a member of Fidesz, wrote a letter to the world's top ten greenhouse gas emitters suggesting they work harder to adhere to the Paris Agreement, and later even publicly criticized Trump's decision to pull out of the process as "disrespectful to future generations and irresponsible."<sup>27</sup> Hungary is unique in that even the opposition far right parties, Jobbik and Mi Hazánk, recognize (at least publicly) the importance of mitigating climate change caused by humans.

However, this pro-climate stance changes when it comes to domestic politics. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is known for gutting environmental protection policies. In fact, Fidesz eliminated the independent Ministry of the Environment, the institution that oversaw environmental protection, and entrusted this task to the Ministry of Agriculture. The phasing out of fossil fuels in Hungary is unlikely given Fidesz's taxes on renewables, which have stymied projects on wind farms, for instance. Hungary's energy mostly comes from fossil fuel industries, with gas, oil, and coal accounting for roughly 70% of the country's energy supply, and nuclear energy accounting for 17%.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the government cited Hungary's dependence on fossil fuels as the reason to veto the Commission's proposal for the EU to become emissions neutral by 2050, only to later

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27 Pivarnyik, P. (2017). President Áder calls Trump pulling out of the Paris Agreement "disrespectful and irresponsible." Available at: <https://budapestbeacon.com/president-ader-calls-trump-pulling-paris-agreement-disrespectful-irresponsible> (01.01.2020).

28 Roth, K. (2019). Who Is Hungarian President Janos Ader? Not Much Different Than Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Available at: [www.ibtimes.com/who-hungarian-president-janos-ader-not-much-different-prime-minister-viktor-orban-2792333](http://www.ibtimes.com/who-hungarian-president-janos-ader-not-much-different-prime-minister-viktor-orban-2792333) (02.01.2020).

soften its vote with the promise of EU energy transition funding.<sup>29</sup> Orbán has notably demonstrated an allegiance to ROSATOM's construction of two new reactors at Paks, south of Budapest.

Fidesz's defining features are its nationalism and anti-immigration stances. Redirecting funding is a major issue. The government has channeled significant funds to research (like that conducted by the Migration Research Institute) that supports its nationalist agenda, releasing reports on "the downside of immigration and the efficacy of the barbed wire fence along the southern borders of Hungary."<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the government regularly defunds civil institutions, the most high-profile example being the Central European University founded by George Soros (a foe of the far right in Europe), where researchers work on issues such as migration, LGBT rights, gender studies, producing research that, at times, undermines the government's position.<sup>31</sup> The university was forced to move its operations to Vienna in 2019.<sup>32</sup> These current policies are built on the historical context of Hungary's 1956 revolution, which incited a break with Stalinism. Given this history, right-wing populism flourishes as Hungarian agriculture and rural life become identity markers that need to be "saved" and "protected" from Brussels bureaucracy and the crisis of border protection.

What began as a barbed wire fence in 2016 turned into a 175-km-long wall on the country's southern border with Serbia and Croatia, with calls for

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29 AFP. (2019). Eastern EU states opposed to 2050 zero-emissions goal. Available at: [www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/eastern-eu-states-opposed-to-2050-zero-emissions-goal/ar-AAK4b4s](http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/eastern-eu-states-opposed-to-2050-zero-emissions-goal/ar-AAK4b4s) (02.02.2020).

30 Karáth, K. (2018). Hungarian scientists are on edge as country is poised to force out top university. Available at: [www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/05/hungarian-scientists-are-edge-country-poised-force-out-top-university](http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/05/hungarian-scientists-are-edge-country-poised-force-out-top-university) (03.01.2020).

31 Szigeti, T. (2018). Fidesz-Linked Magazine Publishes List Attacking Supposedly "Liberal" Academy Researchers. Available at: <https://hungarytoday.hu/fidesz-linked-magazine-publishes-list-attacking-supposedly-liberal-academy-researchers> (03.01.2020).

32 Adam, C. (2018). Hungary's loss – Central European University moves to Vienna. Available at: <https://hungarianfreepress.com/2018/12/03/hungarys-loss-central-european-university-moves-to-vienna> (03.01.2020).

“more massive” fencing.<sup>33</sup> Orbán has said that migration is a “poison” and that “we don’t need it and won’t swallow it.” He openly praises Trump for his clarity on the issue of migration.<sup>34</sup> In a 2018 interview, Orbán told Bild, a German newspaper, that Muslim immigrants are “invaders” and Hungary is experiencing an invasion, stressing that the country is undergoing a crisis in population control. Orbán has projected that Christian Europeans will be outnumbered and effectively replaced by 2050 “if Europe is not going to be populated by Europeans in the future and we take this as given, then we are speaking about an exchange of populations, to replace the population of Europeans with others.”<sup>35</sup> One proposal Orbán instituted against this “replacement” is procreation through “family first policies.” Orbán described his reasoning as follows: “if a nation is unable to sustain itself biologically, it will not be capable of preserving its cultural and spiritual community either, and will disappear.”<sup>36</sup>

An important challenge for the progressive climate movement in Hungary, however, is geographical. Budapest, the capital city, is a progressive dot in a relative sea of conservative and right-wing voting. In October 2019, Budapest elected Gergely Karácsony, who ran on a “greener and fairer” Budapest platform.<sup>37</sup> But there is an interesting development. According to the 2019 Eurobarometer, more than 85% of the Hungarian population believe that climate change is a serious problem. This concern has only grown since 2017, meaning that Hungary exceeds the EU average (79%)

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33 AP. (2016). Hungary's PM plans 'more massive' fence to keep out migrants. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/26/hungarys-pm-plans-more-massive-fence-to-keep-out-migrants](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/26/hungarys-pm-plans-more-massive-fence-to-keep-out-migrants) (03.01.2020).

34 Staff and agencies. (2016). Hungarian prime minister says migrants are 'poison' and 'not needed.' Available at: [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/26/hungarian-prime-minister-viktor-orban-praises-donald-trump](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/26/hungarian-prime-minister-viktor-orban-praises-donald-trump) (04.01.2020).

35 Walker, S. (2019). Viktor Orbán trumpets Hungary's 'procreation, not immigration' policy. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/06/viktor-orban-trumpets-far-right-procreation-anti-immigration-policy](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/06/viktor-orban-trumpets-far-right-procreation-anti-immigration-policy) (02.01.2020).

36 MTI. (2019). Orbán: Polluters Should Pay for Climate Protection. Available at: <https://hungarytoday.hu/orban-polluters-should-pay-climate-protection> (04.01.2020).

37 Walker, S. (2019). Budapest's new mayor: my win proves there's more to Hungary than Orbán. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/17/gergely-karacsony-mayor-budapest-eu-hungary-liberal-viktor-orban](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/17/gergely-karacsony-mayor-budapest-eu-hungary-liberal-viktor-orban) (03.01.2020).

when it comes to citizens concerned about climate change. This indicates that, despite the votes for right-wing parties, people in rural areas are responding to the climate crisis.

At grassroots level, some activists believe that this changing public opinion is an opportunity to build a strong political movement. Some of this is inspired by the growing presence of #FridaysForFuture (FFF) in Budapest. In September 2019, thousands gathered in Batthyány Square. Some criticized Fidesz, demanding that the “government declare a climate emergency and prepare an action plan.” This came one day after chief of staff Gergely Gulyás called Greta Thunberg a “sick child.”<sup>38</sup> It coincides with a key Fidesz strategy: targeting individuals by undermining their credibility and producing fake stories about who they are and who finances them. At the same time, there are a few NGOs, namely Greenpeace Hungary, that are finding ways to support emergent student strike activism.

This makes Hungary a unique case in climate and right-wing politics. Right-wing and far-right parties, to a large degree, actively engage in climate politics. For instance, the far-right opposition party Jobbik and Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (Our Homeland Movement), which has its own “green wing,” could also be considered radical right environmentalists. They are working to institute an environmental protection program and have publicly supported the global student strikes, as well as writing about the prospect of green nationalism. This also means that the green party has found itself in coalition with right-wing and far-right parties, particularly on issues of small farming.

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38 Murphy, P. (2019). Hungary's Orban faces growing heat over climate change. Available at: <https://news.yahoo.com/hungarys-orban-faces-growing-heat-over-climate-change-132847459.html> (02.01.2020).



## GERMANY

Germany is known for being a stronghold of right-wing climate change denialists. The group with the most political influence is Alternative for Germany (AfD). As a party, it rejects the science behind climate change, claiming that “the climate changes as long as the earth exists. Climate protection policy is based on [IPCC] hypothetical climate models...carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is not a pollutant, but an indispensable component of all life.”<sup>39</sup> In this, the AfD argues that humans are not responsible for the impact on our atmosphere. According to the AfD, this then means adopting an opposition stance on renewable energy and wind power or climate policies that curb emissions, nationally or internationally.

This position is supported by the magazine *Compact* and largely curated by the Europäisches Institut für Klima und Energie (EIKE), a Jena-based independent think tank of climate change denialists with the single aim of systematically undermining climate science. EIKE’s funding sources are not public, yet they have extensive connections to the US-based think tanks Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow and the Heartland Institute (both backed by ExxonMobil and foundations run by the Koch Brothers and the Trump-supporting Mercer family), with whom EIKE organizes annual climate conferences.<sup>40</sup> EIKE’s vice-president is Michael Limburg, who works for Karsten Hilse, the AfD’s environment spokesperson, and played a key role in the party’s climate and energy working group.<sup>41</sup> While EIKE members work with many AfD politicians, they also support others within the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union parties.

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39 AfD. (2018). Programm für Deutschland, 156. Available at: [www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2018/01/Programm\\_AfD\\_Druck\\_Online\\_190118.pdf](http://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2018/01/Programm_AfD_Druck_Online_190118.pdf) (15.12.2019).

40 Taylor, J. (2018). Press release: Heartland Institute to present latest climate science in Poland during cop-24. Available at: <https://archive.md/g3JUH> (23.12.2019).

41 Kahya, D. (2019). German far right targets Greta Thunberg in anti-climate push. Available at: <https://archive.md/ooUG4> (22.12.2019).

The AfD harnesses this support to spread false information about the impact of climate change, such as the cause of ice sheets melting in the Arctic.<sup>42</sup> The AfD also publicly attacks proponents of climate action. This includes framing climate change as a conspiracy of Marxists and Greens, framing climate activists as religious cult leaders, or making anti-Semitic accusations about George Soros' influence. They claim that children and students are being used to forward the political aims of those tackling climate change. Meanwhile, 19-year-old AfD supporter Naomi Seibt, known as the "Anti-Greta", makes party promotion videos.<sup>43</sup> As of September 2019, the AfD is the second strongest party in the East German states of Brandenburg and Saxony (notably the region with the largest lignite coal mines in the country).

The AfD are stringent climate change deniers with a classic neoliberal approach to economic issues. Research indicates that, given Germany's dependence on the automotive industry, the AfD would face a major political challenge to account for the reality of climate change. Alongside their core concern of market security sits the issue of immigration. The AfD more regularly addresses the environment within the context of immigration, namely through the lens of protection in general and population control in particular. In 2015, Björn Höcke, chairman of the AfD in Thuringia, spoke about biological differences between Africans and Europeans, saying: "the countries of Africa, they need the European borders in order to arrive at an ecologically sustainable demographic policy."<sup>44</sup>

And yet climate change is not entirely off the table within the ranks of the party. In May 2019, just after the European elections, Junge Alternative,

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42 AfD. (2017). Giant Antarctic Ice Shelf Demolition is a completely normal process - the Antarctic has been getting colder for 30 years. Available at: [www.afd.de/riesiger-antarktis-schelfeis-abbruch-ein-ganz-normaler-vorgang-dabei-wird-die-antarktis-seit-30-jahren-kaelter](http://www.afd.de/riesiger-antarktis-schelfeis-abbruch-ein-ganz-normaler-vorgang-dabei-wird-die-antarktis-seit-30-jahren-kaelter) (22.12.2019).

43 Smith, D. 2020. "'Anti-Greta teen activist to speak at the biggest US conservatives conference.'" Available at: [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/feb/25/anti-greta-teen-activist-cpac-conference-climate-sceptic](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/feb/25/anti-greta-teen-activist-cpac-conference-climate-sceptic) (29.02.2020).

44 Clancy, R. (2015). Björn Höcke: On the Differential Population Growth Rates Among Africans and Europeans. Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=487wMXiRARU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=487wMXiRARU) (22.12.2019).

the party's youth wing, called upon AfD politicians to reconsider their position and "refrain from hardly comprehensible claims" that climate change is not caused by humans.<sup>45</sup> The youth group reported fearing that the party risks losing relevance.

The Institut *für Staatspolitik* is another right-wing think tank, albeit with less influence in climate politics. It attempts to shape discourse by writing about ecological issues as a cover to espouse traditional right-wing topics such as *Heimat*, *Heimatschutz*, and the "organic worldview," which sees the planet as a living organism. They promote speakers such as Reinhard Falter, a nature conservationist and esoteric folk philosopher. In some cases, they have sought to infiltrate and consequently influence climate discussions.

According to the Berlin-based apabiz Antifaschistisches Pressearchiv, a number of far-right groups share the narrative of regretting "having lost hegemony" over environmental discourse, ceding it to the progressive greens. In *Ökologie von rechts*, they write, "ecology is considered by many to be a strategic means of opening up a new electorate without having to forego right-wing tribal themes..."<sup>46</sup> This reference points to the 1970s, a time in German history when left and right groups cooperated on anti-war and environmentalist issues. Indeed, the Green Party was co-founded by Herbert Gruhl, a prominent right-wing politician, known for his criticism of progressive immigration policies and population control, and even housed *völkisch* nationalists like Baldur Springmann. At this time, activists across the political spectrum were leaning towards the burgeoning Green Party, using slogans such as "not right or left but ahead." This cooperation had come to an end by the mid-1980s, but has emerged in other forms as parts of the Green Party collaborate with the Christian Democrats in some regions. The reason is, according to Peter Bierl, author of *Green Brown: Environmental, Animal, and Homeland Protection from the Right*, "that

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45 Wehner, M. (2019). Berliner AfD-Jugend will grüner werden. Available at: [www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/nach-der-europawahl-berliner-afd-jugend-will-gruener-werden-16210600.html](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/nach-der-europawahl-berliner-afd-jugend-will-gruener-werden-16210600.html) (23.12.2019).

46 Apabiz (2019). *Ökologie von rechts*. Available at: [www.apabiz.de/2019/oekologie-von-rechts-teil-1](http://www.apabiz.de/2019/oekologie-von-rechts-teil-1) (03.09.2019)

the Green Party, dominated by right-wing and bourgeois groups, failed at several elections”, needing to obtain five percent of votes. Since then, he continues, German environmentalists and left-wing groups have kept a close watch for ways the right wing tries to draw on left currents.

The progressive climate movement in Germany currently has a lot of traction around Hambach Forest in the West and lignite coal mines in the East. Ende Gelände, formed in 2015, is a prominent force in direct action against the coal industry. They are a broad coalition of groups that believe that “to stop climate change we need to take action ourselves, using civil disobedience as a powerful signal for real action to put our climate before profit.”<sup>47</sup> FFF and Extinction Rebellion have very active chapters in the country.

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47 "About us". Available at: [www.ende-gelaende.org/en](http://www.ende-gelaende.org/en) (10.12.2019).

## POLAND

The leading right-wing influence on climate politics in Poland is the governing party, Law and Justice (PiS), also known as the “pro-coal party.” Founded in 2001 by brothers Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, the party came into parliament in 2005 and formed an absolute majority government in 2015. In recent years, PiS has adopted a more populist position using “us vs. them” and the “enemy within” rhetoric. Even though the party emerged from the post-Solidarity trade union era of the 1990s, where many of today’s political elites worked together as anti-communist dissidents, PiS has created an anti-establishment image for the “losers” of the transition from socialism to capitalism, where the enemies are elites, the LGBT community, or people who practice Islam, where “hard-working people” and Christian identity are perceived to be under threat.<sup>48</sup>

Within international climate politics, PiS has voted against the majority of climate and energy proposals in the European Parliament. For example, Poland famously chose not to ratify the Doha Amendment, the second stage of the Kyoto Protocol, for years, later signing on “symbolically.”<sup>49</sup> More recently, the EU exempted Poland after they refused to participate in the emissions proposal to reach “net zero by 2050”, based on the idea that the EU would no longer contribute any carbon emissions to the world.<sup>50</sup> Poland’s representatives rejected the proposal on the grounds of an East-West divide, that the country cannot be held to the same standard as Western Europe. To this point, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki declared, “Poland would be reaching climate neutrality at

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48 Kalan, D. (2019). In Poland’s Upcoming Election, the Law and Justice Party Is Demonizing the LGBT Community to Win. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/09/poland-pis-demonizing-lgbt-community-win-upcoming-elections> (09.12.2019).

49 Goswami, U. (2018). Poland to formally adopt climate treaty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/poland-to-formally-adopt-climate-treaty-to-reduce-greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-2020/articleshow/65784580.cms> (09.12.2020).

50 Keating, D. (2018). EU Unveils Proposal To Bring Its Emissions To Zero By 2050. Available at: [www.forbes.com/sites/davekeating/2018/11/28/eu-unveils-proposal-to-bring-its-emissions-to-zero-by-2050/#77ddb49a6d47](http://www.forbes.com/sites/davekeating/2018/11/28/eu-unveils-proposal-to-bring-its-emissions-to-zero-by-2050/#77ddb49a6d47) (08.12.2019).

its own pace.”<sup>51</sup> This position is connected to the country’s history of occupation and underdevelopment. However, right-wing narratives use this to cultivate a myth within climate politics, namely that Poland needs to develop itself to reach the living standards of Western countries, therefore Poland cannot afford to pay to cut emissions. It is up to the rich countries to pay. We must develop ourselves. This aligns with Polish nationalism, historically formed in opposition to both German and Russian nationalism.

In 2015, PiS ran on a platform with promises to sustain industry and jobs, and support coal unions. In 2018, President Andrzej Duda spoke at the COP 24 in Katowice: “Coal is our strategic resource. We have stocks of it for the next 200 years, it’s hard for us to resign from the resource that gives us energetic sovereignty.”<sup>52</sup> Coal is a fundamental part of Poland’s current grid, accounting for around 80% of the country’s energy production, and is a major source of employment. Despite Poland’s high levels of coal production, the country still imports a lot of it from abroad, including from Russia. New projects to build power plants and expand mines are currently under way, in part financed by German insurance companies Allianz and Munich Re.<sup>53</sup> In fact, the government is in the process of drafting an amendment to geological and mining laws that would circumvent local governments, should they oppose new mining projects, in the name of “raw material for national security.”<sup>54</sup>

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51 Wyatt, T. (2019). EU commits to being carbon neutral by 2050, but gives Poland exemption. Available at: [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-climate-change-carbon-emissions-net-zero-2050-poland-a9245521.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-climate-change-carbon-emissions-net-zero-2050-poland-a9245521.html) (07.12.2019).

52 Rolski, T. (2018). UN climate conference meets in coal-focused Poland. Available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/climate-conference-meets-coal-focused-poland/story?id=59659379> (06.12.2019).

53 Magenheim-Hörmann, T. (2018). The dirty business of insurers. Available at: [www.fr.de/wirtschaft/schmutzige-geschaef-versicherer-11010489.html](http://www.fr.de/wirtschaft/schmutzige-geschaef-versicherer-11010489.html) (06.12.2019).

54 Erizanu, P. (2019). Extinction Rebellion is taking root in Eastern Europe. Here’s what they’re fighting for. Available at: [www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/11477/extinction-rebellion-eastern-europe-protest-climate-change](http://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/11477/extinction-rebellion-eastern-europe-protest-climate-change) (07.12.2019).

Bełchatów Power Station is the world's largest lignite-fired station, located in the central region of Łódź, supplying up to 20% of the energy consumed in Poland. Oil, natural gas, and renewables are relatively small sources of energy by comparison. Poland, tied with Germany, is the EU's top consumer of coal.<sup>55</sup> Outside the EU, US President Donald Trump has promised to support the Polish coal industry in times of decline and has arranged a new defense agreement, moving special operations forces from Germany to Poland. The agreement will bring the number of US troops stationed in Poland, at a base informally called "Fort Trump", to 5,000.<sup>56</sup>

Public polling shows that climate change is becoming an important issue in Poland. According to the 2019 Eurobarometer survey, 70% of respondents in Poland consider climate change to be a serious problem –a twelve point increase from 2017– and 87% believe it is important for the national government to set targets to increase renewable energy use by 2030.<sup>57</sup> Ecological and social issues, when framed in terms of the environment, are far more contested, protested, and engaged with. This challenges the prevailing myth, often supported by strong mining unions, that "environmental protection is part of an EU conspiracy."<sup>58</sup> Picking up on the shift in public discourse, Polish right-wing think tank Klub Jagielloński published an article entitled "Do not leave ecology to the left", describing the political opportunity for right-wing structures to engage more proactively with ecological issues.<sup>59</sup>

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55 Chestney, N. (2018). Poland's power from coal seen down at 50 percent by 2040 – government official. Available at: [www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-energy-idUSKCN1MC2FM](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-energy-idUSKCN1MC2FM) (08.12.2019).

56 Diamond, J. (2019). Trump and Polish President sign new defense agreement. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/12/politics/donald-trump-andrzej-duda-poland-f-35-deal/index.html> (09.12.2019).

57 Eurobarometer by the European Commission. (2019). Poland. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/support/docs/pl\\_climate\\_2019\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/support/docs/pl_climate_2019_en.pdf) (09.12.2019).

58 Olszewski, M. (2015). The Polish conservatives and the ecology issue. Available at: <https://pl.boell.org/en/2015/11/12/polish-conservatives-and-ecology-issue> (09.12.2019).

59 Musiałek, P. (2015). Let's not leave the ecology of the left! Available at: <https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2015/10/05/nie-zostawiajmy-ekologii-lewicy> (06.12.2019).

In 2019, the government attempted to build a canal through a heavily wooded sandbank called the Vistula Spit, which encloses a coastal lagoon shared with Russia, in order to open access to the Baltic Sea.<sup>60</sup> A grassroots group called Obóz dla Mierzei (Camp for Spit) organized public protests highlighting the significant wildlife devastation this would cause. The European Commission soon halted the large-scale construction, although the government has continued to prepare the area by felling trees.<sup>61</sup>

The European Commission also took PiS to court over air quality. Cities in southern Poland are some of the most polluted in the world, at times surpassing rates recorded in Beijing and New Delhi. The court accused Poland of exceeding the daily legal amount of pollutants in 35 of its 46 "air quality zones", and nine of those zones also failed an inspection of the annual legal limit.<sup>62</sup> Pressure from activists in groups like Obóz dla Klimatu<sup>63</sup> and Greenpeace and the court's ruling forced President Duda to sign an "Anti-Smog Act" in 2015.<sup>64</sup>

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60 Baczyńska, G. (2019). EU says Poland cannot build Baltic canal without approval. Available at: [www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-poland-vistulaspit-idUSKCN1QI56C](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-poland-vistulaspit-idUSKCN1QI56C) (05.12.2019).

61 Baczyńska, G. (2019). EU says Poland cannot build Baltic canal without approval. Available at: [www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-poland-vistulaspit-idUSKCN1QI56C](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-poland-vistulaspit-idUSKCN1QI56C) (05.12.2019).

62 Koester, S. (2018). EU's top court says Poland breached air pollution rules. Available at: [www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-court-poland/eus-top-court-says-poland-breached-air-pollution-rules-idUSKCN1G617D](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-court-poland/eus-top-court-says-poland-breached-air-pollution-rules-idUSKCN1G617D) (05.12.2019).

63 Rushton, S. (2019). Polish climate movement stages first mass civil disobedience against coal. Available at: <https://obozdlaklimatu.org/about>, [www.occupy.com/article/polish-climate-movement-stages-first-mass-civil-disobedience-against-coal#st-hash.0Gj0wVtS.dpbs](http://www.occupy.com/article/polish-climate-movement-stages-first-mass-civil-disobedience-against-coal#st-hash.0Gj0wVtS.dpbs) (05.12.2019).

64 Prezydent.pl. (2015). The president has signed the so-called "Anti-smog act." Available at: [www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,37,prezydent-podpisal-ustawy-prawo-ochrony-srodowiska-tzw-ustawy-antysmogowej.html](http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,37,prezydent-podpisal-ustawy-prawo-ochrony-srodowiska-tzw-ustawy-antysmogowej.html) (05.12.2019).



The most controversial environmental confrontation between the government and popular movements in recent years was in 2016 over the logging of the primeval Białowieża Forest.<sup>65</sup> The then Polish Minister for the Environment, Jan Szyszko, tripled logging permits after repeated warnings from the European Commission, scientists from across Europe, and thousands of Polish activists.<sup>66</sup> In the midst of the controversy, investigative journalists found that EU funds allocated to Poland for environmental protection projects like the Białowieża Forest were set up to “feed a right-wing pseudo-ecological political organization [called puszcza.tv] on the one hand and [a right-wing] media outlet on the other.”<sup>67</sup>

In 2018, the European Union ruled against the government, ruling that Poland broke EU wildlife laws. “It was all to humiliate Poland in international relations,” said Szyszko after he was dismissed from his cabinet position.<sup>68</sup> So far, the only coherent plans for environmental policy are being proposed by Lewica Razem, a left-wing party in the Left Coalition. Most importantly, this party can articulate the failings of the PiS social platform and apply pressure.

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65 Białowieża Science Initiative. (2015). Available at: <https://informar.eu/bialowieza-science-initiative> (05.12.2019).

66 Newsroom. (2017). Thousands protest logging in Poland's ancient forest. Available at: [www.enca.com/life/thousands-protest-logging-in-polands-ancient-forest](http://www.enca.com/life/thousands-protest-logging-in-polands-ancient-forest) (06.12.2019).

67 Szczygiel, K. (2017). PLN 6 million for Szyszko's environment. OKO.press reveals the political, business and family system. Available at: <https://oko.press/6-milionow-zlotych> (06.12.2019).

68 European Commission. (2017). ACTION for failure to fulfil obligations under Article 258 TFEU. Available at: <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?jsessionid=9ea7d2dc30dd4595f09e35b74e558d388d17bb12b2b2.e34KaxiLc3qMb40Rch0SaxyNc350?text=&docid=201150&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=731345> (06.12.2019).

In recent years, grassroots movements have emerged as a formidable force in shifting public opinion around the environment and climate. Movements like Extinction Rebellion, FFF and Earth Strike were imported from Western countries by Polish youth. The movement showing the most lasting promise comes out of the Białowieża Forest struggle, where Obóz Dla Puszczy (Camp for Forest) was created to block logging.<sup>69</sup>

In 2019, another grassroots group, Obóz dla Klimatu (Climate Camp), effectively brought together people from all over the country to focus on blocking a lignite mine in West Poland. Finally, a notable formation is Koalicja Klimatyczna, or the Polish Climate Coalition, which has created a consistent science-based approach to climate change through policy analysis and public conferences.

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69 Inicjatywa Dzikie Karpaty Facebook. Available at: [www.facebook.com/dzikiekarpaty](https://www.facebook.com/dzikiekarpaty) (06.12.2019).

## ITALY

Climate politics struggle to find footing in Italy. Historically, parties have shown the climate and even the environment little interest in the national political arena. Indeed, the only political party to take up environmental concerns more concertedly was the left-wing party Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (Left Ecology Freedom), which was founded in 2009.

This lack of political engagement around ecology from parties persists today. The right-wing populist party Lega (the League) made faint gestures toward climate in their program while in coalition with the Five Star Movement (M5S), the left-wing populist party. Here they focused largely on sustainable energy use, voting in favor of policies for energy efficiency and renewable energy, those that might prop up nationalistic economic interests, aligning with their “Italy First!” slogans. Between 2014 and 2018, Lega voted against nearly all EU climate and energy policy proposals.<sup>70</sup>

Lega has amassed tremendous support in recent years, electing Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, known for his crusades against immigration.<sup>71</sup> In his fervor to defund official refugee camps, Salvini commented on the status of people fleeing climate crises over Twitter: “It is crazy to exploit a serious subject like climate change to legitimize illegal immigration.” In September 2019, M5S reconfigured the government by forming a coalition with the center-left Democratic Party; neither party has a strong climate platform.

Mobilization on the environment takes place at grassroots level. After the Italian political system was restructured in the early 1990s, environmental issues were reactivated by CasaPound Italia. As the most influential right-wing group, CasaPound is a neo-fascist, far right movement. It emerged in 2003 as a far right movement of squatters occupying a state-owned

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70 Schaller, S. and Carius, A. (2019). Convenient Truths: Mapping Climate Agendas of Right Wing Populist Parties in Europe, 88. Available at: [www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths](http://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths) (19.11.2019).

71 Stille, A. (2018). After years on the fringes of Italian politics, the populist leader of the Lega has stoked anti-immigrant panic and barged into power. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right](http://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right) (10.01.2020).

building in the suburbs of Rome, although more broadly the group is part of a long-standing fascist tradition in Italy, following in the footsteps of groups such as Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo, la Nouvelle Droite, Terza Posizione, Campi Hobbit, Centro Studi Orientamento e Ricerca, Sinergie Europee, the Summer University and finally CasaMontag.<sup>72</sup> Recent media coverage of CasaPound has overlooked its rallies against asylum houses or attacks on journalists and the Roma people in favor of its views on veganism and animal welfare.<sup>73</sup>

CasaPound is made up of diverse grassroots organizations across Italy, but most are centrally located near Rome. The group has shops, book stores, bars, and even organizes street-based structures, some offering medical services in certain neighborhoods. At its core, CasaPound demands sovereignty for the nation. This framework is then applied to the climate crisis, as seen through the group's call for energy independence, in particular from transnational fossil fuels and the EU,<sup>74</sup> but it does not go as far as developing a discourse on climate.

CasaPound encompasses three main associations that promote environmental issues: La Foresta che Avanza, La Salamandra, and La Muvra. La Foresta che Avanza in particular calls itself the environmental movement of CasaPound, although its online presence never makes mention of climate. Instead, it is known for its opposition to Harlan Laboratories, a company that delivers animals for vivisection and testing, and for the Monte Giano forest campaign, where members send trees to towns across Italy on 21 November in order to revive a holiday created by Arnaldo Mussolini in 1923. At a tree ceremony in 2018, members held a banner that read "The roots take root better on the soil of the Nation", showing how nationalism interprets

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72 Wolff, E. (2019). CasaPound Italia: 'Back to Believing. The Struggle Continues.' Available at: [https://brill.com/view/journals/fasc/8/1/article-p61\\_61.xml?language=en](https://brill.com/view/journals/fasc/8/1/article-p61_61.xml?language=en) (25.01.2020).

73 Torrisi, C. (2018). Some reporters have dangerously framed this violent movement and its female leaders as 'beautiful,' 'clean-faced,' and attractive to voters. Available at: [www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/italian-media-casapound-glamourise-fascism](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/italian-media-casapound-glamourise-fascism) (09.01.2020).

74 Jones, T. (2018). Italy's CasaPound has been central to normalising fascism again in the country of its birth. Now they're trying to enter parliament. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/22/casapound-italy-mussolini-fascism-mainstream](http://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/22/casapound-italy-mussolini-fascism-mainstream) (09.01.2020).

ecology.<sup>75</sup> La Foresta che Avanza speaks largely about forest conservation as a way to preserve history, framing nature clean-ups as “battlefronts.”<sup>76</sup>

In September 2019, members of CasaPound attempted to influence an FFF demonstration in the northern city of Turin. Before the protest began, a banner reading “Greta do not rant, it is not the climate, it is your new world order” was hung. In the southern city of Palermo, CasaPound attempted to join a demonstration but was peacefully forced to leave. This makes Italy a unique case in its resistance to far-right engagement in climate politics.

FFF is the largest mobilization effort around the climate crisis, as well as the youngest movement, bringing students between the ages of 14 and 19 onto the streets, in between 105 and 150 cities across the country. The last time Italy saw such mobilization was around the oil crisis in the 1970s and the anti-nuclear movements of the 1980s, where over half of Italian citizens took to the streets.<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, as FFF formed in Italy, the movement declared itself anti-fascist. This was possible thanks to more seasoned generations of activists from the nation-wide committee network, particularly long-standing environmental committees like NoTav and No Grandi Navi, who met with students in the national FFF assemblies. After this, FFF adopted anti-fascism as a political value. In September 2019, climate activism in Italy gained another foothold when militants from different organizations across the country gathered at the Venice Climate Camp, coming into contact with European climate activists, bringing stories and strategies back to their regions in Italy.<sup>78</sup>

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75 CasaPound Sicilia. (2018). Tree festival 2018: the militants of the Avanza Forest plant and donate trees throughout Italy. Available at: [www.casapoundsicilia.altervista.org/festa-del-lalbero-2018-militanti-della-foresta-avanza-piantano-donano-alberi-tutta-italia](http://www.casapoundsicilia.altervista.org/festa-del-lalbero-2018-militanti-della-foresta-avanza-piantano-donano-alberi-tutta-italia) (10.01.2020).

76 Eisen, E. (2019). Italy's Green Fascists. Available at: <https://jewishcurrents.org/italys-green-fascists> (19.09.2019).

77 Bulli, G. (2019). Environmental Politics on the Italian Right: Not a Party Issue?, in Forchtner, B. (eds) (2019).

78 Social Centers of the North East. (2015). Apocalypse or revolution, we change everything so as not to change the climate. Available at: [www.globalproject.info/it/in\\_movimento/apocalisse-o-rivoluzione-cambiamo-tutto-per-non-cambiare-il-clima/19569](http://www.globalproject.info/it/in_movimento/apocalisse-o-rivoluzione-cambiamo-tutto-per-non-cambiare-il-clima/19569) (10.01.2020).

## FRANCE

The far right populist party Rassemblement National (or National Rally, RN) is France's most influential right-wing grouping in climate politics. It is a major force in shaping present day French nationalism and is known for its zero tolerance policies with regard to law and order, calls for significant cuts to immigration policy, and an anti-globalist position that considers the UNFCCC a "communist project."<sup>79</sup> In 2018, the party changed its name from National Front to National Rally in an effort to assuage its racist and anti-Semitic history and broaden its appeal within mainstream politics.<sup>80</sup>

The RN has voted largely against EU climate and energy proposals over the last decade, but does nominally favor domestic renewable energy projects like solar power and encourages the phasing out of fossil fuels in order to reduce dependence on foreign energy sources.<sup>81</sup> The party is inconsistent in its climate agenda. For instance, it opposes animal cruelty practices while defending hunting rights and big agriculture businesses. It claims to support renewable energy, but votes in favor of nuclear power and allowing Canadian tar sands in EU fuel.<sup>82</sup> These contradictions often pivot around arguments for localism or populism. For example, in 2019 Jordan Bardella, RN's spokesperson, discussed the party's campaign against wind turbines as a solution to "visual and sound pollution", a polite way of describing disruption to France's culturally significant countryside. The emphasis on "localism", according to French newspaper Le Monde,

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79 Schaller, S. and Carius, A. (2019). Convenient Truths: Mapping Climate Agendas of Right Wing Populist Parties in Europe, 83. Available at: [www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths](http://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths) (19.11.2019).

80 Foudrot, E. (2018). France's National Front renamed 'National Rally.' Available at: [www.reuters.com/article/us-france-politics-nationalfront-idUSKCN1IX5LU](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-politics-nationalfront-idUSKCN1IX5LU) (13.01.2020).

81 Schaller, S. and Carius, A. (2019). Convenient Truths: Mapping Climate Agendas of Right Wing Populist Parties in Europe, 83. Available at: [www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths](http://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths) (19.11.2019).

82 Nelson, A. (2014). French National Front launches nationalist environmental movement. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/dec/18/french-national-front-launches-nationalist-environmental-movement](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/dec/18/french-national-front-launches-nationalist-environmental-movement) (09.01.2020).

is a tactic “that (badly) hides the rejection of foreigners and immigration.”<sup>83</sup>

Links between right-wing politics and ecology have a long history in France. In the 1970s, a group called Groupement de Recherche et d’Etudes pour la Civilisation Européenne (Research and Studies Group for European Civilization, or GRECE) provided a foundation for mid-20th century racism. GRECE was founded by Alain de Benoist, a French political philosopher who argued for ethnopluralism, or the idea of preserving ethnic and cultural differences through distinct regions and boundaries. Sometimes this is argued through ideas of a “right to difference.” Benoist continues to be a prominent figure in the movement. GRECE formed the foundation of the racist social movement Nouvelle Droite, founded in 1968. Benoist has more recently spoken at events in the United States organized by Richard Spencer, a well-known American neo-Nazi.<sup>84</sup> GRECE latched onto the concept of Arab people “invading” France, a conspiracy prompted by debates over anti-colonial discourse emerging from Algeria’s independence from France in 1962.<sup>85</sup> This “invasion” concept was largely taken from Renaud Camus’ “Great Replacement,” where supposedly white people are replaced by African and Middle Eastern people. This theory finds notable purchase in the French identitarian movement today.

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83 Vincent, C. (2019). “Integral ecology”, ecofascism...: a history of identity ecologies. Available at: [www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2019/10/04/ecologie-integrale-ecofascisme-une-histoire-des-ecologies-identitaires\\_6014144\\_3232.html?fbclid=IwAR08Mlz0mlAZQLa4d1D1sWRR2X9eaRQ3aCaODpJ7pX-1WSN1NysqUDLCGBps](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2019/10/04/ecologie-integrale-ecofascisme-une-histoire-des-ecologies-identitaires_6014144_3232.html?fbclid=IwAR08Mlz0mlAZQLa4d1D1sWRR2X9eaRQ3aCaODpJ7pX-1WSN1NysqUDLCGBps) (08.01.2020).

84 Williams, T. (2017). The French Origins of ‘You Will Note Replace Us.’ Available at: [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/04/the-french-origins-of-you-will-not-replace-us](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/04/the-french-origins-of-you-will-not-replace-us) (08.01.2020).

85 Mechaï, H. (2017). Todd Shepard: “In France, the figure of the Arab man is obsessive.” Available at: [www.lepoint.fr/culture/todd-shepard-en-france-la-figure-de-l-homme-arabe-est-obsessionnelle-15-03-2017-2112117\\_3.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/todd-shepard-en-france-la-figure-de-l-homme-arabe-est-obsessionnelle-15-03-2017-2112117_3.php) (09.01.2020).

The RN picks up on the theme of invasion, but emphasizes nationalism, which is a marked difference in argument. According to the 2019 Adelphi report, the RN personifies green nationalism by “aiming to create domestic wealth [and] promoting ecological policies while withdrawing from global mechanisms for cooperation.”<sup>86</sup> In this way, RN joins Italy’s Lega and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in viewing climate change through the lens of immigration and nationalism.

In 2017, Marine Le Pen, whose father (a climate skeptic) founded the party, gave an opening presidential campaign speech that touched on her party’s environmental agenda. She talked about the majesty of the French countryside, while connecting climate change to concepts of national sovereignty, French identity, and a heritage she described as under threat from pollution and overpopulation.<sup>87</sup> This framing garnered little attention. Two years later, RN released their European election manifesto, a self-described “vision for humanity” with a mission to turn Europe into “the world’s first ecological civilization.”<sup>88</sup> They softened their original anti-EU position but stepped up their anti-immigration stance. The platform accuses migrants of having no homeland and of being unaware of the environmental damage they cause. Jordan Bardella, the lead RN candidate in the European elections, said “borders are the environment’s greatest ally; it is through them that we will save the planet.”<sup>89</sup>

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86 Schaller, S. and Carius, A. (2019). Convenient Truths: Mapping Climate Agendas of Right Wing Populist Parties in Europe, 83. Available at: [www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths](http://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths) (19.11.2019).

87 Boukala, S. and Toutasaki, E. (2020). From Black to Green, in: Forchtner, B. (eds) (2020).

88 Mazoue, A. (2019). Le Pen's National Rally goes green in bid for European election votes. Available at: [www.france24.com/en/20190420-le-pen-national-rally-front-environment-european-elections-france](http://www.france24.com/en/20190420-le-pen-national-rally-front-environment-european-elections-france) (10.01.2020).

89 Landrieu, V. (2019). Jordan Bardella: "The best ally of ecology is the border." Available at: [www.lesechos.fr/elections/europeennes/jordan-bardella-le-meilleur-allie-de-lecologie-cest-la-frontiere-1007315](http://www.lesechos.fr/elections/europeennes/jordan-bardella-le-meilleur-allie-de-lecologie-cest-la-frontiere-1007315) (11.01.2020).



RN also launched an environmental nationalist movement called Collectif Nouvelle Ecologie (New Ecology) “based on national interest and patriotism.”<sup>90</sup> The party-backed movement, now defunct, focused on issues such as nuclear power, pollution, nutrition, and health and built their position on these topics through criticisms of RN’s political opponents while expressing skepticism about climate science.<sup>91</sup>

Le Patriots is another political party, albeit with far less governing influence, that takes a green nationalist position, but more centrally so than RN. Its platform is rooted in Euroscepticism and calls for the country to regain its national sovereignty through a Frexit referendum. Their main issues are the strong support of organic food and pesticide-free agriculture, divesting from fossil fuels, ending transnational trade agreements, and promoting recycling programs, among others. Like RN, Le Patriots emphasizes strong border control in order to fight the ecological crisis.

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90 Phillips, C. (2014). France’s Front National Launch ‘Patriotic’ Environmental Movement. Available at: [www.newsweek.com/frances-front-national-launch-patriotic-environmental-movement-293160](http://www.newsweek.com/frances-front-national-launch-patriotic-environmental-movement-293160) (11.01.2020).

91 Boukala, S. and Toutasaki, E. (2020). From Black to Green, in: Forchtner, B. (eds) (2020).

## UNITED KINGDOM

The most influential right-wing grouping on climate in the United Kingdom is the governing Conservative Party, colloquially known as the Tories, who have been in power since 2010. Traditionally a center-right political party, within a permissive political atmosphere supported by the Brexit debate the party has moved farther to the right and adopted increasingly populist and nationalist narratives and policies. For instance, Nigel Farage, leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), has fostered a political environment conducive to climate skepticism, forcing the main parties to reshape their immigration policy.<sup>92</sup> As the ruling party, the Conservatives publicly acknowledge climate change, yet their commitment to the fossil fuel industry paints a more telling picture of their intentions.<sup>93</sup>

The political landscape in the UK in recent years is best described as tumultuous. At any given moment in 2019, debates were dominated by a roster of different right-wing to far right politicians. This includes the populist Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the nationalist and former UKIP turned Brexit Party leader Nigel Farage, and the far right street-fighting brand of politics from Tommy Robinson of English Defence League notoriety. In the December 2019 elections, the Conservatives took the reins in a landslide victory over the Labour Party, while absorbing political positions and voters from the nationalistic Brexit Party (Brexiters) and UKIP. More notably, the Conservatives were successful in peeling away sections of the white working class vote from the Labour Party on an explicitly xenophobic and anti-migrant platform.<sup>94</sup>

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92 Serhan, Y. (2019). Nigel Farage's Brilliant Failure. Available at: [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/12/nigel-farage-britain-election-brexit-party/603376](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/12/nigel-farage-britain-election-brexit-party/603376) (14.12.2019).

93 Innes, A. (2019). Conservative government climate policy is more dangerous than one of open denial. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/government-climate-policy> (06.01.2020).

94 McKenzie, L. (2016). Brexit is the only way the working class can change anything. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/15/brexit-working-class-sick-racist-eu-referendum](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/15/brexit-working-class-sick-racist-eu-referendum) (07.01.2020).

At face value, the Tories accept climate change, as seen in their 2019 manifesto. In the platform, they describe climate change as “one of the ‘grand challenges’ that will define our future” to which they propose using the “£1 billion Ayrton Fund to develop affordable and accessible clean energy.” With limited explanation, the manifesto describes a commitment to “net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050” and defines renewable energy as nuclear and hydrogen gas. Despite the party’s position, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has waffled dramatically on the subject, from denying that climate change is caused by humans to aligning himself with climate science deniers and avoiding participating in a televised debate on the issue.<sup>95</sup> The depth of his climate commitments is likely shallow given that Johnson’s hard-right cabinet includes Environmental Secretary Theresa Villiers, a known denier of climate science and pro-fracking Member of Parliament.

Still, the more pressing aspects shaping what is politically possible around climate change are immigration policies and allegiance to the fossil fuel industry. Much of the Brexit debate took place within a government led by former Prime Minister Theresa May, who in 2012 commented on the UK’s immigration policy: “the aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration.”<sup>96</sup> The referendum was originally launched by David Cameron in an attempt to quell internal party divisions between Eurosceptics and those who were more centrist; a strategy with disastrous consequences. Since then, the Conservatives have promised to “Get Brexit Done” by early 2020, a promise that includes adopting the Australian-style points-based system, as first suggested by UKIP and Brexit campaigners.<sup>97</sup> This includes increased funding for police departments, likely in part to

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95 Desmog. Boris Johnson. Available at: [www.desmog.co.uk/boris-johnson](http://www.desmog.co.uk/boris-johnson) (05.12.2019).

96 Shand-Baptiste, K. (2019). The UK’s immigration system is ideologically broken. Available at: [www.independent.co.uk/voices/windrush-dexter-bristol-death-scandal-immigration-home-office-a9146221.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/windrush-dexter-bristol-death-scandal-immigration-home-office-a9146221.html) (05.01.2020).

97 Davidson, H. (2016). What is Australia’s points-based immigration system? Available at: [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jun/01/what-is-australia-points-based-immigration-system-brexite](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jun/01/what-is-australia-points-based-immigration-system-brexite) (12.01.2020).

facilitate upcoming deportations. In many ways, the Brexit campaign was successful because of the “us vs them” narrative. Brexit positioned Britishness – culture, values, borders, and money – as under threat and in opposition to particularly Eastern European migrants, refugees and transnational laws.<sup>98</sup>

A significant concern in all of this is the influence that lobby groups, right-wing think tanks, and data companies have, particularly the US-UK exchange of information and money along illegal lines. One such example is Steve Bannon and Cambridge Analytica, a data-mining company with a central role in promoting and fundraising for the Brexit campaign. Bannon was fully aware of Cambridge Analytica’s plans to circumvent UK laws forbidding foreign contributions to political campaigns.<sup>99</sup> Right-wing think tanks often play a similar role. As NGOs that research policies with the aim of shaping government, their primary concerns are those of their funders, not voters.<sup>100</sup> This means that it is difficult to regulate or monitor their work. In the UK context, the two think tanks instrumental in shaping the Brexit campaign were the Legatum Institute, run by known “disaster capitalist” Christopher Chandler<sup>101</sup>, and the Institute of Economic Affairs, whose alumni – former Chancellor Sajid Javid, Home Secretary Priti

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98 Sudarshan, R. (2017). Understanding the Brexit Vote: The Impact of Polish Immigrants on Euroscepticism. Available at: [www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge\\_detail/understanding-the-brexit-vote-the-impact-of-polish-immigrants-on-euroscepticism](http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge_detail/understanding-the-brexit-vote-the-impact-of-polish-immigrants-on-euroscepticism) (02.01.2020).

99 Mayer, J. (2019). New evidence emerges of Steven Bannon and Cambridge Analytica’s role in Brexit. Available at: [www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/new-evidence-emerges-of-steve-bannon-and-cambridge-analyticas-role-in-brexit](http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/new-evidence-emerges-of-steve-bannon-and-cambridge-analyticas-role-in-brexit) (09.01.2020).

100 Geoghegan, P. (2019). Revealed: Climate change denier makes big donations to Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt. Available at: [www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/revealed-climate-change-denier-makes-big-donation-boris-johnson-and-jeremy-hunt](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/revealed-climate-change-denier-makes-big-donation-boris-johnson-and-jeremy-hunt) (09.01.2020).

101 Geoghegan, P. (2017). Legatum: the Brexiteers’ favourite think tank. Who is behind them?. Available at: [www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/legatum-who-are-brexiteers-favourite-think-tank-and-who-is-behind-them](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/legatum-who-are-brexiteers-favourite-think-tank-and-who-is-behind-them) (12.01.2020).

Patel, and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab – sit in the Tory cabinet.<sup>102</sup> These two think tanks essentially crafted the Brexit strategy.<sup>103</sup> They are also part of a transnational coalition of 450 campaign groups and think tanks called the Atlas Network. This network's aim is to create ultra-free markets with limited government worldwide and is largely funded by private donations from "fossil fuel magnates, hedge fund and finance billionaires, and tobacco and oil companies."<sup>104</sup>

The strategy is to create "a constant river of commentary" from many different groups – with official yet indistinguishable names and acronyms – to create a facade of dominant opinion, despite the fact that the position comes from one network. The Atlas Network is one way in which right-wing think tanks in the UK and the US exchange advice, strategies, and tactics, like the US-UK free trade deal.<sup>105</sup> Notably, before the Tories came to power the UK was a leading progressive voice on climate change in the international arena: take, for example, the Climate Change Act of 2008. Since 2010, however, the Tories have consistently undermined such action.<sup>106</sup>

A key fight in the UK context is the struggle over fracking and efforts to build new gas line infrastructure. Reclaim the Power is a decade-old direct action network that has grown in response to this fight, and recently put anti-racism at the center of its anti-fracking camp, "Power

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102 Lawrence, F. (2019). How the right's radical think tanks reshaped the Conservative party. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/29/rightwing-thinktank-conservative-boris-johnson-brex-it-atlas-network](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/29/rightwing-thinktank-conservative-boris-johnson-brex-it-atlas-network) (18.12.2019).

103 Crerar, P. (2018). Shanker Singham: is he the brains of Brexit?. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/23/shanker-singham-is-he-the-brains-of-brex-it](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/23/shanker-singham-is-he-the-brains-of-brex-it) (22.12.2019).

104 Lawrence, F. (2019). How the right's radical think tanks reshaped the Conservative party. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/29/rightwing-thinktank-conservative-boris-johnson-brex-it-atlas-network](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/29/rightwing-thinktank-conservative-boris-johnson-brex-it-atlas-network) (18.12.2019).

105 Lawrence, F. (2018). Rightwing think tanks unveil radical plan for US-UK Brexit trade deal. Available at: [www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/18/rightwing-think-tanks-unveil-radical-plan-for-us-uk-brex-it-trade-deal-nhs](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/18/rightwing-think-tanks-unveil-radical-plan-for-us-uk-brex-it-trade-deal-nhs) (18.12.2019).

106 Innes, A. (2019). Conservative government climate policy is more dangerous than one of open denial. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/government-climate-policy> (06.12.2019).

Beyond Borders: Against New Gas and the Hostile Environment”, in July 2019. In partnership with organizations working to address the social crisis, such as All African Women’s Working Group, Anti Raids Network, End Deportations, Resist + Renew, and North East London Migrant Action, the Reclaim the Power network reintegrated social causes into environmental fights.

Extinction Rebellion is another influential demonstration of resistance on climate change.

Originating in the UK, the movement garnered massive media attention and put newfound pressure on political representatives after shutting down central London in October 2019. It has since become an international movement.

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

- > WHICH right-wing groups are talking about climate change in your context?
- > WHAT context is key to understanding how right-wing groups engage climate change in your context? How is this different or similar to other places across Europe?
- > WHAT narratives, tactics, and strategies are being used by right-wing groups in your context?
- > HOW can you connect your work to other groups in other countries?



III  
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CONCLUSIONS



Although right-wing engagement with the politics of nature is nothing new, the way these politics take shape in the present is original. Here are some lessons, questions, and considerations for progressive climate movements to more deeply engage this field of struggle.

## LESSONS

### **CLIMATE TRANSITION IS INEVITABLE, JUSTICE IS NOT**

The banner of climate justice has gained considerable traction in recent years. Its roots reach back to the 1980s in US environmental justice movements as a response to mainstream organizations removing the people most affected by environmental destruction (often Black and indigenous communities at the sites of point-source extraction) from the conversation and decision-making. This movement brought about a greater understanding of what justice means – that people’s health, safety, and well-being matter – when progressive movements fight for an ecologically sound society.

To organize for climate justice means articulating what kind of society we eventually want – what kind of economy we want, what kind of work we want, how we want people to relate to each other, how we deal with conflict and harm, what quality of life people should have. The answers here are not easy, but they must form part of our politics around climate. If we do not *make them central*, the ecological elements of our movements could be appropriated by anyone.

Climate justice means tackling the problem head-on by ending the era of extreme energy, reducing carbon emissions, and creating meaningful work that connects urban and rural communities, *while at the same time* working to reconstruct the social and political relationships whose erosion has brought us to such extreme conditions. In practice this means prioritizing human rights over borders, building localized democracies, public and community-controlled economies, and uplifting the solutions and leadership of communities on the frontline of climate change.<sup>107</sup>

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107 Climate Justice Alliance. Available at: [climatejusticealliance.org](https://climatejusticealliance.org) (23.12.019).

When our climate actions and campaigns are rooted in a justice framework, we not only minimize the risk of propping up right-wing interpretations of the environment and climate, we also share a vision of a more equitable, ecological society, entrenched in political possibility rather than playing on fear.

## ECOLOGY OVER BORDERS

Climate politics often serve as a tool for right-wing groups to argue against migration. This position is based on the idea that migration is *the cause* rather than *a consequence* of environmental and climate destruction.

More importantly, the core principle of interdependence within ecological processes undermines this position. For instance, when France's RN party expresses its positions on climate, claiming that «ecology is about people living in a territory, who are attached to it and who make plans for the long term” while simultaneously refusing to cooperate with other European nations on climate policies, their tactic begins to break down.<sup>108</sup> In this way, ecological principles can be used to undermine right-wing positions.

A wildfire will blaze through a border control station. Extreme drought will shift land mass regardless of property values. Air pollution affects the lungs of all breathing animals. Borders, in an ecological sense, do not exist. Ecological boundaries, rather, are far more permeable and adapt over time.

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108 Onishi, N. (2019). France's Far Right Wants to Be an Environmental Party, Too. Available at: [www.nytimes.com/2019/10/17/world/europe/france-far-right-environment.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/17/world/europe/france-far-right-environment.html) (04.01.2020).

## CLIMATE JUSTICE AND ANTI-FASCISM

This booklet highlights the idea that if progressive climate movements look only to the issue of climate and not at the rest of society, we will dramatically misread the political terrain. The international political shift to the right not only influences what is politically possible, but also what is seen as normal. In other words, climate change is happening within a European society that is increasingly authoritarian and home to fascist movements.

Luckily, progressive climate activists do not need to look far for guidance on these issues. We can find points of collaboration with anti-fascist movements who have experience in analyzing right-wing statements, studying fascist history, and exposing ideological and political connections invisible within mainstream journalism. What's more, we can learn about what options are available to us, as a public movement, when climate activists face right-wing and state repression.



# QUESTIONS

## HOW DO WE BRIDGE RURAL AND URBAN DIVIDES?

The tension between urban and rural areas is present in nearly every example discussed in this booklet. Right-wing populism often equates rural life with authenticity, simplicity, and honest labor positioned against transnational decision-making bodies, against outsiders, against modernity. Mainstream assumptions that people who live rurally are naturally more conservative play into this dynamic, placing ruralness as a driver of right-wing populism rather than decades of neoliberal policies and severe economic crises.

This tension has the ability to create identities rooted in nationalism and, as we have seen, can shape what is politically possible around climate change. Progressive climate movements able to disrupt this contrasting characterization of urban and rural areas are better positioned to undermine nationalistic interpretations of ecology.

## DO WE ABANDON NARRATIVES BECAUSE THEY ARE USED BY THE RACIST RIGHT?

There are a number of narratives that progressive and left movements often use that also find purchase among the conservative right and far right (e.g. populist “us” versus “them” rhetoric, a critique of corporate power, and calls for environmental protection). Some argue that we ought to abandon these narratives because they too quickly slip to the right.

This booklet argues for the need to become more skillful in our use of these narratives. We must become clear on key points of differentiation. For instance, a criticism of corporate power and the logic of capitalism should not collapse into narratives of a conspiring elite, potentially propping up anti-Semitism in progressive and left movements. This kind of clarity is part and parcel of gaining a clear social and ecological vision of a just world.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Should progressive climate movements cooperate with right-wing groups on climate issues?

This question is inevitable in the politics of climate change. Answers, however, may vary depending on context. In places where far right groups and parties dominate governing structures, opposition groups, including progressive and left groups, must contend with this question more often.

Is it more dangerous to align with right-wing groups on climate issues and run the risk of strengthening their repressive social agenda, such as border protection, or does greater peril come from drawing a clear ethical line amidst impending ecological system collapse? Are temporary alliances less concerning for more localized environmental issues or does forming any alliance set a threatening precedent?

In Hungary, for instance, there is an example of the far right Jobbik party building bridges with the green Lehet Más a Politika (LMP) party, whereby Jobbik created a climate-focused NGO in 2011 called Zöld Válasz. Their website leads with the slogan “Sooner or later, the silent killer will come for everyone” and writes favorably about Greenpeace campaigns against the government’s waste management policies.<sup>109</sup> In an effort to break Jobbik into the mainstream, Zöld Válasz has organized events on climate policies and invited people from other opposition parties and think tanks.

At parliamentary level, climate change can become a slippery slope for green parties. In January 2020, a new governing coalition formed in Austria between the conservative People’s Party, ÖVP, and the Greens. The new government released its 300-page contract cementing the coalition. Sebastian Kurz, leader of the ÖVP, boasted that the government is the “best of both worlds” and has claimed to “protect both

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109 Zöld Válasz (2019). Greenpeace warns of plastic pollution in parliament with life-size whale statues. Available at: [www.zoldvalasz.hu/2019/07/10/eletnagysagu-balnaszo-brokkal-figyelmeztet-a-greenpeace-a-muanyagszennyezese-re-a-parlament-elott](http://www.zoldvalasz.hu/2019/07/10/eletnagysagu-balnaszo-brokkal-figyelmeztet-a-greenpeace-a-muanyagszennyezese-re-a-parlament-elott) (20.12.2019).

the climate and the borders.”<sup>110</sup> The agreement showed gains for the climate such as a zero emissions goal by 2040 and flexible public transport tickets – although it failed to mention the expansion of a third runway at Vienna Airport. Yet the green policies did little in the way of changing the policies left over from the previous coalition that included the far right Freedom Party (FPÖ), including lowering tax rates on corporate profits<sup>111</sup>, increasing military funding to “maintain public security”, cutting public benefits to non-citizens, and seizing the cell phones of people seeking asylum.<sup>112</sup> Journalists described this coalition as the result of paltry political decisions: “For the Greens’ decision to accept the hard right-wing, authoritarian politics of the former government as a benchmark for what “good politics” look like and play along with the logic of the “lesser evil” contributes to shifting public discourse even further to the right.”<sup>113</sup>

Speaking on this issue from a historical perspective, Peter Staudenmaier, whose work focuses on the green wing within Nazi Germany, warned against situational alliances between left and far right groups: “It is one of the major contexts out of which currents of historical fascism emerged. We think of fascism as essentially a phenomenon of the right, of the far right, but historically speaking fascism drew on left currents as well. And, if we look at the personal development of fascists, for example Mussolini himself starts off as a socialist – a major socialist, the editor of the socialist party’s newspaper. And within a few years he goes through this transformation. We need to take that part

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110 Kaufman, A. (2020). Austria’s New Anti-Immigrant Green Government Stokes Fears Of Climate ‘Nightmare.’ Available at: [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/austria-greens-conservatives-climate\\_n\\_5e19011ec5b6640ec3d4598b?ri18n=true&guccounter=2](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/austria-greens-conservatives-climate_n_5e19011ec5b6640ec3d4598b?ri18n=true&guccounter=2) (18.01.2020).

111 APA (2019). Tax reform 2021 – the details: KöSt drops to 21 percent. Available at: [www.trend.at/politik/steuerreform-koest-prozent-10769582](https://www.trend.at/politik/steuerreform-koest-prozent-10769582) (18.01.2020).

112 Bell, B. (2018). Europe migrants: Austria to seize migrants’ phones in asylum clamp-down. Available at: [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43823166](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43823166) (20.01.2020).

113 Petrick, T. (2020). How Austria’s Greens Became the Right’s Best Ally. Available at: <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/01/austria-greens-peoples-party-sebastien-kurz-coalition> (22.01.2020).

of the history seriously. There is something about fascism as a politics that is enlivened by and made more dynamic by its episodic borrowings from the left, including sometimes from the radical left.”<sup>114</sup>

This question of situational alliances needs to be investigated within progressive climate movements, ideally sooner rather than later.

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114 Original interview. August 2019.

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

- > HOW does your group use a climate justice framework? If you don't, why? If you do, what does it mean in your context?
- > WHY should climate justice and anti-fascist movements work together? Why not? If they should, where are the opportunities?
- > HOW does your group talk about the urban/rural divide? What are interesting ways to break down this social and political divide?
- > WHAT aspects of progressive climate movements maintain rural and urban divides? Where are these divides being bridged already?
- > WHAT does your group think about situational alliances with right-wing groups on climate issues?
- > WHO is excluded from climate protection when far right or fascist climate policies are adopted?





# SECTION IV

**NEXT STEPS**

## WAYS TO USE THIS BOOKLET

### **READ IT TOGETHER:**

use this booklet to strike up conversations and put new questions to your group. It can also be a way to involve new people in your work. Discuss what else you want to know to better understand how right-wing groups are engaging climate change in your context.

### **CONNECT:**

use this booklet as a conversation starter with another group, such as with an anti-fascist group that might be working on an aspect of this topic from a different angle.

### **BUILD:**

talk to climate justice and anti-fascist groups in other countries, who may have similar stories or can share their own lessons about what works and what doesn't. Find ways to take action together.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Antifaschistisches Pressearchiv (2019). *Ökologie von rechts, Teil Eins und Zwei*. [www.apabiz.de/wp-content/uploads/magazine\\_4\\_web.pdf](http://www.apabiz.de/wp-content/uploads/magazine_4_web.pdf). (19.11.2019).

Biehl, J./Staudenmaier, P. (2011). *Ecofascism Revisited: Lessons from the German Experience*. AK Press.

Dawson, J. (1996). *Eco-Nationalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine*. Duke University Press.

Fekete, L. (2019). *Europe's Fault Lines: Racism and The Rise of the Right*. Verso.

Forchtner, B. (2019). *The Far Right and the Environment: Politics, Discourse and Communication*. Routledge.

Schaller, S./Carius, A. (2019). *Convenient Truths – Mapping climate agendas of right-wing populist parties in Europe*. [www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths](http://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/convenient-truths) (19.11.2019).

# GLOSSARY

## ANTI-GLOBALISM

Anti-globalism opposes the current global economic and trade system. It emerged from a progressive struggle against international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, for their exploitative practices in developing countries, but in recent years has taken a rightward turn, in large part due to hostility toward migration and economic stagnation or decline for people in the Global North.<sup>115</sup>

## ECO-FASCISM

"Fascism gains its power by claiming to restore dignity, nobility, purpose, and privilege to some unique people or race whose members feel that their original mystical-organic social unity and their ties with the homeland are degenerating because of the insidious influence of alien races and foreign ideas. Moreover, fascism involves 'an understanding of society in essentially military terms that stress struggle, heroism, leadership, masculinity, and youth'. To merit the name "eco-fascism" then, a radical ecology movement would have to do more than demand that ecologically vital private property be protected from those who would despoil it. In addition to portraying ecological despoliation as a threat to the racial integrity of the people, an eco-fascist movement would have to urge that society be reorganized in terms of an authoritarian, collectivist leadership principle based on masculinist-martial values."<sup>116</sup>

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115 Horner, R. (2018). How anti-globalisation switched from a left to a right-wing issue – and where it will go next. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/how-anti-globalisation-switched-from-a-left-to-a-right-wing-issue-and-where-it-will-go-next-90587> (22.12.2019).

116 Zimmerman, (1995). The Threat of Ecofascism, Social Theory and Practice, Vol. 21, No.2: 207–238.

## **ETHNONATIONALISM**

Ethnonationalism is another ideology built on prioritizing the nation state, yet is primarily concerned with protecting an ethnicity or race.

## **ECO-MALTHUSIANISM**

Named after 18th century English scholar Thomas Malthus, eco-Malthusianism is the belief that population growth tends to outpace our resources. Malthusian theory suggests that this can be regulated either through moral restraint or disaster (such as disease, famine, or war), widespread poverty, and environmental degradation. Malthusianism positions “humanity”, rather than capitalists, multinational conglomerates, or international development agencies, as the cause of ecological destruction.

## **GREEN NATIONALISM OR ECO-NATIONALISM**

Green nationalism is the belief that dependence on outside fuel and energy resources is a threat to the nation state. It relies on notions of preserving land or romantic ideas of landscape as a means of preserving national identity, while harnessing concerns about the use of a nation’s limited resources and the well-being of its legal citizens.<sup>117</sup>

## **NEOLIBERALISM**

A political project initiated in the late 1960s and early 1970s by corporate capitalists intending to curb the power of labor institutions and movements. It was inspired by Lewis Powell, Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable, which first set neoliberal practices into motion, such as establishing privately funded think tanks to counteract the research and progressive impulse of universities. Other practices include reducing tariffs and empowering financial capital, moving production (and therefore jobs) abroad, the automation of skilled labor, structural readjustment programs, and the individualization of costs and debt.<sup>118</sup>

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117 Ireland, T. (2017). Green nationalism? How the far right could learn to love the environment. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/green-nationalism-how-the-far-right-could-learn-to-love-the-environment-76035> (04.01.2010).

118 Harvey, D. (2007). A Brief History of Neoliberalism. Oxford University Press.

## RIGHT-WING POPULISM

**Right-wing populism** is a set of politics comprising both an appeal to “the people” and the use of “anti-elitism”, combined with repressive scapegoating. A right-wing populist movement then mobilizes a mass constituency as a sustained political or social force.<sup>119</sup>

RIGHT-WING POPULISM ENCOMPASSES THE FOLLOWING  
COMPLEX CHARACTERISTICS:

- Producerism, positioning so-called producers in society in opposition to unproductive elites and subordinate groups defined as lazy or immoral
- Conspiracism, which uses a form of scapegoating in which the enemy is positioned as part of a vast and insidious plot against the common good, while lauding those “sounding the alarm” as heroes
- Apocalypticism, or the anticipation of a righteous struggle against evil conspiracies.

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119 Berlet, C./Lyons, M. (2000). *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort*. Guildford Press.

## METHODOLOGY

This booklet emerged from conversations between climate justice and anti-fascist activists and organizers in Germany. *Burning Earth, Changing Europe: How the Racist Right Exploits the Climate Crisis —And What We Can Do About It* also builds on the work of *Organizing Cools the Planet: Tools and Reflections to Navigate the Climate Crisis* (PM Press, 2010), which was translated into German and expanded upon in *Wurzeln im Treibsand*. In some ways, I see this booklet as the next iteration of engaging the current political landscape while building on the strategies and frameworks discussed in *Organizing Cools the Planet*. Below are a few ways in which this booklet came into being:

- Multiple and ongoing conversations with climate justice and anti-fascist activists from Saxony and Berlin.
- Collaboration with and resources from the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Brussels.
- Over 25 interviews with activists, organizers, and academics. Not all interviewees wanted to be listed. Some of the people interviewed include: Irma Allen, Lise Benoist, Andrea Berta, Peter Bierl, Paolo Brunori, Giorgia Bulli, Gopal Dayaneni, George Edwards, Liz Fekete, Bernhard Forchtner, Ulli Jentsch, Ilana Krause, Balša Lubarda, Jakub Możaryn, Marcin Skupiński, Peter Staudenmaier, Kristóf Szombati.
- Multiple conversations with important thinkers on this topic, such as Peter Staudenmaier, Bernhard Forchtner, and Liz Fekete.
- A workshop at and participation in the November 2019 Political Ecologies of the Far Right conference at Lund University, attended by activist and academic experts in this field.
- Survey of over 100 resources, including books, reports, and articles. See footnotes for the most relevant sources.

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Project Manager  
**Nessim Achouche**

Author  
**Hilary A. Moore**

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**Jamila Barra**

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In Europe today, more people than ever before are convinced that climate change is a pressing political issue. This is not a win by default. People anxious about ecological catastrophe are vulnerable to racist, xenophobic and even fascist methods of addressing the climate crisis, especially as far right and populist actors are occupying more and more positions of power across Europe, emboldening racist violence in the streets.

Left and progressive movements must be more skilled in messaging, more precise in forging political alliances, and more articulate in positioning justice as a centerpiece of the climate struggle. The stakes are simply too high. This booklet represents a toolkit in that project: a roadmap for identifying what we must reject, how to counteract approaches adopted by the right, and how to keep climate change a progressive issue.