

## Article

# What's under green? Eco-populism and eco-fascism in the climate crisis

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### *Abstract*

The ongoing environmental crisis has prompted various groups, organizations, and political parties to develop new strategies for addressing this global challenge. In this context, eco-populist actors, organizations, and parties are playing a key role in challenging the current exploitative capitalist system. However, it is important to note that eco-populist movements can differ significantly from one another. This article aims to distinguish between two contemporary but distinct movements: eco-populism and eco-fascism. To accomplish this, the terms “populism” and “eco-populism” will be conceptualized and analyzed, and the ideological deviations that eco-populism has undergone will be explained. The article will then provide brief case studies that showcase both eco-populist and eco-fascist events. By examining these examples, we will strive to identify the main similarities and differences between these two movements. Our conclusion will be that, despite sharing some features, eco-fascist movements tend to be more violent and nativist than eco-populist movements.

Although some extremist Populist Radical Right Parties are still reluctant to acknowledge the evident effects of climate change and the urgent need to take necessary actions (see Spanish Populist Radical Right Party VOX), there is quite a consensus among climate researchers, environmental scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists on the causes that have driven us to this climate crisis. Among the main reasons that can explain climate change, there

is no doubt that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and massive extraction and exploitation of natural resources have contributed the most to the ongoing crisis (see IPCC, 2022). However, the impacts of climate change differ from region to region, thus making individuals more vulnerable according to their nationality, social class, proximity and dependency on natural areas (see Thornton et al., 2014). Considering these factors, it can be concluded that Indigenous communities are among the most endangered groups due to climate change. This vulnerability has led to the emergence of popular movements that oppose extractive industries and their consequent exploitation of the resources found in natural areas, thus fueling violence and concern all over the globe (see Torres-Wong, 2019).

In the beginning, these movements were somehow marginal and unknown by the rest of the world and their demands were far from being considered by policymakers; however, as climate change impacts have become more tangible, these groups and movements have enjoyed more recognition, and their demands are currently being heard and considered, for example during the Alternative COP 26 in Glasgow and COP 27 in Egypt. Today, though the approaches and strategies may differ, it is difficult to find a political party that has not included climate change mitigation and adaptation in its agenda. However, although “green policies” have become an integral area of most political parties and social movements, different approaches and schools of eco-political thought have emerged in response to the current situation. These include Eco-Rousseauians, who believe that GHGs emissions must be curbed by the purchase of carbon credits from the underdeveloped world and call for the immediate and voluntary halt to the exploitation of natural resources and the protection of ecosystems of the world; Eco-Hobbesians, who defend that climate change can only be overcome by the imposition of global sanctions and mutual coercion mechanisms; Eco-Smithians, think that climate change will be solved by human inventiveness and see it as an opportunity for designing, producing, and selling new products that will boost private gain; Eco-Calvinists, who opt for using resource-efficiency techniques to solve the climate crisis; Eco-Christians, who firmly believe that only a coalition with evangelicals would ensure God’s creation; and Eco-Populism, which is worth a more thorough explanation due to its complexity (Yanarella, 2015).

This article aims to analyze the rise of eco-populism across the world and to identify its main features, motivations and goals. Furthermore, this article will also aim to make a distinction between eco-populism and an appearance similar movement that has been coined under the name of eco-fascism. To do so, we will first conceptualize what we understand as populism and eco-populism and will point out some deviations the latter has undergone in recent years. The following section will showcase four different case studies that will aim at helping us identify some common and distinctive features between eco-populists and eco-fascists. Lastly, our findings will be discussed and contrasted with the existing literature.

## **Populism & Eco-Populism**

A comprehensive and precise definition of eco-populism requires a thorough examination of the concept of populism. Although populism has existed for centuries, defining the concept is often more challenging than expected. In other words, populism has become a contested term that lacks an agreed scholarly definition and differs from region to region (Kaltwasser, 2018). According to Cas Mudde (2004: 543), populism is nothing but a thin-centred ideology that understands society to be divided into two antagonistic and homogenous groups, and that argues that politics should ultimately be an expression of the general will of the people. In this same line, Ernesto Laclau (2005) has defined populism as a political, social, economic, and cultural phenomenon that aims at attracting popular support through the constant appeal of popular sovereignty, as well as through the construction of a dichotomy between two different groups: them versus us. On the other hand, other scholars have focused on the role of leadership under populism. For instance, Weyland (2001) has defined populism as a quasi-personal power relationship between a personality-driven leader and direct, unmediated, and unorganized large numbers of followers.

It is clear that while some scholars have considered populism to be a political phenomenon (see Mudde, 2004), others have addressed it as a political strategy (see Weyland, 2001). Laclau (2005), however, has merged both approaches and pointed out both its tactics and its core political features. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that populism may differ from region to region, and from time to time, thus leading to the emergence of different subtypes of populism (Kaltwasser, 2018).

### **What are eco-populisms?**

According to Judis (2016), populisms are more likely to emerge where there is a crisis in the hegemonic political worldview or ideology. Therefore, in times when climate change is one of the most salient issues that is unquestionably challenging both the global economic system and the capitalist global society, it is not surprising that a phenomenon like eco-populism has entered the scene. But what exactly is eco-populism?

Eco-populism can be defined as socio-environmental movements that have scaled up their struggle and have employed both universal rhetoric and approach to inscribe their demands (Griggs & Howarth, 2008). Nonetheless, this definition is quite broad; therefore, Middeldorp and Le Billon (2019: 326-327) have further elaborated on eco-populism's definition and stressed the fact that eco-populism "broadens social mobilization beyond directly affected communities and often seeks to unite the people against ruling elites and dominant corporations", thus working as an emancipatory approach of social mobilization that is built upon extended solidarities against the dominant exploiters of natural resources and that also aims at reducing individual vulnerabilities stemming from the exploitation of natural resources. This definition corresponds with Yanarella's (2015) research on eco-populism, in which he pointed out that eco-populisms are characterized by believing that corporate wealth and power are turning the landscape into a speculative good as well as considering free trade and global economic integration as a simple

extension of the global reach of such corporations. This belief is also directly connected with Middeldorp and Le Billon's (2019) research, arguing that eco-populisms generally seek to terminate environmentally destructive projects rather than derive benefits from them, as well as to pursue a common front among social justice movements that challenge existing systems of domination.

Moreover, by focusing on the Love Canal Homeowners Association, Stone Jr. (2022: 143-144) has identified some of the main features of eco-populist strategies, seen in the involvement of direct actions and citizen protests aimed at mobilizing public opinion rather than relying on governments measures, and the willingness to build a grassroots movement formed by average citizens that can face and challenge entrenched corporate power and government corruption. Further along this line, it is important to understand the relevancy of local, rural, or Indigenous subjectivities. In this aspect, eco-populist discourse claims that Indigenous communities have already proven their capacity to use and maintain natural resources in a sustainable way for generations, thus defending local resource use practices and participatory methods (Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019; Wittmer & Birner, 2005).

Eco-populist movements have emerged throughout history and across countries. The Love Canal Homeowners Association was one of the first examples of progressive eco-populist movements that were created to demand the government take due action to protect residents from toxic wastes that were poisoning their groundwater, provoking serious illnesses in the residents (Stone Jr., 2022: 143). Another similar example occurred in New Zealand during the 1990s, when the future of white bait -juvenile fish from the Galaxiid family- stood for debate, thus leading to the creation of the Southland White-baiters Association (SRWA). This association initially aimed at protecting whitebait stands and keeping a vigilant eye on the Department of Conservation (DoC) but finally assumed a key role in the governance of the fishery (Haggerty, 2007). Two similar cases emerged in Thailand and Indonesia, respectively. While the former comprised a network of more than 700 village-based forest and watershed management organizations, NGOs, and academics that protested against the establishment of government-supported commercial forest plantations on traditional village forest resources, the latter was led by an NGO that assisted a village in their struggle to be resettled from the Lore Lindu National Park (Wittmer & Birner, 2005). However, the outcome of the demands of different eco-populist movements and mobilizations have also differed across countries. Actually, in some cases, eco-populist mobilizations and movements have made states' authorities and elites carry out brutal repression against eco-populists, as can be observed in state repression during the Bajo Agua Palm Oil conflict or the Agua Zarca Dam conflict (Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019).

### **Deviations of eco-populism**

There have been of course several appropriations of the term and the strategies of eco-populist movements by either the elites or other movements. For instance, Stone Jr. (2022) has distinguished between progressive eco-populism and sham eco-populism; whereas the former meets the characteristics and goals of the aforementioned definition of eco-populism, the latter focuses on

disguising the advocacy on behalf of the industry and economic interests by recognizing concern about the impacts of environmental protection on the livelihoods of ordinary working people. In this same line, Besson (2010) has stressed that, due to rising environmental problems, authoritarian rule by the elites and big corporations in this regard is more likely to become widespread and dominant in the future.

On the individual side, Middeldorp and Le Billon (2019) have pointed out that despite broadening coalitions, eco-populisms can also forge populist exclusionary identities, thus boosting authoritarian and nativist discourses and strategies that can considerably differ from the ones that belong to traditionally progressive eco-populist movements. When examining the terms “authoritarianism”, “nativism”, and “populism”, what undoubtedly comes to the scene is Cas Mudde’s (2007: 15-23) framework on Populist Radical Right Parties. What is clear is that the ongoing rising popularity of the far-right has paired with the climate crisis, resulting in a renewed interest of these parties in environmental issues (Lubarda, 2022). Nonetheless, the question here is not whether Eco-Populist Radical Right Parties exist or not, but how far-right parties are integrating eco-populist discourses into their agendas to pursue their nativist, authoritarian and exclusionary goals and what can differentiate them from traditional eco-populist parties and movements.

In this same line, Forchtner and Kølvråa (2015) have argued that the Populist Radical Right may use environmental stances to extol their nationalist views. Examples of this can be observed in several examples in European politics, such as Le Front National’s “patriotic ecology”, which aims at protecting the French people, their nation, their culture, their identity, and the environment against climate change, pollution, energy policies, and resource depletion through the combination of French natural resources and their national identity, but which ultimately hides nativist and Eurosceptic policies; the UKIP’s approach to dealing with the British countryside consisted of politicising the environmental debate in this regard by suggesting that the true England is on the countryside and blaming the European Union, overpopulation and immigration for the countryside’s deterioration; the environmental discourse of the Czech far right, which has criticized eco-terrorism and evoked a spiritual and nativist Czech environment; and the (Boukala & Tountasaki, 2020; Tarant, 2020; Turner-Graham, 2020; Forchtner & Kølvråa, 2015).

Although Populist Radical Right Parties may not pursue ecological stances (see, for instance, VOX in Spain), what remains clear is that these authoritarian, nativist, and exclusionary features have closer ties to the far-right than to any other political ideology (Campion, 2021; Taylor, 2019). Hence, this recent connection between the far-right and ecologism has resulted in new approximations of environmental issues that have been echoing in political, social, and cultural fields under the name of ecofascism. Champion (2021: 8) has defined ecofascism as a “reactionary and revolutionary ideology that champions the regeneration of an imagined community through a return to a romanticized, ethnopluralist vision of the natural order”. This new ideology has resulted in the belief that the forces of modernity, globalization, multiculturalism, migration, materialism, etcetera, have therefore disrupted

the environment and can consequently be considered as the main reasons that explain the current environmental crisis (Hughes et al., 2022; Campion, 2021; Dyett & Thomas, 2019; Taylor, 2019). For instance, immigrants are perceived by eco-fascists as parasites in their ecosystems that are stopping nature from recovering its state of harmony and strength (Campion, 2021). As a consequence, overpopulation control or anti-immigration policies are some of the proposals that have been quite popular and supported among ecofascists, thus shedding some light on their political motivations (Dyett & Thomas, 2019).

Though the aforementioned far-right political parties have integrated eco-fascist stances into their agendas, this radical ecological ideology has also emerged in several social movements. Campion (2021) has identified interpretations and categories of eco-fascism that vary across countries and regions, among which the most relevant ones are Western neo-Nazis, who support violence in order to achieve an ethnostate that is aligned with nature's laws; American Odinists, who champion a very racialized form of paganism characterized by linking environmental deterioration with the pure race decay; the European Identitarian movement, which rejects multiculturalism and progressivism since they believe these facts have torn civilization from its natural attachments, and supports racism as well as anti-Muslim, anti-immigration, and population control policies; Australian supremacists, who contend that population must follow nature's eternal laws and purity of the race, reject technological innovation and industrialization, believe in the mystical and restorative power of the Australian wilderness, and champion a world order based on racial segregation by territory; and Radical Fringes movements, which support the return to ecological harmony through an idealized human relationship with nature that controls population size, preserves perceived values, and conserves wild areas.

### **Crime & punishment: eco-populist and eco-fascist demonstrations, protests, and repression**

Some of the aforementioned cases have already carried out several mobilizations, protests, and demonstrations against existing and proposed practices and policies perceived as either unfair or harmful. This section aims at showcasing different examples from both eco-populist and eco-fascist movements to identify their main strategies by carefully examining specific cases. This section will, therefore, tackle five different case studies; two correspond to eco-populist demonstrations, and the remaining three correspond to eco-fascist mobilizations. However, before addressing the aforementioned case studies, it is notable that such mobilizations are not a complete novelty. For instance, during the 70-80-90s, some popular mobilizations took place that had considerable similarities with eco-populist and eco-fascist contemporary movements; some of these can be observed in the Sagebrush Rebellion and the Wise Use Movement.

The Sagebrush Rebellion took place in 1979 in the U.S., when the state of Nevada's administration started considering the design of a bill that would aim to claim ownership of the unappropriated federally controlled public lands in the state (Leshy, 1981). These federal lands are quite important not only for

supporting a wide range of recreational, agricultural, commercial, and defence-related activities but also for being the repository of natural heritage and a powerful attraction to increasing numbers of migrants (Babbitt, 1982; Wald & Temkin, 1982). Clayton (1980) identified the root causes of the rebellion in the perception of western states' ineffectiveness in Congress, observed in the proponents' argument that the West had no clout in the decision-making process that directly affected them and their lands, which also happened to contain a substantial portion of the nation's natural and energy resources. Additional causes that Clayton identified included the Imbroglia of Federal Regulation, which resulted in restrictive land-use policies, and the adverse economic impact, which could be summarized in the proponent's argument that federal ownership of such lands negatively affected the state economies due to their immunity from state property taxation. In sum, the primary goal of the Sagebrush Rebellion was to secure the transfer to the states of the lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Proponents linked their goal with two theories that were later rejected by the federal District Court for the District of Nevada: first, they argued that the US Property Clause did not give the federal government the power to retain lands indefinitely, thus being such retention a violation of the Tenth Amendment, which reserves to the states the powers not delegated to the US by the Constitution; and second, on the so-called "equal footing" doctrine, which was argued to override the federal government power to retain land indefinitely (Wald & Temkin, 1982).

Though the historical record did not support the Sagebrush rebels' view (Babbitt, 1982), they embraced several arguments to justify their struggle. These included their argument that the states could manage the public lands as well as, if not better, than the federal government; their claim that the West has long been a colony of the rest of the nation and that transferring the public lands to the states was necessary to put an end to their colonial status; their belief that the federal government was locking up the public lands and was randomly constraining economic uses of them; and their claim that the federal government was making enormous profits from the public lands, at the expense of the economic well-being of the states (Wald & Temkin, 1982). All in all, Scheiber (1982) argued that the Sagebrush Rebellion was nothing but the new voices of a long historical record of antiforeshism and the pursuit of old-style state mercantilism in the region, which is characterized by discrimination against non-residents, either through the manipulation of the terms of access to markets or through the implementation of policies that affect the management of public resources.

Another example that can be used as a historical case to illustrate the historical record of eco-populist and eco-fascist movements is the Wise Use Movement, which took place in Western American rural areas between 1988 and 1996 as a reaction to regional restructuring, encompassing a coalition of organizations and industrial, agricultural, and conservative political interest groups that concentrated their agenda on making efforts to maintain rural commodity producers' historical, privileged access to and control over the federally owned lands in the above-mentioned regions (McCarthy, 2002; Brick, 1995). More specifically, the Wise Use movement's members justified their self-

styled war against public land ownership by pressing two themes: on the one hand, they claimed that environmentalists were destroying communities; and on the other hand, they also argued that private property rights were paramount, thus preaching the gospel of private property and self-determination as well as the evils of interfering government agencies (Hungerford, 1995). Having said this, it can be determined that the Wise Use movement's battle was against two different enemies: firstly, against the federal government agencies, which were depicted as a considerable threat to life, liberty, happiness, land, and everyone's livelihood in the county; and secondly, against the environmentalists, who were considered by the Wise Use movement's members as ignorant individuals that were only aiming to deteriorate and worsen their contemporary lifestyle (McCarthy, 2002; Hungerford, 1995). Nonetheless, according to Brick (1995), the Wise Use movement was more than simply a collection of front groups for industry, it indeed reflected a growing sophistication of right-wing political organizations in the United States through the combination of ideological guidance, legal advocacy, and grassroots political organizations, such as industry trade associations and local businesses and individuals. In addition to this, McCarthy argued that the Wise Use movement exhibited many features that frequently characterize social movements centred on resource use and access in the global South, such as cultural identity, the predominance of local knowledge over expert science, numerous reinventions of community and tradition, firm support and defence of localism, as well the fact that actions outside of and in opposition to state arenas were central to its goals and tactics.

Having briefly presented some historical precedents to the selected cases, the following lines will introduce some contemporary events, demonstrations, and rebellions that have taken place more recently and have been labelled as either eco-populist or eco-fascist examples. After doing so, similarities and differences among the presented cases will be showcased.

### **Fridays for Future**

Fridays for Future was initially inspired by Greta Thunberg's Skolstrejk för Klimatet, in which she claimed to be motivated by a scientific report that stated that, as of 2017, there was only three year-time left to reach the goal of the 2015 Paris Agreement to hold global temperature below two 2°C above the pre-industrial levels (Figueres et al., 2017). Greta Thunberg had an immediate global impact, leading to the inauguration of Fridays for Future on September 4th, 2018, in the Hague. This youth-driven movement appeals to the citizens of the world to stand together and fight against climate change through the organization of strikes and demonstrations (Brünker et al., 2019). After carrying out a survey analysis, Wallis and Loy (2021) found that members of Fridays for Future identified more strongly with others engaging in climate protection and expressed stronger ties to participate in protests based on their values, and the desire to make a relevant contribution.

Though this movement is not aligned with the right-wing agendas often associated with populism, it shares some aspects of that broad term, especially in its affective appeal. Participants of Fridays for Future, no matter their age, have been observed to share a common range of emotions. These sentiments are



mutual across different cities around the world, and existing research has not found considerable differences regarding the age cohort a participant belongs to (de Moor et al., 2020; Wahlström et al., 2019). This is particularly relevant since it sheds some light on how Fridays for Future has forged a shared identity among its members. Brünker, Deitelhoff and Mirbabaie (2019), after analyzing more than 1,100 comments on Instagram, found that individuals from Fridays for Future mainly express group cohesion and emotional attachment to its cause rather than simply solidarity.

### **Agua Zarca Dam Conflict**

The ongoing efforts to increase renewable energy generation have boosted global interest in the construction of hydropower facilities; however, the erection of dams has affected thousands of people -among which Indigenous groups are particularly vulnerable- due to impacts on local environments, resulting in several protests and demonstrations that are usually repressed violently (Del Bene et al., 2018; León, 2016). Although multiple cases illustrate these trends, the example of the Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Dam in Honduras showcases the direct relationship between transnational investment, government-backed human rights violations, and the eco-populist resistance by the Lenca people.

The Agua Zarca Dam is a project carried out by Desarrollos Energéticos S.A (DESA) and consisted of the construction of a 21.3 MW dam on the Gualcarque River in Intibucá, home of the Indigenous Lenca communities (Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019). The Agua Zarca Dam project suffered a series of blockades carried out by local communities orchestrated by COPINH, a social movement co-founded by Berta Cáceres that aimed at revitalizing Indigenous Lenca identity, reclaiming and obtaining titles for ancestral lands, as well as creating an autonomous governance structure (Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019; Metz, 2010). COPINH started its campaign of blockades after having been a victim of a campaign of criminalization carried out by several websites, the police, the military, and the government (Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019; León, 2016; Willems & de Jonghe, 2016). Such criminalization commenced when COPINH started working on filing an official complaint based on the violation of the community's right to be consulted before the construction of the dam started, which was never done and therefore made the whole project illegal (Willems & de Jonghe, 2016).

The Agua Zarca dam struggle reached a turning point when Berta Cáceres and Nelson García were assassinated in March 2016. This event put the dam conflict in the international spotlight and resulted in the project standstill after a campaign across different European countries carried out by COPINH (Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019).

### **Malheur Occupation**

The Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Occupation occurred in January 2016 and was carried out by a self-styled group of armed patriots who demanded the ownership of the land to be turned over to the citizens of Harney County, Oregon (Robbins, 2016). The occupation lasted forty days and was extremely mediatic thanks to the willingness of the armed occupiers to give interviews

to the reporters and share their experiences on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Youtube (Gallaher, 2016). According to Tat Wiles (2016), the occupation was an escalation of the 2014 Westwide insurgency sparked by the reaction to the sentencing for arson of Dwight and Steve Hammond, who had become very well-known during the Sagebrush Rebellion over the last two decades. The Malheur Occupation ended up in a violent confrontation between the authorities and the occupiers, resulting in 6 dead occupiers and several arrests by the FBI that finally allowed the government to regain full control of the refuge (Callaher, 2016, Wolf et al., 2016; Zaitz, 2016). Nonetheless, what is relevant about this historical event is not the event itself but why it was carried out and by whom.

There is no consensus on how to define the Malheur occupiers. While some have defined them as hyper-masculine extremists or white supremacists (see Irons, 2018; Bell, 2016), others have claimed them to be more aligned with Mormon fanaticism (Beam, 2016). However, Carolyn Callaher (2016) has argued that the Malheur occupiers' politics and motivations cannot be reduced to a single identity, suggesting overlapping interests that explain the aforementioned occupation. It must be noted that all the occupiers were white and well-armed, among which the majority of them were men (Irons, 2018; Callaher, 2016). After examining the event, Irons (2018) concluded that the perpetrators were motivated to carry out the armed occupation because they perceived the traditional structure of the family unit regarding land management to be at stake due to the (recently-introduced) federal land management in the region, thus dismantling traditional and patriarchal local power structures, and threatening their control over the resources. In other words, Irons stated that the Malheur Occupation was an extreme example of the logical progression of patriarchal rural ideology that sees federalism as a threat to their traditional and rooted-to-land rights as men. In this same line, Callaher (2016) has argued and demonstrated that the Malheur occupiers' anti-federalism and anti-elitist rhetoric channelled their race and class-based interests, which ultimately were about the reclamation of land that had historically belonged to them -according to their selective use of history-, and their avoidance to tackle the potential inequities entailed in the reclamation of land they were supporting.

### **Christchurch Massacre**

The Christchurch Massacre took place on 15th March 2019, when a lone Australian shot and killed 51 people and wounded many more after emailing a 74-page manifesto entitled "The Great Replacement", where he justified his terrorist attack through white genocide and eco-fascist conspiracy theories, defended anti-immigrant sentiments and racialized traditions, and included neo-Nazi tropes and symbology (Campion, 2021; Crothers & O'Brien, 2020; Reicher et al., 2019). According to Reicher, Haslam, and Van Bavel (2019: 11), the criminal activities carried out in Christchurch were "rooted in a world view which divides people into antagonistic racial blocs in which the very presence of the one is at odds with the survival of the other". Nonetheless, although the Christchurch Massacre perpetrator could seem like a lone wolf,

it is worth noting that the massacre was embedded in a worldwide nexus of activities involving Muslim communities and the development of white supremacist ideology and terrorist activities where the internet played a crucial role in providing a platform for the incubation and promulgation of such ideologies (Crothers & O'Brien, 2020; Veilleux-Lepage et al., 2020).

Reicher, Haslam, and Van Bavel (2019) have examined and connected the concept of toxic leadership with the justification provided by the Christchurch Massacre perpetrator, thus finding that it meets the five steps criteria that make such atrocities be perceived as good or noble by the perpetrator, being such steps the definition of the ingroup, the delineation of exclusive boundaries, the ingroup's representation as noble and virtuous while the outgroup is depicted as a threat to the ingroup, and the consideration that the destruction of the "other" is permissible. Although some could argue that the Christchurch Massacre perpetrator did not belong to a formal organization that somehow enhance such racist, xenophobic, and eco-fascist sentiments; the truth is that transnational digital media and the internet played that role (Crother & O'Brien, 2020; Dreher, 2020; Veilleux-Lepage et al., 2020). Further along this line, several studies have pointed out how much the perpetrator was influenced by the figure of Anders Breivik in Norway as well as by ethno-nationalist, white-supremacist forums and networks (Macklin & Bjørgo, 2021; Veilleux-Lepage et al., 2020; Pratt, 2019).

### **Analysis & discussion**

Having briefly showcased different historical cases that involved either eco-populist or eco-fascist actors and organizations, this section aims to identify and extract the key features and motivations that are somehow shared by both eco-populism and eco-fascism adepts and supporters, as well as those characteristics that have made both movements different, thus resulting in the employment of different approaches to address and face the contemporary ecological crisis. Thus, one of the key features shared between eco-fascist and eco-populist movements is their opposition against a supposed ruling and corrupted elite (see Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019). This is indeed shared with traditional populisms as well, which always employ antagonistic rhetoric in which "the others" are depicted as evil enemies to overcome (see Mudde, 2004; Laclau, 2005); however, while eco-populist movements seem to seek to terminate environmentally destructive projects and are positioned against privatization practices and the use of public spaces and natural resources as speculative goods by transnational corporations and financial elites (see Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019; Yanarella, 2015), eco-fascist demonstrations and mobilizations suggest that eco-fascism, on the other hand, embraces the belief that land and natural resources must be somehow inherited by natives, who should own the rights to exploit and make profits from such spaces and goods. This tendency occurs in the above-mentioned example of the Malheur Occupation and its predecessors the Sagebrush Rebellion and the Wise Use Movement (see McCarthy, 2002; Brick, 1995; Scheiber, 1982; Wald & Temkin, 1982). Hence, although both approaches seek to confront a pre-identified and perceived corrupted elite, eco-populisms tend to be built upon

extended and transnational solidarities and identities against the dominant elites and corporations (see Brünker et al., 2019; Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019; Griggs & Howarth, 2008), whereas eco-fascisms, as can be deduced from the above-mentioned case studies, usually seek the privatization and control of public lands according to a racial and nativist criteria and the maintenance of inherited privileges, thus forging an exclusionary identity and boosting authoritarian and nativist discourses and practices (Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019; Irons, 2018; Callaher, 2016; Hungerford, 1995; Scheiber, 1982; Leshy, 1981).

Following this line, the second feature worth noting from both approaches is how they integrate Indigenous and local people and their knowledge as it informs their strategies and goals. The case studies here show that both eco-populisms and eco-fascism have stressed the importance of locals. This can be observed in how some of the examples presented aimed at either integrating local knowledge in the exploitation of natural resources or stressed their historical inherited right to control such areas and resources (see Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019; Wittmer & Birner, 2005; McCarthy, 2002). Nonetheless, when comparing and contrasting the Malheur Occupation, the Sagebrush Rebellion, and the Wise Use Movement with the Agua Zarca Dam Conflict or the eco-populist village network in Thailand, it can be easily identified that the formers present a very strong antiforeignism, nativist, xenophobic, and class-based component (see Irons, 2018; Wittmer & Birner, 2005; Brick, 1995; Scheiber, 1982).

The last feature of these groups that can be extracted from our case studies is the way the groups pursue their goals. What eco-populism and eco-fascism have in common is their constant appeal to average citizens to take action against the so-called dominant and corrupted elite, as could have been observed during the Sagebrush Rebellion, the Agua Zarca Dam Conflict, in the movement “Fridays for the Future”, or during the Malheur Occupation, among others (see Stone Jr., 2022; Brünker et al., 2019; Middeldorp & Le Billon, 2019; Callaher, 2016; Scheiber, 1982). However, the *modus operandi* of eco-fascism differs considerably from the approaches embraced by eco-populist organizations; despite violence being present in both cases, its direction is quite different. More specifically, as noted in our case studies, eco-populist mobilizations and demonstrations are usually carried out peacefully. Although in some instances such mobilizations may end up being violent, in most cases violence is exerted vertically, that is from the state/power authorities and repression bodies to the demonstrators and eco-populists (see Middeldorp et al., 2019; Del Bene et al., 2018; León, 2016). On the other hand, when we scrutinize eco-fascists mobilizations, we can observe that violence is exerted horizontally; it could be either carried out by a lone wolf actor, as in the Christchurch Massacre or by an armed group of people or militia, as can be observed in the example of the Malheur occupation (see Campion, 2021; Crothers & O’Brien, 2020; Robbins, 2016). This does not necessarily exclude eco-fascists from undergoing repression from the state and security forces; however, this vertical violence has to be considered as a response by the state to the crimes these groups have already perpetrated, such as armed occupation or mass killings.

To sum up, eco-populism and eco-fascism have three main common features that also differentiate them: identitarianism, localism, and violence. First, while eco-populist organizations and groups tend to construct their identity beyond national borders, thus usually relying on transnational solidarities, eco-fascist groups frequently embrace a very strong nativism that is believed to give them some inherited rights and privileges over the natural resources at dispute. Second, both movements seek to improve the situation of the locals and Indigenous groups concerning the management and exploitation of natural resources. Their motivations could be considered class-based; however, it can be argued that eco-populist organizations aim to recover control and management of lands and resources from transnational corporations to reduce individual vulnerabilities and exploit them following traditional practices in a more sustainable, egalitarian, and traditional approach. On the other hand, eco-fascists seek to protect traditional structures and values, namely traditional family structure, patriarchy, and anti-foreignism, for them to exploit and obtain benefits from the resources in dispute. Finally, while violence in eco-populist mobilizations usually occurs as a consequence of the violent repression perpetrated by the state or the dominant elites, eco-fascists frequently consider violence as a legitimate and reasonable tool to accomplish their goals.

## **Conclusion**

Most scholars, experts, and politicians expect climate change to be a turning point in our lives, not only because of the impacts it will have on the population, but also due to the approaches needed to face them. Thus, it is not unusual to observe groups mobilizing and protesting against those whom they firmly consider the originators of this global phenomenon. Eco-populism has emerged as a response towards the capitalistic and neoliberal practices that massively and intensively extract natural resources in the Global South, thus exacerbating inequalities and vulnerabilities within and across countries. Nonetheless, as we have shown, eco-populism has undergone some changes and mutations that have resulted in different, more dangerous, and violent approaches that seek to somehow tackle the climate and resource management crisis. Eco-fascism is the result of a combination of nativist, xenophobic, anti-multiculturalism, anti-foreignism, anti-globalization, and traditional and backwards beliefs whose ultimate aim is to solve the contemporary problems through the systematic exclusion of whom are believed to be the cause of such challenges, namely the immigrants, global practices, and multiculturalism.

Though both eco-populism and eco-fascism may present some similarities, this article has attempted to showcase three commonly shared features that also make them considerably different. These particularities have been detected through the examination of different case studies and have been identified as identitarianism, localism, and violence. Nevertheless, although shared between eco-fascist and eco-populist organizations and supporters, when examined closely and carefully, it is not difficult to observe that these same common features are also distinctive from one movement to the next. Climate change needs to be approached from a multidimensional, multidisciplinary, transnational and just strategy that does not systematically exclude some cohorts

of the global population according to some supposed inherited privileges and rights.

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