

Terrorism in the Era of Ecological Change



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Introduction

Over the last four decades innovators have come up with many low or zero-carbon energy sources that have made some renewable sources cheaper than coal, with the intention to help the international community transition away from fossil fuel.¹ The need for such a systemic change comes because scientific evidence from such bodies as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the 400 percent increase in extreme weather events highlight the need for critical action to address greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.² And yet, the consistent reliance on fossil fuel has led to immense consternation, anger, and disillusionment particularly among the younger generation, who feel that the older generations do not appreciate their fear of an impending environmental apocalypse. These young climate-aware activists also feel patronised because often their fears are dismissed as youthful naivety or misguided idealism.³

Climate activism is a complex movement, involving many different actors and tactics. At its most basic, it calls on states to address global warming, but climate action is a nonexcludable global public good, which means that state some can free-ride, putting responsibility for action on others.⁴ It also means that states and communities are affected differently, as is the ability to adapt and mitigate to the changing climate.⁵ The diversity of the movement means that some approach climate change as a single issue in that they may only focus on fossil fuel dependence whereas others look for systemic changes that go beyond policies aimed at addressing global warming, through such concepts as climate justice.

Climate justice has become a central feature in the contemporary climate activist movement. This newish theme in climate politics is premised on seeing the inequality in inter-state relations. Activists frame the discussion through a victimisation lens and inequality coupled with an inability to bring forth the changes because climate activists

¹ Neil Gunningham. "Averting Climate Catastrophe: Environmental Activism, Extinction Rebellion and coalitions of Influence." *King's Law Journal* 30:2 (2019): 194-202.

² "Global Warming of 1.5°C: An IPCC special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018), www.ipcc.ch/sr15/ (accessed on 6 January 2023); Adam Aron. "3 reasons local climate activism is more powerful than people realize." *The Conversation* 26 December 2022, <https://theconversation.com/3-reasons-local-climate-activism-is-more-powerful-than-people-realize-196637> (accessed on 6 January 2023)

³ Greta Thunberg, Anna Taylor and others. "Think we should be at school? Today's climate strike is the biggest lesson of all." *The Guardian* 15 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/15/school-climate-strike-greta-thunberg> (accessed on 10 February 2023)

⁴ For instance, it is argued that China and India, two major carbon emitters, must take action to reverse their dependence on fossil fuel. However, as developing countries such as China and India were not subject to the emission reductions under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

⁵ Institute for Economics & Peace. *Ecological Threat Report 2021: Understanding Ecological Threats, Resilience and Peace*, Sydney, October 2021. <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources> (accessed 27 February 2023).

do not have political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental power.⁶ Greta Thunberg captured this reality when she declared in 2019:

“This movement [#FridaysForFuture] had to happen, we didn’t have a choice... We’ve seen years of negotiations, pathetic deals on climate change, fossil fuel companies being given free rein to carve open our lands, drill beneath our soils and burn away our futures for their profit... If those in power today don’t act, it will be our generation who will live through their failure... We have watched as politicians fumble, playing a political game rather than facing the facts that the solutions we need cannot be found within the current system. They don’t want to face the facts – we need to change the system if we are to try to act on the climate crisis.”⁷

This exploratory paper looks at the prospect of climate-based political violence and why such a development could occur. It begins by defining political violence, underlying the role of ideology and the belief that violence is the only way to bring about drastic, dramatic, and meaningful change, either because of frustration with the status quo or because change is not occurring fast enough. It draws on the premise that terrorism is a form of politically or religiously inspired violence with those using violence to challenge existing norms of governing society.⁸

To date there has been no substantive environmental, or ecological form of terrorism beyond some limited action in the 1980s and 1990s,⁹ but by offering a typology of climate activism and the emergence of the climate justice movement, the paper draws out the evolutionary change of climate activism, raising the possibility that violence remains a possibility, especially if one accepts the premise of a climate apartheid.¹⁰ In exploring the evolution, a clear line is drawn between the climate activists of the 1980s and 1990s in that the focus was either very much on animals or the testing of products on animals as seen with the Animal Liberation Front. The Earth Liberation Front and Earth First in that they sought a total systemic reengagement with the planet, whereas the contemporary climate action movement began by looking to policymakers to bring about change, and when that failed, activists sought to shame institutions into action.

⁶ Jason Wilson and Will Parrish. “Revealed: FBI and police monitoring Oregon anti-pipeline activists.” *The Guardian* 8 August 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/08/fbi-oregon-anti-pipeline-jordan-cove-activists> (accessed on 3 February 2023)

⁷ Greta Thunberg, Anna Taylor, and others. “Think we should be at school? Today’s climate strike is the biggest lesson of all.” *The Guardian* 15 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/15/school-climate-strike-greta-thunberg> (accessed on 10 February 2023)

⁸ Alex P. Schmid. “The Definition of Terrorism.” *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011): 86-87; Martha H. Crenshaw. “The Concept of Revolutionary Terrorism.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 16. 3 (1972): 383-396; Bruce Hoffman. *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁹ Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler and Cas Mudde. ““Ecoterrorism”: Terrorist Threat or Political Ploy?” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37:7 (2014): 586-603.

¹⁰ Damian Carrington. ““Climate apartheid”: UN expert says human rights may not survive.” *The Guardian* 25 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/25/climate-apartheid-united-nations-expert-says-human-rights-may-not-survive-crisis> (accessed on 10 February 2023); Jennifer L. Rice, Joshua Long, and Anthony Levenda. “Against climate apartheid: Confronting the persistent legacies of expendability for climate justice.” *EPE: Nature and Space* 5.2 (2022): 625-645.

When that proved ineffective, activists engage in peaceful civil disobedience such as the closing of roads to bring about change. A rise in lack of public trust in the political system and politicians, concern over new legislation prohibiting or curtailing climate action could push climate activists to explore new tactics that could lead to violence.¹¹ Works by activists such as Andreas Malm who has defended the destruction of fossil fuel property, equating it to removing a bomb from one's house to hunger strikes to forest occupation to blocking trains carrying oil.¹² The paper concludes with some general observations about the likelihood of climate action embracing terrorism.



¹¹ Haroon Siddiqu. "Curbs on protests in policing bill breach human rights laws, MPs and peers say." *The Guardian* 22 July 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/08/fbi-oregon-anti-pipeline-jordan-cove-activists> (accessed on 10 February 2023)

¹² Andreas Malm. "The moral case for destroying fossil fuel infrastructure." *The Guardian* 18 November 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/18/moral-case-destroying-fossil-fuel-infrastructure> (accessed on 23 February 2023)

Political Violence and the Belief in an Existential Threat

The scholarship on why individuals turn to violence to bring about political change is extensive. Studies have focused on tangible, material sources as the cause for the radicalization, as well as exclusion, marginalisation, discrimination, as well as injustice and political repression.¹³ Some studies have looked at the role of education, underlining that knowledge could lead to violence because education enlightens the individual in terms of what they have or more importantly what they are lack or denied – relative deprivation.¹⁴

Ideology, when understood as vision and principles, seems to be a key element in why some individuals choose violence to bring about political change. Ideology not only underscores the views of a particular group but also underlines its overarching purposes, including the tactics that the group would use to achieve its goals. Additionally, ideology distinguishes between the enlightened (in-group) and the larger community by laying out why the in-group is wanting change and the role of the out-group in denying it.¹⁵ The link between the vision, principles and actions stems from seeing ideology as encapsulating a set of ideas about society and how society should exist, and when those holding and espousing those ideas feel rejected, unheard and/or ignored, they may turn to action to bring about. Put differently, the ideas provide the vision of what the individuals want to achieve, and why violence is legitimate.¹⁶ Cognition, causation and exposure further help to untangle why individuals may turn to political violence as they may not understand the core ideas that were meant to inspire their violence, but what these individuals did understand comradeship, specific grievance, a search for action, experience, and the like.¹⁷

Those that turn to political violence to change body politics seem to go through a process – radicalisation.¹⁸ Firstly, they look at the status quo and see it as wrong, whether morally, ethically, culturally, economically, or socially. They recognise that the existing political system could be reformed peacefully if enough people protest and express their displeasure at the status quo, the political class will bring about legislation that would change the political, social, economic, and cultural system because it wants

¹³ Edward Newman. "Exploring the "root causes" of terrorism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29.8 (2006): 749-772; Alex P. Schmid. "Root causes of terrorism: Some conceptual notes, a set of indicators, and a model." *Democracy and Security* 1.2 (2005): 127-136.

¹⁴ Brandon Ives and Jori Breslawski. "Greed, grievance, or graduates? Why do men rebel?" *Journal of Peace Research* 59.3 (2022): 319-336; Ted Gurr. *Why Men Rebel*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog. *Engineers of Jihad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Assaf Moghadam. "The Salafi-jihad as a religious ideology." *CTC Sentinel* 1.3 (2008): 14-16.

¹⁶ Gary A. Ackerman and Michael Burnham. "Towards a definition of terrorist ideology." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33:6 (2021): 1160-1190.

¹⁷ Donald Holbrook and John Horgan. "Terrorism and ideology." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13.6 (2019): 3; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko. "Mechanisms of political radicalization: Pathways toward terrorism." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20.3 (2008): 415-433; Assaf Moghadam. "Failure and disengagement in the Red Army Faction." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35.2 (2012): 156-181.

¹⁸ Sophia Moskalenko and Clark McCauley. "Measuring political mobilization: The distinction between activism and radicalism." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21.2 (2009): 239-260.

to avoid a revolution. A classic example of the political class taking action to avert a revolution was the 1832 Great Reform Act, which raised British voting rights by nearly 50 percent and redistributed 144 constituency seats.¹⁹ An alternative way to foster change is through the action of a small group of individuals – whom the state may come to define as terrorists depending on their tactics – operating under the self-proclaim banner of political enlightenment serves as the vanguard to bring about a new order. These individuals have taken the view that the system cannot be reformed peacefully. Consequently, the campaign is largely violent, directed at the political class through the public experiences the brunt of the violence because by targeting the public pressure is placed on the ruling elite.²⁰ The typology should highlight why terrorism is best understood as a politically driven tactic involving the threat or use of violence or force to instil fear with the intention of changing public policy or the political system.²¹

When looking at climate activists, it is clear they are ideological in that they understand the science behind global warming, the nature of the political, economic, social, and cultural system, and have adopted tactics that they hope could foster peaceful change.²² The activists want to see a system-wide change encapsulating the political, economic, social, cultural, and generational. Historically, such changes occur as part of an evolutionary social process.²³ For them the transformation can either occur with the ruling elites supporting the transition because they recognise that it is moral, ethical, and practical. As things stand most climate activists are looking to operate within established boundaries, however the question that emerges is if one believes that an existential threat exists, one must wonder how long their patience will stay, particularly when change is piecemeal, slow, and the ruling elite is not receptive to the need for revolutionary change.

¹⁹ There is a possible link between the 1832 Act and the French Revolution, in that without the latter, the British political aristocracy would have sought to crush the demands for substantive political change. Thomas Ertman. "The Great Reform Act of 1832 and British Democratization." *Comparative Political Studies* 43.8-9 (2010): 1000-1022; Toke S. Aidt and Raphaël Franck. "What motivates an oligarchic elite to democratize? Evidence from the roll call vote on the great reform act of 1832." *The Journal of Economic History* 79.3 (2019): 773-825.

²⁰ Boaz Ganor. "Terrorism as a strategy of psychological warfare." *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 9.1-2 (2005): 33-43; Martha Crenshaw. "The psychology of political terrorism." *Political Psychology* 21.2 (2000): 405-420.

²¹ Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler and Cas Mudde. "Ecoterrorism": Terrorist Threat or Political Ploy?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37:7 (2014): 586-603; Alex P. Schmidt and Albert I. Jongman, *Political Terrorism* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1988, 2nd edition).

²² Greta Thunberg, Anna Taylor and others. "Think we should be at school? Today's climate strike is the biggest lesson of all." *The Guardian* 15 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/15/school-climate-strike-greta-thunberg> (accessed on 10 February 2023)

²³ Samuel P. Huntington. *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

Climate Activism From Ecotage to Civil Disobedience

In the 1970s, individuals, groups and states mobilised to address global warming. These early advocates for climate action focused on peaceful lobbying to call on states and by extension companies to change their behaviours in response to rising temperatures. The initial campaign was not based on scientific evidence *per se*, but rather on activists' belief that action was necessary. This may explain why in 1986 only 39 percent of the public reported having "heard or read anything about the greenhouse effect." With greater media attention and record hot summers, the public became more aware of climate change.²⁴ It is therefore unsurprising that the contemporary climate activist movement draws heavily on scientific evidence, and it is also supported by the scientific community, highlighting not only that the planet is warming, but that action was vital for the survival of humanity.²⁵

In the 1990s and 2000s, there were a few entities and individuals that engaged in what came to be known as eco-terrorism. The two main ones were the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). These entities allegedly carried out around 600 criminal acts between 1996 and 2002 leading to some \$43 million in damage as they carried out ecotage, which mean that the focus is not to harm people but rather inanimate objects.²⁶ The ELF operated as a leaderless resistance movement, with no discernible organisational structure. The movement, whose goal was rollbacking industrialisation because ideologically they draw on biocentrism and deep ecology relied on the members to act on their initiative.²⁷ In 2001, partly because of the activities of these entities, the FBI named the ELF, which as the country's leading domestic terrorist threat. The members choose violence arguing that legal protests are unlikely to bring about change. Their preferred tactics were arson and sabotage.²⁸

The link between the ELF/ALF movements and contemporary activists is their anti-dualistic and generally anti-nationalist attitudes. Ideologically, both maintain there is a need to address how humans behave and interact with the environment; they share a sense that industrialisation is harming the environment; leading to a call for direct action because the political class is beholden to vested interests. Where there are differences between those groups and the contemporary climate activist movement is

²⁴ Matthew C. Nisbet, Teresa Myers. "The Polls—Trends: Twenty Years of Public Opinion about Global Warming." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71.3 (2007): 444-470.

²⁵ Hana Morel and Janna oud Ammerveld. "From Climate Crisis to Climate Action: Exploring the Entanglement of Changing Heritage in the Anthropocene." *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice* 12,3-4 (2021): 271-291.

²⁶ Stefan H. Leader and Peter Probst. "The Earth Liberation Front and Environmental Terrorism.," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15:4 (2003): 38.

²⁷ Biocentrism refers to a belief that all organisms are equal and have moral rights and considerations. Deep ecology is a call to move away from industrialisation and return to a way of life that preserves the environment. Stefan H. Leader and Peter Probst. "The Earth Liberation Front and Environmental Terrorism.," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15:4 (2003): 39-40.

²⁸ Steve Vanderheiden. "Eco-terrorism or justified resistance? Radical environmentalism and the "war on terror"." *Politics & Society* 33.3 (2005): 427-428; Stefan H. Leader and Peter Probst. "The Earth Liberation Front and Environmental Terrorism." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15:4 (2003): 38-40.

in the tactics, in that both the ELF and the ALF engaged in violence, mainly against property, whereas contemporary climate activists emphasise peaceful civil disobedience. Additionally, the current movement is heavily vested in science, whereas with the ELF and ALF, science was not a core motivator for action, but rather ideological predispositions.

The 2009 UNFCCC meeting in Copenhagen (COP15) was a seminal moment in the history of climate activism. The meeting, attended by around 10,000 policymakers and countless climate activists had been framed as a 'now-or-never' opportunity to address global warming. The aim was to build on the 2007 Bali Action Plan whose goal was long-term cooperative action to reduce emissions, requiring states to engage in mitigation, adaptation, technology development and financing. Additionally, climate activists also hoped that with the election of Barack Obama, the US could become more cooperative on climate negotiations.²⁹ However, instead of having binding commitments, the international community was deeply divided on such issues as what would amount to an effective global stabilisation goal and whether commitments from developing countries should be measurable.³⁰ The Conference ended up opting for more soft targets, precipitating a sense of demoralisation, disappointment, frustration, and disillusionment. The sense of failure may explain why many activists changed tactics and opted to focus on localised action in the form of changing local policies to meet specific targets.³¹

Six years after COP15, policymakers and activists met in Paris for what was COP21. This time, policymakers, possibly inspired by localised action, the growth of the climate action movement, and incontrovertible scientific evidence, agreed on a progressive commitment to address global warming. Although COP21 symbolised progress, the climate action movement was deeply unsatisfied, seeing the commitments made in Paris as insufficient. The sense of disappointment fuelled a new form of activism,³² embodied by such people as Bill McKibben and Greta Thunberg. McKibben argued it is ethically wrong to rely on fossil fuel because of the damage it was causing, leading him to assert that institutional investors are morally wrong to profit from fossil fuel.

²⁹ Christopher J Bailey. "Assessing President Obama's climate change record." *Environmental Politics* 28.5 (2019): 847-865.

³⁰ Peter Christoff. "Cold climate in Copenhagen: China and the United States at COP15." *Environmental Politics* 19:4 (2010): 637-656.

³¹ Joost de Moor, et al. "New kids on the block: Taking stock of the recent cycle of climate activism." *Social Movement Studies* 20.5 (2021): 619-625.

³² Social, environmental activism in itself is not new. The FFF and XR movements should be considered as new because many of the individuals involved had never protested before, the FFF movement, at least initially, was led by teenage girls and women. Both movements look for government action to address the climate crisis, which differs them from many other environmental movements that either looked for local action or wanted to overthrow the government. Joost de Moor, et al. "New kids on the block: Taking stock of the recent cycle of climate activism." *Social Movement Studies* 20.5 (2021): 622.

The Moral and Ethical Argument for Climate Action

Bill McKibben, a veteran climate action campaigner and academic, wanted to see substantive action to avert global warming. Initially, McKibben working with his university students promoted the 'Step It Up' campaign and the 350.org. Their intent was to encourage society to see the fossil fuel sector as a villain, which would lead to pressure being put on policymakers to withdraw the social licence that the sector had. They therefore looked to portray the fossil fuel sector as immoral, dangerous, and evil, which is why it needs to be stopped.³³ The goal was to end the use of fossil fuel through such peaceful means as divestment, which meant that their target audience was investing institutions that looked to serve the public good and higher education students who would drive the civil disobedience, information campaign. The focus on the latter was not only because McKibben was the Schumann Distinguished Scholar in Environmental Studies at Middlebury College and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which gave him access to university students, but because it was felt that universities already have student activism, they possess moral and scientific standings, and the media takes an interest in these places.³⁴ While McKibben and his students campaigned to encourage divestment, the Carbon Tracker Initiative highlighted the top 200 fossil fuel companies infusing it with an economic argument that the value of fossil fuel was inflated ('carbon bubble'). Richard Heede of the Climate Accountability Institute furthered the moral and ethical argument that McKibben and the 350.org were promoting by showing that nearly 75 percent of CO₂ emitted since the 1750s was traceable to the 90 largest fossil fuel and cement producers. Heede's work underlined the moral argument that the developed world had an ethical obligation to address climate change.³⁵ Thus, what McKibben, the Carbon Tracker team, Richard Heede and other NGOs were doing at this stage was engage less with policymakers who many felt either did not appreciate the sense of urgency or did not believe in the science or feared the social, economic, and political fallout if they moved away from fossil fuel, but focus instead on institutional investors looking to persuade them to divest from fossil fuel. Simply, the purpose was to shame these entities into moving away from investing in fossil fuel and in doing help shift society to 'Go Fossil Free.'

³³ Bill McKibben. "The case for fossil-fuel divestment." *Rolling Stones* 22 February 2013: 1-10; Naomi Klein. "Time for big green to go fossil free." *The Nation* 20 May 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/174143/time-big-green-go-fossil-free> (accessed 6 January 2013).

³⁴ Todd Schifeling and Andrew J. Hoffman. "Bill McKibben's influence on US climate change discourse: shifting field-level debates through radical flank effects." *Organization & Environment* 32.3 (2019): 214; Alida Monaco. "Divestment and greenhouse gas emissions: an event-study analysis of university fossil fuel divestment announcements." *Journal of Sustainable Finance & Investment* (2022): 1-29, DOI: 10.1080/20430795.2022.2030664

³⁵ Julie Ayling and Neil Gunningham. "Non-state governance and climate policy: the fossil fuel divestment movement." *Climate Policy* 17:2 (2017): 131-149.



European
Eye on
Radicalization

Friday for Future and Extinction Rebellion: Climate Activism is Changing

Greta Thunberg offered a different form of climate activism. She, whether intentionally or not, gave rise to the ‘#FridaysForFuture (FFF) movement. The movement began when in 2018, aged 15 Thunberg choose to skip school. Holding a banner *skolstrejk för klimatet* (school strike for climate) she stood in front of the Swedish parliament to demand action.³⁶ Her action inspired others to join, giving rise to the hashtag ‘#FridaysForFuture’ and the phenomenon of a climate strike, a reference to people walking off their jobs or school to demand action to address global warming.³⁷ This climate action movement, which now encapsulates the Youth for Climate, School Strikes for Climate, Sunrise Movement, and others is largely peaceful, driven by young school-aged teenage girls and young women angry at what they see as lack of action by governments.³⁸

The age of these activists is significant for several reasons. There is a broad ageist assault on climate activism, as reports – more so in the conservative media world – tend to emphasise their age linking it to youthful idealism and wokism.³⁹ From the young climate activists perspective, they accuse the older generation of not only of inaction but for being complicit in threatening their future because there to date there has not been substantive reform of the political-economic-social-cultural system.⁴⁰ They also maintain that many policymakers reject scientific evidence showing that climate change is responsible for at least 150,000 deaths annually and that between 1993 and 2021, sea levels rose by 3.3 millimetres per year, there are also larger wildfires, and longer drought periods.⁴¹ Additionally, many point out that even though for many 18 to 25 years-old climate change is the most important issue that the world is facing, policymakers are not taking action.⁴² The young climate activists assert that what motivates them is that their future is being threatened by the post-Second World War

³⁶ Jonathan Watts. "Greta Thunberg, schoolgirl climate change warrior." *The Guardian* 11 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/11/greta-thunberg-schoolgirl-climate-change-warrior-some-people-can-let-things-go-i-cant> (accessed 17 February 2023).

³⁷ Joost de Moor, et al. "New kids on the block: Taking stock of the recent cycle of climate activism." *Social Movement Studies* 20.5 (2021): 621. Emily Witt. "How Greta Thunberg transformed existential dread into a movement." *The New Yorker*. (6 April 2020), <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/how-greta-thunberg-transformed-existential-dread-into-a-movement> (accessed 10 February 2023)

³⁸ See for example Scott Morrison's response to School Strike 4 Climate, which he claimed lacked "context and perspective". Steve Biddulph. "Morrison a 'bad dad' for denigrating young climate protesters." *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/morrison-a-bad-dad-for-denigrating-young-climate-protesters-20190930-p52w63.html> (accessed 10 January 2023).

³⁹ Zoe Bergmann and Ringo Ossewaarde. "Youth climate activists meet environmental governance: ageist depictions of the FFF movement and Greta Thunberg in German newspaper coverage." *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 15:3 (2020): 267-290

⁴⁰ Jody Rosen, "Staring down Donald Trump, the same elephant in every room." *The New York Times Magazine* 12 December 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/16/magazine/the-same-elephant-in-every-room.html> (accessed 17 February 2023).

⁴¹ Corey H. Basch, Bhavya Yalamanchili, and Joseph Fera. "# Climate change on TikTok: a content analysis of videos." *Journal of community health* 47 (2022): 163–167.

⁴² Emanuela Barbiroglio. "Generation Z fears climate change more than anything else." *Forbes* 9 December 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emanuelabarbiroglio/2019/12/09/generation-z-fears-climate-change-more-than-anything-else/?sh=4ce58937501b> (accessed 23 February 2023)

liberal international order and the reliance on fossil fuel. In other words, they seem dissatisfied with the Peace Dividend, which they tie into climate injustice.

In terms of tactics, this youthful movement has looked to social media marketing and performative power to promote an environmentalist agenda based on science, a new interpretation of representational politics, and civil disobedience. The intention is to persuade the ruling elite through mass mobilisation to work to change the system. Consequently, Thunberg and other climate activists such as Amariyanna Copeny (Little Miss Flint), Vanessa Nakate, Autumn Peltier look to engage with the UN and the international press corps, as all covers their activism with the intention that awareness would lead to action.⁴³ They use social media over 80 percent of people between the age of 18 and 29 in the US alone, use at least one of the following TikTok, YouTube, and/or Instagram, which means that they have a wide reach.⁴⁴ Simply, because the goal of these leaders and members of this movement is to use morality, knowledge and the existing political system to bring about change, they recognise they need to educate first, which would lead to mobilisation, which hopefully would lead to action, with action ranging from demanding divestment in the fossil fuel sector to government action.



⁴³ Samantha Hautea, et al. "Showing they care (or don't): Affective publics and ambivalent climate activism on TikTok." *Social Media & Society* 7.2 (2021): 1-14.

⁴⁴ Corey H. Basch, Bhavya Yalamanchili, and Joseph Fera. "#Climate change on TikTok: a content analysis of videos." *Journal of community health* 47 (2022): 163–167.

Climate Justice and the Rising Belief of An Existential Threat

In 2007, in Bali, a coalition of activists came together to form the Climate Justice Now (CJN). This movement rose in part as a reaction to Climate Action Network (CAN), formed in 1989 to question the science of climate change.⁴⁵ CJN has several themes. Firstly, that there is an unequal relationship between the Global South and the Global North. Secondly, the connection between the changing climate and social inequality. Both these issues were framed through a justice lens, which leads to two communities: the climate privileged, and the climate precarious. The former refers to those that can mitigate, adapt and isolate themselves to the changing climate, whereas the latter are the ones that cannot protect themselves from climate change.⁴⁶

A rudimentary interpretation of climate justice defines it as a framework connecting the debate over climate change and social inequalities through structural violence and recognition of a distinction between the privileged and underprivileged. Principally, climate justice connects development (Sustainable Development Goals) and human rights to achieve a human-centred approach.⁴⁷ A more progressive interpretation sees climate justice is to see it as a movement looking to address historical wrong, because climate change tends to compound the inequality. Activists point to the legacy of sugar plantations mainly in the Caribbean. These white-owned business, employed or used slaves. They generate massive incomes for the Europeans who used the money to invest in industrialisation, at the expense to the people that did the labour and the communities that had to deal with the environmental damage that these plantations caused. This is why climate justice activists identify two distinct communities, one that benefits from the post-Second World War liberal international economic system, which relies on fossil fuel and rewards the industrialised world. This community's development and success comes at the expense of less developed economies, the other community, which hold many of the raw materials that sustains the wealthy. Moreover, climate justice underlines that often environmental policies that is adopted in the global north, has detrimental impact on the global South, as seen for example with corn ethanol policies tend to drive up prices in Central America. In other words, not only are the most disadvantaged are the least responsible for climate change, but they also experience the change more than the wealthy ones, who ignore or obfuscate their international obligations to address pollution, climate change, and adaption and mitigation.⁴⁸ Consequently, the goal of climate justice is to address this inequality

⁴⁵ Anders Svensson and Mattias Wahlström. "Climate change or what? Prognostic framing by Fridays for Future protesters." *Social Movement Studies* 22:1 (2023): 1-22,

⁴⁶ Jennifer L. Rice, Joshua Long, and Anthony Levenda. "Against climate apartheid: Confronting the persistent legacies of expendability for climate justice." *EPE: Nature and Space* 5.2 (2022): 625-645.

⁴⁷ Libby Porter. "Climate Justice in a Climate Changed World." *Planning Theory & Practice* 21:2 (2020): 294.

⁴⁸ Peter Newell, et al. "Toward transformative climate justice: An emerging research agenda." *Climate Change* 12.6 (2021): 1-17.

through different initiatives ranging from debt cancellation (climate debts) to reparations to "loss and damage" funds to more revolutionary systemic changes.



Civil Disobedience: Is Climate Activism Changing?

In May 2018, in the UK, a separate movement focusing on climate activism through ‘regenerative culture’ emerged.⁴⁹ The new force, operating under the banner of Climate Extinction, which became known as Extinction Rebellion (XR) is decentralised and leaderless with over 130 groups in the UK alone, and close to 700 globally, operating in over 40 countries⁵⁰ making it hard to generalise when it comes to tactics.

When XR first appeared, the members had three principal demands. Firstly, they wanted the government to ‘tell the truth’ about the climate crisis, indicating disbelief is not only an official assessment of climate change but a claim that current measures are insufficient to prevent extinction. Secondly, a commitment by governments to net-zero carbon emissions by 2025. Thirdly, the establishment of a Citizens’ Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice to oversee the transition towards climate justice.⁵¹ XR supporters operate through non-violent, direct civil disobedience ranging from road closure to throwing liquids on artwork glass, gluing themselves to gallery walls or government building, with intention of attracting the attention of the public as to the need for climate action.⁵² The measures cause inconvenience and economic loss, but they are not meant to cause physical harm to the public, though some would accept property damage.

These campaigns, whether #FridaysForFuture, Climate Justice Now and Extinction Rebellion look for systemic change to address climate change based on the science-driven belief that the world is facing a climate emergency has led supporters to undertake dramatic disruptive measures, with some still showing faith in working with policymakers to bring about change. These movements have over time emphasise the existential threat that climate change poses by using such concepts as a climate emergency, extinction, crises, and the like. Additionally, both also highlight the uneven effect of climate change, as they draw attention to the fact that poorer countries and communities face a heavier burden when it comes to global warming. These themes are

⁴⁹ The concept of ‘regenerative culture’ is inspired by the writing of Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone who called for actions that connects the people to the planet through a duty of care. Joanne Macy and Chris Johnstone. *Active hope: how to face the mess we’re in without going crazy*. (New World Library, 2012). Emily Westwell and Josh Bunting. “The regenerative culture of Extinction Rebellion: self-care, people care, planet care” *Environmental Politics* 29:3 (2020): 546-551. Ben Charlie Smoke. “How XR’s Controversial Co-founder fell out with the group he created.” *Vice* 24 September 2020, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7wpad/extinction-rebellion-roger-hallam-beyond-politics> (accessed 19 January 2023)

⁵⁰ Neil Gunningham, “Averting Climate Catastrophe: Environmental Activism, Extinction Rebellion and coalitions of Influence.” *King’s Law Journal* 30:2 (2019): 198; Marianna Fotaki and Hamid Foroughi. “Extinction Rebellion: Green activism and the fantasy of leaderlessness in a decentralized movement.” *Leadership* 18.2 (2022): 224-246.

⁵¹ Extinction Rebellion. 2019. Our demands. Extinction Rebellion UK, Available from: <https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/demands/> [Accessed 5 January 2023].

⁵² George Petras and Jennifer Borresen. “From Mona Lisa to The Scream: Climate activists protest by defacing art.” *USA Today* 2 December 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/graphics/2022/11/30/climate-activists-attack-paintings-mona-lisa-scream/10699588002/> (access 15 February 2023)

more prominent in the XR movement, which has an international solidarity working group. XR has also held events seeking to raise awareness of how climate change impacts the community leading to a focus on climate justice.⁵³



⁵³ Tom Smiles and Gareth AS Edwards. "How does Extinction Rebellion engage with climate justice? A case study of XR Norwich." *Local Environment* 26.12 (2021): 1445-1460.

Conclusion

Political change is a feature of human evolution. History has shown that if there is opposition to the change and if there is repression, the change is likely to occur through violence.⁵⁴ More often, the process for change begins peacefully, with either the ruling elite or an enlightened vanguard leading to calls and actions for change. Both entities recognise that something is wrong with the status quo. If the demands are ignored or rejected, there may be more calls for peaceful actions such as demonstrations and even civil disobedience, before a select few, reject the entire process, and adopt an ideology that legitimises violence by asserting that all peaceful means have been exhausted.

When it comes to climate activism and the prospect of the movement turning violent stems from the slow pace at which action on global warming and environmental protection is taking place. These two elements coupled with the rising disillusionment with the post-Second World War liberal international order could mean that some activists would feel it morally just to engage in violence to effect change. Such activists would draw on scientific evidence that there is a climate emergency that demands urgent action. They could argue that governments are insufficiently responsive. They would highlight that the system is unjust and discriminatory. The climate injustice argument would emphasise that the poorest and most vulnerable bear the brunt of the changing climate, and eventually when the climate becomes so unbearable and many have no options as to where to flee, they will turn to action to effect meaningful change.

⁵⁴ Theda Skocpol. *States and social revolutions: A comparative analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).