

From Protest to Violence: Ecoterrorism as an Emerging Security Challenge

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Abstract

Climate change has emerged as a strategic security concern globally, with its severity intensifying at an alarming pace. In parallel, incidents of environmental extremism and ecoterrorism are becoming increasingly frequent. Ecoterrorism, a global phenomenon, involves the use of violence or illegal means driven by environmental motives. It has evolved in response to the escalating impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. This phenomenon is characterised by the actions of radical environmental groups that resort to unlawful and often violent methods to protest against ecological destruction and perceived governmental inaction regarding climate policy. This research explores the historical foundations, ideological underpinnings, and significant incidents associated with ecoterrorism. The analysis offers global perspectives on the issue. In addition, the study examines relevant international anti-terrorism legal frameworks, proposes potential strategies for mitigation, and considers the broader implications of this emerging threat. Drawing on open-source data, the article contends that ecoterrorism represents an escalating security risk likely to intensify as environmental extremism becomes further radicalised. It underscores the pressing need for greater global awareness of ecoterrorism, as mostly the issue remains under-recognised and is frequently conflated with ordinary criminal behaviour. The paper concludes that robust international legal measures and decisive policy responses are essential to address this pressing challenge effectively.

Keywords: Ecoterrorism, Climate Change, Environmental Extremist, Radicalisation, Environmental Terrorism

INTRODUCTION

Two of the biggest issues facing the world right now are environmental pollution and terrorism. The rise of extreme right violence and eco-fascist groups poses significant threats to global security and the evolution of ecoterrorism (Chalecki, 2024). Different environmental extremist groups are threatening harm and exploiting the environment and property. Ecoterrorism is defined as ‘the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature ... by an environmentally-oriented ... group for environmental-

political reasons” (Jarboe 2002). ‘Eco-terrorism’ is an act of violence which is committed in support of environmental causes, against people or property to intimidate governments or societies, often linked to radical environmental groups (Buell, 2009). It is a type of terrorism that uses environmental radicalisation to achieve its objectives, often driven by climate change, resource shortages, and financial stresses that ultimately results in increased global insecurity, significant economic losses, and environmental contamination (Spadaro, 2020). Ecoterrorism can result from environmental extremism, which is defined as extreme measures taken to preserve the environment, when people or organisations turn to unlawful or violent acts. It means extreme or radical acts conducted by people or organisations to promote environmental causes; these actions frequently go beyond nonviolent protest or activism (Silke and Morrison, 2022). These disruptive activities often focus on environmental issues like pollution, deforestation, animal rights, or climate change, often seen as excessive or detrimental, to gain attention and stop alleged damage. Extremists may commit unlawful acts on companies’ they believe to be environmentally damaging because they are unsatisfied by what they perceive to be inaction from governments or businesses.

One thing which needs to be focused is that Ecoterrorism is different from Environmental terrorism, environmental terrorism involves individuals attacking in “situ environmental’ resources or infrastructure to achieve political or ideological aims unconnected to the environment, using unconventional targets like water resources, forest areas, and ecosystem sites (Eagan, 1996, Schwartz, 1998). For ecoterrorists, the target is usually a human-built resource, and the motive is anti-economic, specifically to thwart development (Loadenthal, 2014). This distinction underscores the divergent ideological foundations of the two phenomena, where ecoterrorism is rooted in radical environmental advocacy, whereas environmental terrorism exploits ecological vulnerabilities for broader political or strategic purposes.

Aspect	Eco Terrorism	Environmental Terrorism
Definition	Use or threat of violence by radical environmental groups to prevent ecological degradation or protest perceived inaction	Use or threat of violence targeting the environment or ecological systems to achieve political, military, or ideological objectives not necessarily related to environmentalism.
Primary Motive	Pro-environmental: Motivated by ecological preservation, animal	Anti-environmental or instrumental: The environment is targeted to

	rights, or anti-industrial sentiment.	cause economic, social, or political disruption.
Perpetrators	Radical environmental activists (e.g., Earth Liberation Front, Animal Liberation Front).	Non-state armed groups, terrorists, or hostile actors using environmental harm as a weapon (e.g., polluting water sources during conflict).
Targets	Human-made infrastructure perceived as environmentally harmful (e.g., logging sites, labs).	Framed under “traditional terrorism” that uses environmental damage as a tactic or weapon.
Legal Framing	Typically framed as "special-interest terrorism" with environmental justifications.	Framed under “traditional terrorism” that uses environmental damage as a tactic or weapon.

Adapted from: Eagan, S.P. (1996), Schwartz, D.M. (1998), Spadaro, P.A. (2020)

Environmental terrorists are anti-environment. Whereas ecoterrorist are the people who target resource-extractive facilities, and their goal is to protect the ecosystem from what they see to be harm brought by human exploitation, overconsumption, capitalism, and inadequate implementation of climate policies developed by governments or international bodies (Vision of Humanity, 2023).

The idea that attacking natural resources essentially weakens a state or government is the justification for attacks on these resources by non-state armed organisations. Such attacks are seen as a way to force political opponents into submission because these resources are frequently linked to certain communities or companies (Da Silva, 2020). This notion is essentially incorrect because all ecosystem services are interrelated and the loss of one resource will eventually cause ecological imbalance, which will ultimately harm everyone.

Extremist organisations use the region's natural systems for ecoterrorism and resource-driven conflicts, taking advantage of environmental vulnerabilities to achieve their political, ideological, and financial objectives in spite of the dire effects of climate change. This concept is consistent with the larger idea of eco-fascism and is similar to extremist beliefs, such as those of ecoterrorists and radical extremist (Gallagher, 2023, Lederer et al., 2024). Weapons used in acts of terror range from basic weapons to chemical weapons, firearms, and explosives, all of which are easily accessible to these radical groups (Guczalska, 2023).

Environmental extremism contributes to violent extremism and ecoterrorism through resource control, which can have long-term negative effects on the economy, political instability, and public health. The growing threat of ecoterrorism and environmental extremism is inextricably linked to climate change and its consequences for international security. As environmental degradation worsens due to unsustainable human activities and weak climate policy, extremist movements take advantage of these vulnerabilities, utilising violence and sabotage in the name of environmental protection. However, such tactics undercut legitimate environmental campaigning, diminish public trust, and worsen sociopolitical instability. This paper focuses on eco terrorism and contends that comprehending ecoterrorism's ideological underpinnings, intersection with global climate concerns, and broader consequences for environmental governance and security is necessary for dealing with it.

HISTORY OF ECOTERRORISM:

Ecoterrorism emerged during the late twentieth century as a manifestation of radical environmental activism. Initially characterised by sporadic and isolated acts of sabotage, it evolved into more structured and confrontational forms of direct action aimed at preventing or retaliating against perceived environmental degradation. The term *ecoterrorism* was first coined in 1983 by libertarian activist Ron Arnold, who served as the executive vice president of the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise (CDFE). It was subsequently introduced into statutory discourse in 1988 during congressional testimony associated with the Anti-Drug Abuse Act.

The escalation of environmental crises and the perceived ineffectiveness of institutional responses contributed to the proliferation of such activities globally. These developments reflect a transition from individual radical acts to more organised efforts employing illegal tactics in the name of ecological preservation (Da Silva, 2020; Vanderheiden, 2005).

Among the most prominent ecoterrorist organisations is the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), which emerged in the 1990s. The ELF has been responsible for numerous high-profile acts of arson, sabotage, and property destruction, primarily targeting corporations involved in deforestation, urban development, and animal experimentation. Its decentralised and clandestine structure has facilitated the spread of its ideology and tactics across multiple countries (Potter, 2011). On December 31, 1999, four environmental activists affiliated with the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) committed an act of arson at Michigan State University (MSU), targeting Room 324 of Agriculture Hall. The office belonged to the Agricultural Biotechnology Support Project (ABSP) a program promoting genetically modified (GM) crops in developing countries. Three weeks later, ELF claimed responsibility through a communiqué, framing the attack as resistance against the imposition of genetically modified agriculture on nations in Asia, Latin

America, and Africa. The act was positioned by the group as a symbolic rejection of what they viewed as biocolonialism and ecological harm under the guise of scientific development.

Similarly, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), active since the late 1970s, has engaged in illegal direct action to disrupt practices perceived as exploitative or cruel to animals. These have included raids on laboratories, the release of animals, and the destruction of equipment. Both ELF and ALF operate under leaderless resistance models, making them difficult to monitor and infiltrate (Best & Nocella, 2006). ALF and ELF targeted construction sites and forestry industries in the Pacific Northwest. They were in charge of destroying large equipment used in deforestation and tree spiking, which involves driving metal spikes into trees to stop logging. In an attempt to stop logging operations through violent means, radical environmental groups have also targeted European forest industry activities by poisoning trees and destroying forestry equipment (Tides of Flame, 2016)

Additionally, the group *Earth First!* founded in 1980 spearheaded civil disobedience campaigns, most notably against deforestation in the California redwoods. Though it initially embraced a philosophy of non-violent resistance, the group's rhetoric and some actions influenced the radicalization of subsequent environmental movements and contributed to the legitimisation of sabotage as a form of protest (Foreman, 1991; Scarce, 1990). The Monkeywrenching strategy such as tree spiking, to stop the tree from being cut down is associated with Earth First. Another tactic associated with Earth First is unfurling a 300-foot black plastic sheet over a dam to halt its construction in 1981 (Smith, 2024). Dave Foreman, Earth's founder describes the conception of this movement that all living things have an inalienable right to exist, and all humans should consider earth first than mankind. He emphasizes that Earth should be the top priority in human actions, and then that action's morality is decided by how well it benefits the planet. According to their declaration, Earth is a goddess and should be worshipped by humans. Earth First is a radical environmental group that has done various violent actions in the name of environmental conservation.

The global "movement of movements" that fights violence against animals and the environment through economic sabotage has been termed "ecoterrorism" by governments, the media, and researchers. ELF and ALF committed about thousands of crimes and caused about millions of dollar damage. However, the number of ALF and ELF attacks decreased by about 50% between 2001 and 2002. Of these 160 cases, 13% involved the theft or release of caged animals, 17.5% involved arson, and 69% involved vandalism and sabotage (Trujillo, 2005). Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is another non-profit militant conservation organisation founded in 1977 that works to protect the oceans and marine life using illegal tactics. These organisation s fought against a variety of environmental issues, arguing that an uncompromising approach is required because of

environmental necessity. They target property with their destructive actions, and they have threatened to kill those they believe pose a threat to their cause (Nagtzaam and Lentini, 2007). Ecoterrorism can have a greater impact now than in prior decades due to the increasing climate catastrophe.

In addition to this, the states' reaction to environmental activism campaigns has raised some concerns about the suppression of civil liberties. Environmental extremism frequently results from ideological views that put the environment above social, legal, or economic factors, or from dissatisfaction with what is considered to be governments' or companies' inaction on pressing environmental issues. Although environmental extremism emphasizes how urgent environmental issues are, it still causes public hostility and evokes strong government responses due to violent acts taken by environmental extremists to force change. Ecoterrorism can polarize public opinion, leading to repression of peaceful movements as governments may impose strict laws against protests, stifling democratic engagement on environmental issues (Hicks, 2024). A constructive dialogue, rather than coercive tactics, remains the most effective path to meaningful change.

IDEOLOGY BEHIND ECO-TERRORISM:

Discussions on the root causes of terrorism have primarily centred on economic, political, social, and historical issues. However, not every situation will involve all these causes, nor will they exert the same level of influence in every instance (Newman, 2006). Concerns over climate change is a key factor in increasing acts of ecoterrorism. Local resource competition, livelihood insecurity, inflation, extreme weather events, fluctuating food prices, water pollution, sea-level rise, coastal degradation, and unforeseen consequences of climate policies are all risks associated with climate change. The climate crisis is exacerbated by drier forests, leading to increased forest fires and food poverty, and exacerbated by lower agricultural output, which increases the harm caused by attacks on facilities and food supply. Attacks on water infrastructure increase the likelihood of water shortages, especially in drought regions. Climate crisis is more likely to occur in unstable ecosystems, and ecoterrorist organisations can take advantage of climatic disasters by recruiting members through inadequate government response. These occurrences increased human conflict for resources that impacts global security and ultimately result in terrorism linked to climate change (Silke and Morrison, 2022, Eckersley, 2008). Ecological terrorist groups despite differences in specific targets, these groups generally share three defining characteristics: first, they assert that the urgency of environmental degradation necessitates an uncompromising and militant stance; second, they prioritise direct action over engagement with governmental or industrial lobbying channels; and third, they are predominantly grassroots movements,

operating with minimal financial resources, limited or no formal compensation, and a decentralised organisational structure (Eagan, 1996). Ecoterrorism primarily aims for property damage using explosive or incendiary weapons and most attacks target businesses with the intention of destroying them or interfering with their operations. Despite few deaths, ecoterrorists are more likely to use chemical, biological, or radioactive weapons. The reasons for such attacks are that harming valuable natural resources is an effective way to damage a state or a government, as these resources belong to certain people. Environmental extremists are frequently linked to groups that practice ecoterrorism, which emphasizes the destruction of property over human life (Brown, 2007). Radical environmentalists argue that businesses that exploit the environment and governments that do nothing about it are ecoterrorists, rejecting the term "terrorism" to characterize their acts. According to them, their property-damaging acts cannot legitimately be categorized as violent because the conflicting classifications found in different criminal and civil statutes make this problem even worse. Their acts are less directly related to terrorism and more in line with ecotage, or violence against inanimate objects. While their activities resemble illegal behaviours like sabotage, arson, or intruding, their intentions differ significantly from those of terrorism. However, they are considered terrorists due to the uncritical acceptance of the term ecoterrorism and its application to these illegal activities and grey zone operations. Radical environmentalists argue that in order to protect life, they must take the required action against harmful anthropogenic activities irrespective of the consequences of their actions (Vanderheiden, 2005, Sumner, et al., 2013). While radical environmentalists justify their actions as a moral imperative to protect the planet, their approach raises critical questions about the ethical boundaries of activism. Striking a balance between urgent environmental advocacy and the principles of lawful, non-violent action is essential to ensure their cause does not become overshadowed by controversy or counterproductive consequences.

Without a doubt, Ecoterrorist groups are against laws that promote environmental damage, resource extraction, climate change, and anti-animal right, although their actions are exactly opposite. Ecoterrorists argue that legislation addressing climate change are insufficient and biased by political and corporate interests. They support more drastic measures against exploitative businesses or governmental actions and reject laws they believe allow environmental harm. They also argue that pollution, waste management, and greenhouse gas emissions cannot be effectively addressed by environmental protection laws (Daniels, 2012). Although Ecoterrorism is a serious threat to social stability and the environment, there is lack of international legal frameworks to adequately prosecute it. Since existing laws lack procedures for pursuing environmental crimes or grey zone operations, a new international treaty is required to fill this gap. The

formation of international law for Environmental and Ecoterrorism would encourage international collaboration to protect natural resources and ecosystems.

RISE OF ECOTERRORISM: A GLOBAL CONTEXT:

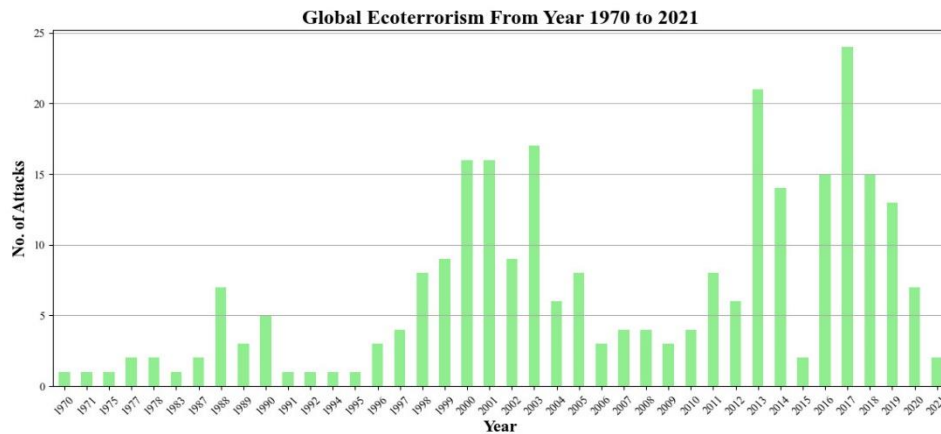


Figure : Global Terrorism from the year 1970 to 2021. Data sourced from [Global Terrorism Database] <https://www.start.umd.edu/download-global-terrorism-database>

Climate movements within Western democracies have increasingly become entangled in environmental conflicts, often giving rise to radical factions and, in extreme cases, acts of ecoterrorism. Among global regions, the United States has witnessed the most high-profile incidents, positioning it as a central case in ecoterrorism studies (Eagan, 1996; Hicks, 2024). Canada, too, has experienced ecoterrorist acts related to the destruction of oil sands infrastructure, pipeline sabotage, and resistance to deforestation. In the United Kingdom, a history of militant animal rights activism continues to raise concern, while in Brazil, long-standing disputes between environmental campaigners and illegal loggers particularly in relation to mining in the Amazon have contributed to growing tensions. Similarly, Germany's anti-coal movement has attracted international attention, with protests escalating into acts of sabotage, and in India, incidents of arson and blockades targeting mining corporations are frequently reported. In South Africa, anti-poaching campaigns have increasingly taken on radicalised dimensions (Eagan, 1996; Hicks, 2024).

These global trends illustrate that ecoterrorism is not confined to a single region, but instead reflects a widespread intensification of environmental conflict across national contexts. For example, in Germany, an Anti-fracking group in Germany protested against fracking by sabotaging equipment and engaging in violent clashes with authorities to stop operations (Clean Energy Wire, 2023). In the United Kingdom, animal rights extremists were reportedly responsible for over 1,200 firebombings, vandalism incidents,

and physical assaults in 1999, with damages estimated at £2.6 million. Yet, paradoxically, the Global Terrorism Database recorded no environmental extremist incidents for that year in the UK, highlighting a definitional and reporting gap in terrorism classification. Elsewhere in Europe Sweden witnessed an arson attack on a mink farm in October 2019., Although similar to previous animal rights incidents, the perpetrators in this case were right-wing extremists inspired by eco-fascist ideology (Understanding Animal Research, n.d.). In the Philippines, 46 environmental activists were killed during 2019, following the passage of the Duterte administration's anti-terrorism bill, which redefined many environmental defenders as terrorists (Mongabay, 2019). In India, Maoist insurgents in Chhattisgarh and Odisha have framed large-scale dam and mining projects as agents of ecological degradation and forced displacement, leading to targeted arson attacks on contractors' vehicles and hydropower installations. Likewise, in Brazil, indigenous opposition to hydroelectric developments in the Amazon has included occupations and acts of sabotage, which the government has labelled as bordering on environmental terrorism.

These case studies underscore that ecoterrorist actions extend far beyond isolated criminality; they present genuine threats to economic livelihoods, national stability, and international security (Loadenthal, 2013). The link between environmental terrorism and climate change is increasingly evident, particularly as rising global temperatures exacerbate both the frequency and impact of these events. This phenomenon now constitutes a form of *grey-zone warfare* operating below the threshold of open armed conflict, yet destabilising societies through indirect violence and political disruption. As traditional warfare declines, this emerging mode of environmental conflict may become a defining security challenge of the 21st century, fuelled by population pressures, ecological degradation, and increasingly authoritarian state responses (Izak, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative for states and international bodies to move beyond reactive security frameworks and develop proactive, preventive strategies that address both the root causes of environmental extremism and the socio-political conditions in which it thrives.

Legal clarity, equitable environmental governance, and enhanced global cooperation are essential to prevent the escalation of ecoterrorism into a persistent feature of future conflict landscapes. Failure to act decisively risks normalising violence within environmental movements and undermining legitimate efforts to achieve ecological justice.

RECENT CASE STUDIES:

Recent events have shown that protest groups and movements with an environmental focus are being included as organisations of concern in counterterrorism awareness campaigns in various developed countries but there is still lack of legal framework for ecoterrorism. A distinct viewpoint on conventional safety is needed by looking at security from the perspective

of climate change (Alpas,2011). Reframing security based on ecological health and stability also demands consideration. Strict laws against ecoterrorism must be established and enforced, ensuring accountability and deterrence. Conventions, legislation, and methods aimed at preventing and combating ecoterrorism should be part of international anti-terrorism law. These rules should safeguard vital infrastructures, human rights, and civilians (Chalecki, 2002).

Pipeline Sabotage by “Pipe Busters” – United Kingdom (2022)

In 2022, climate activists in the UK turned to direct sabotage to protest fossil fuel infrastructure. One target was the Southampton to London Pipeline (SLP), a new aviation-fuel pipeline being constructed to supply Heathrow Airport with jet fuel. The pipeline’s expansion of aviation capacity became a flashpoint, given aviation’s significant carbon footprint. The sabotage was claimed by a clandestine group of climate activists calling themselves “Pipe Busters.” This UK-based collective formed from Extinction Rebellion-style networks and espouses more radical tactics. The activists operated anonymously to avoid legal repercussions, communicating their actions via statements to sympathetic media. No individual members were publicly identified in the aftermath.

In an emailed statement, Pipe Busters explicitly framed the attack as an environmental necessity. “Aviation is a planet killer,” the group wrote, explaining that they acted “to halt the expansion of flying that the SLP would make possible”. Their motive was to prevent increased greenhouse gas emissions by stopping new fossil fuel infrastructure. The sabotage was portrayed as a defensive response to government and industry “failures” on climate change (*opendemocracy*, 2022, para. 3). The British government and law enforcement treated the pipeline break-in as criminal damage, launching an investigation. However, as of 2022 there were no publicized arrests. The incident fed into a broader political backlash against disruptive climate protests. Within months, Parliament passed stricter laws against protest tactics targeting infrastructure (the Public Order Act 2023), reflecting concern over actions like those of Pipe Busters. Media coverage of the sabotage was polarized – environmental groups argued that such property damage, while illegal, was driven by legitimate climate fears, whereas opponents labeled it “eco-terrorism” and pressed for harsher crackdowns. The public discourse thus shifted, with even moderate activists forced to distance themselves from sabotage tactics.

Attack on Coastal GasLink Pipeline Camp – Canada (2022)

In Canada, environmental extremist threw Molotov cocktails at a private residence in Edmonton, Alberta, causing a fire that destroyed the property, causing \$850,000 in damages (Honenu, 2024). Italy's High-Speed Train Line Protest (2011) involved violent protesting of construction of a high-speed rail

line by environmental activists, claiming it would damage natural habitats and contribute to air pollution (Peoples Dispatch, 2023). Mining protests in the 2000s used ecoterrorism tactics to protest against mining companies in Australia, particularly those involved in the extraction of coal and oil.

Recently, the Coastal GasLink (CGL) pipeline in British Columbia, Canada, became a focal point of conflict in the early 2020s. This 670-km pipeline project crosses Wet'suwet'en Indigenous territory, and although elected band councils agreed to the project, the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs fiercely opposed it as a violation of their land rights. From 2018 onward, Indigenous land defenders and environmentalists set up blockades and protest camps along the pipeline route, arguing the project threatens pristine wilderness and contributes to climate change. By 2022, tensions were high after multiple police raids on these protest camps.

The February 2022 attack on a Coastal GasLink work camp was carried out by a group of about 20 unknown assailants, whose identities remain officially unidentified. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) did not directly tie the attackers to the known Wet'suwet'en protest organizers, and Indigenous leaders denied sanctioning any violence. It is possible the perpetrators were an ad-hoc militant faction inspired by anti-pipeline sentiments, acting anonymously to avoid implicating the broader movement. Although no manifesto or direct claim was issued, the motivation was evidently to halt or hinder the pipeline's construction, aligning with the broader goals of Indigenous and eco-activists. The attack occurred in the context of years-long protests against CGL and can be seen as an extreme escalation of tactics born of frustration. This suggests the attackers were ideologically driven by a mix of Indigenous rights advocacy and climate activism, viewing the pipeline as illegitimate exploitation of natural resources. In essence, they aimed to directly intervene to stop environmental harm, however illegal the means.

Anti-“Mega Basin” Riot – Sainte-Soline, France (2023)

The most recent attack took place in western France, in October 2022, a protest at the Sainte-Soline basin site turned violent, foreshadowing a much larger confrontation in spring 2023. By March 2023, the French government had actually *banned* demonstrations at Sainte-Soline, but activists openly defied the ban, framing it as a fight for ecological survival and water justice. The March 25, 2023 protest involved an amalgam of groups: environmental activists (including members of the direct-action network Les Soulèvements de la Terre (SLT)), far-left anarchist collectives, local farmers, and citizen climate protesters. An estimated 6,000 protesters converged on Sainte-Soline. Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin characterized the violent protesters as “eco-terrorists” influenced by far-left ideology. SLT, although officially focused on non-violent sabotage, was accused by authorities of helping organize the reservoir protests. The demonstrators' motivations

blended environmental and social concerns. They opposed the reservoirs as symbols of unsustainable water management essentially accusing large agro-industrial farms of hoarding groundwater at the expense of ecosystems and small farmers. Many saw it as part of a broader climate justice struggle, especially after France's worst drought on record in 2022 heightened awareness of water scarcity. Slogans at the protest declared "Water is a common, not a private commodity" (Reuters, 2023).

These events underscore how environmental grievances can transform into politicised conflict, inviting strong state response and discursive framing that equates civil disobedience with terrorism. To maintain democratic legitimacy, it is essential that governments distinguish between peaceful environmental activism and genuine violent extremism. Conflating the two risks suppressing civil liberties, exacerbating mistrust, and undermining both environmental advocacy and public security. Clear legal definitions, procedural fairness, and calibrated public discourse are therefore indispensable components of an effective and just response to environmental activism in the climate era.

INTERNATIONAL LAWS AND COUNTERTERRORISM MEASURES FOR ECO-TERRORISM:

Strengthening security and law enforcement, addressing underlying causes of ecoterrorism, increasing international collaboration, promoting peaceful activism, and enhancing corporate responsibility can help mitigate the growing threat of ecoterrorism. Ecoterrorism hasn't received enough consideration despite its increasing prominence, because there are very few laws, legislations and regulations for its prevention (Berkowicz, 2011). International law regarding ecoterrorism operates within a complex framework that lacks a universally accepted definition of the phenomenon itself.

Under current international counterterrorism law including the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and CTC frameworks most agreements do not explicitly reference ecoterrorism (Cotler, 1998). International anti-terrorism law is a complex framework that includes international agreements, protocols, and seeks to prevent, combat, and penalize terrorist activities while promoting global collaboration. However, under existing international legal instruments, such acts are typically prosecuted under broader terrorism conventions, including the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (1997) and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (1999). The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court also addresses environmental destruction as a war crime when it involves "widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment" that would be clearly excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. However, the prosecution of ecoterrorism cases often falls under domestic jurisdiction, as most international

frameworks focus on state-to-state environmental obligations rather than addressing non-state environmental extremism.

Regionally, bodies such as the European Union, African Union, Organization of American States, and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation remain largely silent on ecoterrorism as a discrete category. Nonetheless, the unique aspect of ecoterrorism targeting ecological resources to convey ideological messages or provoke policy changes—often complicates classification under conventional terrorism treaties. Consequently, responses frequently depend on national legislation, bilateral treaties, and regional frameworks like the European Union's Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism (2002), which explicitly references environmental targets. Yet, these dispersed regulatory approaches underscore the necessity for clearer international standards and cooperative mechanisms tailored explicitly toward preventing and addressing ecologically motivated terrorist activities. The Pentagon and European Council's inclusion of the climate-security nexus in 2003 marked an early recognition of environmental destabilisation's security implications. Yet the most recent Conference of Parties failed to yield actionable integration, and EU counterterrorism policy continues to overlook ecoterrorism specifically (Hardt & Viehoff, 2020). Although the EU has a strategy to deal with various terrorist attacks, but it has not included any special measures to deal with ecoterrorism attacks, such those carried out by animal rights or environmental groups.

These omissions underscore both strategic inertia and the risk of policy under-preparedness at supranational levels. Positive models exist, however: the FBI has designated animal rights and eco-terrorism as a domestic terrorism investigative priority (FBI, 2002, para. X) maintaining a national task force, intelligence centre, and interagency liaison for coordinated action with international cooperation among law enforcement also part of this strategy.

Additionally, the United States has leveraged federal legislation, particularly the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, enacted as part of the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970, to combat organized crime, including ecoterrorism. Under RICO provisions, groups whose activities adversely affect interstate commerce can be prosecuted, allowing authorities to impose criminal sanctions and mandating financial restitution for affected entities. Furthermore, following the bipartisan enactment of the USA PATRIOT Act, the legislative framework was expanded through the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) of 2006 (FBI 2002). The AETA specifically criminalizes providing material support to individuals or groups engaged in ecoterrorist activities. This act significantly broadens the scope of the earlier Animal Enterprise Protection Act, explicitly outlawing property destruction, intimidation, and economic harm targeted at entities involved in animal enterprises. Penalties under AETA range from

imprisonment for up to one year in cases of minor economic damage to life imprisonment if actions result in fatalities (AETA, 2006). AETA has been used in high-profile prosecutions such as *Operation Backfire*, which resulted in domestic terrorism charges against ELF and ALF members following arson and sabotage incidents causing millions in damages. The AETA framework has been recommended for adoption or modification by a number of states in an effort to better combat ecoterrorism (Yang et al., 2014).

Furthermore, although environmental protection is robustly entrenched in international law through treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971), and various regional instruments aimed at conservation, these agreements primarily focus on state obligations to prevent environmental degradation rather than addressing intentional ecological destruction by non-state actors. Therefore, enforcement gaps emerge, particularly when ecologically destructive acts cross international borders or involve multinational actors. Therefore, enforcement gaps frequently arise, especially when ecologically destructive actions transcend international borders or involve multinational entities. A notable example is Pakistan's accusation against India of engaging in ecoterrorism in 2019, following Indian airstrikes that caused significant damage to dozens of trees within Pakistani territory (Jorgic, 2019). Pakistan subsequently expressed its intention to formally lodge an eco-terrorism complaint against India, highlighting the international complexities inherent in addressing environmental harm linked to geopolitical conflicts. Consequently, addressing such environmental challenges requires a cohesive strategy involving government bodies, educational institutions, and civil society organizations. It is imperative to develop robust legal frameworks and actively involve local communities in sustainable practices and environmental conservation initiatives to mitigate and effectively respond to eco-terrorism and transboundary environmental degradation.

There is urgent necessity to create legal frameworks, to promote local communities in sustainable practices and environmental conservation initiatives, to raise awareness on environmental stewardship and to combat ecoterrorist acts without violating protest rights. International cooperation is essential in the fight against ecoterrorism. Increasing corporate responsibility might motivate businesses to implement ecofriendly procedures and advance openness in sectors that ecoterrorist targets. Ecoterrorism can be reduced by addressing environmental concerns by combining preventive measures with active engagement and legislative improvements (Walker, 2007, Karasick, 2008). Fighting violent extremism also requires active student participation. Education, awareness campaigns and community involvement can all help achieve this. By gaining the abilities and information necessary to address societal issues, youth can become agents of constructive change. Together, these efforts can promote sustainable solutions and safeguard our planet for future generations.

CONCLUSION:

Ecoterrorism represents a complex and evolving security challenge, intrinsically tied to the global climate crisis, ideological extremism, and weak environmental governance. As this study has demonstrated, climate-induced vulnerabilities, socio-political instability, and perceived governmental inaction are enabling the rise of environmental extremism, culminating in acts of ecoterrorism. While motivated by ecological preservation, such violent methods are counterproductive, undermining both legal frameworks and legitimate environmental movements.

While explaining case studies, this paper has illustrated how environmental degradation, inadequate regulatory enforcement, and low public awareness converge to create fertile ground for radical environmental action. The global nature of this threat requires the formulation of a distinct international legal framework that differentiates ecoterrorism from other forms of terrorism and provides a unified response mechanism.

It challenges the stability of democratic institutions, disrupts critical infrastructure, and escalates public fear. In some instances, it has been exploited to justify the securitisation of peaceful activism, further complicating the landscape of civil resistance. Its unpredictable nature and ideological underpinnings make it particularly difficult to detect and prevent, thereby requiring adaptive and intelligence-led responses from law enforcement and security agencies.

Policy Recommendations & Preventive Strategy

Effectively countering ecoterrorist violence requires more than enforcement; it demands multidimensional policy responses:

- **Root Cause Mitigation:** Strengthening environmental governance, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing public education to reduce extremist appeal.
- **Targeted Legal Instruments:** Introducing ecoterrorism-specific definitions, establishing thresholds distinguishing activism from terrorism, and ensuring proportionality.
- **International Collaboration:** Encouraging UN and global counterterrorism institutions to codify ecoterrorism within global treaties, and to mobilise United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) as a forum for normative development.
- **Civil Society Engagement:** Upholding the distinction between legitimate protest and violent extremism and encouraging corporate transparency to reduce ecological grievances.

Simultaneously, organisations such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) should work to ensure the effective implementation of climate policies that address environmental crises and prevent radicalization. Political incentive and National security law is one of

the most important factors in separating ecoterrorist acts from ordinary crime. Established United Nations agreements, including the international Criminal Court (ICC), and temporary international criminal tribunals, could serve as the model for a treaty to combat ecoterrorism. The UNEA, with its universal membership and involvement in international environmental campaigns, is well-positioned to begin discussions for such a convention (Change, 1995).

To mitigate this threat, it is essential to adopt a multidimensional strategy: integrating environmental policy with counter-extremism efforts, strengthening international cooperation, and enhancing education and civil engagement around sustainable development. Only through coherent legal, institutional, and societal action can the dual objectives of environmental protection and public security be simultaneously upheld.

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