

## Eco-terrorism

A terrible heatwave hits the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, leading to the deaths of 20 million people. From the disaster arises a new movement: The Children of Kali. These extremist supporters of the Goddess of Doomsday seek revenge on the people whose actions caused climate change. Don't worry – this scenario is not real. It is the premise of a novel by Kim Stanley Robinson entitled 'The Ministry for the Future.' However, some believe that, with increasing temperatures and a rise in eco-terrorism, this kind of scenario could happen in the future.

Eco-terrorism is the use of illegal tactics to prevent or halt activities that are harmful to the environment. It differs from environmental terrorism, which uses tactics that impact the environment to meet social or political goals. For example, during the Gulf War, in 1991, the Iraqi forces set fire to multiple oil wells, creating smoke and oily clouds that affected warfare. Similarly, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has targeted water resources as a means to control the population.

Unlike environmental terrorists, whose goal is to seek power and invoke fear, environmental activists rarely intend to harm people. Instead, they commit acts of economic sabotage, vandalism, and trespass in pursuit of environmental and animal rights goals. Even so, since 2002, these activities have qualified as a form of terrorism. This is because, following the 9/11 incident, the FBI defined terrorism as 'Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals ... such as those of a(n)... environmental nature'.

Such incidents are commonplace and may be increasing. The FBI is currently investigating 41 incidences of eco-terrorism in Washington State alone, including the derailment of a train that caused 29,000 gallons of crude oil to be spilled. Meanwhile, in the UK, 53 activists were arrested in 2021 while attempting to block a motorway. Moreover, there has been a rise in extreme environmental activism, with groups such as the ITS. Formed in Mexico in 2011, this anarchic environmental movement has caused the deaths of 37 people.

Authorities are dealing with these so-called terrorists with increasingly strict measures. At least a dozen environmental activists were denied entry to Poland before the 2018 United Nations Climate Conference in Katowice because they were considered a threat to national security. In 2019, forty-six environmental activists were killed in the Philippines because, after the government introduced a new anti-terrorism bill that same year, they were categorized as terrorists. In the UK and elsewhere, under the guise of preventing terrorism, the government is attempting to introduce policies that restrict civil liberties, such as the right to protest.

The public's reaction to environmental groups' tactics is mixed. Well-designed and well-publicized campaigns can gain public support if the group's intentions and tactics are accepted. The vast number of people who joined in climate protests worldwide in September 2019 is a case in point. However, the public has less sympathy for actions that are disruptive, selfish and poorly considered. What's more, the media has considerable power in influencing public opinion against environmentalists and pushing the government's agenda.

Having said that, governments' attempts to quash 'eco-terrorism' could work against them. By attempting to restrict the public's right to protest and campaign, more and more people could come out in support of environmental groups. What's more, those groups might become more and more radical. They could turn to extremism not only in defence of animals and the environment, but also in defence of their human rights.