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## **Navigating contradictions: Exploring ecobordering and climate change denial in British far-right parties**

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Bachelor thesis

**Navigating contradictions: Exploring ecobordering and climate change denial in  
British far-right parties**

*How do climate change denialism and ecobordering coexist in far-right parties'  
environmental discourse and for what purpose(s)?*

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## Introduction

Far-right parties are on the rise again, this time emerging in the context of increasing awareness of and debate about the climate change crisis. Most scholars have examined how and why far-right parties adopt climate change denialism (CCD) which has been deemed the dominant far-right environmental discourse (Forchtner & Kølvråa, 2015; Forchtner, 2019a; Hultman, Björk & Viinika, 2019; Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020; Lockwood, 2018; Van Rensburg, 2015). However, a new discourse is emerging, called ecobordering, where far-right parties combine their anti-immigration agenda with a concern for the environment and mitigating climate change. This results in a call for tighter border control and fewer immigrants because immigration supposedly pollutes the environment (Turner & Bailey, 2022, pp. 111-113). While these two discourses should seemingly be mutually exclusive, since one involves the acceptance of climate change while the other involves denial, Turner and Bailey (2022, pp. 116-117) identify multiple far-right parties in which both discourses exist. Yet, no papers have so far addressed this puzzle which leads to the research question of this thesis:

*How do climate change denialism and ecobordering coexist in far-right parties' environmental discourse and for what purpose(s)?*

This question is important to address for multiple reasons. From a scholarly perspective, besides exploring the abovementioned puzzle, it allows for further understanding of how far-right parties are developing their policies with the increasing reality of climate change. It can illuminate the possible climate change policies proposed by far-right parties, some of which are likely to be implemented in the future given the sway of far-right parties in many countries. Understanding how immigrants can presumably be blamed for climate change is important to be able to contribute to a more informed public debate and dismantle false narratives. From a societal standpoint, this research can foster public awareness of how policies that seemingly seek to address current environmental challenges are a way to scapegoat immigrants while not addressing the root causes of climate change. This can, hopefully, lead to more informed voting and political awareness.

This thesis first lays out the existing literature on far-right parties, CCD, and ecobordering as well as its relationship to capitalism. This forms the basis for the theoretical expectations of the paper. Additionally, it presents the research methodology and analyzes ecobordering and CCD discourse in two British far-right parties. Afterwards, it offers a theoretical argument regarding what purposes this can serve. The overall argument of the thesis is that ecobordering and CCD can coexist for three reasons: 1) the discourses might not be too different after all, 2) ecobordering and CCD can

serve different goals for the far right, and 3) they both serve to uphold capitalist structures. Finally, the thesis discusses the theoretical implications and limitations of the results.

## **Existing literature and theoretical expectations**

### ***What is a far-right party?***

It is useful to define a ‘far-right’ party. There is seldom agreement among scholars on the exact name to use for this phenomenon, leading to variations such as radical right, populist radical right, extreme right, right-wing populist, etc. While there are as many different definitions of far-right parties as there are names, a few scholars are recognized for their widely used definition. Far-right parties exist on a continuum, ranging in the extremism of their ideas of ethnonationalism and authoritarianism (Forchtner, 2019a, p. 2; Forchtner, Kroneder & Wetzel, 2018, p. 590). Mudde (2009, p. 22-23) argues that a far-right party has three defining characteristics: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. Nativism indicates that only ‘natives’ should inhabit the state and that non-native outgroups are a threat to the nation-state (p. 22). Authoritarianism expresses “a general disposition to glorify, to be subservient to and remain uncritical toward authoritative figures of the ingroup and [...] punishing outgroup figures in the name of some moral authority” (pp. 22-23). Finally, their populist element is a “thin-centered ideology” (p. 23) that constructs two antagonistic groups, the people and the corrupt political elite, and the far right advocates that politics should represent the general will of the former rather than the latter. Related to this is scapegoating, where the far right places the blame for various problems on immigrants, certain ethnic groups, feminists, and/or supranational organizations and frame them as an antagonistic group supported by the corrupt elite (Wodak, 2019, p. 28). Besides these core traits, other characteristics include ethnopluralism, anti-socialism, opposition to democracy, ideological contradictions, and an “uncritical view on the community’s historical past” (Forchtner, 2019b, p. 3), although these can vary between parties in their presence or extremism (Feldman and Pollard, 2016, p. 327). Forchtner (2019b, p. 3) argues that ‘far right’ encompasses this spectrum and avoids a narrow focus on one character trait. In line with this, this thesis also uses ‘far right’.

### ***The far right and climate change denialism***

CCD, also known as climate change skepticism, has been the far right's main discursive reaction to the climate crisis in recent decades and has been the focus of many scholars (Daggett, 2018; Forchtner & Kølvrå, 2015; Forchtner, 2019a; Hultman, Björk & Viinika, 2019; Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020; Lockwood, 2018; McCright, Marquart-Pyatt, Shwom, Brechin & Allen, 2016; Van Rensburg, 2015). Van Rensburg (2015) defines CCD as “a fairly consistent family of arguments and pool of individuals that reject, dispute, or question the mainstream/orthodox thesis that the global climate is changing primarily due to human activities and that these changes will affect severely both ecosystems and human populations if left unarrested” (p. 1). He identifies three categories of CCD that are outlined in detail in the coding framework (see Appendix 1) and are briefly described here. Evidence skepticism denies or creates doubt about climate change reality, such as significant warming, human responsibility, or its negative consequences (pp. 2-4). Process skepticism doubts the processes of generating climate change knowledge, citing an alleged ideological agenda of scientists and politicians (p. 4). Response skepticism questions the appropriateness or effectiveness of climate mitigation policies, often highlighting their economic costs (pp. 4-6). Van Rensburg's (2015) categories are widely recognized and used in articles exploring CCD (Forchtner et al., 2018; Forchtner, 2019a).

Regarding why far-right parties adopt CCD rather than acceptance, many scholars offer different responses, although there are two broad strands of explanations; one focuses on the populist, anti-establishment sentiment of the far right while the second highlights the worldview and power structures that the far right is protecting. While not mutually exclusive, for the purpose of this literature review they are explained separately.

Lockwood (2018, pp. 721-722) explains the link between right-wing populism and CCD, arguing that the answer lies in the ideological nature of these parties. CCD should not be seen as a genuine engagement with the environment and the issue of climate change, but rather as an expression of their opposition to liberal, cosmopolitan elites. Climate change becomes intertwined in the far right's populist tendencies of constructing an us vs. them dichotomy, where the elite is seen as wanting to reduce the sovereignty of the people. They do so to carry out their own agenda which is supposedly corrupted by the special interests of climate scientists and environmentalists (pp. 722-725). Climate change is especially prone to this type of discourse because of the high levels of

uncertainty regarding the future, long time frames of impact, and an international collective action problem (p. 724). Thus, the far right is ideologically prone to choosing CCD over acceptance.

Forchtner (2019a, p. 6) largely agrees with Lockwood's (2018) arguments in his review of literature on the far-right's response to climate change. He adds that the far right often rejects renewable energy, a key climate change mitigation strategy, due to its perceived high costs and unreliability compared to conventional energy sources like coal (p. 4). However, he does not agree that the far right's ideology should necessarily always lead to CCD, since the far-right's ethnonationalist emphasis on the nation-nature relationship should theoretically lead them to wish to protect the national environment from probably the biggest threat to its wellbeing yet (p. 6). It is a puzzle as to why this potential has not been realized (p. 6). Attempting to answer this question is Forchtner and Kølvråa (2015, p. 204) who argue that far-right environmental communication has three dimensions: aesthetic, symbolic, and material. The aesthetic dimension, focusing on the beauty of nature and the pleasure it gives, is hard to utilize regarding the climate and more easily revoked regarding local environmental issues: "The notion of climate cannot be meaningfully framed as something to be enjoyed or experienced" (p. 212). Instead, the symbolic and material dimensions are highly used when framing climate change. The symbolic dimension focuses on differentiation from others, in this context an opposition to the cosmopolitan elite who are supposedly trying to destroy the nation's sovereignty (pp. 204-206). The material dimension focuses on resources of the land, creating an ideal of self-sufficiency that fits poorly with the idea of investing long-term in renewable energy (p. 206). Thus, the potential for climate change acceptance is not realized because the far right cannot meaningfully frame the climate as something to be cared for (p. 219).

On the other side of the debate on CCD, focused on the worldview protected by the far right, is Jylhä and Hellmer (2020, p. 315) who analyze what factors correlate with CCD attitudes in Sweden. They found that anti-establishment attitudes, as expressed above, only correlate weakly with CCD attitudes, and the effect vanishes when controlling for what they argue is their most important predictor, namely exclusionary and anti-egalitarian preferences (p. 315). These 'preferences' include anti-multiculturalism, anti-immigration, and anti-feminist attitudes (p. 317). Jylhä and Hellmer (2020, pp. 315-316, 318) therefore argue that the real explanation for choosing CCD lies in the power structures and status quo that CCD protects.

McCright et al. (2016) highlight that both gender and egalitarian attitudes affect whether someone displays CCD attitudes. Men are more likely to doubt climate change, and egalitarian values means you are less likely to doubt climate change (pp. 182-183). CCD thus serves, McCright et al. (2020, p. 184) argue, to protect and uphold current power structures (patriarchy, inequality), and in that regard capitalism plays a role as well. Climate change presents an existential threat to global capitalism because it threatens continued economic growth and exposes the unsustainability of it as an economic system (p. 186). People who benefit from capitalism thus have an incentive to deny or downplay climate change to preserve the system and their own economic and social interests (pp. 186-187). Daggett (2018, p. 39) similarly argues that CCD can serve as a compensatory practice when powerful identities protected by capitalism and the fossil fuel industry are under attack. This could seem to be somewhat in tension with the more populist side of the far right who tend to have more antipathy towards capitalism and its elites (Saull, 2015, pp. 29-30). Nevertheless, since the far right is characterized by ideological contradictions (Feldman & Pollard, 2016, p. 327), it is possible that both anti-capitalist rhetoric and capitalist protectionism exist in the far right. Finally, Hultman et al. (2019, pp. 124-125) argue that CCD does not come naturally to all far-right parties through their ideology but can also come top-down, as in their analysis of how a conservative thinktank influenced the Sweden Democrats to adopt CCD. Furthermore, they highlight that this specific far-right party expresses their denialism by performing industrial/breadwinner masculinity, again highlighting the role of power structures (pp. 125-129).

What matters for this literature review is not which approach to CCD is better, but how it highlights that scholars have found CCD very entrenched in the far right and that none of them highlight any avenues for the far right to express acceptance rather than denial. This is the dominant narrative around the far right and climate change, which is now being brought into question by the emergence of ecobordering.

### ***Ecobordering***

Ecobordering is an only recently identified phenomenon, and thus there is limited literature on what it looks like. The main article on the subject is by Turner and Bailey (2022) who coined the term to describe a recent discursive shift away from CCD where far-right parties “cast immigration as a threat to the local or national environment and consequently present borders as forms of environmental protection” (p. 111). Instead of denying climate change, far-right parties seek,



through ecobordering, to blame immigrants, especially from the Global South, for environmental degradation experienced in the nation (pp. 111-112). The solution to climate change thus does not become investments in green energy, restructuring the capitalist system depleting the Earth of its resources, or banning fossil fuel emissions responsible for global warming, but removing immigrants from the local environment and erecting regional and national borders to keep them out (pp. 123-125). While these might not necessarily be mutually exclusive, ecobordering makes other environmental policies appear unnecessary since the ‘real’ issue of climate change is caused by immigration. Turner and Bailey (2022, pp. 118-123) identify two types of ecobordering: one regarding how immigration itself pollutes the environment (migration as environmental plunder), another regarding how the nature of immigrants makes them inherently bad for the environment (migrant as environmental vandal). Both are outlined in detail in the coding framework (see Appendix 1).

Ecobordering is sometimes called eco-nationalism (Aronczyk, 2024; Margulies, 2021). The difference lies in whether ecobordering is seen as an electoral strategy or something more integral to the far right’s nationalist ideology (Aronczyk, 2024, pp. 34-35). So, whereas most scholars of CCD agree that CCD is a strategy rather than a genuinely held belief, this is different for scholars of ecobordering who disagree on whether ecobordering is a strategy or not. Turner and Bailey (2022, p. 113) define ecobordering as a strategy that some far-right parties deliberately adopt to utilize the climate crisis to further their anti-immigration agenda. Aronczyk (2024, pp. 34-35) and Margulies (2021, p. 23), on the other hand, see it as genuine concern with the environment and a phenomenon that is part of the discursive formation of nationalism. This thesis sets out to contribute to this debate by examining whether ecobordering is the main environmental discourse of the far right, or whether it is only used in relation to immigration and not the climate in general. The former would indicate it being more intricate to far-right ideology, whereas the latter would seem a more strategic approach.

It may seem strange that immigrants are blamed for climate change – how can immigrants, who could potentially only be the main cause of environmental degradation locally, be responsible for an international climate crisis? A partial answer can be found by examining the origins of far-right environmental thought which the current far right draws heavily on. Turner and Bailey (2022) argue that “ecobordering represents the consolidation and sanitization of a constellation of 19th and 20th century Malthusian, conservative, and eco-fascist ideas, as well as Romantic-era notions of nature and belonging, formed into a relatively coherent discourse and electoral strategy” (p. 113). Far-right

parties engaged in ecobordering draw on the Blood and Soil ideology of the Nazis that only those who belong to and are rooted in land can be trusted to care for it (Aronczyk, 2024, p. 30; Margulies, 2021, p. 24; Turner & Bailey, 2022, p. 114). They shift the rootless group from Jews to immigrants, who do not have a long history of belonging to the country they immigrate to. Drawing on colonial racial ideas, people from the Global South are also deemed ‘inferior’ in their ability to care for the environment and less deserving of the right to live on the land and use its resources (Aronczyk, 2024, p. 30; Margulies, 2021, p. 24; Turner & Bailey, 2022, p. 114). In the context of the climate change crisis, they combine this line of thinking with lifeboat ethics where rich countries should not help poorer countries by allowing them in the lifeboat because then it will sink, and everyone will be worse off. Translated to the environmental crisis, European countries should not allow people from the Global South to migrate to Europe because they will take up European space, deplete its resources, and pollute the environment (Aronczyk, 2024, p. 30; Turner & Bailey, 2022, p. 115).

Furthermore, they blame climate change specifically on overpopulation which leads to too many people using the Earth’s resources and producing emissions that harm the environment. This leads to calls for population controls of people who are not deemed worthy of having children, supposedly because they harm the environment (Aronczyk, 2024, p. 27; Turner & Bailey, 2022, pp. 114-115). All in all, there is a need to protect the national land and the ‘native’ people in direct competition for land and resources with foreigners in an increasingly unstable climate. Ecobordering ultimately serves as a ‘green’ justification for border erection and minimal immigration.

Turner and Bailey (2022) represent their article as “a corrective to the dominant perception that climate change denialism is the primary environmental discourse of European far right parties” (p. 112) and thus positions ecobordering in stark contrast to CCD. Yet, they identify multiple far-right parties whose discourse consists both of CCD and ecobordering (pp. 116-117). How can this be when one should seemingly rule out the other? This question has yet to be explored, which is the main research gap that this thesis aims to fill.

### ***The far right and capitalism***

Many far-right parties have a contentious relationship with capitalism (Moore & Roberts, 2018, p. 11). While there are many definitions of capitalism, Fraser (2021, p. 100) brings its environmental implications to the forefront which is useful for this thesis. She argues that “more than a way of

organizing economic production and exchange, [capitalism] is also a way of organizing the relation of production and exchange to their non-economic conditions of possibility” (p. 99). Capitalism creates a divide between the economic and non-economic where the economic has value based on its profitability and is dependent on the non-economic which is given no value despite this dependency (p. 99). Nature and the environment belong to the non-economic and is, in a capitalist society, devoid of intrinsic value and exist to be processed in the production of goods (p. 100). This is what creates environmental crises, of which excessive fossil fuel emissions and climate change is just one example. Klein (2014, pp. 25-26) similarly argues that fossil fuel emissions are integral to the capitalist system to keep deregulated markets functioning.

The far right is willing to acknowledge the environmentally destructive consequences of capitalism but are not willing to put the blame on capitalism itself for two reasons. First, international capitalism is the reason for much of the success of the far right (Robinson & Barrera, 2012, p. 4; Saull, 2015, p. 25; Sharpe, 2021, pp. 207-208). The rise of international capitalism has led to increasing inequality worldwide with wealth concentrated in the hands of a few and the uprooting of privileges previously afforded white middle-class men in the West who are now feeling job and identity insecurity as well as the “[uprooting] and [displacement] of millions of people – especially in the third world countryside who have become internal and transnational migrants” (Robinson & Barrera, 2012, p. 5; Saull, 2015, pp. 37-38). These instabilities have led some far-right groups and parties to adopt a political platform based on anti-immigration and re-empowerment of the nation. Without the original capitalist structures, they would lose much of the political fuel behind their platform (Robinson & Barrera, 2012, pp. 5-7). Second, but also somewhat connected to the first point, capitalism creates a lot of the hierarchies and domination that fascinates far-right parties (Moore & Roberts, 2018, p. 11). These hierarchies are often nationalized, racialized, and gendered and play a key role in their narratives of scarcity and competition, domination, and social struggles (p. 11). Yet, capitalism also creates issues that the far right can find appalling, such as environmental degradation (p. 11). This tension is complicated and could be a hard line to walk for far-right parties, and this thesis thus seeks to explain how both ecobordering and CCD can play a role in navigating this tension.

### ***Theoretical expectations***

While there are no direct theories on how and why ecobordering and CCD should coexist, this thesis draws on the literature discussed above to form its theoretical expectations. First, it expects to find both ecobordering and CCD in the parties analyzed, as identified by Turner and Bailey (2022, pp. 116-117). It assumes that one will not rule out the other and all categories of CCD (evidence, process, response) will coexist along both categories of ecobordering (migration as environmental plunder, migrant as environmental vandal).

Second, this thesis will combine several theories explored above to explain why ecobordering and CCD should coexist. It follows in the footsteps of scholars like Jylhä and Hellmer (2020), McCright et al. (2016), Daggett (2018), and Hultman et al. (2019) who argue that CCD is employed to protect a certain worldview and power structures that benefit the far right. It will take their general approach one step further and expect that this can also be applied to ecobordering. The worldview that they are trying to uphold and protect is, as explored in the last section, capitalism (McCright et al., 2016; Robinson & Barrera, 2012; Saull, 2015; Sharpe, 2021). While some scholars have identified capitalism as an ideology that the far right wishes to uphold and have applied it to CCD and ecobordering separately, this thesis seeks to use it to explain why they can coexist. In short, given the contentious relationship that the far right has with capitalism, they can employ both CCD and ecobordering to avoid confronting capitalism and its environmental destruction and power structures, thereby maintaining the status quo.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research design***

This thesis employs an extreme case study design which involves “select[ing] a case because of its extreme value on the independent (X) or dependent (Y) variable of interest. An extreme value is understood here as an observation that lies far away from the mean of a given distribution; that is to say, it is *unusual*” (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 301). Doing an extreme case study allows for the thesis to investigate in a more exploratory way the characteristics of ecobordering and how it coexists with CCD (p. 301).

The two cases chosen for analysis are the British National Party (BNP) and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Both are far-right parties, although BNP is seen as being on the more radical side of the ideological spectrum (Turner-Graham, 2019, pp. 57-58). Thus, UKIP and BNP together occupy a broad range of far-right politics in Britain. What is extreme or unusual about these parties is their prominent use of ecobordering, as they are highlighted by Turner and Bailey (2022, p. 116-117) as being two of the parties that use ecobordering discourse most extensively. However, while Turner and Bailey (2022, pp. 110, 116-117) identify these parties as prominent in their ecobordering discourse, their study consists of 22 European far-right parties, and they only use one or two quotes from each party in their analysis. Thus, focusing on only these two parties allows for a more in-depth understanding of how ecobordering is employed and can coexist with CCD. For practical reasons, choosing two parties instead of one allows for access to more data, and all the data is in English. Since both parties are British, the political and historical background to their emergence and presence is similar, meaning it is easier to draw parallels without having to account for vast historical, political, or cultural differences between them. While the analysis is not comparative and mainly serves to use both parties collectively to analyze ecobordering and CCD, any major differences are discussed.

### ***Data selection and coding framework***

To analyze the cases, discourse analysis is used because the thesis seeks to analyze a possible discursive shift within far-right parties. Discourse analysis allows for a focus on how far-right parties construct narratives of both ecobordering and CCD, and how these coexist and intersect as well as how the far right gives meaning and legitimacy to each (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 364). Furthermore, the expected contradictions within these narratives and the context in which they are created can also be captured by discourse analysis. The data chosen for analysis is environmental discourse in policy manifestos and programs as well as in blog posts on the website of each party. These texts represent their official opinions and allow them to express their stance in the way they wish. The timeframe of the data chosen is April 2015-March 2024. April 2015 is chosen as the starting point since it marked the beginning of the 'refugee crisis' in Europe which brought anti-immigration high on the political agenda (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015). March 2024 is the cut-off point since this is when the coding began.

To structure the analysis, a coding framework is used (see Appendix 1). The categories are based on the literature review - the CCD categories are based on Vans Rensburg's (2015, p. 1) theory, whereas the ecobordering categories are based on Turner and Bailey (2022, pp. 118-123). When the coding started, the need for two additional categories became apparent. The first category, named 'environmental concern' expresses care for the environment and climate change but not in the context of borders and immigration. The second category revolves around the indigeneity of 'native' people which is rooted in land and supposedly makes one more deserving of its resources. This is somewhat of an inverse version of the ecobordering category 'migrant as environmental vandal' but with the focus on the native people as good to and deserving of land. This category was added under the general 'ecobordering' category, since it is still used to justify borders, and labelled 'indigeneity'. The recording unit is sentences since it allows for capturing more context than simply coding words but can also capture more inconsistencies than by coding paragraphs. However, where necessary for the context of the code, two sentences are coded together.

## **Analysis**

### ***The coexistence of CCD and ecobordering***

Before diving into the specific discourses identified, it is useful to outline the broader picture of how ecobordering and CCD coexist, as found in the analysis. Overall, CCD is coded almost the same number of times as ecobordering (72 and 75 times respectively), indicating that CCD is no longer the only dominant discourse. However, if you discount the number of times only the metaphor of immigrants "flooding" the environment is coded (23 times, mostly for the BNP), CCD seems to still be quite prevalent. For UKIP, acknowledgement of climate change and the need to mitigate it comes almost exclusively in relation to immigration, with only three mentions of caring for the environment outside of that context. This seems to indicate that for them, ecobordering is a strategy employed to further strengthen their anti-immigration agenda, rather than a genuine care for the environment and fear of the consequences of climate change. The BNP does express the need to protect nature (BNP, 2016a), recycle (BNP, 2016a), and support renewable energy projects (BNP, 2017h) (although they also oppose them in other sources) not in relation to immigration. However, this was only coded nine times, and most of their acknowledgement of climate change is in relation to stopping immigration. Again, this suggests a strategic use of ecobordering rather than

a genuine concern for the environment. Interestingly, not all ecobordering is related to climate change. Immigrants are not only portrayed as pollutants or with a focus on overpopulation, but also as generally destructive for the environment regardless of climate change. Thus, both parties are mobilizing around the idea that we, as a society, need to care more for and protect the environment, not only in relation to climate change but for the environmental wellbeing overall. This is seen, for example, when immigrants are portrayed as littering, something that does not directly link to climate change but to a general concern for the environment (BNP, 2019b). This seems to link back to Forchtner and Kølvrå's (2015, p. 204) argument that the climate is harder to meaningfully frame aesthetically as something to care about than the local environment. The fact that not all ecobordering relates directly to climate change can partly explain why ecobordering and CCD can coexist; sometimes, when ecobordering revolves around the environment more generally and does not involve climate change acceptance, they are not in direct opposition.

### ***“It’s not about race, it’s about space”***

The first ecobordering discourse identified is best expressed in the words of UKIP: it’s “not about race, it’s about space” (UKIP, 2015, p. 10; UKIP, 2021). Putting aside the racial aspects for later discussion, this discourse revolves around the physical space that immigrants supposedly take up and has been coded as E-P. This is bad mainly for two reasons, according to UKIP and BNP. First, immigration leads to excessive demands for housing which leads to the destruction of the beautiful countryside (BNP, n.d.b; UKIP, 2015, p. 35). Second, the lack of space also means a lack of resources, such as energy, food, and water (BNP, 2022a; UKIP, 2023, p. 49; UKIP, 2022e). This narrative is focused on competition, for example illustrated by how a decline in birth rates among ‘native’ British people is “more than likely a consequence of increased competition for resources” (UKIP, 2022f) from immigrants, something that is only heightened by the climate crisis. In a parallel to the Nazi concept of *Lebensraum* (living space), both UKIP and BNP highlight the need for British people to have “breathing space” (BNP, 2016a; UKIP, 2015, p. 11), painting the picture that people are suffocated by immigrants and need physical space to breathe. Furthermore, it is not just the people who are suffering from immigration, population growth is also “unsustainable” (UKIP, 2023, p. 19) for British soil and nature. While this discourse is not always presented in relation to climate change but also related to the environment in general, climate change is presented as heightening this crisis, leading to further competition for sparse resources. And in

classic ecobordering style, the solution to this crisis is border control and less immigration (BNP, n.d.b).

### *The ‘nature’ of immigrants*

The second narrative emerging from the analysis revolves around the supposed nature of immigrants (coded E-V). Here, the far right paints a picture of how immigrants inherently *are*, which is bad for the environment. The closest link to climate change can be summarized by the BNP: “The British National Party is this nation’s only true Green party which has policies that will actually save the environment [...] the BNP is the ONLY party to recognise that overpopulation – whose primary driver is immigration, as revealed by the government’s own figures – is the cause of the destruction of our environment” (BNP, n.d.b). Overpopulation not only depletes the earth’s resources and destroys the countryside because of housing demands, as discussed above, but also leads to more emissions. They especially find issue with immigrants adopting emissions-heavy Western lifestyles when coming to the UK, the focus being especially on cars and gas emissions (UKIP, 2022a). The far right has adopted environmental terms such as “sustainable carrying capacity” (BNP, n.d.b) to argue why overpopulation causes climate change and environmental degradation. They have less criticism for ‘native’ British people causing emissions, as they should be prioritized over immigrants in terms of rights to pollute. Furthermore, immigrants are painted as unable to take care of and care about the environment because they are transient, supposedly not connected to any local land. As expressed by UKIP, they “don’t think a transient population of immigrants with no ancestral links to the nation and its story will care for [the land] in the same way. Or at all” (UKIP, 2022d). Thus, they make a link between being rooted in the land and being able to care for it, making the mere existence of immigrants inherently destructive for the environment and the climate. This is for example illustrated by the mentions of immigrants littering on the streets and beaches, polluting both the local landscape and the oceans (BNP, 2019b). It is also illustrated more subtly by painting immigrants themselves as natural disasters, using words such as “swamped” (BNP, n.d.c; UKIP, 2015, p. 35), “hurricane” (BNP, 2023e), “hordes” (BNP, 2022a), “flooding” (BNP, 2017e; UKIP, 2021), and “tidal wave” (BNP, 2017b) to describe them. In this way, immigrants are portrayed as destructive, overwhelming, and uncontrollable and they invoke threat and fear that they will hurt the ‘native’ population and its land. It also evokes a more



specific link with climate change in that immigrants are likened to disasters caused by climate change, perhaps making the supposed causal link between the two more believable.

### ***Climate change denialism and energy competition***

If only going by the first two discourses mentioned, it would seem that ecobordering and climate change acceptance is widely part of UKIP and BNP's policies, to the neglect of CCD. However, when it comes to discussing climate change policies not directly linked to immigration, this picture changes. All three categories of CCD are employed to raise doubt about current measures to mitigate climate change. Both BNP and UKIP deny man-made climate change multiple times (coded CCD-E). UKIP (2020b) claims that "the climate changes naturally - it has changed in the past, it is changing today, and it will change in the future. Man has no effect on it", while the BNP seems to have developed a more ambivalent attitude over time. Whereas they in 2017 characterized global warming as a "scam" (BNP, 2017f), in later documents they write that "the BNP accepts that climate change, of whatever origin, is a threat to Britain. Current evidence suggests that some of it may be man-made; even if this is not the case, then the principle of 'better safe than sorry' applies" (BNP, n.d.b). While this sentence expresses some level of acceptance of climate change, it still expresses doubts about the origins. Thus, where they in some places accuse immigrants of definitively being the cause of climate change, in other sources the BNP doubts that climate change is even caused by humans. Both UKIP and BNP seem to want to both accept and doubt climate change at the same time, depending on whether immigrants are at the forefront of the discussion.

Regarding the climate policies themselves, their main concern is that the costs outweigh the benefits, and a lot of their critiques of these policies revolve around it not being the right approach (coded CCD-R). Windmills "blight" (UKIP, 2015, p. 39) the landscape, renewable energy is not reliable (UKIP, 2024, p. 3), climate governmental departments and international agreements are unnecessary (BNP, 2021c; UKIP, 2023, p. 15), climate emergencies are "needless" (UKIP, 2023, p. 7), and the UK is not the biggest polluter so they should not be the first to cut down on emissions (BNP, 2017f; UKIP, 2023, p. 31). They are especially concerned with protecting the gas, oil, and coal industry which they deem necessary for economic stability and growth (BNP, n.d.a; UKIP, 2015, p. 19). This ties into their narrative on competition – energy needs to be as cheap and reliable as possible to compete with other countries financially and for resources, and renewable energy is therefore only desirable if it is offered at competitive prices (BNP, 2017h; UKIP, 2015, p. 39).

However, the BNP and UKIP are sometimes willing to acknowledge the need to cut down emissions due to climate change, but their way of doing so is it cut down on immigrants – with fewer immigrants in the country, there is less need for gas, coal, and oil emissions, and the climate benefits from this (BNP, n.d.b; UKIP, 2022a). Once the pollution-heavy immigrants have left the country, there seems to be no reason to further cut down on emissions. This again shows how the British far right sometimes strategically connects immigration to climate change, while other times not believing climate change exists.

Finally, both BNP and UKIP also question the ideological agenda behind climate change, coded as CCD-P. Although it is the smallest of the CCD categories (only coded eight times), it is still worth mentioning. The UN, the government, and the British left wing are accused of creating the “science fiction” (UKIP, 2022g) of global warming to benefit their own cosmopolitan agenda, conspiring to compromise the sovereignty of the UK and used as an excuse to “tax and control” (BNP, 2017f) the British people. Climate change becomes a conspiracy meant to destroy the energy security and sovereignty of the UK as well as to ignore the will of the people.

### *(Maybe) it is about race*

Finally, the “it’s not about race” discourse, as discussed earlier, is brought into question by the last narrative identified. It revolves mostly around the BNP and is what mainly sets the two parties apart in the analysis. While it is not directly related to climate change, it plays into their environmental standpoint. The BNP co-opts discourse on indigeneity and applies it to ‘native’ British people, which is something Boggs (2019) has previously identified as a trait among the Alt-Right in the US. The BNP presents British people as “indigenous” to their land and they use words such as ‘colonization’ and ‘dispossession’, turning them on their head so that the British people become the colonized and dispossessed of their “homeland” (BNP, 2017e; BNP, 2017g; BNP, 2019a). Having a connection to and right to land is dependent, in their view, on having British ancestors which is what makes someone an indigenous Brit. While this would seem to create a dichotomy of Brits vs. non-Brits, the people presented as a threat to indigenous Brits are not their fellow “indigenous Europeans” (BNP, 2020) but mostly people from the Global South. This is done both visually, by using images of people of color on their blog posts when talking about immigrants, and in writing by naming specific places where the immigrants are from in the “Third World” (BNP, 2021b). Nowhere are white and/or European immigrants presented as a problem. This suggests that

ecobordering is distinctly racialized, with a focus on Global South countries, as also proposed by Turner and Bailey (2022, p. 115). While UKIP does not have the same discourse on British indigeneity, they picture immigrants from the Global South in the same way. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyze why this difference between them exists, it would serve as interesting further research.

To summarize, ecobordering and CDD coexist in both UKIP and BNP, but ecobordering is usually presented in the context of immigration whereas CCD is used regarding the climate generally. Regarding ecobordering, both parties are creating discourses of competition over resources, destruction of nature and the countryside, overpopulation, and the nature of immigrants as inherently destructive to the environment and climate. CCD is more evident when they discuss concrete climate policies, which are usually presented as not the right approach to mitigate climate change, its costs outweigh the benefits, and the use of oil, gas, and coal can only be lessened if the number of immigrants is cut down. Finally, the BNP co-opts indigeneity and uses it to connect the right to land with ancestry.

### ***What purposes do ecobordering and CCD coexisting serve?***

Since the analysis concludes that ecobordering and CCD coexist, with all categories of each coded multiple times, it is obvious to raise the question why. This thesis proposes a threefold theoretical answer to that question. First, as found in the analysis, ecobordering discourse does not always revolve around climate change, contrary to the expectations of Turner and Bailey (2022, p. 112). Instead, it sometimes merely revolves around the protection of the local and national environment, and this type of discourse does not stand in contrast to CCD. Thus, at least some part of their coexistence can be explained by them not being in complete opposition to each other. However, when ecobordering is centered on climate change, the two do stand in stark contrast, which is where the two following proponents come into play.

Second, ecobordering and CCD can serve different goals for the far right. Moore and Roberts (2022) argue that “nature is a ‘thin’ ideological notion, requiring further elaboration to be rendered a substantial political idea” (p. 48), and therefore the use of ‘nature’ varies depending on the political goal in question. Applying this to the concepts of ecobordering and CCD, they can both

serve separate political goals when used. The fact that ecobordering and CCD coexist despite being in opposition indicates that both are used strategically rather than being a genuinely held belief. When talking about immigration, ecobordering is a way of justifying border control and less immigration (Turner & Bailey, 2022, p. 125) while seemingly addressing and accepting climate change. However, when talking about the climate more generally, without the context of immigration, CCD can serve to protect existing structures that the far right finds important, for example the use of gas, oil, and coal, or to protect the sovereignty of the state. The concept of ecobordering does not work (as) well to serve that agenda, thus CCD can be used instead.

Third, the far right can utilize ecobordering and CCD discourse because both serve to uphold capitalist structures. As mentioned in the literature review, the far right has a tense relationship with capitalism, finding its destructive forces on nature repulsive yet being dependent on the hierarchical structures it creates. Some scholars have examined the capitalist foundations of ecobordering and CCD, but separately. Turner and Bailey (2022) argue that “the ecobordering diagnosis of the ecological crisis entirely disregards this structural relationship between the ecological crisis and the operations of the global economy. In neglecting this relationship, ecobordering serves to ‘camouflage’ capitalism in an attempt to politically sustain the economic status quo” (p. 124). Ecobordering places the blame for climate change on those who are victims of it – people from the Global South who have historically produced very little emissions yet bear the brunt of the most extreme environmental degradation caused by climate change (pp. 124-125). By doing this, the far right can also utilize the fear that climate change presents to their own benefit (Aronoff, 2019). If immigrants are the cause of climate change, the best solution is to remove immigrants as soon as possible from the local environment. You transform the immigration system, not the capitalist system. In this way, questions regarding capitalism and its effect on the environment are entirely avoided. This can both be an intentional act of the far-right actors – deliberately deflecting attention from capitalism’s environmental destruction onto immigrants – or be because capitalism is such an integral and unchangeable part of their social reality that it does not occur to them as possibly being something to object to.

In a similar manner, CCD also serves the purpose of upholding or avoiding questioning capitalism. CCD denies that anything is wrong with the capitalist structures creating climate change (Daggett, 2018, p. 34; McCright et al., 2016, pp. 186-187). If climate change is not real, will not affect a certain group, or is not caused by humans, there is no need to change the system – capitalism – behind it. Thus, changes to the status quo are resisted.

This thesis proposes to look at these explanations not separately but together, as one coherent theory on why ecobordering and CCD coexist in the far right. The far right can use either of them to serve different political goals because they both, in the end, protect and deflect attention away from the capitalist system that the far right thrives on politically. Instead of seeing them as being in contrast, they can be seen as complementary. Ecobordering not only serves the far right's anti-immigration agenda but also helps their CCD, since ecobordering, just like CCD, leads to no effective measures taken against climate change. They both help the far right navigate their contentious relationship to capitalism, enabling them to both condemn the environmental degradation caused by it but preventing real change to the status quo.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

### ***Theoretical implications***

This thesis suggests that, in some cases, scholars should look at ecobordering and CCD not separately, as researchers have usually done, but together when developing theories on how the far right engages with the environment and climate change. Instead of seeing them as contrasts, they should be seen as working in tandem. While this is certainly not the case for *all* far-right parties, it is an interesting tendency among the British parties analyzed in this paper that warrants more research. Theories need to be developed to account for the coexistence of both phenomena, and while this is what this thesis has contributed to, more research is needed on other far-right parties to broaden the generalizability of the theory proposed here. Furthermore, the results found lead to the question of when a far-right party decides to adopt both ecobordering and CCD in contrast to when a far-right party uses just one of the strategies. New theories need to be developed to answer this question which is beyond the scope of this paper.

### ***Limitations***

A few limitations of the paper should be discussed. First, an extreme case study limits the degree to which the results are representative of other far-right cases (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 301). UKIP and BNP were chosen because they were identified as using ecobordering discourse quite prominently (Turner & Bailey, 2022, pp. 116-117). This means that there are many cases of far-

right parties that tend to rely more on CCD than ecobordering, making studying the coexistence of these two less relevant for those parties. Furthermore, the unique context of Britain and Brexit might play a role in them choosing both ecobordering and CCD. While this also limits the applicability of the theoretical argument, namely that the coexistence of ecobordering and CCD serves to uphold capitalist structures, the part about how CCD upholds capitalism and the status quo is still relevant for those parties with less or no ecobordering discourse. Additionally, while extreme case studies have limited generalizability, they serve as a good starting point for testing and exploring existing theories and developing them further which is what this thesis has done (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, pp. 297, 301-302). Finally, since Turner and Bailey (2022, p. 113) identify ecobordering as an emerging discourse, using an extreme case study can also showcase how other far-right parties might potentially develop their discourses in the future.

Second, due to the scope of this paper, only policies, manifestos, and blog posts on UKIP and BNP's website were analyzed. If more time had been available, other sources such as parliamentary debates and social media posts could have been analyzed. This might have changed the results of the analysis as the parties could have chosen to focus on one discourse or the other in different contexts.

Third, the threefold theoretical argument proposed here needs to be further tested in other contexts and countries. It might be hard to directly measure that the far right, drawing on ecobordering and CCD, wants to uphold capitalism and the status quo. However, it could serve as interesting future research to look further into this relationship.

## ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, ecobordering and CCD coexist in UKIP and the BNP, and ecobordering is used when discussing immigration, whereas CCD is used when talking about climate change overall, indicating a strategic use of both. Ecobordering and CCD can coexist for three reasons: 1) their discourses are not always in contrast, 2) ecobordering and CCD serve different goals for the far-right, and 3) they both help the far right navigate their relationship to capitalism by upholding capitalist structures while condemning their impact on the environment. Further research could investigate in other contexts the coexistence of ecobordering and CCD as well as the theoretical argument regarding capitalism. Especially looking into countries outside of the West could be interesting, since ecobordering is often presented in a European context. Additionally, diving into

the concept of indigeneity and why some parties, like the BNP, adopt this discourse while others, like UKIP, do not, could also serve as an interesting avenue for more research.

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## Appendix A: Coding Table

Categories	Subcategories	Description	Code	Indicators
Climate change denialism	Evidence-based	Questioning the quality and reliability of evidence behind climate change science	CCD-E	Climate data is not reliable or accurate; allegations of cherry-picking or data manipulation; alternative evidence; emphasis on the uncertainty of climate science
	Process-based	Questioning the methods and processes involved in generating climate change knowledge and how this is communicated and used in policymaking	CCD-P	Scientists are biased and not credible; scientists are ‘bought’ by some interest group; lack of or critique of peer review; concerns about transparency; referencing research scandals; focus on ideological agenda of scientists and politicians
	Response-based	Questioning the appropriateness or effectiveness of possible solutions to climate change	CCD-R	Certain mitigation or adaptation efforts are unnecessary or disproportionate; downplaying urgency of climate change; the benefits of policy do not outweigh the costs; focus on economic costs of mitigation; advocating for alternative approaches such as technological innovation or adaptation strategies



Ecobordering	Migration as environmental plunder	Highlighting the environmental impacts of immigration	E-P	Immigrants use up scarce resources; immigrants take up too much space; overpopulation; immigrants should not adopt emissions-heavy Western lifestyles
	Migrant as environmental vandal	Immigrants are portrayed as threats to the environment because of their character	E-V	Immigrants unable to take care of the environment; immigrants as pollutants; immigrants as reckless and irresponsible regarding environment; being rooted in land important for ability to care; immigrants compared to natural disasters
	Indigeneity	Highlighting the importance of indigeneity in terms of the rights to land and resources	E-I	Native people as more rooted in land; native people are more deserving of land and resources; co-optation of terms revolving indigeneity such as 'indigenous' or 'colonization'
Environmental concern	Care for the environment or need for mitigating climate change not related to immigration		C	Need for reducing emissions; taking care of and preserving nature and wildlife; support for renewable energy and other initiatives to mitigate climate change

## Appendix B: Sample of coding

### UKIP

Source	Sentence	Code	Explanation
UKIP Manifesto 2015 (p. 10)	Immigration is not about race: it is about space.	E-P	Immigrants take up scarce space in Britain.
UKIP Manifesto 2015 (p. 11)	These policies are essential if we are to give our country the breathing space it desperately needs from mass uncontrolled immigration, create harmonious, integrated communities, and catch up on building the essential infrastructure needed to sustain our growing nation	E-P	Immigrants take up too much space; link of “breathing space” to “lebensraum”
UKIP Manifesto 2015 (p. 39)	If we are to have energy security and cheap, plentiful, reliable sources of energy, coal must be part of the solution.	CCD-R	Focus on economic costs of energy mitigation; need for energy to be cheap and competitive
Immigration: Drifting to the extremes	I do wish though, not unreasonably, to see some ethnic and cultural continuity on these islands to preserve our lands, customs, accomplishments and architecture, and don’t think a transient population of immigrants with no ancestral links to the nation and its story will care for it in the same way. Or at all.	E-V	Immigrants are transient and not able to take care of the environment; rootedness in land is important to be able to care for the environment
York immigration demo round-up	The data also shows a decline in births, which is more than likely a consequence of increased competition for resources	E-P	Immigrants use up scarce resources such as food and land
New census data shows immigration is still out of control	Meanwhile immigration is adding to energy demand, and putting massive pressure on roads, water and basic infrastructure which is already at breaking point.	E-P	Immigrants use up scarce resources such as energy and water
Net Zero and immigration: The strangulation of Britain	The green blob is a huge fan of demand side management when it comes to rationing electricity, so shouldn’t that also inform our immigration policy? There are more people than our infrastructure can	E-P	Too many immigrants means too many people adopting Western emissions-heavy lifestyles,

	sustain, and the influx outpaces any new infrastructure.		driving cars and pressuring the infrastructure system
UKIP leader: Tories talk tough on immigration, but how much longer until the public's patience snaps?	Instead, they have favoured their multinational friends over British workers and will do nothing to stop the uncontrollable flood of migration that has already caused staggering damage.	E-V	Immigrants likened to a natural disaster
UKIP Manifesto 2023 (p. 7)	These services must run effectively and efficiently before councillors even think about spending money on vanity projects and needless climate emergencies.	CCD-R	Declaring a climate emergency is not necessary
UKIP Manifesto 2023 (p. 15)	The UN has strayed well beyond its remit with the woke global governance agenda, which now includes pressing people to use gender neutral language to 'help create a more equal world' making unrealistic speeches about climate change, global warming or protecting the planet amongst other things.	CCD-P	UN and other international organizations cannot be trusted because of their ideology of 'woke global governance'
UKIP Manifesto 2023 (p. 55)	There has always been evolving weather patterns and always will be.	CCD-E	Raising doubt about the climate crisis as anything unusual
UKIP Manifesto 2023 (p. 63)	The UK has 1% of the world population and emits less than 1% of global emissions of CO2.	CCD-R	Cutting down UK emissions is not the right approach to solving climate change since they are not a heavy emitter
New reports from NASA and NOAA	The climate changes naturally - it has changed in the past, it is changing today, and it will change in the future. Man has no effect on it.	CCD-E	Climate change is not caused by humans

**BNP**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Environment	The British National Party is this nation’s only true Green party which has policies that will actually save the environment. Unlike the fake “Greens” who are merely a front for the far left of the Labour regime, the BNP is the ONLY party to recognise that overpopulation – whose primary driver is immigration, as revealed by the government’s own figures – is the cause of the destruction of our environment.	E-P	Overpopulation, caused by immigration, is the real cause of environmental destruction
Environment	Britain is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and our population is increasing — due entirely to immigration — which necessitates the building of ever more homes, which in turn places a strain on our infrastructure such as transport and water supplies.	E-P	Overpopulation caused by immigration leads to excessive housing demands, straining the land, infrastructure, and water supplies
Environment	Our immigration policies will achieve this. Together with independent environmental organisations the BNP recognises that Britain’s environmentally sustainable carrying capacity is substantially lower than its present population.	E-P	Overpopulation caused by immigration damages the environment’s sustainable carrying capacity
Environment	Finally, the BNP accepts that climate change, of whatever origin, is a threat to Britain. Current evidence suggests that some of it may be man-made; even if this is not the case, then the principle of ‘better safe than sorry’ applies and we should try to minimise the emission of greenhouse gases and other pollutants.	CCD-E	While expressing need for reducing emissions, it does invariably question whether climate change is caused by humans
Energy	Reopen profitable coal mines to relieve our dependence on imported coal.	CCD-R	Economic costs of coal do not outweigh the benefits
Manifesto 2016 (p. 2)	An immediate halt to ALL Immigration will relieve the demand for new build homes. We	E-P	Immigrants take up too much space. Link between

	need to give ourselves breathing space – literally!		breathing space and ‘lebensraum’
Manifesto 2016 (p. 2)	Plant more trees in London. Not only do trees improve air quality, but they also enhance the social surroundings.	C	Need for improving air quality
Rebecca (p. 1)	Rebecca’s British ancestors built, fought and died to ensure she was handed down a secure homeland. Instead she’ll be lost in an overcrowded melting pot of up to 80 million people.	E-I	Co-optation of indigeneity, right to land comes from ancestry
Grandad’s vote (p. 1)	They brought mass immigration to Britain and flooded the country with cheap migrant labour to undercut British workers.	E-V	Immigrants likened to a natural disaster
Eco activists revealed to be privileged establishment lackeys	London’s ‘woke’, green, Globalist Mayor Sadiq Khan is on board. So too is Boris Johnson with his ‘woke’, green, Globalist government and agenda.	CCD-P	Ideological agenda of scientists and the government
1,000 illegals invade Britain in a single week as Tory betrayal reaches all-time high	The hordes of African and Middle Eastern migrants flooding to soft-touch Britain in the seven months of 2021 has already surpassed the number that arrived in the whole of 2020	E-V	Immigrants likened to a natural disaster
Greta Thunberg, teenage climate activist, used by global elite	Secondly, there is no definitive scientific evidence for man-made climate change — scientists are still arguing about it	CCD-E	Questioning whether climate change is caused by humans
Powering Britain	The current obsession with ‘climate change’ must be replaced by practical action to keep the lights on and the wheels turning	CCD-R	More important to have reliable energy than mitigating climate change
Real nationalism	At a certain point – which can only be recognised if the host population are free to express their concerns openly – immigration stops being about the rights of immigrants and becomes about the colonisation and dispossession of the indigenous community	E-I	Co-optation of indigeneity, now in context of people born with ancestors in Britain