



2 January 2025

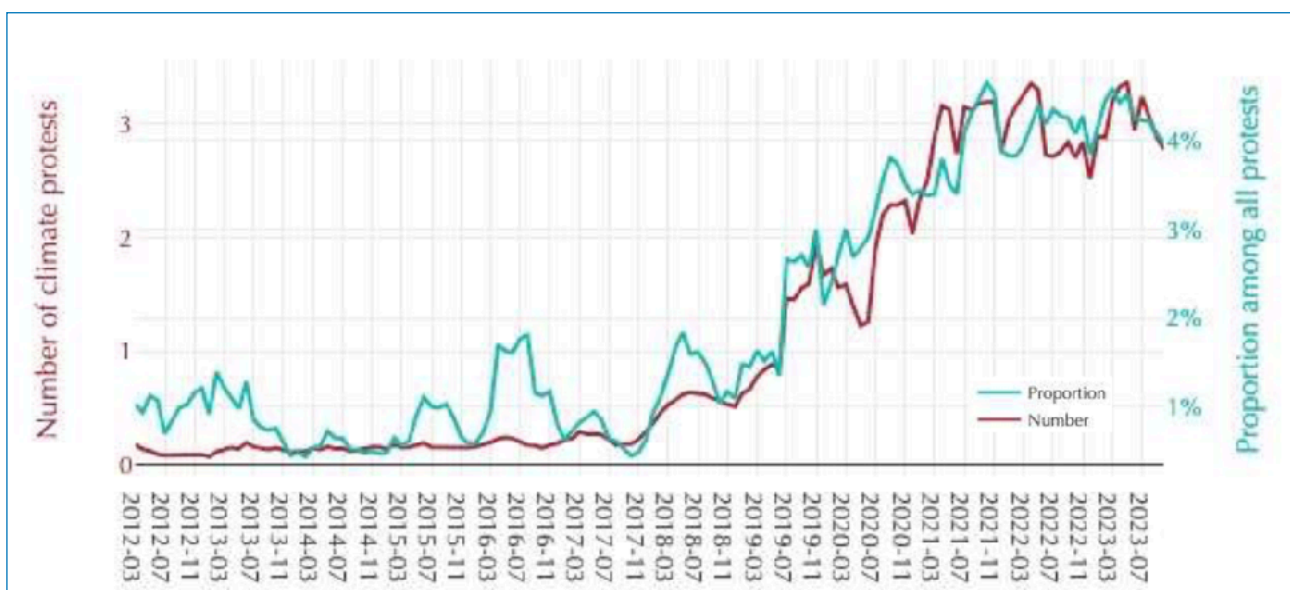
Politics, environment and climate: public awareness, repression and inaction

Nowadays, there is a quite concerning paradox: although the global population is becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues, governments are intensifying repression against environmental and climate protests and are taking very inappropriate environmental actions.

A spectacular increase of demonstrations

Based on data accumulated by [ACLED](#) (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data) and [Global Witness](#), researchers of the [University of Bristol](#), in the UK, show a spectacular increase, after 2019, in protests for the climate and a multiplication by 6 of their number between 2018 and 2021 [\[read\]](#) (see **diagram 1**).

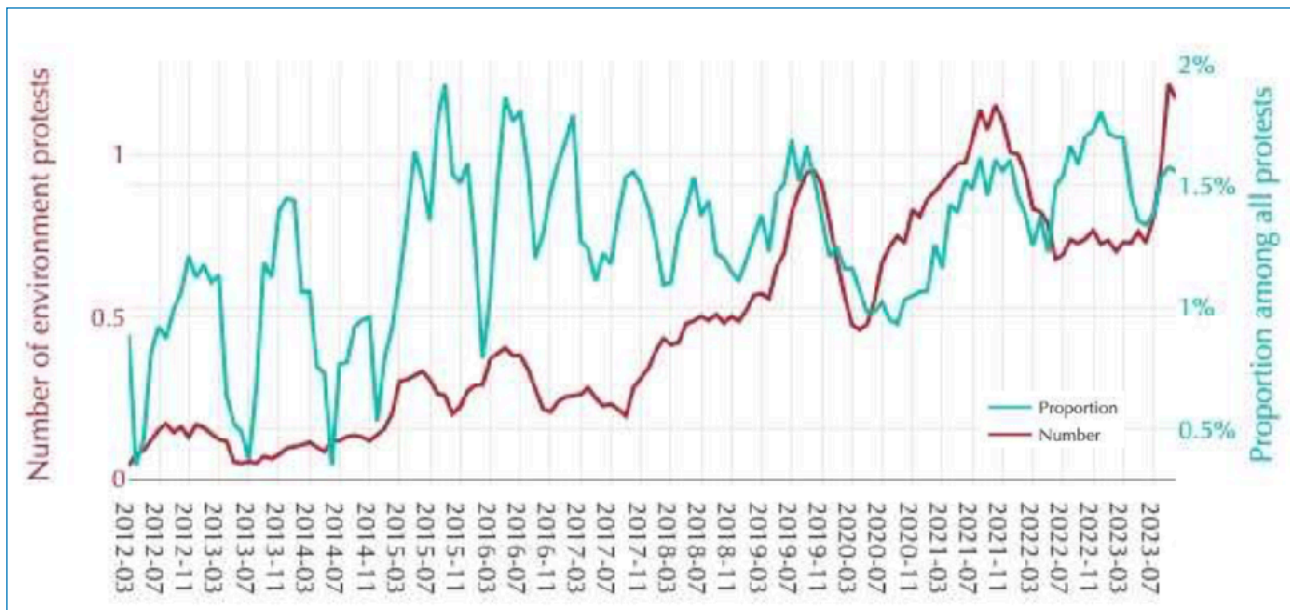
**Diagram 1 – Total number and proportion of climate protests
(March 2012– July 2023)**



Source: [Berglund et al., 2024](#) – ACLED data, per month and country, 5 months smoothing.

Regarding environmental protests, the upward evolution is more consistent over the entire period from 2012 to 2023, with the number of protests increasing tenfold (see **diagram 2**).

**Diagram 2 – Total number and proportion of environmental protest
(March 2012– July 2023)**



Source: [Berglund et al., 2024](#) – ACLED data, per month and country, 5 months smoothing.

A greater concern of world population on environment

This trend is illustrated by the results of the [Global Climate Change Survey](#) conducted as part of the Gallup World Poll 2021/2022 in 125 countries, involving nearly 130,000 individuals. They show that 89% of respondents are calling for an increased government action in favour of climate change and 86% are approving pro-climate social norms. Additionally, 69% are willing to contribute by donating more than 1% of their personal income to fund these efforts. Countries where concern appears to be strongest include China, some countries in Central and South America, countries in the Middle East, and West and East Africa, which are **vulnerable both from a climatic and economic perspective** [\[read\]](#) (see maps in **annexe**).

A study by a Polish researcher who uses the results obtained from the [International Social Survey Program](#) covering 44 countries,¹ goes in the same direction, showing that more than 70% of people are concerned about the environment in countries as diverse as Australia, France, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland. Countries where over 15% of the population do not consider environmental issues important were Slovakia, Thailand, and South Africa. In the countries surveyed, a majority of the population believes that it is better to inform, encourage, educate, and reward citizens through a system of favourable taxes to encourage them to adopt

¹ Australia, Austria, China, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, India, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Norway, New Zealand, the Philippines, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand and the US.

behaviour beneficial for the environment, rather than punishing them with financial penalties [\[read\]](#).

Many more studies come to similar conclusions [read [here](#) and [here](#)].

Votes contradicting opinions?

With the progress made by right-wing and far-right parties², a decrease in public action in favour of the climate can be expected,³ while it is already notoriously insufficient [\[read\]](#), despite the concern of the people that has just been described. This paradox, of course, stems from the multiple reasons unrelated to the climate for which voters might vote for the far-right. Contrary to what is often stated, **right-wing voters are not necessarily climate sceptics** [\[read\]](#). Cost of living, job security, or immigration are issues that sometimes seem to determine voters' choices. Moreover, the way in which the political debate is structured and how public opinion is presented can convey a false impression to people.

This brings up the question of the design of political programmes and **the importance given within them to the most disadvantaged population groups**.⁴ On hungerexplained, we have already shown that it is possible – particularly by using the GHG account approach – to find a way to reconcile the cutting of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the reduction of inequalities, while imposing greater efforts and contributions to wealthier population groups [\[read\]](#).

By pushing their thinking in this direction and designing pro-environmental policies that do not penalise the most disadvantaged, parties wanting to preserve the environment will, in democratic regimes, increase their chances of accessing power and taking action. Otherwise, in the long run, when the environmental situation becomes absolutely untenable, there will be a high risk of seeing **environmental dictatorships** emerge that will truly implement a "punitive ecology".

More repression

A tightening of national policies in terms of repression is underway, even in those states considered democratic.

This can take the form of adopting new and more repressive laws, using anti-terror laws to combat what is then wrongly labelled as 'eco-terrorism', or even

² The most emblematic examples of such successes are the U.S., Argentina, the Netherlands, Portugal, Italy and France.

³ As a consequence of the rise of right-wing parties and especially far-right parties, and the decrease in representation of green parties during the 2024 European elections, the European Union has questioned part of its Green Deal.

⁴ France's fuel tax policy that triggered the 'Yellow vests' movement, is a typical example of what should not be done [\[read\]](#).

using laws for combatting organised crime. Sometimes, new laws may contradict existing legislation or threaten human rights. More repression may also include expanding police powers and granting impunity to officers engaged in violent actions against protesters.



In terms of justice, penal policies can ‘over-criminalise’ protesters and ‘under-criminalise’ behaviours harmful to the environment.

Sometimes, corporations or private groups may take over from governments and suppress pro-environment activists, going so far as murdering them or making them disappear.

Researchers at the University of Bristol have analysed such trends in 14 countries,⁵ ranging from a democracy index of 2.22 out of a maximum of 10 for Russia to 9.81 for Norway.⁶

Among the countries studied, those that have experienced the most **victims** between 2012 and 2023 are Brazil (401 – killed mainly by hitmen and landowners), the Philippines (298 – mostly by the military and hitmen), India (86 – mainly by the police and mafias), and Peru (58 – also mainly by the police and mafias). Victims have also been reported in the United States (2) and France (1).

⁵ Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, India, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Russia, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda, the U.K., and the U.S.

⁶ The Democracy Index is based on 60 indicators, grouped into five categories: electoral process and pluralism; functioning of government; political participation; political culture; and civil liberties. For each of these indicators, the country is given a mark between 0 and 10 [[read](#)].

The use of arrests was most common in Australia, the U.K., Norway, and the U.S., while violence was observed more in Peru, South Africa, Uganda, and France [\[read\]](#).

Conclusion

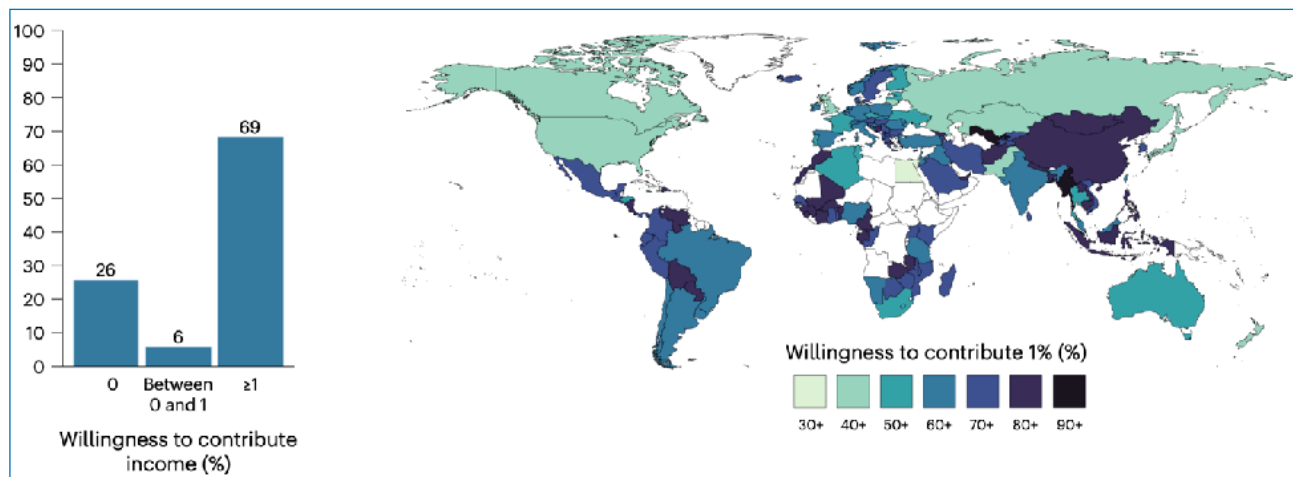
The world population has become increasingly aware of environmental and climate-related issues. The majority is in favour of government action in this area and is willing to sacrifice resources for it.

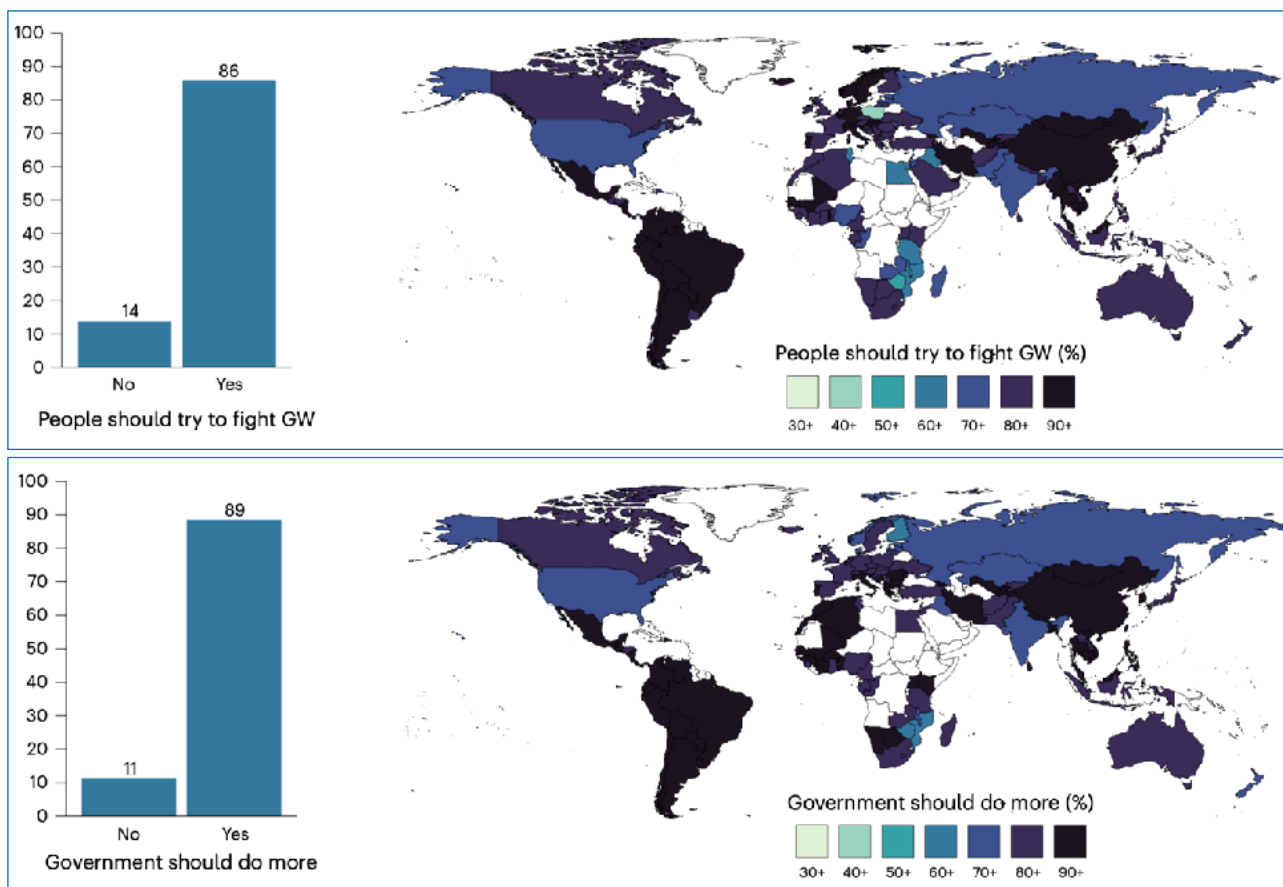
However, the global trend is moving towards the rise of more authoritarian, nationalist, right-wing – even far-right – governments (for a variety of reasons) who are not particularly prone to implementing policies favourable to the environment and climate.

The increasingly frequent environmental and climate protests are met by more repression, both legal and violent.

To counter these harmful trends, left-wing political movements that are pro-climate and pro-environment should develop policies that reconcile environmental goals with economic and social objectives, if they want to have a chance to be in power.

Annexe : Maps showing the results of the Global Climate Change Survey





Source: [Andre et al., 2024](#).

to know more:

- Berglund, O., Franco Brotto, T., Pantazis, C., Rosedale, C. and Pessoa Cavalcanti, R., [Criminalisation and Repression of Climate and Environmental Protest](#), University of Bristol, 2024.
- Bouman, T., Steg, L. & Dietz, T., [The public demands more climate action, not less](#). Climatic Change 177, 167 (2024), 2024.
- Andre, P., Boneva, T., Chopra, F. et al., [Globally representative evidence on the actual and perceived support for climate action](#), Nat. Clim. Chang. 14, 253–259 (2024), 2024.
- Rydzewski, P., [Attitudes Towards Environmental Protection in International Comparative Research](#), Problemy Ekorozwoju, 19(1), 67–77, 2024.
- Potential energy, Later is Too Late – [A comprehensive analysis of the messaging that accelerates climate action in the G20 and beyond](#), Potential Energy Coalition, 2023.

Selection of past articles on [hungerexplained](#) related to the topic:

- [In spite of the huge economic and social costs resulting from environmental degradation, the way we invest is not changing](#), 2024.
- [Climate: global concern and inaction, as COP 28 Dubai is at hand](#), 2023.

- [Thinking outside the box – A solution to cut GHG emissions while reducing inequalities](#), 2022.
- [Income inequality impacts on the level of greenhouse gas emissions and on vulnerability to the consequences of climate change](#), 2020.
- [Terrorism, Hunger, Migrations : Why are we unable to address the root causes of our problems?](#) 2016.
- [Is “free-tradism” agonising? Why is it increasingly difficult to enter into free trade agreements?](#) 2016.
- [Intergenerational equity: the European social model – The story of a political mistake](#), 2015.