

# The risks of radical climate activism and a proposal of a solidarity approach

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“Only by uniting the power of the entire village could they chase Snake away.”

—“Virtue of Sacrifice”; [The Kingfisher Story Collection](#) (2022)

## [SCIENCE COMMUNICATION]

Environmental activism has increasingly embraced radical approaches in recent years, targeting valuable artworks or disrupting public events to raise awareness about urgent climate issues. This form of activism seeks to provoke awareness and pressure governments and businesses to address environmental problems. Radical environmentalist groups frequently employ unconventional methods, believing that dramatic actions are essential to emphasize the urgency of the ecological crisis.

For instance, on November 6, 2023, climate activists smashed the glass covering Velázquez’s “The Rokeby Venus” to criticize government inaction on climate change, revealing the damaged glass frame after repeated hammering. This incident exemplifies a broader strategy within radical activism: using high-visibility events to draw attention to urgent environmental issues [1].

Similarly, on March 5, 2024, Extinction Rebellion protesters blocked lanes of Melbourne’s West Gate Bridge during peak hour, causing major disruption. They parked a truck on the

bridge, climbed on top, and ignited a flare highlighting government inaction on climate change, leading to delays for commuters and emergency services. Police eventually arrested and removed the protesters using a cherry picker. This action coincided with the ASEAN Summit in Melbourne, Australia, which received mixed reactions - some supported the cause but criticized the methods, while others questioned its effectiveness [2].



**Illustration.** Generated by Imagine AI (<https://www.imagine.art/>)

While these dramatic approaches can draw attention, they also come with significant risks. Radical actions can potentially lose public support, cause disruption, and sometimes lead to violence [3]. Moreover, such activism may unintentionally affect the broader environmental movement, as public backlash against perceived extreme or unlawful acts can reduce trust and support for environmental causes [4]. The resulting damage or disruption can also be used by opponents to discredit the entire movement, portraying activists negatively [5]. Furthermore, despite the significant impact of the business sector on environmental degradation, some radical environmentalists view them as opponents [6,7], which could lead to confrontation rather than cooperation.

In their recent paper, Vuong et al. [8] suggest that activists should consider employing more strategic and constructive approaches to optimize their impact to avoid negative consequences. This involves carefully weighing the potential repercussions of their actions

and focusing on engaging stakeholders collaboratively rather than adopting antagonistic tactics. Additionally, addressing these issues may require structural change, emphasizing the importance of a deliberate process rather than rushing it [9]. They highlight the significance of adopting a solidarity approach, which involves collaboration among various stakeholders, including activists, governments, businesses, and citizens. This approach prioritizes education, promotes an eco-surplus culture based on pro-environmental values, and fosters collaboration to develop effective solutions while avoiding confrontational approaches [8].

Moreover, the paper advocates for the active involvement of businesses in climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, encouraging them to realign their priorities and integrate environmental values into their operations. While recognizing the necessity of structural transformation and social transition in addressing climate change, it underscores the need for careful consideration to avoid destabilizing existing social and economic structures. Deep leverage points, such as restructuring institutions and reimagining knowledge production, are identified as critical for meaningful transformation [5].

Additionally, the paper acknowledges the inevitability of social resistance and conflicts during periods of change, emphasizing the importance of managing these conflicts effectively to prevent further worsening of climate problems [10]. It also highlights the interconnected nature of climate change with other urgent issues like socio-economic injustices and inequalities, urging climate activists to address these broader issues within the wider context of environmental and social justice [8].

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