Routledge Advances in Climate Change Research

CLIMATE POLITICS IN POPULIST TIMES

CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN GERMANY, SPAIN, AND AUSTRIA

Mirjam Gruber

Climate Politics in Populist Times

This book navigates the neglected territory where far-right populism intersects with climate change, presenting a nuanced examination that transcends traditional research boundaries.

In recent decades, Europe has grappled with the surge of far-right and populist movements, fuelling robust academic debates. Simultaneously, the global discourse on climate change has become increasingly pervasive in societal and political spheres. This book provides a comprehensive exploration of how populist far-right parties discuss climate change within their national contexts, focusing on Germany, Spain, and Austria. Using a meticulous methodology rooted in critical discourse studies, Mirjam Gruber examines the perspectives on climate change held by mainstream parties, thereby defining the national policy field. Gruber then delves into the discourse about climate change of populist far-right parties, revealing a complex web of obstructionist arguments intricately tied to the national policy context. By analysing a diverse array of documents spanning five years, including social media posts, press releases, parliamentary debates, and policy documents, Gruber uncovers a stark contrast between the willingness of mainstream parties to address climate concerns and the obstructionist rhetoric employed by their far-right counterparts. This illuminating exploration underscores the importance of context in understanding political communication and provides profound insights into how different nations frame the climate change narrative.

Climate Politics in Populist Times will be of great interest to students and scholars of climate change, environmental politics, climate change communication, and populist far-right ideologies.

Mirjam Gruber is a post-doc researcher at the Center for Advanced Studies of Eurac Research, Bozen-Bolzano (Italy). She completed her doctoral studies in political science at the University of Leipzig (Germany), focusing on climate change communication. In 2022, she enhanced her academic pursuits with a five-month research visit at the University of Leicester (United Kingdom) under the supervision of Bernhard Forchtner. Until 2017, she pursued her master’s degree in political science and sustainable development at the University of Bern (Switzerland) and the University of Konstanz (Germany). During her bachelor’s studies, she specialised in international development and cooperation at the University of Bologna (Italy) and the University of Valladolid (Spain). Her current research interests include climate change communication, populism, far-right parties, critical discourse studies, and mainstreaming of the far right.

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Mirjam Gruber

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To all the feminists who paved the way for me, opening doors and breaking barriers.

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Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*)
BG	conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*)
CDS	critical discourse studies
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*)
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSU	Christian Social Union in Bavaria (*Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern*)
DHA	Discourse-Historical Approach
ETS	Emissions Trading System
EU	European Union
EU-ETS	European Union Emissions Trading System
FDP	Free Democratic Party (Germany) (*Freie Demokratische Partei*)
FFF	Fridays for Future
FPÖ	Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*)
GHG	greenhouse gas
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NFZ	Neue Freie Zeitung
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPD	National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ÖVP	Austrian People's Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei*)
PFRPs/PFRP	Populist far-right parties/Populist far-right party
PP	People's Party (Spain) (*Partido Popular*)
PSOE	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*)

SPÖ	Social Democratic Party of Austria (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*)
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
US	United States of America

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1 Introduction

Issues concerning the natural environment have long been present on the political agendas of most European countries and beyond. These include a wide variety of topics ranging from the local to the global level and incorporating, for instance, waste and wastewater disposal, deforestation, biodiversity loss, air pollution, global warming, and climate change. Frequently, environmental burdens are accompanied by visible and tangible consequences for nature and animals (Dauvergne, 2008; IPCC, 2022). Nevertheless, there are often no quick, straightforward, and assured political and social responses to environmental problems (see e.g. Adger et al., 2011; Barnes et al., 2020; Burch & Library, 2011; Degroot et al., 2021; Jones & Davison, 2021; Khan et al., 2016; Maor et al., 2017; Moloney & Strengers, 2014; Moser, 2005) nor 'can policy approaches to problem solving be seen as a direct consequence of a rational consideration process in the choice of the most effective instruments' (Espinosa et al., 2017, p. 9 own translation from German).

Over the past decades, the discourse about climate change has transformed from a topic that was once mainly a concern among natural scientists into an issue that is relevant to social scientists and the general public (Hulme, 2009). Political science research often focuses on the ideas and discourses about climate change of political parties. Indeed, the literature on the views, positions, and communication of populist right or far-right party and non-party actors on climate change has been steadily growing, whereby a climate-obstructive orientation was frequently – but not always – found among these actors (Barla & Bjork-James, 2022; see e.g. Ekberg et al., 2022b; Forchtner, 2019a, 2020; Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015; Hanson, 2023; Huber, 2020; Hultman et al., 2020; Jett et al., 2024; Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020; Letourneau et al., 2023; Lockwood, 2018; Lubarda & Forchtner, 2023; Sommer et al., 2022; Toni & Feitosa Chaves, 2022; Yazar & Haarstad, 2023). This also serves as the starting point for this work, which focuses on the communication about climate change by three populist far-right parties (PFRPs) in Germany, Spain, and Austria. I will show how those parties are dealing with climate change; thus, I analyse the discourse about climate change of three PFRPs. Before I go into detail, I would like to emphasise that understanding the discourse about climate change of individual parties encompasses the respective national context. Scholars have acknowledged the role of the political and cultural context in the managing of climate change policies of individual countries, with far-right policies correlating

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with climate obstruction (Engels et al., 2013; Tranter & Booth, 2015). Even more so, populism in particular is described as 'substantially contextually contingent' (Taggart, 2004, p. 275), which is yet another indication that strategic analysis of context should be systematically incorporated into such studies. More specifically, it is central to include and to understand the national context and more concretely the national policy field of climate change in which the PFRPs' discourse is embedded (see Hulme, 2009). To define the national policy field of climate change in the respective countries for this research, I rely on the analysis of the understanding of climate change of the mainstream parties (i.e. the established and electorally successful parties, such as major conservatives and liberals/libertarians situated most often on the left and right of the political centre) (for a definition of mainstream parties, see Meguid, 2005; or Pop-Eleches, 2010) of that country.[1] Studies of how the environment and, more concretely, climate change impact mainstream parties' discourses or policy agendas, are notably scarce (Farstad, 2018). As a result, the first aim of this research is to analyse how the understanding of climate change developed in the communication of the big centre-left and centre-right parties (i.e. mainstream parties) in different current national contexts. Understanding these national contexts and actual situations lays the foundation for the second goal of this book, which is to show how established PFRPs frame climate change and transport the topic into their mainstream politics. Throughout this work I will reveal how the national policy field of climate change is connected to the populist far-right discourse about climate change. By doing this, I not only highlight how important this relation is but also support the methodological approach that is the innovative basis of this work. This study adds to the growing body of research that tries to disentangle the ideological underpinnings of populist far-right climate change communication, and it discusses discourses about climate change by three PFRPs, a subject that requires more attention.

The value of adopting language-sensitive and discursive approaches in investigating, classifying, and understanding climate change as well as the relevance of studying the discourses about climate change has long been recognised by various disciplines (see e.g. Aitken, 2012; Badullovich et al., 2020; Dickinson et al., 2013; Forchtner et al., 2018; Krzyżanowski, 2013; Weingart et al., 2000; Willis, 2016). While its significance for research is widely acknowledged, the concept of discourse itself remains understood in a wide variety of ways. For instance, Schiffrin et al. (2005) claim in the *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* that linguists in particular define discourse as anything 'beyond the sentence', while others refer to discourse studies as the study of language use (Fasold, 1990). Without going into the many different meanings, definitions, and uses of the term in the wider literature here, it is essential to state at this point that I base my interpretation of the term 'discourse' on Reisigl and Wodak (2017, p. 89), who consider it to be 'a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action' and 'socially constituted and socially constitutive', according to which discourses influence social structures and realities and are also influenced by them. In addition and still in line with Reisigl and Wodak, a discourse is related to a macro topic and 'linked to the argumentation about validity claims such as truth

and normative validity involving several social actors who have different points of view' (2017, p. 89).

Indeed, the issue of climate change is shaped by various competing discourses and perspectives (Grasso & Markowitz, 2015), despite natural sciences agreeing unanimously that human-induced climate change exists and represents a fundamental threat of the present (Cook et al., 2013; IPCC, 2022). Climate change has different meanings for different people, and climate change issues and policies are often shaped by contrasting interpretations of reality, by stakeholder interests, or by power relations. In the book *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* Hulme (2009) presents two very distinct ways of seeing climate change: on the one hand, climate change is an observable physical phenomenon; on the other hand, it is an idea that can be discussed, adapted and used. He states that while the former is measurable and quantifiable, the latter is strongly formed by who is being asked and one's cultural and social background. Moreover, climate change cannot be neatly analysed simply by looking at the scientific results presented, for instance, in Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports. Discourses about climate change have always been formed by cultural and historical perspectives, and in order to understand such discourses it is essential to include the wider cultural context (Hulme, 2008). In fact, a considerable share of people living in Western democracies (concrete numbers vary greatly between different nations) deny the existence of climate change in various ways (Brooks & Wingard, 2023; Jylhä et al., 2021; Kovaka, 2021; Leiserowitz et al., 2009; Leviston & Walker, 2012; Lübke, 2022; Sarathchandra & Haltinner, 2023; Veijonaho et al., 2023; Wullenkord & Reese, 2021). Originating mainly (but not only) in the United States (US) and spreading to many nations, the climate change countermovement can be seen as an international community (Dunlap & McCright, 2012; Sassan et al., 2023). Although the climate change countermovement is relatively small in many countries, denial and scepticism towards anthropogenic climate change has long been considered a fundamental challenge to the development of efficient climate change protection and adaptation policies (Bowden et al., 2019). By now many actors do not deny climate science per se but focus on obstructing climate policy. Therefore, recent literature increasingly speaks of climate obstruction or climate action obstruction (Ekberg et al., 2022a).

A very short literature overview

Ideological factors and political orientation have been documented as relatively stable predictors for climate change beliefs. For instance, scholars reveal that while liberals tend to support pro-climate policies, conservatives typically oppose them (see also Dunlap et al., 2016; Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Myrick & Evans Comfort, 2019). Research suggests that far-right or populist far-right actors in particular tend to obstruct climate action in one way or another (Forchtner, 2019b; Forchtner et al., 2018; Hess & Renner, 2019). The successful election in 2016 of Donald Trump – who unveiled ambiguous beliefs regarding climate change (BBC News, 2020), used climate change denial in his presidential campaign (Dunlap et al., 2016)

and decided to withdraw from the Paris Agreement[2] – highlights that the nexus between climate obstruction and different actors such as the populists far-right is relevant for further research (see Peters, 2018). As mentioned previously, this work addresses this very point. However, even though public support for such political parties and movements is growing, research also agrees that mainstream, that is, parties on the left and right of the political spectrum in particular influence the public discourse (van Spanje, 2010; Wodak, 2018).

Generally, climate obstruction not only expresses itself through a simple outright denial of human-induced climate change or climate science, but researchers have identified various strategies and aspects of obstruction. Many studies rely on Stephan Rahmstorf, who, in his book *The Climate Sceptics*, pioneered three main types of denial or sceptics: trend sceptics (denial of the existence of global warming), attribution sceptics (denial of the human impact on the global warming trend) and impact sceptics (denial of negative impacts of global warming) (Rahmstorf, 2005). However, just as climate science is constantly evolving and constantly presenting new findings, denial or scepticism of (anthropogenic) climate change has also evolved and gained complexity. Therefore, scholars have further developed and reconceptualised this typology. For example, van Rensburg (2015) integrated Rahmstorf's typology in the first of his three distinct categories of objects of scepticism, namely 'evidence scepticism', which includes scepticism about scientific proof of trends, causes and impacts of human-made climate change. He calls the denial or critique regarding the 'scientific, bureaucratic, and political processes behind mainstream climate science' 'process scepticism' (p. 4). His third category, 'response scepticism', implies scepticism of the 'public and private response to the climate issue' (p. 4). In recent literature, attention has increasingly moved from outright denial of climate change towards other types of opposition to climate mitigation, climate inaction, or climate denial (Almiron & Moreno, 2022; Ekberg et al., 2022a). Indeed, Ekberg et al. (2022a) differentiate between primary, secondary, and tertiary obstruction. Actors engaging in primary obstruction deny anthropogenic climate change and the scientific evidence of it. Others, who at least accept climate science but question the validity of policy decisions and decision-making procedures, delay climate action due to, for instance, ideological, political, or economic reasons, and are engaging in secondary obstruction. Tertiary obstruction includes all those accepting climate science and not intending to obstruct climate mitigation but still carrying out business 'as usual' (Ekberg et al., 2022a, p. 11). In Chapter 2 I will go more into detail and explain why climate obstruction (rather than denial or scepticism) is the term I use in this book.

This development highlights the complex nature of climate obstruction, but the literature is considerably more extensive than what is described here. Different disciplines such as psychology, political science, sociology, and behavioural studies deal with climate obstruction and form a comprehensive body of literature. Climate obstruction has been the subject of many quantitative and qualitative studies and in general various factors (e.g. gender, education, socio-demographics) can play a role. I will discuss the state of the art of this research field in detail later in Chapter 2; here I outline a few major findings in the literature in order

to give a brief overview. For instance, researchers have shown that on the individual level, politically conservative men in particular show climate scepticism in various countries (Letourneau et al., 2023; McCright & Dunlap, 2013; Milfont et al., 2015; Whitmarsh, 2011). Also, on the institutional level, conservative foundations, think-tanks, and political parties are more likely to support climate obstruction (Busch & Judick, 2021; Dunlap & Jacques, 2013; Dunlap & McCright, 2012; Ekberg & Pressfeldt, 2022; McCright & Dunlap, 2003). Climate obstruction at the elite level is often influenced and supported by extensive networks of powerful think-tanks (Jacques et al., 2008), which have often financial ties to fossil fuel industries (Brulle, 2013). Thus, large financial resources help to produce and disseminate a wide range of publications and public relations work in the vein of climate obstruction, which in turn leads to a huge global impact on public and political affairs.

Hess and Renner (2019), who compared party statements of moderate conservative and far-right parties on climate change and renewable energies in six European countries, claimed that typically far-right parties reject climate science, while moderate conservative parties generally showed commitment to climate mitigation policies. Indeed, research suggests that there is an important difference between the right side of the political spectrum (e.g. parties on the right of the political centre) and the far right (e.g. radical right actors, extreme right actors or far-right populist parties). For instance, a study was carried out analysing how the rise of a far-right nationalist political party (Sweden Democrats) and ideas of organised groups who obstruct climate action merged in Sweden elucidating the path of climate obstruction from individual groups or movements to far-right party actors and eventually into national parliaments (Hultman et al., 2019). Interesting in this context is a study on Germany by Kaiser and Puschmann (2017), who found similarities in the rhetoric of climate change denial and anti-establishment/anti-elite rhetoric employed by far-right parties. Based on a broad literature review, Forchtner (2020) summarises that many far-right actors reject anthropogenic climate change or are in one way or another sceptical towards climate science issues (i.e. they deny climate research and often speak out against measures and policies that protect the environment and climate) (see e.g. Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015; Lockwood, 2018; Schaller & Carius, 2019).

Research questions and research design

The relevance of investigating this nexus increases due to the fact that in the current European context, the far-right − and in particular populist far-right parties and movements – have been on the rise (Kriesi & Pappas, 2015; Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018; Turner, 2023). Wodak and Krzyżanowski (2017) argue that the rise of right-wing populist parties in Europe and the US has resulted in lost votes for mainstream parties. Concretely, since the so-called migration crisis in 2015 in Europe, 'new' (e.g. the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Vox in Spain) and 'old' (e.g. Lega in Italy and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)) PFRPs have been able to gain votes and, in some cases, even participate in the formation of

national governments (e.g. the Italian Lega was part of the government between 2018 and 2019 and since 2022 with the far-right Fratelli d'Italia, the Austrian FPÖ was part of the national government between 2017 and 2019). Many PFRPs have been found to mobilise primarily on issues such as immigration, identity politics, anti-globalisation, nationalism, Euroscepticism, and law and order (Heft et al., 2022; Naxera et al., 2020; Poier et al., 2017). Mainly during the past few years many, though not all PFRPs, have been showing hostility towards climate change policies and obstructing climate action in one way or another.

At the same time, scholars have identified the potential influence of successful PFRPs on the policy agenda of mainstream parties but refer to necessary caution and differentiation due to further underlying factors in the wake of this development (Akkerman, 2015). The goal of the current study is not to explore party competition processes but rather to comprehend the discourse about climate change by PFRPs and how is woven into the policy field of climate change in various nations. From this I deduce the following research questions:

1. How present is the issue of climate change among mainstream parties?
2. How have mainstream parties changed their communication about climate change from 2016–2018 to 2019–2020?
3. How does the presence of climate change evolve in populist far-right communication between 2016 and 2020?
4. How do populist far-right parties address the issue of climate change?

To analyse these questions, I rely on three different cases, that is, Germany, Spain, and Austria. In order to answer the first and the second questions, I draw on social media posts from party profiles and channels of mainstream parties, protocols of parliamentary sessions, and policy documents. Data is analysed by the methodological apparatus of critical discourse studies (CDS), which enables or requires relevant contextual information to be included in the overall analysis.

The first two research questions on the presence, understanding, and development of the discourse about climate change by mainstream parties are essential to the entirety of the project in order to understand the characteristics of the discourse about climate change in the national context and, more concretely, in the context of a national policy field. This analysis is considered to be the basis that prevails in the political discourse about climate change; thus, it is particularly important to comprehend its understanding. Specifically, this case concerns the conceptual understanding of climate change, which is being countered by other political actors such as PFRPs. Generally, I regard 'language as the key carrier of conceptual dynamics and change' (Krzyżanowski, 2016, p. 312; Steinmetz, 2011). In order to examine how the social and political understanding of climate change is constructed in the communication of the mainstream parties in a country, I rely on CDS and combine the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) with *Begriffsgeschichte* (BG) or conceptual history, elaborated by Reinhart Koselleck (1979, 2002, 2004) and others (Krzyżanowski, 2016, 2019 for more, see Chapter 3).

The second part of the analysis addresses the third and fourth research questions. The DHA fits these research questions very well as it has an interdisciplinary orientation. Concretely it integrates aspects of communication, language, and politics. Moreover, based on the work of Ruth Wodak and her colleagues, I regard discourses as historical, meaning a 'discourse is not produced and cannot be understood without taking the context into consideration' and 'discourses are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically or subsequently'(Wodak, 1996, p. 19). Drawing on the DHA in CDS, especially elaborated by Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl (see also e.g. Krzyżanowski, 2013; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2001), this part of the analysis pursues the 'principle of triangulation', 'which implies taking a whole range of empirical observations, theories and methods as well as background information into account' (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 89). Indeed, in order to analyse the third and fourth research questions, I rely on the analysis of party manifestos, election programs, social media posts, and press releases of PFRPs. The investigation transcends a purely linguistic analysis by integrating other aspects in the analysis, in this case the historical, political, sociological, and scientific dimensions (e.g. Wodak, 2014). Concretely the analysis focuses on the key elements of populist far-right communication strategies on climate change and on the discourse thereby constructed and recontextualised across online and offline communication. Further explanations are provided in Chapter 3.

Relevance of this research project

The relevance of this project is manifold: first, I analyse connections and interrelations between discourses about climate change of various political parties and their respective national policy fields by investigating their understanding of and discourse about climate change. To do that I include various political parties left and right of the political centre, who have a lot of formal power in their respective countries. Second, this project contributes to the policy discussion by expanding the literature on PFRPs, which have become crucial actors in European politics at regional, national, and European levels, particularly regarding topics on migration and integration. In fact, this project aims to give further insights into the role of PFRPs in national contexts. Third, it adds to the growing body of academic work examining the ideological underpinnings of populist far-right climate obstruction. Indeed, the scientific contribution of this work goes beyond the cases of the German AfD, the Spanish Vox, and the Austrian FPÖ as it will engage with the ongoing scholarly debate in which Kulin et al. (2021) suggest that nationalism is more important than populist ideology for climate obstruction by the populist far right and Huber (2020) argues that such obstruction derives from populism. Fourth, investigating the relationship between PFRPs and climate denial is essential not only for understanding climate change stances as a possible symptom of populist far-right ideology but also for finding responses to it that support climate change mitigation policies proposed by natural scientists (Lockwood, 2018).

In addition, this research makes contributions to the literature on discourses about climate change as well as concepts of populism and far-right literature. First, by focusing on the understanding of climate change and mainstream parties, this study demonstrates how to methodically examine and include the analysis of the political context in which a party's discourse is embedded. Understanding how the national context and the policy field of climate change developed by analysing the understanding of climate change of mainstream parties in different countries sheds light on the role of national characteristics, context, and traditions for the nature of discourses about climate change. Second, focusing on how PFRPs address the issue of climate change contributes to the populism literature, which has often concerned itself with issues regarding migration or the environment only. Lastly, this research project contributes to the empirical research in CDS by not only combining various approaches of CDS but also including and comparing various cases in a systematic way.

The European context

In my study, I analyse and compare three European Union (EU) member states, which is a further added value. I chose Germany, Spain, and Austria for my analysis because the EU serves as a crucial connecting factor between the examples. More precisely, discussions about climate change and adaptation and mitigation strategies are frequently held at the EU level. Member states are then urged to put these agreements into practice in their own national contexts. The European context is relevant in this respect, as member states largely follow the EU guidelines in climate protection targets (and policies). Hence, before I outline the structure of this book I would like to discuss some major developments regarding climate change at the European level, which will be addressed again very briefly in the next sections and are particularly relevant for the first part of the empirical analysis.

The EU has addressed climate change since the 1980s and can be considered a major actor in climate change governance and a leader in international climate cooperation (Godet, 2020). In fact, the EU declares itself as a strong player in this matter, acting at the global level and also supporting member states and third countries in implementing climate targets (European Parliament, 2018). Furthermore, the EU has also been a global cooperation partner in discussions on environmental and climate policies since the late 1980s and has long played a leadership role in UN negotiations. After the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and after the Kyoto Protocol with legally binding targets for emission reduction was adopted in 1997, the EU (then consisting of 15 members) committed itself to an emission reduction of 8 per cent below 1990 levels (at the time the average was 5 per cent). The EU also assumed the leadership position after the US announced in 2001 that it would no longer ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

However, global players such as the EU have been criticised for various aspects of its climate change governance. Indeed, it had problems adapting to shifts in the balance of power and was criticised for imposing unilateral and unrealistic climate

targets for countries of the Global South (Helm, 2009; Monyei et al., 2018; Ülgen, 2021). Already in 2009, after the EU failed to reach an agreement at the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) in Copenhagen, its negotiation strategy and normative leadership position were widely questioned. The adoption at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris of the Paris Agreements on 12 December 2015 – an agreement of the UNFCCC with the goal of climate protection – had the potential to restore EU's reputation as a leader. The agreement came into force in most European countries in 2016 and countries committed to meeting its goals, that is, above all, to reducing CO_2 emissions at the national level. In concrete terms, the Paris Agreement forms the basis of the binding international target of limiting global warming to well below two degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels. This also means that national climate protection contributions had to be implemented and communicated or updated by 2020. The temporary[3] withdrawal from the Paris Agreement of the US under President Trump was a new setback not only for the global climate goals but also for the EU as a climate leader. According to Godet (2020, p. 19) 'from a leadership position, the EU is now transitioning into a mediator role in global climate negotiations'.

Currently, in an expanded and updated 2023 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) (United Nations Climate Change, 2023), the Council of the EU and the European Parliament have officially endorsed all the crucial components of the legislative framework required to achieve its goal of reducing emissions by a minimum of 55 per cent by 2030, in comparison to the levels recorded in 1990 (Spain & the European Commission, 2023). Indeed, the central component of the EU's climate policy is the European Green Deal presented by the European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen on 11 December 2019. The proposal pursues the goal of reducing the EU's net emissions of greenhouse gases to zero by 2050, or in other words, to become climate neutral. The EU's commitment to climate protection is reflected in the EU's post-COVID-19 recovery plan for Europe. Thirty per cent of the funds have been allocated to 'fighting climate change', marking the highest share ever designated within the European budget (European Commission, 2022).

However, current climate policies of the EU are a result of the strategic choice made in the 1990s, where the EU decided to focus on emissions reduction and the use of market-based instruments, that is, to pursue decarbonisation mainly through economic incentives rather than change standards for production and consumption. For instance, the international emission trading system (ETS) is one result and even though such actions failed to fulfil climate change goals, the EU seems to maintain this strategy (Clò et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2011; Vlachou & Pantelias, 2016a, 2016b). EU ETS requires energy and industrial plant operators, as well as civil aviation firms, to trade emission certificates. One certificate allows the possessor to emit one tonne of CO_2 and other greenhouse gases. According to the OECD (2023), there are two main principles of trading systems: 'Cap-and-trade" and 'baseline-and-credit'. A cap-and-trade system establishes an upper limit on emissions, and emission permits are either auctioned off or distributed for free based on defined criteria (OECD, 2011). There is no fixed limit on emissions under a baseline-and-credit system, but polluters who lower their emissions more than

they otherwise are required to can earn 'credits' that they can sell to those who need them to comply with rules (OECD, 2011, 2023). The EU ETS works on the 'cap and trade' system.

The failure or non-fulfilment of the climate targets of many European states is no secret and particularly in the wake of the Paris Agreement large movements – composed mainly of young people – have arisen in Europe to fight for climate protection. The youth movement 'Fridays for Future' emerged in Europe and grew after Swedish high school student Greta Thunberg protested in front of the Swedish Parliament in 2018 with a sign 'School strike for climate' (Swedish Skolstrejk för klimatet). In September 2019, over 4 million protesters, many of them schoolchildren or students, participated all over the planet during the 'Global Week for Future'. With the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe in early 2020, the activities of the movement were severely restricted, and it was not until 2021 or 2022 (depending on the pandemic situation in the various countries) that more large-scale actions (e.g. demonstrations) were organised again. More recently, the so-called Last Generation, a coalition of climate activists, seeks to compel government measures aligned with the Paris Agreement and the 1.5-degree target through civil disobedience. They consider themselves the last generation capable of averting an Earth collapse (*Letzte Generation*, 2024). Notably, the group gains attention for disruptive actions like glueing themselves to roads and painting buildings with orange paint, prompting widespread public disapproval. Activists in Germany commonly face criminal convictions, mainly for coercion, leading to fines or occasional prison (Berliner Morgenpost, 2023).

Structure of the book

Having introduced important context information about EU climate policy, I now close this chapter by outlining the content of the next chapter of this manuscript. The second chapter of this manuscript outlines the state of the art and discusses similar and competing research in detail. I discuss both climate obstruction research and its conceptualisations as well as relationships between political orientation and climate change communication. I further discuss literature that considers the relation of populism and climate change and show the substantive arguments and the controversial role of populism. At the end, I concretise the research gaps in the empirical literature on this topic. This is followed by the third chapter, which includes the data, cases, and the method. I describe the selected period and explain and justify the selection of cases and data for the analysis. I then outline how I analyse the understanding of climate change, and how I investigate the PFRPs' discourse about climate change. Chapter 4 examines the climate change communication strategies of mainstream parties in Germany, Spain, and Austria, presenting the results of the understanding of climate change of the mainstream parties of the three countries, which also represents the policy field defined for this research. In Chapter 5, the analysis of the populist far-right parties follows. Here I first discuss the topics identified in the discourse and then look at different discursive strategies with a focus on the arguments. After presenting and discussing the details and individual

nuances for all three cases in Chapters 4 and 5, I look at the big picture in the discussion in Chapter 6. There, I compare the cases with each other and place the PFRPs even more in the respective context of the understanding of climate change. Finally, in Chapter 7, the Conclusion, I provide a conclusive summary of the entire work as well as an outlook.

Notes

1 For the present work I define the policy field of climate change based on the results of the examination of the climate change communication of the mainstream parties of a country (i.e. the understanding of climate change), which are in all three cases the big centre-left and centre-right parties within the political spectrum.
2 With Joe Biden's election victory in the 2020 presidential election, he moved to reinstate the US to the Paris Agreement shortly after taking office in January 2021.
3 The US rejoins the Paris Agreement in 2021 under President Joe Biden.

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2 Navigating the discourse

Unravelling climate change communication, political orientation, and populist far-right ideology

In this chapter I discuss the state of the art of the literature regarding the question of how political parties communicate climate change, focussing on PFRPs. Besides PFRPs communication, the legacy media (see e.g. Antilla, 2005; Bell, 1994; Boykoff, 2007; Dolšak & Houston, 2014; Feldman & Hart, 2018; Stoddart & Tindall, 2015; Weingart et al., 2000) as well as social media (e.g. Jones-Jang et al., 2020; W. Shi et al., 2020) have been major actors that has been analysed regarding their climate change communication. Nearly a decade ago, Rickards et al. (2014) found little research on how politicians understand and frame the complex issue of climate change (an exception is Fielding et al., 2012 about Australian politicians). However, since then, the number of studies has been growing constantly as the climate crisis and related issues increasingly concern scholars from social science disciplines. Willis (2016) investigated how politicians articulate climate change in general and analysed speeches by Members of the UK Parliament regarding discussions of the Climate Change Bill in 2008 using corpus analysis. Her analysis showed that politicians framed the climate crisis as an economic and technical issue. Like Espinosa et al. (2017), Willis (2016) describes the ways in which 'politicians, rather than responding in a straightforward or linear way to climate science, actively craft and shape the issue to fit with their outlook, and those of their supporters and other actors' (Willis, 2016, p. 213). More and more similar studies are focusing on language-related aspects, which highlight the importance of the central role of language in identifying and defining political issues and positions (Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2000). These support the view that language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a means for actors to exercise their power and advance their own agendas, as has been argued by Bourdieu (1991) and colleagues.

However, due to the focus of the present investigation, this chapter concentrates on the nexus of climate change and populist far-right actors, with special consideration of communication-related studies. Scholarly attention on 'right-wing' climate change communication increased enormously in the past years and spread from a broad focus on contemporary conservative actors (see e.g. Anshelm & Hultman, 2014; Campbell & Kay, 2014; Capstick & Pidgeon, 2014; Carvalho, 2007; Jacques et al., 2008; Jaspal et al., 2016; Kaiser & Rhomberg, 2015; Koteyko et al., 2015; McCright et al., 2016; McCright & Dunlap, 2011a; Painter & Gavin, 2015; Poortinga et al., 2011; Tranter, 2017; Woods et al., 2018) to more specific investigations

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on the far right (see e.g. Barla & Bjork-James, 2022; Bennett & Kwiatkowski, 2020; Forchtner, 2020b; Hatakka & Välimäki, 2020; Hultman et al., 2019, 2020; Jylhä et al., 2020; Tarant, 2020; Taylor, 2020; Toni & Feitosa Chaves, 2022; Yazar & Haarstad, 2023). As described in the introduction, far-right actors in particular tend to obstruct climate action in one way or another (Forchtner et al., 2018; Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015; Forchtner & Lubarda, 2022; Gemenis et al., 2012; Hanson, 2023; Küppers, 2022; Lubarda & Forchtner, 2023; Schaller & Carius, 2019).

In order to provide a fruitful discussion, I first present the literature on climate obstruction and clarify how the term is used in the present research. I then discuss the state of the art of climate change communication in connection to political orientation to delve deeper into the topic, addressing the nexus between climate change communication and (populist) far-right party and non-party actors. In the last section of this chapter, I provide a critical analysis of the ideational approach of populism and how the role of populism is considered on this issue.

Conceptualisations of climate change scepticism, denial, and obstruction

Climate change obstruction is not a new phenomenon, and a substantial body of scientific literature exists dealing with the issue (Björnberg et al., 2017; see e.g. McKie, 2019; Parkes, 2013; Tängh Wrangel & Causevic, 2021; Washington & Cook, 2011a). The situations in the US (Dunlap et al., 2016) and in Australia (Moffitt & Sengul, 2023; Tranter, 2017) in particular have been widely researched. A literature review on science denial by Björnberg et al. (2017) identified the majority of the articles as climate-related (see e.g. Andersen, 2015; Jacques, 2006; Jacques et al., 2008 for denial related to stratospheric ozone depletion; see e.g. Oreskes & Conway, 2010 for denial about sulphur, nitrogen and chlorofluorocarbon emissions). Accordingly, '[c]limate science denial is by far the most coordinated and well-moneyed form of science denial, constituting the backbone of the opposition to environmentalism and environmental science in general' (Björnberg et al., 2017, p. 235; Dunlap & McCright, 2011). However, this section does not want to review the literature on predictors, explanations, distributions, or psychological, social, and cultural factors of climate obstruction. Instead, I introduce a variety of classifications and types of climate obstruction present in the literature, outline their development, discuss the terms most present and finally conclude with the arguments for choosing climate obstruction as the prevailing terminology for this work.

As explained in the introduction, scholars distinguish between different variants of climate obstruction and use different terms. I already mentioned in the Introduction the trend-attribution-impact typology elaborated by Rahmstorf (2005) that has been enjoying wide currency (see e.g. P. Matthews, 2015; McCright, 2016; Poortinga et al., 2011). Engels et al. (2013) added a fourth type who aim to deny the scientific consensus on human-caused global warming, dubbed 'consensus denial' (see also Cohen, 2001). Also widely referenced in the literature are Van Rensburg's (2015) categories of objects of scepticism: evidence scepticism (denial regarding scientific evidence on trends, causes, and impacts of human-made climate change),

process scepticism (denial or criticism of the administrative, political, and scientific procedures that underpin mainstream climate science) and response scepticism (scepticism of the public and private responses to the climate crisis). Scholars such as Petersen et al. (2019, p. 117) examine the concept of 'ideological denialism' – a failure to acknowledge a growth-dependent economic system as a primary driver of climate change.

Moreover, in his book *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* Stanley Cohen (2001) proposes three types of denial in society. First, literal denial is simply claiming that something is not happening, for instance that the climate is not changing. Second, there is interpretive denial, in which actors reinterpret what is occurring in such a way that it loses importance, for instance, if one views raising global CO_2 emissions mainly as beneficial for plant growth. Third, implicatory denial applies when individuals, institutions, and states refuse to act (or block feasible acts) despite knowing they should, due to moral, political, and psychological preferences of these actors. This last classification can also be connected to Lamb et al. (2020), who look at four discourses of delay that accept the existence of climate change but rationalise inaction or insufficient effort. For instance, proponents of climate delay would highlight negative effects of climate mitigation, plead for non-transformative solutions, or cast doubt on the possibility of mitigating climate change.

In fact and as stated in the introduction, in recent research, the explicit denial of climate change is viewed as only one way to obstruct climate action or policy (Almiron & Moreno, 2022; Ekberg et al., 2022). Cohen's (2001) implicatory denial, Van Rensburg's (2015) process and response sceptics as well as Lamb et al.'s (2020) discourses of delay all look at those who accept climate change but do not act (appropriately). In addition, the types of obstruction suggested by Ekberg et al. (2022 see Introduction), that is, primary (denial of climate science/climate change), secondary (acceptance of human-made climate change combined with delay or forestall valuable climate mitigation), and tertiary obstruction (acceptance of human-made climate change combined with the retention of business as usual), all have in common that they 'need to be equally acknowledged as they all contribute towards the same outcome: lack of taking urgently needed steps' (p. 11). These types of climate obstruction need to be separated but can be overlapping and entangled in many, complex ways.

Having presented a selection of types of climate denial, scepticism, and obstruction, considering also their progression over time, it is time to also discuss terminologies. As various terms used in the literature are politicised and contested, their clarification of is needed in relation to their use in this manuscript. Therefore, I will outline discussions regarding the use of phrases such as 'climate' sceptic', 'climate contrarian', 'climate denial', and 'climate obstruction' (Howarth & Sharman, 2015; Jacques, 2012; Jankó et al., 2014; O'Neill & Boykoff, 2010).

Regarding 'climate sceptic', I refer to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) that provides the following definition in 2022:

> climate sceptic *n.* and *adj*. (also **climate skeptic**) *(a) n.* a person who or institution which rejects the idea (or the evidence) that climate change caused by human activity is occurring, or that it represents a significant threat to human

> and environmental welfare; cf. *climate denier* n.; *(b)* adj. that rejects the idea (or the evidence) that climate change caused by human activity is occurring, or that it represents a significant threat to human and environmental welfare.
>
> (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022)

Various scientists reject the term 'sceptic' in this context, claiming that science is intrinsically 'sceptical' in the sense of challenging presumptions and deferring judgment until the evidence is convincing (Garrard et al., 2019; see also O'Neill & Boykoff, 2010). According to the website Sceptical Science, created by John Cook, research assistant professor at the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University scientific scepticism is healthy. Scientists should always challenge themselves to improve their understanding. Yet this isn't what happens with climate change denial. Sceptics vigorously criticise any evidence that supports human-made global warming and yet embrace any argument, op-ed, blog or study that purports to refute global warming (Sceptical Science, 2020).

Moreover, Washington and Cook (2011b, p. 1) claim that scepticism 'is about seeking the truth and realizing the world is a complex place' and genuine scepticism 'is one of the ways that science progresses, examining assumptions and conclusions'. Therefore, scepticism or sceptics are generally seen as 'an integral part of the scientific method' (O'Neill & Boykoff, 2010, p. E151) and as an essential aspect in the development of knowledge ensuring that research is carried out systematically and according to high scientific standards (e.g. peer review processes). Indeed, scepticism is

> the heart of the scientific method. Genuine skeptics don't come to a conclusion until they have considered the evidence. In contrast, people who deny well-established science come to a conclusion first, and then discount any evidence that conflicts with their beliefs. That means that denial and skepticism are polar opposites.
>
> (Sceptical Science, 2022)

Also according to Poortinga et al. (2011), there is a substantial amount of variety among those who identify as sceptics, making the term 'scepticism' ambiguous with different connotations in the context of the complicated discussions around climate change (Tranter & Booth, 2015).

The term 'denial' is the most widely used alternative to sceptic, but various scholars highlight that the term is contested (Björnberg et al., 2017; Garrard et al., 2019; Van Rensburg, 2015). The term recalls 'holocaust denial' (see e.g. in the German context Goodbody, 2019) and as in the movie *An Inconvenient Truth* Al Gore quoted Winston Churchill comparing the climate crisis to the Nazi threat, the analogy has been criticised (Rudrum, 2021). However, regardless of how confident climate scientists are in their predictions, it is unlikely that they would ever assert that historical records and future scenarios are epistemically equal (Garrard et al., 2019, pp. 21–22). A frequent definition of (science) denial is the refusal to accept the validity of the existing scientific evidence (Björnberg et al., 2017; Dunlap, 2013; Goldsby & Koolage, 2015; Howarth & Sharman, 2015; Liu, 2012). Researchers

point out that a key component of science denial is the spreading of unproven claims about the validity of scientific findings and data, as well as the misrepresentation of scientific research and the rejection of the scientific consensus (Diethelm & McKee, 2009; Dunlap & Jacques, 2013; Oreskes & Conway, 2010; Rosenau, 2012).

The term 'contrarian', which is occasionally used, appropriately describes how anti-environmentalists see mainstream research, but it also carries negative overtones of 'personal pettiness' (Van Rensburg, 2015, p. 9). The phrase 'Flat Earther' has been also used to describe people who deny climate science, but the use has also been criticised, in particular, because the President of the Flat Earth Society accepts the science of climate change (Garrard et al., 2019).

The term 'climate obstruction' goes beyond simply denying or not denying climate change. Academic research has revealed that political inaction and delay in climate mitigation policies cannot be explained solely by the denial of climate science (Almiron & Moreno, 2022). Indeed, I illustrated above that various types of denial and scepticism proposed by scholars such as Cohen (2001), Van Rensburg (2015) and Lamb et al. (2020) focus on the obstruction of climate mitigation rather than the outright denial of human-induced climate change. Due to the use and further development of terms such as 'sceptic' and 'denial' in previous research, most recently scholars argue that 'climate obstruction' appears as a sophisticated conceptual and analytical framework 'that provides more nuance and aligns with the evidence emerging from academic research' (Moreno & Thornton, 2022, p. 9). The obstruction of necessary climate mitigation has often 'ended in the conceptual deadlock of "denialism", that is, of thinking about and looking for explicit and "extreme" cases of outright denial of the effects of human-induced greenhouse gases or the existence of climate change altogether' (Ekberg et al., 2022, p. 8). Since a clear consensus of climate science exists and has been available for many decades now (IPCC, 2014, 2022), its literal denial might not be the only efficient way to obstruct climate mitigation. In fact, studying mainly political parties and politicians, I can assume that such actors have easy access to the existing knowledge of climate science. Ferkany (2015, p. 710) speaks of 'motivated' denial although access to adequate information is available, and claims that climate obstruction is rooted in 'cultural cognition'. He distinguishes it from 'naïve' denial, which is mostly based on 'ignorance of the facts about climate change or mainstream climate science' (Ferkany, 2015, p. 710).

In the book *Climate Obstruction: How Denial, Delay and Inaction Are Heating the Planet*, Ekberg and his colleagues (2022) look at various actors with different agendas and how they are implicated in obstruction. To further strengthen the use of the framework climate obstruction, I briefly outline the presence of different actors in the academic literature, showing that often outright denial is less common than the obstruction of climate action.

Governments certainly feature as actors in this research field (Editorial, 2008; McCright & Dunlap, 2003, 2010; Young & Coutinho, 2013). Generally, they do not actively deny climate science entirely or human-made climate change but doubt the necessity of taking immediate action to stop it (Björnberg et al., 2017; Dunlap & McCright, 2011), that is, obstruct its mitigation. Furthermore, much of the existing literature analyses political and religious organisations, often with a geographical

focus on the US (Antonio & Brulle, 2011; Armitage, 2011; Dunlap, 2014; Dunlap & Jacques, 2013; Dunlap & McCright, 2015; L. C. Hamilton & Saito, 2014; Jacques, 2006, 2008, 2012; Jacques et al., 2008; McCright & Dunlap, 2010; McKewon, 2012; Wright & Mann, 2013) (for religion see Copeland Nagle, 2008; Daley Zaleha & Szasz, 2013; Danielsen, 2013; N. Smith & Leiserowitz, 2013). Björnberg et al. (2017, p. 236) also mention industry as 'important funders of activities inimical to environmental science' (Dunlap & McCright, 2011; Freudenburg & Muselli, 2012; Mann, 2021; Salinger, 2010; Talbot & Boiral, 2014; Wright & Mann, 2013). Many such companies promoting climate obstruction are involved in oil or coal production (Exxon Mobil, Peabody Coal), and in the steel, mining, and car industries (see e.g. Mann, 2021). Climate obstruction is also widespread in the media, as scholars show (see e.g. Brüggemann & Engesser, 2014; Elsasser & Dunlap, 2012; Feldman et al., 2012; Freudenburg & Muselli, 2012; Hoffman, 2011; Painter & Ashe, 2012). Here, studies often point to a strong correlation between (far) right-wing orientation and the publication of denialist articles (Dunlap & McCright, 2011; Feldman et al., 2012). Social media also plays a role as an 'echo chamber' of climate obstruction (Elgesem et al., 2014; Elsasser & Dunlap, 2012; Holder et al., 2023; Jacques & Connolly Knox, 2016; Lewandowsky, 2014; Lewandowsky et al., 2013; P. Matthews, 2015; Nerlich, 2010; Sharman, 2014; Wu & Xu, 2023). In addition, the public is the focus of many studies, with surveys often used to analyse the different varieties of obstruction and factors (e.g. demographic, ideational, socio-economic) (Gauchat, 2015; Kiral Ucar et al., 2023; McCright et al., 2014; McCright & Dunlap, 2011a, 2011b; Poortinga et al., 2011; Ratter et al., 2012; Scruggs & Benegal, 2012; Whitmarsh, 2011); (see also Lo & Jim, 2015 for Hong Kong; Milfont et al., 2015 for New Zealand; Ojala, 2015 for Sweden; J. Shi et al., 2015 for Switzerland; Tranter & Booth, 2015 of 14 industrialised nations). The least focus is on scientists, and generally only a small minority of scientists actively deny the evidence of climate or environmental issues (see Björnberg et al., 2017). Most of these scientists are not part of the established academic community, have no academic institution affiliation, and often work for think tanks such as the Heartland Institute in the US or The Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) in Australia (Anderegg et al., 2010; Lahsen, 2008, 2013; McKewon, 2012; Oreskes & Conway, 2010; Plehwe, 2014). For literature on the effect of climate change denial on the scientific community, see, for example, Lewandowsky et al. (2015).

In short, based on the current literature as well as on the characteristics of the present research, I will mainly but not exclusively rely on the framework (and terminology) of climate obstruction. Where appropriate and necessary, however, terms such as 'climate change denial' and 'scepticism' continue to be used.

Climate change communication and political orientation

It is nothing new that political orientation has been identified as an influencing factor for climate change beliefs and attitudes (Böhmelt & Zhang, 2023; Dupuis & Knoepfel, 2013; Hao et al., 2023; Knollenborg & Sommer, 2023; Ziegler, 2017) and ultimately also climate obstruction. According to the current state of the art, political ideology and orientation explain a notable amount of climate scepticism

and support for environmental protection, with left-right ideology in particular at its core (Dunlap et al., 2001, 2016; Guber, 2013; Häkkinen & Akrami, 2014; Jylhä et al., 2021; Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020; McCright et al., 2016; McCright & Dunlap, 2011b; Neumayer, 2004). The following first outlines left-right ideology and its role in climate change communication, moving towards the far right of the political spectrum. Here I discuss parties of the far right and their stances/beliefs about climate change. I then introduce nationalist ideology and studies on ecofascist actors.

Research focusing on the left-right divide emphasised that right-wing parties are typically averse to state regulation and interventions, while left-wing parties generally support the expansion of state functions. Several clusters of ideas, including conservatism, support for the free market, anthropocentrism, low concern about climate change, high scepticism about climate science, and opposition to climate change mitigation policies, were strongly associated in surveys conducted in the UK (Poortinga et al., 2011; Whitmarsh, 2011), Canada (Y. Heath & Gifford, 2006), the US (Borick & Rabe, 2010; Dunlap et al., 2001), and Australia (Tranter, 2011, 2012). Van Rensburg and Head (2017) emphasised that the same tendency was found in surveys that asked participants to identify their political party. An Australian study conducted by Tranter (2011) found a high correlation between political party identity and beliefs about climate change, even in the midst of widespread popular concern about the environment in 2007. Supporters of the Labour Party and the Green Party were nearly three times as likely as conservative party supporters to think that human-caused global warming would constitute a severe threat in their lifetime (Tranter, 2011, p. 89). Tranter (2013, 2017) confirmed the party differences on the climate crisis in later surveys (see Reser et al., 2011 for a study on Australian public opinion on climate issues). Duijndam and Van Beukering (2021) found no strong direct relationship between the rise of right-wing populist parties that show climate obstruction and public concern about climate change on either a quantitative or individual level. However, staying on the individual as well as quantitative level, Jylhä et al. (2020) studied climate change denial among radical right-wing party supporters in Sweden and aimed to identify factors that could explain possible differences between far-right and mainstream parties regarding such obstruction. They conducted a regression analysis including a set of variables such as socioeconomic attitudes, exclusionary sociocultural attitudes (e.g. negative attitudes towards immigration and feminism), conservative ideologies, institutional distrust, and belief in conspiracies. According to their results, voters of the Sweden Democrats were more likely to disagree with the statement 'Global warming that is caused by humans is happening' than supporters of the mainstream right-wing (Conservative Party) and centre-left (Social Democrat) party (Jylhä et al., 2020, p. 5). Moreover, socioeconomic right-wing attitudes as well as sociocultural antifeminism attitudes predicted climate obstruction. Stanley et al. (2023) have particularly addressed perceived threats in climate protection among adherents of conservative ideologies, outlining drivers of conservative denial of climate change and resistance to climate policy.

Environmental policy and, in particular, climate policy are often associated with government intervention in the market or with restrictions on property rights

(McCright & Dunlap, 2011b). Specifically, climate change policies such as decarbonising the global economy can be accompanied by particularly profound interventions into markets and also into peoples' lives (see e.g. Finon, 2013; Walters, 2022; Welton, 2018). Indeed, it is important to treat environmental issues and climate change issues differently: even though climate change and environmental issues seem to be, and are in part, close to each other because many interfaces exist, it is vital to recognise the differences, explain them, and identify connections and contrasts. For instance, while left-right ideology helps to explain the differences in the salience of climate change in party manifestos (left-wing parties revealing a higher salience), Farstad (2018) points out that in an identical analysis on environmental salience, ideology was not identified as an important explanatory factor. Therefore, I look at research on both topics, but with a focus on climate change. This is connected to the issue that ecological concerns are becoming more significant in the so-called risk societies, as described by Beck (1992). The destruction or pollution of the local terrain, rivers, or air were common types of earlier or traditional environmental concerns, which could be managed within a national framework. In contrast, new environmental risks such as climate change are transnational problems that transcend national boundaries (see e.g. Hall, 1996). This transfers agency from the nation state to international and, at the same time, contradicts fundamental tenets of the nationalism ideology and its idea of the nation as intrinsically 'limited and sovereign' (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).

While between 2009 and 2013 mainstream parties (see Introduction and for a definition of mainstream parties see Meguid, 2005; or Pop-Eleches, 2010) have not made climate change a salient issue in their party manifestos (Farstad, 2018), a study of Denmark and Ireland illustrated that traditional left-wing and right-wing ideologies play an important role in how parties adopt climate change policies. In particular, competition between mainstream parties can be a catalyst for 'greener' climate policies but can also act as a constraint on party preferences (Ladrech & Little, 2019). Quantitative cross-national studies that analyse various individual-level factors affecting climate change perceptions identified political orientation as one of several important predictors of climate change beliefs or concerns (Poortinga et al., 2019). However, the authors also admit that effects of the various factors vary greatly across countries and national contexts. For example, Hornsey et al. (2018, p. 614) suggest that 'there is a political culture in the US that offers particularly strong encouragement for citizens to appraise climate science through the lens of their worldviews', while the authors find weaker correlations between climate obstruction and ideology in other countries.

However, when political orientation and ideology are identified as an indicator for climate obstruction, conservative actors located on the right wing (or on the far right) of the political spectrum are more likely to express such obstruction than their left-wing counterparts (Dunlap et al., 2016; Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Leiserowitz et al., 2013; McCright et al., 2016; Myrick & Evans Comfort, 2019). This division can be found on the individual as well as on the institutional or elite level (Dunlap & McCright, 2010a; Fielding et al., 2012). For instance, many conservative foundations, think tanks, and political parties support climate research denial (Almiron et

al., 2022; Dunlap & McCright, 2010b, 2012; McCright & Dunlap, 2003; Moreno et al., 2022, 2023). The majority of 'environmental sceptical' commentaries, for instance, have been generated by conservative think tanks in the US (Jacques et al., 2008; Union of Concerned Scientists, 2013), and they have had a significant impact on the content of the printed media (Dunlap, 2009). A similar pattern was observed in Australia, where conservative front groups and think tanks have taken the lead in efforts that oppose climate change (Hodder, 2010; McKewon, 2012). The conservative Murdoch media supported such climate-sceptic views (Bacon, 2011; McKnight, 2010). Right-wing ideology can also attenuate a positive effect of education on climate change beliefs in countries with high levels of development (Human Development Index), as Czarnek et al. (2021) revealed in a quantitative study. In fact, several scholars already noted that knowledge can have diverging effects depending on the political orientation of individuals (Kahan et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2015; Malka et al., 2009).

From a more general overview of climate change communication in connection to left-right ideology, I now move on towards studies about far-right ideology. Concerning policy and, more concretely, policy support for environmental and climate issues, a report in 2019 by the adelphi think tank in Berlin found great support from some populist right-wing and far-right parties in the European Parliament regarding environmental policies, dealing with issues such as plastic- and air-pollution, and biodiversity. In fact, the voting behaviour of the Danish People's Party, the Finns Party, the FPÖ in Austria, Golden Dawn, Flemish Interest, and National Rally showed support for such environmental legislation, while the Party for Freedom and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) mainly rejected it. However, except for the Danish People's Party, the Finns Party and the Sweden Democrats, far-right parties predominantly rejected policies dealing with climate change issues. Indeed, the AfD in Germany, Flemish Interest, the FPÖ, Golden Dawn, the League, National Rally, and the UKIP showed no support for climate-change policies (Schaller & Carius, 2019, pp. 63–74).

Forchtner and Lubarda (2022) showed in their content analysis of basic party stances at EU level towards anthropogenic climate change, that between 2004 and 2019 (EU parliamentary terms 6–8) the 'far right has seemingly shifted towards "acceptance"' (p. 14, especially regarding evidence scepticism), nonetheless climate change sceptic arguments dominate pro-climate arguments in particular via process/response scepticism (see Lubarda & Forchtner, 2023 for an analysis about the narrative structure of far-right climate change acceptance; see Van Rensburg, 2015). Indeed, De Nadal (2022) demonstrates, with the example of the French populist far-right Rassemblement National, that even among PFRPs, there has been an inclination towards acknowledging climate change and engaging in green politics, especially by advocating for a more localised development trajectory. Ten years earlier, Gemenis et al. (2012) analysed two dimensions, the electorate positions on environment based on cross-country mass survey data, and the positions of political parties based on national and European election programs of 13 far-right parties in Europe. The authors argue that the 'environment is increasingly perceived as a positional issue' (p. 1) rather than a valence issue, that is, a consensus issue,

meaning the entire electorate agrees on a desired outcome and all political parties would endorse a clear ideological position, differing only on the details and degree to which they would emphasise it (see also Stokes, 1963). Position issues, on the other hand, 'involve trade-offs between two highly desirable but mutually exclusive outcomes' (Gemenis et al., 2012, p. 2; see also A. F. Heath et al., 1985) and involve alternatives that parties can be in favour of or against. In contrast, other scholars argued that (at least traditional) environmental issues or protection can indeed be classified as a valence issue (Dunlap, 1995; Farstad, 2018; Jordan & Rayner, 2010; Mertig & Dunlap, 1995). However, concerning the party dimension, which is the focus of the present analysis, Gemenis et al. (2012, p. 3) find that far-right parties 'have largely incorporated anti-environmentalism within the main ideological tenets of their party family'. Concerning climate change issues, they looked at party stances vis-á vis the statement 'Global warming is man-made': four parties disagreed (the Belgian Flemish Interest, the British National Party, the Danish People's Party, the Northern League in Italy (now League)), two showed inconclusive results (the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) and the Sweden Democrats), and one agreed (the Greek Popular Orthodox Rally).[1] Conducting a similar analysis, examining party documents, Voss (2014) identified the British National Party, the Dutch Party of Freedom and the Flemish Interest as sceptical of human-made climate change, and lists the Norwegian Progress Party as well as the Swiss People's Party as 'unclear' (see Voss, 2014 in Forchtner, 2019b). Staying in Norway, one result of Båtstrand's analysis of party manifestos of the election in Norway in 2009 is that the far-right Progress Party expressed doubts about human-made climate change (Båtstrand, 2014, p. 937). He lists the following as parties that accept anthropogenic climate change in their party documents: the Alliance for the Future of Austria, the Dutch Centre Party/Centre Party '86, the Danish People's Party, the French Front National (now National Rally) and the National Front/National Democracy of Belgium, the FPÖ, the Northern League, the NPD, the True Finns/Finns Party, the German Republicans, the Swiss Democrats/National Action, and the Sweden Democrats (see also Forchtner, 2019b). Hungarian far-right parties, even if they sometimes talk very little about climate change (e.g. Jobbik), do not deny climate change (Kyriazi, 2020; Lubarda, 2019). Furthermore, Hess and Renner (2019) identified the AfD, the Dutch Party for Freedom, and the UKIP as rejecting climate science; the French National Front as having ambivalent stances; and the Spanish Vox as not rejecting it. Timofejevs (2020) studied the view on nature, the environment, and governance for sustainability of the Latvian populist far-right party National Alliance; in their overall communication, the party committed to sustainable development and briefly mentioned its support of energy independence and the achievement of climate goals. Kasekamp et al. (2019) noted briefly a citation of the young far-right Conservative People's Party of Estonia about 'pseudo-scientific climate change' (p. 52).

Jeffries (2017) pointed out a difference between Anglophone and continental European far-right parties, arguing that in contrast to the US, European far-right actors do not reject climate science as such, but in order to keep issues such as immigration and border control more present on the political agenda, they rather aim to

marginalise the climate issue. This may have been the case around 2015 – when the so-called refugee crisis in Europe was framed – for parties such as the National Rally in France, the FPÖ, Hungary's Fidesz and Jobbik, Norway's Progress Party or Finland's Finn Party (Lockwood, 2018, p. 717), but more recent studies indicate a relevant presence of climate change issues and also climate obstruction in European far-right communication (see e.g. Forchtner, 2019a; Hultman et al., 2019; Küppers, 2022). However, the study by Farstad (2018) described above also found no difference in the salience of climate change in party manifestos between Anglophone and continental European countries. A relevant difference to be noted, however, is that far-right climate change communication in the US might be 'primarily rooted in long existing, strongly polarization debates over climate change', while in the UK it might 'be connected to Eurosceptic conversations' (Forchtner, 2019b, p. 2). In the latter case, sovereignty questions may play a particularly important role, since climate change is often discussed at the EU level, where corresponding policies are elaborated.

Nationalism

In the spectrum of political orientation, nationalist ideologies and the understandings of nature embedded therein might also condition party attitudes towards environmental issues and discourses (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015). In fact, several scholars (see e.g. Boukala & Tountasaki, 2020; Bulli, 2020; Forchtner, 2020a; Tarant, 2020; Turner-Graham, 2020) studied relations between far-right party and non-party actors and the environment and some findings reveal strong support for environmental protection and such policies (see e.g. Bennett & Kwiatkowski, 2020; Forchtner & Özvatan, 2020; Voss, 2020). Here, nationalistic narratives often play a role, and the link between 'the land' or 'nature' and 'the people' or 'the nation' or the 'nature-nation-purity nexus' (Forchtner, 2019b, p. 2) is sometimes present in discussions on environmental protection and overpopulation as well as immigration (see e.g. Aufrecht, 2012; Bhatia, 2004; Dyett & Thomas, 2019; Forchtner, 2016; Forchtner & Gruber, forthcoming; Hultgren, 2015; Richardson, 2017; Taylor, 2020) (for refugee and immigration studies regarding climate change, see e.g. Ketola, 2015, 2017; T. Matthews & Potts, 2018). At the same time, I will explain in the following sections that these same actors often deny climate change and reject policies for climate protection (e.g. Hatakka & Välimäki, 2020; Hultman et al., 2020; Küppers, 2022).

Indeed, the boundless and uncontainable character of climate change that ignores geographics, class, and ethnonational boundaries 'can hardly be comprehended within the limits of nationalist world vision' (Conversi, 2020, p. 625). At the same time, it is hard 'to imagine a world without nationalism', as the nation has been 'so central, and protean, a category of modern political and cultural thought, discourse, and practice' (Brubaker, 1996, p. 10; for a contemporary analysis of nationalism in the EU, see Karolewski, 2020). Indeed, even though nationalism has been an obstacle in the development of multilateral climate negotiations (Christoff, 2010; Temko, 2018), nationalism studies show a lack of research on the

complex relationship between climate change and nationalism (Conversi & Friis Hau, 2021). The historian Hobsbawm (1990) emphasised the reactionary essence of nationalism and referred to an incapacity to confront contemporary environmental or social challenges (Conversi & Friis Hau, 2021). The acknowledgement of the primacy of domestic politics in the Paris Agreement has been seen as a progressive element, as it allowed countries to set their own levels of ambition for climate change mitigation (Falkner, 2016, p. 1107). This climate policy in the Paris Agreement also meant a new form of media debate 'one in which national responses to climate change are discussed by comparing *our* responses to *their* responses and thus establishing othering, nationalistically loaded argumentations regarding "how responsible *we* are"' (Ridanpää, 2022, p. 3).

However, nationalism is a vague concept and has multiple varieties and nuances; it can be found at the state as well as at sub-state levels, on the left or right of the political spectrum, and can be described as moderate, liberal, or pluralistic (A. D. Smith, 1995, 1998). Therefore, studies on the nexus climate change and nationalism can reveal important insights into the role of nationalist ideologies. Conversi (2020) suggests two ways in which nationalism can be related to or appear to be a reaction to climate change: resource nationalism and green nationalism. The first type often follows a narrative of climate obstruction (Washington & Cook, 2011a) and often overlaps with far-right nationalism and populism. However, according to Conversi (2020), resource nationalism has its roots in the way territorial resources (e.g. coal, gas) are controlled and used and is a form of rhetoric 'that uplifts and sacralizes soil-rooted national resources as a common good even though only a tiny minority of the population actually benefits from their extraction and exploitation' (p. 630). For instance, nationalism plays a central role in the debate about the use of coal and shale gas in Poland (Materka, 2012), where also the antifracking movement has been silenced by nationalism and a lack of debate (Jaspal et al., 2016). What Conversi (2020, p. 629) calls green nationalism is 'centered around national sustainabilities' (see e.g. Jones & Ross, 2016), but has not been fully theorised or conceptualised (for 'sustainable nationalism', see Conversi & Posocco, 2022). In particular nationalist parties in stateless nations in Europe (e.g. Scotland, Catalonia) 'propose an environmentally focused agenda for advanced social transformation to radically address the issue of climate change' (Conversi, 2020, p. 632), whereby the rhetoric focuses on 'traditional nationalist tropes, such as territory, soil, and belonging, and fusing these with the progressive political stance of most contemporary autonomist and pro-independence movements' (p. 632). Here, a romanticised countryside often plays a role, combining heritage and sustainability with nationalist aspirations (see e.g. C. Brown et al., 2012). In one of the few studies on left-leaning nationalist parties (the Scottish National Party and the Republican Left of Catalonia) and climate change, the authors identified 'green nationalism' as consistent over time 'as [sub-state] nationalist actors construct rhetorical and ideological continuity between sub-state nationalism's long-standing focus on the protection of territory and contemporary climate-friendly policies' (Conversi & Friis Hau, 2021, pp. 1102–1103). Here, Conversi and Friis Hau (2021, p. 1102) refer to the distinction between *ethnic* and *civic* nationalism (A. D. Smith, 1998,

pp. 125–127, 210–212), whereby – in line with Hamilton (2002) – they regard Green politics as closer to civic nationalism and incompatible with ethnic nationalism. Hamilton (2002, p. 27) has also already identified the values of ethnic nationalism as 'incompatible with those of Green political actors'. Diprose et al. (2016) illustrated how climate activists and campaigners in New Zealand strategically draw on eco-nationalist identity narratives to mobilise against oil drilling, referring especially to the value of non-human things (beaches) as part of national identity and to ultimately 'contest government and oil companies' pragmatic abstractions of "responsibly" managed drilling and "stewardship" of New Zealand's natural resources' (p. 169) (see also Loftus, 2015).

Relying on a different definition of resource nationalism put forward by Wilson (2015, p. 400), who considers it as 'a strategy where governments use economic nationalist policies to improve local returns from resource industries', Poberezhskaya and Danilova (2022, p. 445) show that the authoritarian regime in Kazakhstan uses climate change as a resource 'which is used to deprioritise climate change policies whilst also strengthening the state's economic ambitions'.

In a study of far-right media and its discourse on Greta Thunberg, Vowles and Hultman (2022) also made a connection to nationalism. Referring to Benedict Anderson's (2016, p. 6) conceptualisation of the nation as an 'imagined political community' that is bounded and sovereign, where this imagined community of the far right is 'a homogenous, patriarchal, and industrially prosperous one that needs to be defended at any cost' (p. 422), the authors describe Thunberg and climate policy as being framed as a threat to the (fossil-fuelled) modern economy and thus to the well-being of the nation (Vowles & Hultman, 2022). In a study of how Finnish media approach the concept of carbon footprint as a socio-political discourse, the author argues that the Finnish newspaper 'constructs and sustains logic of thinking in which carbon footprint responsibility is merged together with the state-centric perceptions and nationalistic ideologies' (Ridanpää, 2022, pp. 430–431). The article shows 'how banal nationalism functions as a contextual media framework', whereby in this case nationalism is to be understood particularly in terms of national pride (see e.g. Antonsich, 2009; Ridanpää, 2022, p. 431). Conversi and Posocco (2022) also identified a new form of national pride as a response to the global climate crisis, which they describe as 'pride based on achievements that can be shared across borders, even while the first beneficiaries are those living within the national boundaries' (p. 12) and the nation state with the lowest carbon footprint gains the most prestige. Nevertheless, Braun (2021) argues that the countries in Europe in particular are not large enough for unilateral action to have a significant impact on the mitigation of global warming. Nationalism is considered by many scholars to be the dominant ideology in contemporary society (Conversi, 2010, 2012, 2014; Malešević, 2019); thus social sciences need to explore the relation between nationalism and climate change in greater detail and effort.

Especially in times of the rise of far-right actors, discursive contexts of the natural environment and issues of national identity or immigration that frame such parties and movements become also salient to mainstream actors (Lubarda, 2020). Indeed, framing nature such as the forest as a 'national treasure' and relating it to

issues such as immigration or religion (Isaev & Korovin, 2014) can also be seen among actors who do not view themselves as nationalists (Lubarda, 2020).

Ecofascism

In recent years, literature on the far right and environment is also concerned with the concept of ecofascism as an emergent ideology (see e.g. Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1995, 2011; Campion, 2021; Dyett & Thomas, 2019; Harris, 2023; Hughes et al., 2022; Lubarda, 2020; Macklin, 2022; Moore & Roberts, 2022; Olsen, 1999; Reid Ross & Bevensee, 2020; Szenes, 2021; Zimmerman, 1995). This literature can be divided into empirical research on the far-right and historical and contemporary approaches to ecology, and into work that theorises and defines these concepts (Hughes et al., 2022). Here, scholars underline the need to distinguish theoretical considerations of ideas, practices, and movements from other far-right ideologies, such as 'far right ecologism' (see Lubarda, 2020). For the first category, distinguishing the concepts of 'ecology' and 'ecologism' from 'environmentalism' is emphasised. According to Dobson (2007, 2012), environmentalism and ecologism are different political animals and ideologies: environmentalism does not necessarily require a rethinking of the economic system, can simply be appropriated by conservative actors, and 'argues for a managerial approach to environmental problems' (Dobson, 2000, p. 2). Ecologism, in contrast, requires radical change and demands the establishment of a new economic system. It can be defined as any 'attempt to address the fundamental causes of environmental change through holistic, ideological or value-based underpinnings' (Lubarda, 2020, p. 1). Or as Dobson (2000, p. 2) puts it, 'ecologism holds that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life'. While some authors used ecofascism and right-wing ecology interchangeably (Olsen, 1999; Staudenmaier, 2011), recent literature clearly distinguishes between ecofascism and these concepts of far-right ecologism (Lubarda, 2020). According to Hughes et al. (Hughes et al., 2022, pp. 6–7):

> One might say that far-right ecologism emerges at the point where the ecofascist imaginary collides with the material realities of resource allocation and the far-right's mode of gathering political power. At the very least, we can distinguish contemporary ecofascist tendencies from "actually existing" far-right ecologism by looking to ecofascism's open preference for irrationalism and occultation. . . . Ecofascism exists most comfortably in the register of the imaginary, in the mystical, rather than in the practical.

Such differences have also been identified by Hughes et al. (2022) in their empirical work as they argue that ecofascism is mostly concerned 'with imagining an ethno-national community' (p. 19), while far-right ecologism tends 'to be more practical and have actually coalesced in far-right movements proper' (p. 19). In fact, Lubarda (2020) argues that the far-rights attempts to influence environmental thought are very complex and go beyond mere ecofascism. The distinctive set of

values of far-right ecologism, including spirituality and mysticism, organicism, and naturalism, are far from being marginal and it ‘enhances the existing frameworks addressing far right values on the environment by pointing to a distinctive social imaginary’ (Lubarda, 2020, p. 19). Indeed, the key characteristics of ecofascism can be defined as ‘first and foremost an imaginary and cultural expression of mystical, anti-humanist Romanticism’ (Hughes et al., 2022, p. 2). Others also highlight characteristics such as irrationality, pseudoscience, or ‘mythology of racial salvation through return to the land’ (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 2011). Historically, modern ecofascism has evolved from Nazi ecofascism, but the combination of nationalism, authoritarianism, charismatic leaders, and a mystical and biologist view of nature is very similar to its historical counterparts. Ecofascism has been defined as ‘the preoccupation of authentically fascist movements with environmentalist concerns’ (Staudenmaier, 2011, p. 14) and as a concept that is ‘inextricably bound up with virulently xenophobic nationalism’ (Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1995, p. 6). In the words of Campion (2021, p. 1), ecofascism is a reactionary and revolutionary ideology, and ecofascists believe ‘that their chosen community has weakened because the connection to nature has been disrupted by the forces of modernity, spanning industrialisation, urbanisation, multiculturalism, materialism, and individualism’. Rueda (2020) and other scholars of the fascism studies field (e.g. Roger Griffin, Emilio Gentile, George I. Mosse, Zeev Sternhell, Stanley G. Payne, and Robert Paxton) pointed out the link between fascism and romanticism, which considers national identity, the nation, and its culture as natural creations rather than products of human activity (Olsen, 1999). Indeed, the ‘blood and soil’ thinking of Nazism (see also Macklin, 2022) is considered a clear ideological expression of ecofascism with nature as ‘the foundation of the social order’ (Flipo, 2018, p. 170; see also Hughes et al., 2022). Moreover, Szenes (2021, p. 150) underscores that ‘the idea that nature and land are one with the people and therefore, protecting the purity of the land and nature equals protecting national identity and racial purity originates from German Romanticism and anti-Enlightenment nationalism’ (see also Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1995; Olsen, 1999; Staudenmaier, 2011). The historical roots of ecofacism can even be traced back to the 19th-century German *völkisch* movement ‘that combined nationalism and white racial superiority with neo-pagan nature mysticism and nostalgia for a lost past’ (Staudenmaier, 2011; Szenes, 2021, p. 151). Ecofascists believe that their ecological harmony and society have been weakened by forces of modernity, such as individualism, materialism, industrialisation, urbanisation as well as immigration and multiculturalism (Campion, 2021, p. 2).

However, without going into details about the development of this ideology, I now want to give a short overview of the current research on ecofascism and its links to discourses about climate change. By analysing the Nordic Resistance Movement manifesto, Szenes (2021) illustrates how grievances of environmental degradation are linked to ‘old’ white supremacist grievances (e.g. ‘mass immigration’, multiculturalism, or ‘global Zionism’) and linguistically construct ecofascist ideology. In addition, she argues that such ecofascist discourses ‘have the potential to become part of more mainstream political discourses’ (Szenes, 2021, p. 149) and from an educational point of view, she claims that it will become increasingly

important to dissociate ecofascism and its disinformation campaigns (which might aim to reinforce white supremacist ideologies) from climate justice movements, in particular from the youth engaging in such movements.

An exploration of how contemporary extreme right groups reacted to climate change and phenomena such as population growth and migration claims '[e]xtreme right environmentalism and ecology has re-emerged as an ideological agent for de-humanising those perceived to threaten racial purity' (Macklin, 2022, p. 13). Various authors refer to mass violence in Christchurch and El Paso in 2019, where the perpetrators identified themselves as ecofascists (e.g. Hughes et al., 2022; Lubarda, 2020), and where racial exclusion and violence was reframed as an 'act of physical, spiritual and environmental salvation' (Macklin, 2022, p. 13). In fact, like Szenes (2021), Macklin (2022) refers to the potential of climate change and associated environmental degradations as a source of far-right violence, but, most importantly, both point to the potential for the eco-fascist-propagated anti-human environmental views to influence the wider public in their understanding of and attitudes towards climate emergency. Indeed, climate change migrants are often described as a burden and a threat to the natural resources and internal stability of nations (Campion, 2021, p. 4). Measures such as family-planning programs raised in discussions to counteract overpopulation as a means of alleviating the climate crisis can be described as a 'superficial, Western, capitalist-driven idea and discussion, laced with sexist and racist undertones' that ignore historic power relations (Dyett & Thomas, 2019, p. 205). Indeed, by employing a critical decolonial and ecofeminist lens, historical roots around such family-planning movements (especially in the Global South) linked to overpopulation can be traced back to ecofascism or nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments (Dyett & Thomas, 2019).

Climate change communication and populist far-right actors

In recent years, there has been an enormous increase in academic research on how populist far-right actors communicate climate change and include the topic in their political agenda. As this is also the research area of this study, the following part focuses on climate change communication by populist far-right actors. Far-right populism is 'built around ethno-nationalism and authoritarianism' (Forchtner, 2019b, p. 2; Holzer, 1994; Rydgren, 2018). Within the far right, the radical right 'accepts the essence of democracy, but opposes fundamental elements of liberal democracy' (Mudde, 2019, p. 7); the extreme right 'rejects the essence of democracy, that is, popular sovereignty and majority rule' (Mudde, 2019, p. 7); and the populist right '*considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite*"' (original in italics Mudde, 2004, p. 543) (see populism as a thin ideology in Mudde, 2007, and detailed description and discussion is provided below).

As mentioned already, according to the current literature, many, though not all, populist far-right actors communicate obstruction of climate change mitigation in one way or another. In fact, the far right is still divided on climate change (Forchtner, 2019b, 2020b; Forchtner et al., 2018; Lubarda & Forchtner, 2023) and

it is worth mentioning that actors of the far right are increasingly engaging in environmental activism (see e.g. Forchtner & Tominc, 2017) by promoting cycling instead of driving, by collecting waste from public places, or by advocating a vegan or vegetarian diet (Szenes, 2021).

Analysing the arguments

More detailed and profound analyses of arguments confirmed the climate obstruction of many populist far-right actors in Europe. But before I go into detail about the arguments, it is worth repeating that scholars have also found some neglect of the issue of climate change (see above the example of the Hungarian far-right party Jobbik). Research that investigated far-right communication of environmental issues of German party and non-party actors illustrates that in comparison to other environmental issues such as biodiversity or material pollution, the salience of climate change in the far-right texts was low (Forchtner & Özvatan, 2020). Also in Austria, the FPÖ, a party that ‘has been pioneering with nature protection in Austria’ (Voss, 2014, 2020, p. 153), includes many different topics in its nature protection programme, such as agriculture, animals, conservation, economics, energy, fish and marine policy, human health and bio-ethics, immigration, individualism, consumption, international relations, science and technology, spatial planning, traditional culture, transportation, and waste management. However, climate change, if anything, is only a marginal topic (see also Vihma et al., 2021).

A recent examination of how the AfD communicated climate change and COVID-19, both paradigmatic translational crises, to legitimise itself ‘as the true representative of the nation vis-à-vis national (Germany) and supranational actors (the European Union, EU)’ revealed various topics and arguments that have also been found in many other studies (Forchtner & Özvatan, 2022, p. 209). Indeed, the authors identified irrationalism, left-wing dominance, incompetent elite, economy, and national sovereignty as main topics the AfD relates to climate change and argue that via these macro-topics, the populist far-right party delegitimises ‘the other’ or the elite, who allegedly harm the national sovereignty and economy (Forchtner & Özvatan, 2022).

Nationalist ideology and sovereignty

A current argument that has been found in several studies relates to a national issue. Hanson's (2023, p. 1) analysis of the Spanish populist far-right Vox argues that the party constructs a nationalist narrative on climate change, reterritorialising it at the national level, asserting national innocence against claims of global climate justice, and portraying mainstream climate action as part of a broader globalist imposition that jeopardises the integrity of national culture. Confirming the climate-change scepticism of the British National Party and the Danish People’s Party, Forchtner and Kølvraa's (2015) findings suggest that climate, due to its abstract nature, as it ‘can hardly be depicted outside scientific models or satellite photos’ (p. 212) is less aesthetically comprehensible (than the natural environment). However, even

though popular sovereignty – a typical element for nationalist ideology – is far more central in discourses about the nation's countryside and landscape, where both parties emphasise the cultural and historical links between the land and the people, on the transnational level sovereignty is also present, in that above all independence in energy issues and, more specifically, renewable energies is called into question. Moreover, nationalist concerns seldom consider the climate itself but rather focus on conflicts or certain actors that populist far-right actors see emerging in and through climate change discussions and that they accuse 'of using climate change as an excuse for attacking national sovereignty' (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015, p. 213).

Similar to other far-right nationalist parties, environmental issues have been part of the Sweden Democrats' political agenda since the late 1980s. However, regarding climate change, Hultman et al. (2020) provide research showing how this party adopted a climate change sceptic agenda through anti-establishment rhetoric, marketing doubts about climate science, and promoting ethno-nationalism. In fact, Hultman et al. (2020) explain the shift of the Swedish political landscape in the past decade, illustrating how ideas from climate obstructionist groups merged with the far-right nationalist Sweden Democrats. The issue of sovereignty, or more specifically, the issue of a threat to national sovereignty, has also been identified in the climate change communication of the German AfD (Küppers, 2022). In this argumentation the EU is frequently mentioned, which is in line with the general Eurosceptic position of the party. Thus, policies around climate change provide another way for the AfD to attack the power of the EU. This is consistent with the postulated mechanism of Kulin et al. (2021), which connects nationalism and climate obstruction (see also Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015). A study of right-wing populism in Switzerland also illustrated how 'conventional nationalistic and identitarian narratives' of far-right movements might mix with environmental concerns to attract support from people who have not often backed populist actors (Audikana & Kaufmann, 2022, p. 137). Thus, the authors describe such actors as populist movements 'that elaborate and circulate pro-environmental arguments jointly with traditional identitarian and exclusionary narratives' (p. 152).

In contrast to Germany, Austria, and Sweden, environmental issues are rather new on the Polish political scene and the elite-level discourse is not coherent on topics such as climate change (Bennett & Kwiatkowski, 2020). The environment and its protection have widely been approached by non-political actors, including far-right groups. Indeed, the extreme right Ruch Naradowy party rejects climate change 'along cosmopolitan/trans-national grounds' (Bennett & Kwiatkowski, 2020, p. 249). Similarities are found in an analysis of the discourse of the climate policy rhetoric by Poland's populist far-right Law and Justice (PiS) party (including statements made by politicians, right-wing media (wPolityce.pl and Niezależna.pl both share personal, ideological, and financial ties with the PiS party and the government of Poland), and comments on the forums of right-wing portals) (Żuk & Szulecki, 2020). The study revealed that climate change scepticism addresses mainly nationally and sovereignty-oriented arguments and the defence of 'Polish coal' as the PiS and related media outlets criticise any calls for changes

in the national energy policy (see also Żuk, 2022; Żuk & Szulecki, 2020). In general, the 'PiS' narrative about climate change and energy has been shifted from the scientific-rational area to the sphere of ideology and unverifiable myths' (Żuk & Szulecki, 2020, p. 25). Especially the EU is framed as a corrupt elite threatening the sovereignty of the national energy and economic policy (Żuk, 2022). Indeed, nationalist and sovereignty framings of climate issues are often connected to the energy independence of the nation (see also Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015).

Similar to what other scholars have already found (see e.g. Hess & Renner, 2019; Stegemann & Ossewaarde, 2018), alternative energy sources such as renewables are framed as being anti-environmentalist and contradicting common sense. Sovereignty issues often play a role here, since the issue is about being energetically autarkic and independent as a nation. As such, depending on the national context, renewable energy sources are sometimes framed by the far right as a solution leading to more independence (e.g. Forchtner et al., 2018). Far-right actors also refer to environmentalist and animal-welfare arguments when they argue against renewable energies such as wind farms, which are allegedly responsible for the death of birds and bats (see Hatakka & Välimäki, 2020 and below).

Irrationalism

Alongside nationalist and sovereigntist arguments, scholars frequently found irrationalism in the climate change communication of populist far-right actors. Attacks on mainstream scientists and science, arguments based on religious irrationalism, claims that CO_2 is not causing climate change, or framing climate change policies as a threat for the economy and jobs were identified as themes in an analysis of three outlets (*Die Aula, Zur Zeit*, and *unzensuriert.at*) that are closely linked to the FPÖ and, according to the author, largely in line with the FPÖ stances (Forchtner, 2019a). In sum, the analysis displayed a quite straightforward climate-change sceptic communication in the documents, while at the same time the importance of environmental protections is present.

Religious metaphors are connected to irrationalism. Indeed, Atanasova and Koteyko (2017), who studied linguistic and conceptual metaphors in British newspapers, identified religious metaphors used to convey climate scepticism and downplay the urgent need to act on climate change (p. 452). Nerlich (2010) also illustrated the role of religious metaphors in climate obstruction. Moreover, a series of themes are highlighted in similar research, such as the belief in climate change as the 'new secular religion' (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015, p. 213) along with doubts about the connection between CO_2 emissions and global warming, accusing the IPPC of being driven by 'vested interests' rather than being a scientific organisation (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015, p. 214), or doubts about the human impact on climate change.

Gender masculinities

Worth mentioning is the connection identified between climate change scepticism and gender, as the world is being seen by far-right actors in Sweden from an

industrial masculinities viewpoint and climate change (policy) is perceived as a threat to industrial/breadwinner masculinities (Hultman et al., 2020). Indeed, the conceptualisation of industrial/breadwinner masculinities (see Hultman & Pulé, 2019) was used to study hostilities towards Greta Thunberg constructed in Swedish far-right digital media (Vowles & Hultman, 2022). The authors showed the connection between anti-environmentalism and antifeminism and how Thunberg 'is portrayed and constructed as a threat to the imagined Swedish community of the far right' (Vowles & Hultman, 2022, p. 415). The link between (toxic) masculinities and climate obstruction is also highlighted by Malm and the Zetkin Collective (2021) in their study of the far right and the climate crisis (see Hultman & Pulé, 2020, for more details about masculinities, the environment, and climate change in 2019). Furthermore, a Norwegian quantitative study found that conservative men in particular are more likely to show scepticism around climate change (Krange et al., 2019), and the findings of Jylhä et al. (2020) revealed similar correlations.

Secondary obstruction

According to Vihma et al. (2021), who explored the patterns of climate policy and authoritarian populism (see e.g. Norris & Inglehart, 2019), or, more concretely, populist argumentation in climate policy communication in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, countries with an overall 'green' image, the populist parties – namely the New Right Party in Denmark, the Finns Party and Sweden Democrats – are moving away from denying the existence of climate change, because they regard the term 'denialism' as carrying negative connotations (p. 232). However, they still tolerate 'the expression of doubt about climate change' (Vihma et al., 2021, p. 232). Moreover, at the core of the climate change communication of the Finns Party and Sweden Democrats is the notion that they are not the ones who should act, as their domestic action will not matter globally. As mentioned before, Ekberg et al. (2022) call this secondary obstruction, and it was also found in the climate change communication of the Danish People's Party (Kølvraa, 2020): while the party still displayed a hostile attitude towards climate change, the focus shifted from primary obstructionism, that is, denial of (human-induced) climate change (see Ekberg et al., 2022), to an ideological critique of policy responses and key authorities on climate change. Other studies also found that populist far-right parties communicated at least partial acceptance of anthropogenic climate change and corresponding measures that serve the goal 'to protect the green and pleasant land' (p. 68), criticising however climate change policies and actors engaging in it (see e.g. Küppers, 2022 for the German AfD; Turner-Graham, 2020 for the British National Party).

Economic arguments

As previously demonstrated by Supran and Oreskes (2017) and Franta (2022), economic interests aimed at preserving fossil capitalism often play a significant role in climate obstruction. Such economic arguments are often also raised by populist far-right parties. For instance, the Finns party did not question 'the validity of

climate change as a natural phenomenon, but it has severely questioned whether international cooperative means to curb climate change are efficient and reasonable from the point of view of the Finnish people' (Hatakka & Välimäki, 2020, p. 141). In the party's programmes, they frame environmental protection as trade-off to economic growth (see also Gemenis et al., 2012).

However, economic arguments are also used in connection with climate obstruction, as the example of the AfD shows. The German AfD rejects the fact that humans are causing climate change (see 'attribution scepticism' conceptualised by Rahmstorf, 2005) and various arguments are response sceptic (i.e. they show hostility towards climate change mitigation policies) (Küppers, 2022). Accordingly, the AfD frames climate mitigation measures as being socialist, as an 'eco-dictatorship', or as a 'totalitarian system' (p. 11). Many arguments are of an economic nature (e.g. climate policies damage Germany industries), which reflects Germany's dependence on fossil fuels as well as the high number of employees in sectors such as the automotive industry that would be affected by a green transition. While neoliberal arguments are employed, the party referred to social justice, especially for arguments regarding the transition (which could be socially unjust). Remaining in Germany, Forchtner et al. (2018) identified various nuances of (human-made) climate obstruction and recognised general topics that have been outlined also in previous studies on far-right and contemporary conservative climate change scepticism (e.g. scepticism about the impact of human-made greenhouse gas emissions on climate change, or accusations towards the left/liberals of being anti-little guy, anti-freedom, hysterical, or religiously deluded).

Conspiracy beliefs

Conspiracy theories and beliefs are also found in the literature on far-right climate change communication. For instance, the mainstream media and the mainstream scientific community, as well as the United Nations (UN) and the US, are portrayed as actors who seek to manipulate the public (Forchtner et al., 2018). Kaiser (2020), who focused on investigating the connection between German climate sceptics and the US right-wing, in particular the far-right, suggested differentiating between mono-thematic sceptics and political climate sceptics in the German climate obstruction. The latter combine various conspiracy theories and frequently reject mainstream media and science sources. The former, mono-thematic sceptics, focus mainly on climate change and climate science. The Austrian FPÖ also actively use conspiracy theory arguments and employ populist rhetoric in their discourse about EU climate and energy policies, including their animosity towards the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change (Huber et al., 2021, p. 1005).

The ideational approach as an enlightening theoretical framework

Before discussing the role of populism in climate change communication and more concretely the obstruction of climate change mitigation and policies, I need to give a short overview of theoretical aspects of populism.

Already the term 'populism' is frequently used in different ways and hotly debated (Barr, 2009; Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013; Roberts, 2006). Some populist scholars highlight the importance of such discussions, because 'populism does leave an imprint on important political phenomena' (Hawkins, 2010, p. 49). Without going into detail about various discussions in this field, and without explaining different approaches and related debates such as populism as political logic or (post-foundational) discourse (Laclau, 2005), as a political or/and communication style or strategy (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt, 2016; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), or as a media phenomenon (Pajnik & Sauer, 2017), I will only elaborate on populism as an ideology (Kriesi & Pappas, 2015; Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Thus, the ideational approach, which defines populism as a thin-centred ideology, does not limit itself to a specific type of leadership, communication, or mobilisation. Instead, it can encompass various political actors that can be considered both far right and populist. And more generally speaking, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017, p. 20) argue that this approach 'allows us to take into account both the demand side and the supply side of populist politics'. Discourse researcher Wodak (2018) also emphasises that it is important not only to consider (right-wing) populism as a rhetorical style or a purely media performance phenomenon but that ideological content is crucial in communication. Moreover, sociologist and media expert Dick Pels (2012) claims that the combination of content and form of populism contributes fundamentally to its success.

But what is actually the ideational approach of populism? Mudde (2004, p. 543 original in italics), who is still one of the most significant proponents of this strand, considers populism as a thin-centred ideology 'that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people'. This minimal definition seeks to capture the traits that serve to identify the phenomena in all conceivable circumstances and can 'represent the lowest common denominator among all manifestations of a given phenomenon' (Katsambekis, 2020, p. 8; Rooduijn, 2014; Sartori, 1970).

Scholars widely agree that when populism is called an ideology, it is not a full or a thick ideology and is therefore referred to as a thin or thin-centred ideology (Fieschi, 2006; Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; B. Stanley, 2008). Freeden (1996, 1998), who coined the term 'thin-centred ideologies', described it as not being able to provide answers to a comprehensive range of social questions. Taggart (2004) previously highlighted that populism alone offers limited content or a clear political agenda and refers to the 'empty heart' of populism and its chameleonic nature, unlike full-fledged ideologies such as socialism, conservatism, fascism, or liberalism (Freeden, 1998). The thinness of populism is also one reason why some scholars propose to conceive populism as a transitory phenomenon: it either 'transcends' itself into something bigger or it fails (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). Therefore, populism is seldom found in its pure form but employs concepts from other ideologies, existing most often in combination with

other (thin or full) ideologies (Mudde, 2004, p. 544). The thin-centred nature of populism allows it to adapt to specific socioeconomic and socio-political characteristics where it merges, or in other words, it adopts distinctive features in different contexts (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 8).

However, according to Freeden (2017), populism is also different from other thin-centred ideologies (such as feminism, ecologism, and nationalism) that could 'become full if they incorporate existing elements of other ideologie; whereas the truncated nature of populisms seldom evinces such aspirations or potential' (Freeden, 2017, p. 3). Moreover, he argued that populism is more fragmented, thus less cohesive than other thin-centred ideologies and frequently lacks internal coherence outside of its broad-brush core beliefs (p. 7). Moffitt (2016, p. 20) also points out the criticism that 'unlike other "thin ideologies", [populism] has made no attempt to become "thicker"'. However, he also highlights the fruitfulness of Mudde's (2004) definition by enabling classifications for politicians and political parties in particular for comparative politics, allowing a break from heated theoretical debates and promoting cross-regional analysis.

In order to better define the concept of populism, elitism and pluralism often appear in the literature on populism (A. Akkerman et al., 2014; Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). The former is the ideological opposite of populism, because in elitism the sole rule of a moral, cultural, and intellectual superior elite is sought, whereby, as in populism, the antagonism between this elite and the people is central (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). In pluralism, on the other hand, society is heterogeneous and therefore consists of groups and individuals with many different ideas and views. Pluralism rejects the homogeneity of elitism and populism. Furthermore, Hawkins (2010) attributes a number of characteristics to pluralism, such as valuing human individuality as well as minority rights, respecting formal rights and freedoms, and treating political opponents with respect. According to Katsambekis (2020, p. 10), however, this implies that populism rejects these attitudes, which is particularly problematic since most populists of the political left would be excluded from the concept of populism because they define 'the people' inclusively.

In addition, populists mainly follow a Manichean view, where on one side the friends, the good and pure, are situated and on the other side the enemies, foes, or opponents that are fundamentally presented as evil, which makes compromises impossible. Elitism shares this view and sees 'the people' as evil, dishonest, or dangerous, while 'the elite' is morally, culturally, and intellectually superior (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 7). In populism, it is the other way round. The concept of the people in populism is often vaguely described, which for many scholars renders the use of 'the people' useless (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). However, Laclau (2006), who is regarded as the radical other approach to Mudde in the literature, argues that the vagueness of 'the people' makes it an 'empty signifier', which leads to the powerfulness of populism. Indeed, the possibility to frame 'the people' somewhat independently facilitates the creation of a shared identity between various groups, which helps them to receive support for a joint cause (see also Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 9).

In an attempt to define populists' 'the people', Mudde (2004, p. 546) relies on Taggart's concept of the heartland. In his words, 'the people of the populists are an "imagined community", much like the nation of the nationalists' (for imagined communities, see Anderson, 1983), but at the same time he points out that the concept of the heartland can also be vague and different populists can create different heartlands even in the same national context. It can be easier to determine who or what populists are against. Taggart (2004, p. 274) argues that the 'commitment to the "people" is in fact a derivative consequence of the implicit or explicit commitment to a "heartland"' and to understand what populists mean by or how they construct 'the people', it is necessary to understand their understanding of their 'heartland'. For instance, he claims that the heartland for European populists is often an imaginary from past times, without complications of globalisation processes, immigration, or the encroachment of taxation. For Taggart, the heartland is something 'that is felt rather than reasoned, and something that is shrouded in imprecision' (p. 274). This can result in a certain ambiguity, as different positions can create a heartland that hides these differences behind the nature of the heartland. This way, the impression can be generated that populists are internally conflict-free and monolithic, whereas in reality populist parties are particularly prone to factionalism (Taggart, 2004, p. 274). Moreover, the lack of core values in populism emerges from the importance of the heartland in populism. There are populist movements and parties across the political spectrum, from far left to far right, from authoritarian to libertarian, from revolutionary to reactionary. He describes this as a weakness, but it also gives populism a certain ubiquity. It makes populism mutable, and while populism is fundamentally directed against elites and/or institutions, the nature of populism varies because elites and institutions can be very different. In Taggart's (2004, p. 275) own words, 'populism is *de facto* substantially contextually contingent' whereby it is the specific version of the heartland that determines a populist movement's own particular characteristics. Populists, in fact, do not mobilise when another heartland is in danger but only when they see their own heartland as threatened.

Current populists usually lean against the established parties and claim that only they are the true representatives of the 'oppressed people' and want to liberate them. Unlike early populist movements of the New Left that emerged in the late 1960s which wanted to improve the status of workers, populists of the early 21st century do not want to change the values or the way of life of the people (Mudde, 2004). In addition, while the New Left 'referred to an active, self-confident, well-educated, progressive people' (p. 557), the current populism 'is the rebellion of the "silent majority"' (p. 557). In fact, the basis of all good politics in populism is so-called common sense, which is supposed to refer to the consciousness of the people. To highlight such differences between the New Left and the current zeitgeist of populism, Mudde (2004) refers to the different heartlands. He names Berlusconi in Italy or Haider in Austria as examples of populism, whose heartlands can be described as conservative, hard-working, and law-abiding people with growing anger about progressives, criminals, and aliens who distort their world (p. 557). Notably, such populists are supporters of democracy but do not want to be constantly bothered

with politics (Mudde, 2004). Indeed, according to him, the people want leadership with a focus on output and not on the input of democracy. In other words, populist leadership should pursue policies that meet the wishes of the people without really involving them. This is where charismatic leadership, which Taggart has already mentioned, comes into play. In his words, populism 'requires the most extraordinary individuals to lead the most ordinary of people' (Taggart, 2000, p. 1). Mudde (2004) points out that it does not have to be the 'true outsider' or 'the man of the streets' (p. 559), a charismatic personality who is not the elite itself but who may already be associated with it is sufficient. The approach that considers populism as a political strategy relies first and foremost on such a strong and charismatic leadership figure who concentrates power but maintains direct contact with the masses (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 4). This approach is particularly popular among scholars of Latin American and non-Western societies (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 4). In sum, according to the ideological approach, the idealised people are both the addressee and the origin of political action (Poier et al., 2017).

In contrast to many theoretical attempts to define 'the people' in populism, less attention has been paid to the concept of 'the elite'. Most often, populists refer to the political establishment as the corrupt homogenous elite but often also include economic, cultural, and media aspects in their criticism. According to Mudde (2004, p. 561), in 'the populist mind, the elite are the henchmen of "special interest"'. While these formidable, dubious entities have historically been mostly associated with international financiers (often alleged to be Jewish), in today's populism the 'progressives' and the 'politically correct' have often been labelled as the 'new class'. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017, p. 12) put it, 'the elite are defined on the basis of power, i.e., they include most people who hold leading positions within politics, the economy, the media, and the arts'. When populists themselves are in power they could be seen as part of the establishment. However, examples have shown that in these cases, populists (re-)direct their anti-establishment rhetoric against 'shadowy forces that continue to hold on to illegitimate powers to undermine the voice of the people' that is, the populists (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 12). In fact, examples of left-wing populists who often point to the elite with economic power when their policies lack success can be found in Latin America as well as in Europe (e.g. Hugo Chávez in Venezuela or Alexis Tsipras in Greece).

Based on the definition of populism above (see Mudde, 2004, p. 543, and above), an explanation of the third core concept of the populist ideology, the general will (*volonté générale*), is needed. Mudde refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), who distinguished the general will (*volonté général*) from the will of all (*volonté de tous*). The first 'refers to the capacity of people to join together into a community and legislate to enforce their common interest', while the latter 'denotes the simple sum of particular interests at a specific moment in time' (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 16). Moreover, this notion of the general will is relatively complex and the belief that there is a general will is strengthened by populists' moral and monist distinction between the good people and the corrupt

elite. On the one hand, scholars refer here to the advocacy of direct democracy measures, which populists often call for or support; on the other hand, there is also a certain tendency towards authoritarianism. In the latter, the homogeneity of the people is central, which leads to the exclusion of those who do not correspond to this homogeneity. Hence, the general is seen as transparent but also absolute; it allows populists to be open to authoritarianism and illegal attacks against those who allegedly endanger the people or their homogeneity (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 16–18).

In the ideational approach, political actors are thus primarily defined as populists when they divide society in terms of moral struggle between the corrupt elite and the virtuous people. According to Mudde (2017, p. 29), moralism is 'the essence of the populist division'. The moralistic conception of politics presented by populists depends on some standard for differentiating the moral from the immoral, the pure from the corrupt (Müller, 2016, p. 18). Despite how technical something may be, Hawkins (2010, p. 33) claims that populism assigns a moral component to everything and understands it 'as part of a cosmic struggle between Good and Evil'. Katsambekis (2020, p. 9) summarises that for these scholars, any actor who bases their strategy on appeals to 'the people', as opposed to an elite, cannot be characterised as a populist if the dimension of moralism is not salient; they may instead be anti-establishment or anti-systemic, but not populist. This moralistic character of the ideational approach is often criticised in the literature, 'as it automatically equates populism with an anti-pluralist and illiberal form of politics' (Katsambekis, 2020, p. 2). This critique sets a dividing line in populism studies to Laclau's post-foundational discursive approach (Kim, 2021).

However, populism as a thin-centred ideology does not limit itself to a specific type of leadership, communication, or mobilisation, but it is able to include various political actors that can be considered both far right and populist. Indeed, the ideational approach has proved to be particularly valuable in combination with far-right ideology, where this work would also like to make a contribution. Indeed, the following sections outline in detail how scholars of the ideational approach work with far-right ideology and how it is relevant for the present research.

From populism to the far right

The combination of the far right and populism has been widely discussed in the literature and, similar to the conceptualisation of populism, the label or terminology 'right-wing populism' or 'far-right populism' seems contested. As early as the 1990s, Betz (1994) defined radical right-wing populism as a new party family in Western Europe and regional forms of populism such as Alpine populism (e.g. FPÖ, Swiss Peoples Party, Lega Nord) with specific transnational conditions were discussed (Caramani & Meny, 2005). In the German context in particular, Frank Decker (2000, 2015) and Michael Minkenberg (2018) contributed to the debate. Decker (2015, pp. 535–536) defined right-wing populism as 'a collective term for a party family that has emerged since the 1970s . . . between the conservative or Christian Democratic or Christian Democratic centre-right parties and the

representatives of the extreme (fascist or neo-national socialist) right' (own translation from German). Minkenberg (2018) argues that Decker's conceptual discussion basically revolves around populism in general and sharply criticises attempts by other scholars (e.g. Priester, 2016) to make the concept of right-wing populism stronger than that of right-wing radicalism.

The concept of the far right is well established in political science and can be seen as a spectrum which includes various types of far-right actors. As mentioned in the introduction, it includes radical right parties and non-party actors that are anti-liberal and reformist but do not reject the essence of democracy, as well as extremist right parties that are anti-democratic, that is, reject the essence of democracy, and revolutionary. For '(populist) radical right collective actors'[2] – as Pirro (2023, p. 5) puts it – the conflict between natives and non-natives is purely political and despite their rejection of the established socio-political and sociocultural order, they do not take part in efforts to undermine the democratic system. The extreme right collective actors parties aim at subverting the democratic status quo and are 'prepared to elevate conflict beyond the political sphere and annihilate its enemies' (Ellinas, 2020; Pirro, 2023, p. 6). Pirro (2023) recently pled for a systematic use of the term 'far right' due to the growing links and the fluidity between illiberal-democratic radical right and anti-democratic extreme right collective actors. The ideological core of the far right is the combination of the radical exclusionary form of nationalism, that is, nativism and authoritarianism. In a dualistic worldview, the far right frames society as divided between a native in-group ('us') versus an alien out-group ('them') that poses a threat to the homogeneity of the nation state (Mudde, 2007). Indeed Miller-Idriss (2020, p. 8) claims that 'all far-right ideological beliefs share exclusionary, hierarchical, and dehumanising ideals that prioritise and seek to preserve the superiority and dominance of some groups over others'. The use of the concept far right does not take these actors' fundamental attitude towards democracy into account but focuses instead on nativism and authoritarianism or on 'what far-right collective actors actually do, on top of what they usually say or publicly claim to stand for' (Pirro, 2023, p. 7).

In fact, such categorisations changed and developed over time and can be seen as dynamic and not static. Klause Von Beyme (1988) distinguished between conservatives who aim to maintain the status quo and right-wing extremists who try to restore the status quo ante. Then he described three waves of 'right-wing extremism' in postwar Europe. The first wave was in the first 15 years after World War II, where mainly neo-fascism was present but not successfully represented in party politics in most European countries. During the second wave, approximately between the 1960s and the 1980s, he described 'right-wing populist' parties and movements appearing in Europe, ranging from the NPD to the French *Poujadists* (see also Wondreys & Mudde, 2022). It was in the third wave, starting in 1980, that various parties that Von Beyme (1988) defined as 'right-wing extremist' increased their electoral and political success. Examples include the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) with Jörg Haider, and the French National Front (FN) with Jean-Marie Le Pen. According to Mudde (2019), the rise of electorally successful populist radical right parties in the third wave cannot be denied, but such parties were politically

marginalised. Indeed, the far right entered national parliaments, but mainstream parties excluded them from coalitions and thus from entering (national) governments (T. Akkerman & Rooduijn, 2015; Mudde, 2019; Wondreys & Mudde, 2022). Many collective actors of the far right considered themselves as outsiders and positioned themselves as not interested in a shared government position with 'established' parties (Wondreys & Mudde, 2022; Zaslove, 2012).

In this third ideological wave the most successful parties moved within the nexus of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, which Mudde (2007) called the populist radical right. Nativism promotes the protection of the interests of the 'natives' over those of, for example, immigrants or, in general, 'non-natives' or 'aliens', who are considered a threat to the nation state. Nativism can be described as a xenophobic form of nationalism (Wondreys & Mudde, 2022). Authoritarianism is a form of government characterised by the idea that only a strong central power (e.g. strong state) can preserve the political status quo and the rule of law and can prevent chaos, relying on large police forces and prioritising discipline in education and upbringing (Mudde, 2007). Populism is defined as a thin-centred ideology (see above and Mudde, 2004).

According to Mudde (2019) the reduction of the far right to the political margins changed fundamentally during the fourth wave, which started around the beginning of the 21st century. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 'the political context changed significantly, and so did the position of the far right' (Wondreys & Mudde, 2022, p. 87). The political debate was increasingly characterised by sociocultural concerns and the political mainstream moved to the right, especially on security and immigration issues; thus, 'radical right parties have become mainstreamed and increasingly normalized, not just in Europe, but across the world' (Mudde, 2019, p. 3; Wodak, 2018). This means that far-right parties have been part of coalitions, part of (national) governments or were at least considered *koalitionsfähig* (acceptable for coalition formation) (Wondreys & Mudde, 2022, p. 87). In many countries they are no longer considered outsiders or challengers and have often become the political mainstream. Since World War II the European party system has been characterised mainly by the traditional party families – namely the conservatives, Christian democrats, social democrats, socialists, and liberals – and the only new party family to successfully establish themselves since then in all parts of Europe is the populist radical right-wing (Mudde, 2007). The next section will outline what Mudde (2019) calls the mainstreaming or normalisation of the far right, and I explain in greater detail the new role of such actors in the contemporary European context.

The mainstreaming and normalisation of far-right populism

The mainstreaming and normalisation of far-right parties in several European regions are extensively discussed in Mudde's (2019) book *The Far Right Today* (2019). However, he was undoubtedly not the first or the only scholar to note these changes in European party politics. Indeed, the move towards the mainstream by direct or indirect government participation (i.e. being part of coalition

governments or central supporters of minority governments) (see e.g. De Lange, 2008; Minkenberg, 2001) raised the question of whether the radical right had been sufficiently 'tamed', deradicalised, or mainstreamed already more than one decade ago (Minkenberg, 2001, 2009, 2013, p. 5). Minkenberg (2013, p. 6) argued that 'the willingness of the mainstream right to collaborate with the radical right indicates a porosity between the two'. In fact, he asserts that established political figures have responded to the radical right scene's growing organisational power not only by embracing and legitimising certain of its components but also, in some instances, by forming alliances or coalitions with them (Minkenberg, 2013, p. 20). Thereby, the contrasts between Western and Eastern European nations are pronounced: while in Western Europe, conservative parties' attempts to harness the radical right's electoral success and relative pragmatism increased these parties' legitimacy, in many Eastern European countries a radicalisation of the mainstream has been observed rather than a mainstreaming of the radical right (Minkenberg, 2013, p. 5).

Before I go on to discuss further literature about the mainstreaming of the far right, the concept of the mainstream and mainstreaming needs to be clarified. Indeed, this aspect often remains vague (K. Brown et al., 2021). Of course, there are also some scholars who deal extensively with this concept and a variety of approaches, aspects, and perspectives could be discussed here (e.g. Kallis, 2013; Meguid, 2005; Pop-Eleches, 2010). Nevertheless, one problem remains that 'its contingency is masked through the assumption that it is common sense to know what it signifies, thus contributing to its reification as something with a fixed identity' (K. Brown et al., 2021, p. 5). Furthermore, according to Brown et al. (2021, p. 14), understanding mainstreaming necessitates the prior recognition that the mainstream is not only 'constructed, contingent, and fluid' but also that it is not intrinsically good, rational, and moderate in and of itself in order to avoid normative assumptions and conclusions. Without going into more detail here and for the present research, I refer to Mudde (2019, pp. 164–165), who argues that:

> Mainstreaming takes places because populist radical right parties and mainstream parties address increasingly similar issues and because they offer increasingly similar issue positions. The change can come from movement by the populist radical right (moderation), the mainstream (radicalisation), or by both at the same time (convergence).

Mudde (2019) explicitly refers to the populist radical right, arguing that in the majority of Western democracies the extreme right remains primarily marginal and marginalised. In the 1980s or in the beginning of the third ideological wave, there were on one side the traditional mainstream parties (such as conservatives and liberals/libertarians or in other words, parties mainly on the right and left of the political centre) that mostly competed based on socioeconomic issues such as taxes and unemployment (for a definition of mainstream parties see Meguid, 2005; or Pop-Eleches, 2010). On the other side were the populist radical-right parties that focused on sociocultural issues such as immigration and crime. This division

changed at the beginning of the 21st century, with the fourth ideological wave. Increasingly, political discourse in many Western nations has focused on sociocultural concerns or so-called identity politics, including a rather overt defence of white supremacy in the light of the escalating politicisation of ethnic and religious minorities (Mudde, 2019, p. 165). As a result of such prioritisation of sociocultural issues, at least in electoral campaigns by mainstream and populist radical right parties, socioeconomic issues have been marginalised or become niche.

Mudde (2019) also emphasises the aspect of issue positions of mainstream and populist radical right parties, which became more and more similar. Notably, this development is less due to populist radical right parties becoming more moderate but mainly because of the increasing radicalisation of mainstream parties (i.e. moving further towards the right, mainly in terms of immigration and integration, law and order, European integration, and international collaboration and populism). Indeed, even if there is no doubting that far-right parties and policies have contributed significantly to the current political climate in Europe, which can be seen, for example, in some outstanding election performances of populist far-right actors (K. Brown et al., 2021; Hainsworth, 2016), scholars highlight that 'mainstreaming of the far right is a process which sees both the far right and the mainstream as agents and subjects' (K. Brown et al., 2021, p. 3). Within this development, the radicalisation of mainstream parties and the increasing salience of sociocultural issues (e.g. immigration) can be related to political events, for example, jihadist terrorist attacks or the so-called refugee crisis. Furthermore, Mudde (2019, p. 166) argues that through the increasing adoption of populist radical right discourses and frames by mainstream parties, 'populist radical right parties have increased not only their electoral support but also their political impact'. Indeed, various populist radical right politics have become 'common sense' in the fourth wave. In sum the boundaries between mainstream and populist radical right parties have become blurred, and the latter is becoming increasingly normalised (Bruno, 2022; Mudde, 2019).

Terminology

There is no academic consensus on the appropriate terminology for the overall movement and the many subgroups. In this study I adopt the term 'populist far right' over 'populist radical right'. Before I justify this choice, I want to underline Muddes' (2019, pp. 163–164) assertion that the far right is not a homogeneous entity but rather includes a variety of different actors in terms of ideology, mobilisation, type of organisation, relationships, age, electoral success, history, legacy, or political relevance. First, populist far right and populist radical right signify a populist form of the far right or the radical right respectively. Second, I prefer far right over radical right to include the broad variety of sub-groups of the far right – as described above – covering the full spectrum of different manifestations and combinations of features within the far-right ideology. What is considered radical in one national context or at one specific time could be perceived as reactionary or extremist in another national context or at another time (Mudde, 2007). Indeed, recognising the contingency of conceptual choices is crucial to studies on the subject because it is

obvious that political families and ideas do not become ossified but rather change with time and context (K. Brown et al., 2021, p. 4). In Mudde's (2019, p. 164) words 'even within the most relevant subcategory of the far right, that is, populist radical right parties, differences are at least as pronounced as similarities'. Focusing on the far right instead of only one-party family allows dynamic-, country-, and time-relevant factors to be considered in a national context and regards the comparison between countries as relevant but secondary. While all populist radical right parties are populist far-right, not all PFRPs are populist radical rightists. Indeed, while scholars sometimes disagree about the differences, overlapping, and common characteristics of populist radical-right parties and moderate as well as more extreme right-wing parties (also regarding their denomination), it is easier to find consensus that parties can be considered far right. Furthermore, parties on the right, which include populist ideology, are often characterised by different factions within the parties, one being 'moderate' and one being more 'extremist', fascist, or racist, therefore, party classification can be difficult and dissatisfying. Moreover, the focus on far right instead of right wing (e.g. see Zulianello, 2020) in general already excludes a broad range of moderate party families (mainstream right/conservative parties) and clearly locates itself more to the right of these parties. For instance, Minkenberg (2018) rejects the German term 'Rechtspopulismus' (in English right-wing populism), arguing that it lacks a clear ideological characteristic and only generates new analytical haziness. Henceforth, this study's focus lies on PFRPs, that is, political parties with a core ideology that includes nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (see Mudde, 2007, p. 26).

The populist far right and its communication

Many of the discussed approaches emphasise in different ways that the rhetoric of populist far-right actors or how they communicate is an important part of their appeal (Busby et al., 2019). The following paragraphs shall explain how populist far-right actors communicate and frame social phenomena. To do so, I rely on the literature that focuses on the rhetoric and communication of populist far-right actors and describe typical argumentation of such actors, identified by various scholars of CDS, populism, and party literature. I will discuss essential features such as ideological and political viewpoints of populist far-right actors relevant to this project.

Wodak (2018, pp. 329–330) describes performance in public and media politics as a defining characteristic of right-wing populist parties.[3] In this context, right-wing populist actors resort to constant provocations in order to gain attention for their own political agendas or their own leadership personality (Wodak, 2016, pp. 38–40). This approach is loosely connected to Moffitt's political style approach and especially bad manners; that is, deliberate rudeness, mis/disinformation, insults, and intentional taboo-breaking can play a role (Moffitt, 2016; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). Norms of political correctness are deliberately and obviously violated without apologising for it (Scheff, 2000), thus presenting an anti-elitist behaviour that 'the people' can identify with (Wodak, 2018). In this context, Wodak

(2018, p. 330) refers to the 'conditions of sayability or opportunity that determine' (*Sagbarkeits*-bzw. *Möglichkeitsbedingungen*) what can be said in a discourse without being held accountable for it (Bettinger, 2007, p. 77; Goffman, 1967; Grice, 1975). But provocations often contain extreme right-wing content, which has been frowned upon or even banned in many Western European countries since the end of World War II. Following Scheff's (2000) theory on the relevance of shame as a social bond for group identities, Wodak (2018) claims that 'the intentional shamelessness that accompanies the normalisation of previously taboo contents and behavioural patterns creates . . . a new *group cohesion*, i.e. consolidates the group identity of the voters of right-wing populist parties vis-à-vis (often moralising) elites' (p. 330, own translation from German). Indeed, voters for right-wing populist parties feel taken seriously by this, as they often emphasise how important it is to them that these politicians finally say what they themselves have been thinking for a long time (Wodak, 2016, p. 141, 2018, p. 330).

As Wodak (2015, p. 1) argues, right-wing populism relates to the form of rhetoric and to specific contents (see also above) and 'such parties successfully construct fear and – related to real or imagined dangers – propose scapegoats that are blamed for threatening or actually damaging our societies, in Europe and beyond'. Such scapegoats can be any kind of ethnic/religious/linguistic/political minority and are a threat to 'us' or to 'our' nation. She calls this phenomenon 'politics of fear' (Wodak, 2015). As outlined above, appeals to common sense and anti-intellectualism are popular characteristics of such parties and mark a return to pre-modernist or pre-Enlightenment thinking. Wodak (2015, p. 2) refers to this phenomenon as the 'arrogance of ignorance'.

To deconstruct and explain populist far-right messages (and their electoral success), it is first necessary to understand that PFRPs combine and integrate form and content in their communication that targets a specific audience and can adapt to different contexts (Wodak, 2015, p. 3). Pels (2012) argued that socio-political challenges and different types of crises (e.g. financial, climate) concern voters and right-wing populists often offer simple and clear-cut answers to fears (often constructed or enhanced by such parties) by constructing scapegoats and enemies that can be blamed (Wodak, 2015).

In the literature several discursive features are proposed that seem common to many PFRPs (see e.g. Reisigl, 2013; Wodak, 2013). The following represents a selection:

- Dramatisation is accomplished through emotive language and frequent metaphor use. The actors create tension in order to increase support for themselves, either by reiterating what has already been accomplished (e.g. exaggerated celebrations of alleged 'successes' of the party) or by condemning the tragedies that would happen if the actor were to lose its defences (e.g. 'emergency speaks', hysteria) (Albertazzi, 2007, p. 335).
- Fictionalisation of boundaries is the 'blurring of boundaries in politics between the real and the fictional, the informative and the entertaining' (Wodak, 2011, p. 157). Accordingly, the reality appears simple, ordered, and manageable, and

the real complexity and the pluralism of contemporary societies and societal phenomena are not visible to the viewer.

- The symbolic dimension of 'doing politics' must be viewed as the foundation of all political performances in the media, at rallies, in parliament, at press conferences, and elsewhere (Alexander, 2006; Edelman, 1967; Goffman, 1959; Wodak, 2015, p. 12). Such symbolic performances must integrate into the traditions and culture, the narratives and myths of a respective society, and be attractive to the audience (Wodak, 2015, p. 12).
- Rhetoric of exclusion is based on the claim of populist far-right actors to represent the good, homogeneous people, whereby 'we' (i.e. the nation state, the Occident, or Christian Europe) have to be defended against 'them' (i.e. the immigrants, the 'Orient', Muslims, Jews, Roma, or other minorities). According to this claim, such Outsiders, being either up there (the elites) or 'others' would take away the jobs of 'native' people, do not want to integrate or adapt to 'out culture' (Wodak, 2015).

The literature has also identified different strategies that are considered typical for populist far-right actors. Concretely, referring to ethno-nationalist forms of populism, Wodak (2015, p. 54) mentions the appeal to national sameness, unity, and cohesion, which includes the *fallacy of sameness*, which 'imagines the "own" nation as a culturally homogeneous community', and the fallacy of *argumentum ad bacum*, which refers to '(alleged) dangers that threaten this so-called national homogeneity'. Other scholars mention the appeal to security legitimising exclusionary rhetoric via security measures (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Matouschek et al., 1995). The fallacy of comparison is, according to Wodak (2015, p. 54), exaggeration of one's own nation's superiority to all other countries and ethnic minorities. Further typical strategies are a focus on homogenous demos, (nativism)/ anti-elite discourse (Aslanidis, 2018), references to the heartland (or homeland) and the claim of the need to protect it from threats/them, appealing to protect the fatherland (revisionist histories) and the appeal to traditional, conservative values, a dissemination and promotion of conspiracies (some perpetrators are allegedly pulling the strings), the appeal to common sense and simplistic explanations and solutions as well as anti-intellectualism and motivated resistance to expert consensus (Merkley, 2021). In order to identify populist tendencies in a text, the shifting of blame/blame attribution/blame avoidance (Busby et al., 2019; Hansson, 2015), problem-denial, counterattack, negative other-presentation (*argumentum ad hominem, argumentum ad baculum, post hoc/ergo propter hoc fallacy* (alternative claim applied to shift blame) are also considered as further indicators.

In conclusion, at the beginning of the 21st century populist movements were described as a reactive phenomenon to social developments (Taggart, 2000). More recently, scholars claim that populism often emerges from crises and according to Lockwood (2017, pp. 9–10), this means that populism's 'main preoccupations should vary across time and space with the nature of those crises'. The so-called 'migration crisis' or 'refugee crisis'[4] in 2015 in Europe was in fact a major boost for many PFRPs in various European countries. Other topics such as climate change

have long been a peripheral issue for populist far-right movements and parties. And although the immigration issue is still present both in the public domain and in academic research in Europe, it has visibly begun to flatten out. Indeed, as social and political pressure to act on climate change and related environmental problems slowly increases in many regions, populist far-right parties are also positioning themselves more clearly on issues and policies concerning environmental matters such as climate change (Forchtner, 2020b; Forchtner et al., 2018).

For this project I am combining the ideational approach of populism and essential aspects of populist far-right communication on a topic (i.e. climate change), which for a long time was not found on the political agenda of such parties. Moreover, I emphasise the role of the national context in the empirical analysis, which could be connected to theoretical insights such as the role of the 'heartland' within populism. The characteristic of populism as a 'thin-centred' ideology (Mudde, 2004) and the associated conceptual obscurity of the concept makes it difficult to articulate the core values of this category. But according to Lubarda (2020, p. 12), 'the ability to employ Manichean, binary representations in policy debates allows right-wing, national populists to engage with environmental topics' (see e.g. Capstick & Pidgeon, 2014; Carvalho, 2007; Farstad, 2018; Forchtner et al., 2018; Fraune & Knodt, 2018), and not all right-wing or far-right populist actors are 'anti-environmental'.

The role of populist ideology

Having presented the current empirical evidence to date and a current snapshot of the ideational approach of populism, I now turn to the role of the (populist) ideology of climate sceptic communication by the far right. Selk and Kemmerzell (2022, p. 755) consider populist climate politics to be 'retrograde as well as context-relative', whereas I contend that especially the latter introduces complexity, thereby posing challenges to formulating broad generalisations. However, some scholars emphasise in particular the need to focus on populist orientations in climate change communication and, more concretely, on its explanatory power for climate change scepticism (Huber, 2020; Lockwood, 2018). However, here I find contradictory views and results around a link between climate scepticism and populism, considered as a thin ideology, political or rhetoric style, or structuralist approach. I now discuss the wide range of empirical and conceptual studies that support the claim that populism and climate scepticism are connected on one side, and on the other side, examinations with contrasting findings.

According to Lockwood (2018, p. 713), there is a 'congruence between RWP [right wing populism] and climate scepticism' and he provides a theoretical assessment of the role of populism based on two kinds of explanations: structuralist and ideological. The structuralist approach draws on economic and political marginalisation as roots of populism, focusing on those 'left behind' mainly by globalisation processes or technological changes. For the ideological approach, Lockwood (2018) draws on populism as a thin ideology focussing on the antagonism between the 'pure people' and a 'corrupt or cosmopolitan elite'. Indeed, he claims that 'ideological explanations are more persuasive in drawing links between climate

scepticism and nationalism, authoritarianism, and anti-elitism, so that climate change features as a kind of "collateral damage"' (Lockwood, 2018, p. 714). In other words, he combines populism with authoritarianism and nationalism (see Mudde's (2007) definition of populist radical right parties) and argues that because climate change policies would threaten national sovereignty, right-wing populists show hostility towards them. He regards the structuralist approach as limited for such explanations. Lockwood's (2018) study, however, is theoretical, and while it provided inspiration for other research, empirical investigations are needed to support such arguments. Indeed, empirical knowledge about the role of populism is steadily growing.

Hatakka and Välimäki (2020) analysed environmental communication of the populist radical Finns Party as thin-centred ideology (Mudde, 2007, p. 23) and as a political communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). The authors used the example of a campaign against wind power and illustrated how the Finns Party used many aspects that are at the ideological core of populism, in particular, anti-elitism and people-centrism, while simultaneously expressing the intention to 'restore the people's sovereignty' (see also Ernst et al., 2017; Forchtner et al., 2018; Hatakka & Välimäki, 2020, p. 142). Moreover, various stylistic elements of populist communication such as the use of colloquial language and polarised black-and-white rhetoric that divided 'us' and 'them', as well as emotionalisation and dramatisation, were identified in the parties' campaign (p. 143). In sum, Hatakka and Välimäki (2020, p. 146) demonstrate that even when environmental politics are addressed as one topic among others, such issues 'provide fertile ground for populist radical right and identity struggles, and for creating conflict with pro-environmental actors'. Huber (2020) analysed the links between populist attitudes and climate change scepticism on the individual level in the UK. His quantitative study shows that those individuals who exhibit strong populist attitudes are more prone to be sceptical about climate change, claim that action to protect the environment has gone too far, and prioritise economic growth over environmental protection (p. 972). Hence, Huber (2020) suggests that populism − considered as a broader conceptualisation, including, for example, populist sentiments, anti-politics, or a lack of trust in the political establishment (Hay & Stoker, 2009) − 'is an important explanation of climate skepticism for left- and right-wing individuals' (p. 972). A large-scale, comparative, and systematic assessment dealing with the question of how populism in leadership positions can influence environmental politics comes to the conclusion that 'populism lowers environmental performance' (Böhmelt, 2021, p. 116). According to the author, populist leaders are prone to reject and restrain the implementation of 'green' policies, 'as these are usually promoted by "corrupt elites"' (p. 97). Furthermore, he argues that populism undermines democratic institutions, thereby undoing a number of mechanisms associated with better environmental outcomes (Böhmelt, 2021, p. 97).

Regarding climate change and populism, it has been noted that conspiracy theories play a role in both aspects. First, sceptic rhetoric around climate change can often be linked to conspiratorial thinking (Uscinski et al., 2017) and, second, populist (and in general far right) actors seem to be more prone to conspiracy theories

(Bergmann, 2018; Castanho Silva et al., 2017; for a study on politically extreme individual and their believe in conspiracy theories in Sweden consult Krouwel et al., 2018). Especially on the individual level, scholars argue that populist world-views (considered mainly as thin-centred ideology) foster conspiratorial thinking (Bergmann, 2018; Castanho Silva et al., 2017; Oliver & Rahn, 2016; Van Prooijen, 2018). In particular, studies on the COVID-19 pandemic regarding populism and conspiracy theories highlighted their connection (Ferreira, 2021; Stecula & Pickup, 2021). Indeed, Eberl et al. (2021) argued that the positive relationship of populist attitudes and conspiracy beliefs is independent from political ideology (p. 272). However, apart from populist attitudes, Van Prooijen et al. (2015) claimed that conspirator thinking is more common among political extremes on both sides of the political spectrum and while the extreme left 'perceives conspiracies about issues concerning – for instance – capitalism (e.g. multinationals)', the extreme right 'particularly perceives conspiracies about topics such as science (e.g. evolution and climate change) or immigration' (p. 576, see also Forchtner, 2019b). Studies linking conspiracy theories with climate change scepticism support this argument (Hornsey et al., 2016; Huber, 2020; Lewandowsky et al., 2013).

Castanho Silva et al. (2017, p. 423) claim that the relationship between conspiracy belief and populist attitudes builds on people-centrism and anti-elitism 'confirming the common tendency of both discourses to see the masses as victims on elites' hands' (p. 423). Forchtner (2019b, p. 5) also argues that 'it is in the area of climate change that the far right both warns against "fearmongering" (by the mainstream/left and the hysteria the latter supposedly spreads) and could be accused of inciting it when claiming that *they*, through *their* responses, screw *us*'. According to the author, it is in this context, where the homogeneous people are confronted by the climate change activities of the 'corrupt elite', 'that climate change can become a vehicle for performing populism' (Forchtner, 2019b, p. 5). Here, populist actors seem to side with the 'little guy' and his economic interests, which they claim to protect from an oppressive elite whose climate policies are associated with 'cosmopolitanism', 'globalism', or 'liberal world government'. Indeed, this not only underscores the antagonist divide between the ordinary and blameless people and the corrupt and culpable elite (Hameleers & Van der Meer, 2021; e.g. Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde, 2004) but also attributes the blame to the establishment, which is central in populist communication (Busby et al., 2019; Hameleers et al., 2017; Vasilopoulou et al., 2013). Hameleers and van der Meer (2021, p. 4712) argue in their article on anti-science communication that 'we can regard a conspiracist narrative as an aspect of science-related populism' (see a more general conceptualisation of science-related populism in Mede & Schäfer, 2020). Studying the socio-political event Brexit in relation to energy issues, Batel and Devine-Wright (2018) described the denial of scientific knowledge in the name of defence of the people as 'right wing post-truth logic' (p. 42).

In contrast to the investigations arguing that populism plays an important role in climate obstruction in one way or another, I now turn to studies claiming that populism is not a major influence factor. In the aforementioned article where Küppers (2022) studied the framing of climate change by the German AfD, she also claims

that even though the populist radical right party frequently refers to the 'core people' and people-centrism is one element identified, populism (as a thin-centred ideology) does not play a prominent role in their climate change communication. The author argues that nationalism is a stronger predictor of climate change scepticism than traditional left-right ideology. Based on a quantitative investigation of individuals and their voting behaviour and views about climate change in a cross-national study, Kulin et al. (2021) claimed that nationalist ideology has more influence on policy attitudes about climate change than other factors such as left-right ideology, environmental values, or political trust. However, relevant for the present research, the authors found that 'nationalist ideology is positively associated with climate change scepticism' and is a more important predictor of such scepticism than right-wing populist voting behaviour (Kulin et al., 2021, p. 1121).

Huber et al. (2021) explored the policy discourses, positions, and actions of six European populist parties belonging to different types of populism and asserted that left-wing and left-leaning valence populists demand more ambitious energy and climate policy measures, relying on populist discourses. On the contrary, right-wing and right-leaning valence populist parties do not support ambitious energy and climate policies. Indeed, their study supports the notion that the key factor for a party's stance on climate and energy policy is not populism itself but left-right host ideology. The authors also mentioned that the level of populism in discourse on energy and climate policy tends to decrease when parties move from opposition to government (p. 999). Results of an investigation of the effect of populism on people's climate attitudes in the US suggested that 'populist attitudes enhance the effects of partisanship, rather than creating an independent, orthogonal dimension' (Huber et al., 2020, p. 373). (Find an overview about climate change and right-wing populism in the US in Fiorino (2022), and regarding national energy and climate politics and policy and populist radical right parties participation in government see Ćetković and Hagemann (2020)).

Combining survey analysis with computational social science methods, Yan et al. (2021) examined (among other aspects) the link between populism and climate change scepticism in various European countries and in the US. However, the authors found such a connection only for right-wing populist supporters but not for supporters of left-wing populist parties. Even though Yan et al. (2021) argue that their findings 'lend support to Lockwood's [(2018)] argument that ideological explanations are stronger than structuralist (economic) explanations in the link between climate sceptics and populism' (p. 21), the fact that their study simply distinguishes between right-wing and left-wing populism makes it difficult to attribute the results to the role of populism rather than left-wing and right-wing ideologies. In fact, at the party level, Timofejevs (2020, p. 3) summarises the difference in the ideological facets of the far-right as when far-right parties stress populist (i.e. anti-establishment) positions in their communication, 'they tend to be wary of supporting the "globalist" scientific climate change consensus' (see also Kølvraa, 2020). On the other hand, when parties focus more on ethnonationalist ideology they primarily emphasise 'the importance of homeland as part of their concept of the "pure" nation' (Timofejevs, 2020, p. 3; see also Voss, 2020).

A study analysing correlations between climate obstruction and various variables associated with right-wing populism found no support for a notable link between populist anti-establishment attitudes and climate change denial (Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020, pp. 315–316). According to their calculations, the authors identified exclusionary and anti-egalitarian preferences (negative views on feminism or multiculturalism) as the strongest predictor of climate obstruction (p. 328). Lastly, Haas (2023) utilises critical political economy and cultural studies to deepen understanding of the ascent of populist far-right actors and their propensity for obstructing climate action, asserting that economic, political, and cultural factors are interlinked. Right-wing populists aim to reinforce existing power dynamics by discrediting climate science and associated policies (p. 11).

Chapter summary

In conclusion, while some studies on the US are included, the majority of academic literature and studies on climate change communication and populist far-right actors have a European focus. Scholars have already noted that Europe has a sizable number of populist far-right actors who have a lengthy history and, as a result, a similarly high volume of studies (Forchtner, 2019b). While this chapter revealed that many PFRPs show climate obstruction in one way or another and reveal great hostility towards climate protection policies, they often support environmental protection, linking it to national ideology and identity issues, landscape, and countryside.

In addition, I cited a wide range of academic works across a broad range of fields (political science, sociology, psychology, behavioural research, etc.) and was able to demonstrate how authors analysed a variety of different aspects of climate change communication and political actors, with a focus on political orientation and populist far-right actors. Although this research field is relatively young, it is currently experiencing an upswing in research. Yet, there is another aspect I would like to contribute with this research paper. It is striking that qualitative studies often neglect the comparative perspective. Quantitative studies, on the other hand, often work with different countries and compare them but place little emphasis on examining the role of the (national) context. Here, I want to emphasise how often national policy issues or the context of national climate change are overlooked. Emphasis is placed on characterising the national context in many qualitative investigations, particularly those with a critical discourse analysis. However, even there, it is essentially integrated with the body of literature in a descriptive manner without analysing the mainstream parties, the policy field, or the development of the field. The paucity of study is particularly intriguing because academics frequently stress how crucial it is to integrate the national context, yet only do so in passing. Additionally, it is uncommon in the literature to find the integration of the national context (which is primarily descriptive) with a comparative perspective. However, this pairing might offer unique insights into how the national context affects climate change communication, especially how it affects climate obstruction. With this book, I contribute to this literature by emphasising the empirical

analysis of the national context on the one hand and incorporating data from three different nations on the other to offer a comparison viewpoint.

After providing an overview of the ideational approach of populism, I outlined how PFRPs have developed over four waves in Europe. Especially with the third and fourth waves, many populist far-right actors gained attention and political relevance all over Europe. I elaborate on the communication of populist far-right actors (e.g. Wodak, 2015, 2018) and highlight some of the dominant features and themes of populist far-right messages. Based on that, I have demonstrated that there is research identifying populism as a crucial factor, and research that identifies other factors (such as nationalism) as being more significant than populism in climate obstruction. With the current study, I want to contribute to populism research by theoretically discussing populism and its role for climate change communication and to empirically examining climate change communication of various political actors.

The next chapter will focus on the research design, presenting the data and cases as well as describing the methods used to analyse climate change communication of major and populist far-right parties.

Notes

1 The remaining six radical right parties were not shown in their table (p. 16) for this dimension, and it is assumed that these parties did not integrate aspects on global warming into their election manifestos.
2 Even though not all contemporary radical-right collective actors are populist, the majority can be considered as such (Mudde, 2007), glorifying ‘the people’ and criticising ‘the elite’, therefore Pirro uses the term (populist) radical right, but putting populist in brackets.
3 Wodak uses the term ‘right-wing populist parties’, but given explanations and examples, she first and foremost speaks of what I refer to on populist far right actors.
4 I chose to put these terms in quotes, based on critical academic literature that argues that to frame that development as a crisis was rather a personal judgment than an objective observation (see Mudde, 2019). Even though the number of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Europe was extraordinarily high, the European Union had the financial resources to deal with such numbers. Furthermore, Mudde (2019, p. 4) argues that ‘mainstream media and politicians *chose* to frame the influx of asylum seekers as a “crisis,” thereby providing ammunition to the already mobilized far right’.

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3 Methodology

Innovatively integrating comparative aspects in critical discourse studies

This chapter describes the research design of the present study and thus provides an outline of the data, the cases, and the method for the analysis. As shown in previous chapters, language is an important factor in the analysis of various societal issues and phenomena such as climate change. This analysis aims to reveal how different parties deal with climate change, especially regarding it's communication. With a particular emphasis on PFRPs, I wish to comprehend discourses about climate change that are pertinent in various national contexts. By examining the discourses of the centre-left and centre-right parties, that is, mainstream parties, I investigate the understanding of climate change (and potential changes) in Germany, Spain, and Austria, which I define as policy field for this research. Subsequently, the discourse about climate change of the nationally relevant PFRPs will be analysed. I use the apparatus of CDS. The branch of research of CDS is particularly well suited for this analysis as it is interested in revealing hidden meanings and the connections between discourse, ideology, and power (Fairclough, 1992). In analysing the understanding of climate change, I follow an approach already established in the literature, combining aspects of the DHA and of conceptual history (or BG). In the second step, I conduct a classical entry-level and in-depth analysis following the DHA. The chapter starts with an explanation of the selected time frame, followed by a description and justification of the case selection. Then, I outline the data selected for the analysis before going into depth about the method.

Germany, Spain, and Austria: data and cases

This analysis centres on the development of discourses in the context of climate issues over a five-year period. Specifically, I investigate various documents (see Table 3.1) over time to study discourses about climate change of various political parties in three European countries. The main time span of the analysis ranges between 2016 and 2020, which has been selected because of its relevance in terms of both PFRPs in Europe and climate change as an issue on the political agenda. However, documents that were created or published before or shortly after this period were also included if necessary.

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Selection and justification of the time frame

Since the signing and ratification (in Europe mostly in 2016) of the Paris Agreement, the social relevance and salience of the issue of climate change has steadily increased in many European countries. In particular, Fridays for Future (FFF) as well as other movements (e.g. Extinction Rebellion) have contributed to raising the public profile of climate change. At the same time, various PFRPs gained (more) formal power in various European countries such as Germany, Spain, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. Parties such as the AfD in Germany and Vox in Spain have ushered in a new era in their national contexts, as for the first time since the end of World War II in Germany and in Spain after the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, a PFRP entered their respective national parliaments.

Concretely, in Germany, the populist far-right party AfD was founded in 2013 as an EU sceptic and right-wing liberal party. After an economic liberal wing split off in 2015, the party moved steadily to the far right. In the 2017 federal elections the AfD achieved 12.6 per cent of the vote, entering the 19th German Bundestag. In Spain, the populist far-right party Vox was founded in 2013, and in April 2019 it obtained 10.2 per cent of the vote, which increased to 15.1 per cent in the repeat Spanish parliamentary elections in November 2019, representing 52 mandates. The PFRP of Austria, the FPÖ, was founded in the middle of the last century, has been represented four times in a federal government, and in 2017 they were part of the governing coalition with the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP), which was however dissolved in 2019, in the wake of a political scandal (the Ibiza affair).

In addition to these three countries, which are the focus of this study, other parties (which are not the subject of this study) will also be mentioned in order to underline the rise of PFRPs in this period in Europe. For example, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), which has been the strongest party by seats in the Swiss National Council since 1999 as a radical right party also managed to win the Council of States in the 2019 Swiss parliamentary elections, gaining 20 per cent of the vote. In Italy, the radical right Lega (former Lega Nord, which has changed its orientation and political goals several times since its founding) also managed to be part of the national government from 2018 to 2019 (and since 2022 in coalition with the Meloni-led government). In the elections for the European Parliament in 2019, too, populist far-right and nationalist parties were able to enter Parliament with a strengthened position.

In sum, within the time frame 2016–2020, PFRPs gained power in various European countries and the issue of climate change has become more salient in politics, societies, and the media.

Selection and justification of the cases

The research is based on a case study with three different cases (see Table 3.1). All cases refer to populist radical right parties following Mudde's (2007) conceptualisation, or more generally speaking, PFRPs that are present and relevant on the national level. Based on the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and especially on

Table 3.1 Case selection

Cases	*Country*	*Centre-left party*	*Centre-right party*	*Populist far-right party*
Case 1	Germany	SPD	CDU/CSU	AfD
Case 2	Spain	PSOE	PP	Vox
Case 3	Austria	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ

Pirro's (2023) plea for an umbrella concept, I will refer to these parties as PFRPs even if the concept of populist radical right parties could also be applied to all three cases, according to Mudde (2007).

The cases and the respective political parties are selected and operationalised with the help of existing literature (Mudde, 2019; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; e.g. Norris, 2020; Wondreys & Mudde, 2022; Zulianello, 2020) and databases such as Manifesto data on the 'Right-Left Position' of political parties. The selection of cases is primarily predicated upon three pivotal commonalities: (1) the prominence of mainstream political parties, (2) membership within the European Union, and (3) the current relevance of a PFRP at the national level. First, classic mainstream parties, that is centre-left and centre-right parties, exist in each of the three cases and are significant players in their respective national contexts. These parties have consistently obtained a large proportion of the vote in their own nations, alternated between becoming governments based on election outcomes, or created coalitions to form governments. For instance, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and Christian Democratic Union of Germany/Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CDU/CSU) have alternated in holding the chancellorship in Germany since 1949, frequently forming coalitions to govern (see Grand Coalition). Similar circumstances exist in Austria, where the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) alternate and have frequently formed government coalitions since 1945. Since 2017, the SPÖ has not been involved in forming a government anymore, but it remains the strongest force in the opposition. In Spain, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the People's Party (PP) have also been taking turns in forming the government. In all three cases, the mainstream parties have strongly influenced political affairs, events, and developments for decades and played a central role in defining policy fields and their content as well as in discourses about important social issues. In other words, the parties and their communication provide core information for the identification of the national contextual discourse about climate change.

Second, regarding the topic of climate change, it made sense to include only members of the EU due to the competences regarding climate adaptation and mitigation (see e.g. European Green Deal) at this supranational level. The EU not only influences national politics through, among other aspects, policy papers on climate change and the corresponding climate protection requirements of its members but also plays a role in discourses about climate change (see Chapter 1).

Third, Case 1 and Case 2, that is, Germany and Spain, have PFRPs that have recently been in parliament and are relevant on the national level. However, they do

not appear to have much formal power. The populist far-right FPÖ in Austria has long been present at the national level and joined the national government several times, demonstrating more formal power.

Regarding these crucial commonalities among the cases, several dimensions exhibited significant differences, namely (1) environmental tradition, (2) historical tradition with PFRPs (Post-World War II), and (3) impacts/consequences of climate change. First, disparities in environmental traditions were evident, with Germany and Austria, for instance, boasting a longstanding tradition of environmental protection, often intertwined with national identity (see below in detail). Conversely, while environmental awareness exists in Spain, it is not as pronounced as in Germany, as evidenced by the absence of a prominent green party. Second, the historical evolution of populist far-right parties post-World War II varied across all countries. In Austria, the FPÖ has enjoyed national significance for an extended period, particularly since Jörg Haider's leadership in the 1980s. In contrast, both PFRPs in Germany and Spain were founded much later, in 2013. Third, the diverse impacts and consequences of climate change exhibit varying degrees of severity. Spain has been grappling with the effects of the climate crisis for several years, experiencing intense heatwaves, droughts, crop failures, and wildfires. While Austria and Germany also witness manifestations of the climate crisis, such as increased heavy rainfall and flooding, they are currently considered less vulnerable than Spain (see e.g. Climate Change Vulnerability Index).

In Chapter 4 I describe in detail the three national contexts including features of their party system and environmental tradition and give a general overview of climate change issues in the three countries.

Selection and justification of the data

For the analysis I include different types of texts and thus refer to the different *genres* that can be applied to texts. A *genre* could be described as 'a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity' (Fairclough, 1995, p. 14). Referring to van Dijk (2007), different genres have more or less fixed forms or formats. For instance, a news report typically consists of a title or headline, a lead, a main event description, context or background, and a conclusion. Genres such as conversation often have fixed formal categories, such as greetings, debating, talking, and so on. Van Dijk (2007, p. xxxi) emphasised that such structures are not local but global as 'they characterize discourse as a whole, or apply to larger fragments of discourse' and 'they are *formal* categories defining abstract schemas'.

Reisigl and Wodak (2017, p. 90) argued that a general discourse about climate change can be accomplished through a variety of genres and texts, including speeches or lectures by climatologists, TV debates about the policies of a particular government regarding climate change, and recommendations for reducing energy use. As I do not study the general discourse about climate change but rather focus on the political field of climate change by concentrating on mainstream parties of a country in a first step and on the PFRPs in a second step, I concretely include the

genres of party programmes, election programmes, press releases, social media posts, parliamentary sessions, coalition programmes, and policies. It should be possible to gain the most accurate understanding of the general discourses of the respective actors by including a variety of genres.

In order to reflect shortly on the genre affordances, I want to highlight that each case is different, thus data varies. Although a comparative perspective is pursued, data of each case, and more concretely of each party, must be selected individually, based to a major extent on the national political context (see details below). This means, for instance, that not all countries published the same kind of policy regarding climate change issues. This means also that the political situation has an impact on the data selection. For example, when the PFRP of one country is in a government coalition with one of the mainstream parties during the selected period, I need to evaluate the inclusion of text genres that are created by mainstream parties and PFRPs together. In summary, I want to mention that political situations such as government coalitions, party systems, or the party landscape but also other aspects such as data availability and production play a role in data selection and genre affordances.

To return to van Dijk (2007), some of these genres fulfil similar forms, for example, party programmes and election programmes, while other genres such as social media posts and press releases are quite different and distinguishable from each other. Nevertheless, the structures are global; that is, social media posts in Germany fulfil the same format as those in Austria or Spain, as do press releases, parliamentary debates, and so on. It is thus possible to examine intertextual and interdiscursive links thanks to the incorporation of multiple genres, while on the other hand, comparisons between the various political parties as well as nations can be pursued.

In essence, a keyword search was used to gather the data. One aspect of climate change, especially regarding language, discourses, or framing, starts already with the terms used. There are very different expressions, which are not always used by different actors in the same way. For each term, such as 'global warming', 'climate crisis', 'climate change', different scientific definitions, and connotations exist (Kennedy & Hefferon, 2020; Jang & Hart, 2015; Schuldt et al., 2011; Villar & Krosnick, 2011), which however overlap partly in their meanings and are often used interchangeably. Shi et al. (2020) conducted a semantic network analysis to investigate the difference in the terms 'global warming' and 'climate change' on Twitter. Their findings reveal that the latter became more dominant in public discussions and indicated a more scientific perspective. However, the term 'global warming triggered more political responses and showed a greater connection with [general] phenomena' (Shi et al., 2020, p. 1). Lineman et al. (2015) also illustrated that the use of the term 'climate change' increased over ten years (2004–2014), while the use of the term 'global warming' decreased. Climate scientist Michael Mann (2021) highlights that climate change is a more comprehensive description of the problem, as it includes not only the warming of the Earth's surface but also the melting of glaciers, rising sea levels, changing ocean currents, shifting precipitation zones and desert belts, etc. Based on this literature, climate change was

considered as the keyword for the data gathering. The specific keyword search term 'climate' (German: Klima, Spanish: clima) was chosen in order to include potential literature on climate catastrophe, climate warming, or climate emergency, that is, terms that obviously deal with climate change (other texts that contain the term 'climate', e.g. political climate, were excluded).

The analysis covers the period 2016–2020. When preparing the corpus for analysis, the collected data, specifically concerning social media and press releases, needs to be downsized according to specified criteria. Relying on existing literature (e.g. Reisigl & Wodak, 2017) as well as characteristics of the present project, the criteria I established are as follows:

- Salience: the time periods (within 2016–2020) that show a high salience of climate change (measured by social media posts concerning climate change) are considered as a first indication for a temporal selection of data (see also identification of key moments below).
- Intertextual or interdiscursive coverage: texts on topics that are present in texts assigned to different genres are preferred, for example, a topic both discussed in the social media channels of the actors and in press releases or that include a further link, whereby the actors go deeper into a topic.
- Frequency: the more often a topic is addressed, the more likely it is to be analysed.
- Reactions to social media posts: posts with a high number of reactions such as 'likes' were preferred.
- Representativity: data that are representative of climate change.
- Uniqueness: data or contents that are unlike anything else in comparison.
- Redundancy: the multiple mention of information as a rhetorical device.

In the case of parliamentary debates, the criterion of randomness has been applied. Specific discussions on the subject of climate change were sought, and two of these were randomly chosen for each case. In the following sections, I provide a detailed overview of the data of each part and each country.

Data for the analysis of the national policy field

In the first part of the analysis, I was interested in investigating evolving meanings of the understanding of climate change as the national policy fields, thus in the discourses of mainstream parties.

The period of analysis is 2016–2020, although I constructed two study periods to be able to trace a development. The first period encompasses the time between 2016 and 2018, and the second period covers 2019–2020. These two periods have been artificially constructed, taking into account some aspects that apply to all three countries. I will show below that the salience of the issue of climate change in all analysed parties has strongly increased from 2019 onwards, that is, the first time period covers three years in which climate change is less salient for all parties in their communication than between 2019 and 2020. In all three countries, a peak

in the Facebook communication of the nationally relevant parties can be detected in 2019 (see Chapter 4). This classification thus makes it possible to examine whether the increase in the salience of climate change also leads to changes in content. It allows answering the questions: does only the salience increase or also the variety of topics? Does the understanding of climate change change?

I also tried to pinpoint other critical times, such as when the total number of posts each month topped ten, climbed by at least 30 per cent from the previous month, and then decreased by at least 30 per cent the following month. I then place these key moments in the context of the country, or, to put it another way, I attempt to connect these moments to occasions that might be connected to them. By doing this, I build a connection between my data and the national contexts.

Now I present the data for the first part of the individual cases. Table 3.2 displays the data corpus for the German centre-left (SPD) and centre-right (CDU, CSU) parties. Regarding the social media posts, between 2016 and 2018, a total of 34 Facebook and Twitter posts talking about climate change issues were collected (CDU/CSU: 22, SPD: 12), and between 2019 and 2020, 194 (CDU/CSU: 163, SPD: 31). Through the downsizing process according to the criteria outlined above, I remained with 19 posts for the SPD and 38 posts for CDU/CSU, divided between two time periods (see Table 3.2). It should be noted that CDU/CSU basically use more different social media profiles than the SPD and therefore, quantitatively speaking, have more posts. The following Facebook and Twitter profiles were consulted for data collection: on Facebook, SPD, SPD Fraktion im Bundestag, CDU, CSU, CDU/CSU Bundestagsfraktion; and on Twitter, @CDU, @CSU, @spdbt, and @cducsubt.

This division of time periods was contrived to see if (and which) discourse changes are observable after a clear peak in the salience of climate change took place in 2019. As described above, there was a lot of political, public, and media discussion on climate change in 2019; therefore, the corpus for the data analysis for the time period 2019–2020 is larger. This is valid also for Spain and Austria.

Table 3.2 Corpus for the analysis of the mainstream parties (SPD, CDU/CSU) in Germany

Timeframe	*Actor*	*Genre*	*Number*
2016–2018	SPD/CDU/CSU	Coalition paper	1
	SPD/CDU/CSU	Parliamentary session (no. 38, 2018)	1
	SPD/CDU/CSU	Policy (‘BMU, Klimaschutzplan 2050’, 2016)	1
	SPD	Social media posts	9
	CDU/CSU	Social media posts	12
Total			**24**
2019–2020	SPD/CDU/CSU	Parliamentary session (no. 176, 2020)	1
	SPD/CDU/CSU	Policy (‘BMU, Klimaschutzprogramm 2030’, 2019)	1
	SPD	Social media posts	10
	CDU/CSU	Social media posts	26
Total			**38**

Table 3.3 displays the data corpus for the Spanish centre-left (PSOE) and centre-right (PP) parties. Regarding the social media posts, between 2016 and 2018, a total of 57 social media posts (Facebook and Twitter) talking about climate (in the sense of climate change or environment) were collected (PSOE: 36, PP: 21), and between 2019 and 2020, 117 (PSOE: 94, PP: 23)). Through the downsizing process according to the criteria above, I remained with 55 posts for PSOE and 37 posts for PP, divided between two time periods. The following Facebook and Twitter profiles were consulted for data collection: on Facebook, PSOE, PP; and on Twitter, @PSOE, @Populares.

Table 3.3 Corpus for the analysis of the mainstream parties (PSOE, PP) in Spain

Timeframe	*Actor*	*Genre*	*Number*
2016–2018	PSOE/PP	Parliamentary session (no. 153, 2018)	1
	Gobierno de españa/ Ministerio de medio ambiente (PP)	Policy ('Ley 1/2005, de 9 de marzo, BOE» núm. 59, de 10 de marzo de 2005, last amendment 2017')	1
	PSOE	Social media posts	24
	PP	Social media posts	18
Total			**44**
2019–2020	PSOE/PP	Parliamentary session (no. 34, 2020)	1
	Gobierno de España/ Ministerio para la transición ecológica y el reto demográfico (MITECO) (PSOE)	Policy (MITECO, 2020 'Plan nacional de adaptación al cambio climático 2021–2030')	1
	PSOE	Social media posts	31
	PP	Social media posts	19
Total			**52**

For Austria, I did not include a policy paper regarding climate due to the situation of the government coalitions. Concretely, between May 2016 and December 2017, the SPÖ formed a coalition with the ÖVP, and during this time only minor amendments were made to the Climate Protection Act (passed in 2011). Also, the Energy Efficiency Act had already been passed in 2014. Then between December 2017 and May 2019, the ÖVP formed a coalition with the FPÖ in government, which means that a clear influence of the FPÖ on policies has to be taken into account and would affect this analysis as well as a comparison between centre-left and centre-right parties with PFRPs. After a period of expert government, the ÖVP formed a coalition with the Greens in January 2020. Examining a policy statement for this alliance also makes little sense because the Greens' influence on the document would skew a straightforward study of the ÖVP or SPÖ. In other words, a possible change in the understanding of climate change with the inclusion of policy documents from the first period, a time when the ÖVP formed a coalition with the FPÖ, and policy documents from the second period, when the ÖVP formed a coalition with the Greens, could strongly depend on the respective different coalition actors, who can be assigned to different ideological orientations. Therefore, or because of this

specific context in Austria, I rather included the 2015 policy statement ('Grundsatzprogramm') published by the ÖVP, as well as the 2018 party programme of the SPÖ for the first period. For the second period I relied on the SPÖ's Climate Justice Paper ('Klimagerechtigkeit') published in 2019 and the ÖVP's Leading proposal for the Federal Party Congress 2021 ('Leitantrag zum Bundesparteitag 2021').

Table 3.4 shows the data corpus for the Austrian centre-left (SPÖ) and centre-right (ÖVP) parties. Between 2016 and 2018, a total of 35 social media posts (Facebook and Twitter) talking about climate (in the sense of climate change or environment) were collected (SPÖ: 16, ÖVP: 29), and between 2019 and 2020, 101 (SPÖ: 76, ÖVP: 25). For the analysis, I downsized the data according to the criteria outlined above, which left me with 70 posts for the SPÖ and 48 posts for the ÖVP. The following Facebook and Twitter profiles were consulted for data collection: on Facebook, SPÖ, SPÖ im Parliament, ÖVP; and on Twitter, @SPOE_at, @volkspartei.

Table 3.4 Corpus for the analysis of the mainstream parties (SPÖ, ÖVP) in Austria

Timeframe	*Actor*	*Genre*	*Number*
2016–2018	SPÖ/ÖVP	Parliamentary session (no. 14, 2018)	1
	ÖVP	Policy programme 2015 ('Grundsatzprogramm 2015')	1
	SPÖ	Party programme 2018 ('Parteiprogramm 2018')	1
	SPÖ	Social media posts	12
	ÖVP	Social media posts	25
Total			**40**
2019–2020	ÖVP/SPÖ	Parliamentary session (no. 3, 2019)	1
	ÖVP	Leading proposal for the Federal Party Congress 2021 ('Leitantrag zum Bundesparteitag 2021')	1
	SPÖ	Climate Justice Paper ('Klimagerechtigkeit 2019')	1
	SPÖ	Social media posts	58
	ÖVP	Social media posts	23
Total			**84**

Data for the analysis of the discourse about climate change in populist far-right communication

In the second part of the analysis, I was interested in investigating the discourse about climate change of PFRPs in the three countries studied. As in the first part, I included different genres in the analysis, which are listed in more detail in the following tables. Similar genres for all three countries were chosen for this part as well but with care for the individual national context.

Table 3.5 displays that for the AfD in Germany, the official party programme of the AfD, two election programmes, and social media posts (Facebook and Twitter) were analysed. Within this combination of genres, the focus is primarily on communication with the public and self-presentation to the outside world. Social media posts and press releases were collected by searching the German term 'Klima'

Table 3.5 Corpus for the analysis of the German AfD

Genres	*Number*
Party programme ('Programm für Deutschland', 2016)	1
Election programmes ('Wahlprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag am 24. September 2017' and 'Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 9. Europäischen Parlament 2019')	2
Social media posts	21
Press releases	24
Total	**48**

(English climate), and the following party profiles were included in the analysis: @AfD, @AfDimBundestag (both Twitter), and @alternativefuerde (Facebook). Also here, the number of social media posts and press releases exceeds the analysis potential, thus only part of the total collected data was analysed, with downsizing carried out according to the criteria outlined above.

Table 3.6 reveals the data corpus for the Spanish populist far-right party Vox. It includes the party manifesto of Vox, called '100 medidas para la España Viva' and 'Programa protejamos España' and parliamentary activity reports. The latter consist of the parties' own reports about their parliamentary actions, reconciliations, and discussions. Using a keyword search on their webpage, I identified ten such reports. In addition to the party programmes, further programmes as well as election programmes were also considered but were later omitted because they did not address the issue of climate change (e.g. 'Programa electoral para las elecciones autonómicas de 2019'). Moreover, Vox's communication which is probably closest to the citizens, that is, social media posts and press releases, are integrated in the corpus.

Table 3.6 Corpus for the analysis of the Spanish Vox

Genres	*Number*
Party programme ('100 medidas para la España Viva', 'Programa protejamos España'	2
Parliamentary activity reports ('Actividad Parlamentaría')	10
Social media posts	14
Press releases	15
Total	**41**

Social media posts and press releases were collected by searching 'Clima', and the following official party profiles were included in the analysis: @VOXEspana (Facebook) and @vox_es (Twitter). In the case of Vox, due to the low number of social media posts on climate change, all posts were included in the analysis.

Table 3.7 shows that the data corpus for the Austrian FPÖ consist of their party programme, first published in 2011, but still valid and published on their official website. Instead of an election programme, which was not available online, I included a document called Interim Government Review ('Regierungszwischenbilanz') of

Table 3.7 Corpus for the analysis of the Austrian FPÖ

Genres	*Number*
Party programme ('Parteiprogramm 2011')	1
Interim Government Review ('Regierungszwischenbilanz 2018')	1
Social media posts	19
NFZ articles (2017–2020)	23
Total	**44**

Table 3.8 Neue Freie Zeitung (NFZ)

Year	*Number of issues*	*Number of issues containing articles on climate change*	*Percentage of issues containing articles on climate change*
2017	2	0	0
2018	44	21	47.73
2019	44	42	95.45
2020	46	36	78.25
Total	**136**	**99**	**72**

2018. Moreover, regarding the communication with the public, I included social media posts, and the articles published in the party newspaper 'Neue Freie Zeitung' (NFZ) instead of press releases, which were also not available online for the time period 2016–2020.

In the case of Austria, only Facebook data from the official FPÖ profile @ FPÖ was used, as the search on Twitter did not yield any results in the time frame 2016–2020. The NFZ was analysed using 23 articles from 18 issues; therefore, the aforementioned downsizing criteria were also applied there. The NFZ is published weekly and Table 3.8 gives a concrete overview of the exact number of issues that are currently online since 2017. In addition, I recorded how many issues contain articles on climate change. In sum, the FPÖ addressed the issue of climate quite frequently and in 2019, almost all issues (except two) included articles about climate change.

Critical discourse studies: DHA and BG

While at least until 1960 language as the object of social-scientific inquiry and communication per se received a very limited recognition, linguistic aspects in general and CDS in particular have now arrived in many social science disciplines (see linguistic/communicative turn in social sciences). The discourse is seen as 'socially constitutive as well as socially shaped: it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 259). Regarding its socially constitutive nature, 'discourse represents, creates, reproduces and changes social reality' (Reisigl, 2017, p. 51). CDS are study traditions that comprise several schools and methodologies that vary in their genealogy and methodology. In the next two

sections, I outline two methodological strategies used in the present investigation: BG (Reinhart Koselleck) and the DHA (Ruth Wodak, Martin Reisigl, Michal Krzyzanowski, etc.).

DHA is at the core of the analysis. It is characterised by 'relative constructivism, a hermeneutic direction . . . as well as an empirical, problem-related, socially-critical and application-oriented approach' (Reisigl, 2007, pp. 6–7 original in German). Moreover, DHA, which is mainly qualitative, 'rejects the idea of "value-neutral research" and, understanding itself as "anti-objectionist", attempts at terminological precision and text- and discourse-analytic scrupulousness' (Reisigl, 2007, p. 6 original in German). That said, I do not want to write too much in general about DHA – many others have already done that (Forchtner, 2011; Reisigl, 2007; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, see e.g. 2017; Wodak, 1996, 2001) – but rather briefly and succinctly describe some crucial aspects as well as the application of DHA in this work (for ecolinguistic approaches in CDS see e.g. Alexander & Stibbe, 2014; Stibbe, 2014, 2015, 2017). I would like to stress that right-wing populism in Europe along with discourses about the environment and climate change are a few of the many research subjects that have recently attracted the attention of discourse-historical analysts. Thus, this work integrates very well into the existing DHA literature.

The DHA views discourse analysis as a multifaceted undertaking that incorporates theory, methodology, and empirically supported research activities that result in practical social applications rather than merely being a method of language analysis (Reisigl, 2017, p. 48). DHA considers different genres of text/data, (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 89) views texts in context, that is *discourse*, as 'socially constituted and socially constitutive' as well as 'context-dependent semiotic practices' 'related to a macro-topic' and pluri-perspective, which is connected to argumentation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 89; Wodak, 1996). Argumentation is a fundamental area of DHA and more important than in many other CDS approaches (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2012; Reisigl, 2017; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Historical change in discourse is related to social change, and DHA pays particular attention to historical change (Reisigl, 2017, p. 52). Indeed, discourses, according to DHA, are primarily historical and innately reliant on the social contexts in which they are produced and received (Krzyżanowski, 2010) as Wodak (1996, p. 19) claims that

> [d]iscourse is historical: Discourse is not produced and cannot be understood without taking the context into consideration. . . . Discourses are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as to those which are produced synchronically or subsequently.

In DHA there are three dimensions to the context – macro, meso, and micro – and it is explored at four levels that include: (a) 'the immediate, language or text internal co-text'; (b) 'the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses'; (c) 'the extra-linguistic social/sociological variables and institutional frames of a specific "context situation"'; and (d) 'the broader socio-political and historical contexts, which the discursive practices are embedded in and related to' (Wodak, 2001, p. 67). The fourth dimension, the historical

context, receives particular focus in DHA (see for more details and research practice Reisigl, 2017, pp. 53–55; Reisigl & Wodak, 2017).

DHA and in general most variations of CDS include somehow the concepts of critique, power, and ideology. First, although critique is primarily 'situated critique', adopting a 'critical' stance should be understood as separating oneself from the data, placing the data in its social context, identifying the political positions of the discourse participants, and putting constant self-reflection as a priority while conducting research (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 88). Second, examining ideology seen as 'an often one sided perspective or world view' (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 88) is central to DHA to identify multiple discursive representations of ideological perspectives across a range of social areas, places, and genres. Ideologies play a significant role in the establishment and maintenance of unequal power relations through discourse and can more or less significantly alter power relations (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 88) – which leads to, third, power that is viewed as a mechanism for establishing and maintaining inequality among various social groups and among individual members of society and power that 'is legitimized or de-legitimized in discourses' (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 89; Wodak, 1996). In sum, to examine, comprehend, and explain the complexity of the investigational objects and as already outlined in the introduction, I will follow the 'principle of triangulation', taking into account a wide range of empirical facts, ideas, and procedures in addition to previous knowledge (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017). I go into greater depth about the research strategies in the two sections that follow.

The policy field of climate change: DHA and BG

The first part of the investigation that analyses the national policy fields of climate change, that is, the understanding of climate change in the different national contexts over time connects CDS with conceptual thinking and, more concretely, the German tradition of conceptual history, the so-called *Begriffsgeschichte* (BG) (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003; Koselleck, 1979, 2002). Concretely, this analysis combines BG with the DHA in CDS (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2008), as suggested by Krzyżanowski (2016).

Such a methodological combination (Krzyżanowski, 2010) enables the analysis of how the 'semantic field' of climate change or the understandings of climate change developed between 2016 and 2020 as well as the tracing of the recontextualisation of various discourses about the issue. In this context-sensitive study, I rely on a multi-level definition of context (Wodak, 2001) that 'integrates the influence of changing socio-political conditions (i.e. macro-level of context) on the dynamics of discursive practices (policy documents, etc.) with an in-depth analysis of relevant texts' (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2011, p. 118). This led me to first give an assessment of the 'macro' backdrop, which in my case includes recent political, environmental, and climate-related developments in the three individual countries, before analysing the documents introduced and described in the first section. The 'macro' context of the individual national contexts will be described in Chapter 4 and on the European level in the introduction.

Like DHA, BG refers to its interdisciplinary orientation and should be seen as a 'linguistically-oriented social history' (Krzyżanowski, 2010, p. 126). BG can be thought of as both a diachronic and synchronic investigation of the evolution and modification of fundamental social and political concepts. Koselleck (1982) regarded concepts as basic elements of all social fields of action and in BG studies three types of concepts are distinguished: (1) the Grundbegriffe or so-called basic or key social and political concepts, which are the focus of attention; (2) Nebenbegriffe or their neighbouring or sister-concepts; and (3) Gegenbegriffe or their adversary or counter-concepts. Grundbegriffe are defined as concepts that possess 'mobilising force' in a particular way, appear at critical moments in history, and often survive the environments in which they were created (Krzyżanowski, 2016, p. 313). Examples of such basic terms are concepts such as 'civilisation' (Ifversen, 2002), which have been redefined again and again throughout history or whose meaning is, as it were, dynamic in context without losing its universal core (Krzyżanowski, 2016). BG includes not only Grundbegriffe but also Nebenbegriffe and Gegenbegriffe. Nebenbegriffe can also be referred to as sister-concepts in English and are intended to help the basic terms fit into a larger semantic field. Gegenbegriffe, on the other hand, represent concepts that are fundamentally adversarial to the base concept. Such anti-concepts can also help in understanding the basic concepts by raising ideas or values that are contrary.

In BG, semantic fields is the term applied to the process of building how Grundbegriffe are positioned 'vis-à-vis their sister- and counter-concepts' (Krzyżanowski, 2016, p. 313) and is seen as the synchronically oriented analyses in BG. While the diachronic perspective focuses on the singularity (uniqueness of concepts) or generality (the ability to become universal concepts) of particular concepts (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003; Koselleck, 1985), synchronic analyses operate on a variety of levels that can assist in not only identifying concepts and relationships between concepts but also in observing how the resulting constructed semantic field shapes society and social domains of action (Krzyżanowski, 2010, p. 127). The semantic field of a concept is there to break down and represent all types of concepts and the relationships between them. As previously mentioned, these can change over time and therefore the notion of semantic field is particularly central in BG in order to comprehend possible changes.

BG's analyses and interpretations are guided by three distinct dimensions: temporal, spatial, and hierarchical. For the temporal dimension, the before and after conceptual division is central (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2012, p. 381; Koselleck, 2004, p. 257). For the spatial dimension, the inside and outside distinction is at the core. According to Koselleck (2004), any community must be able to conceptually set itself apart from other communities, for instance in the case of the concepts of 'enemy/friend' (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003, p. 45), 'which are also reproduced in categories of "us" and "them"' (Krzyżanowski, 2010, p. 127). Finally, for the hierarchical dimension, the up and down distinction is central, which implies that any society will prioritise particular ideas as embodying what it considers to be the essence of 'us' (in Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2012, pp. 381–382; Koselleck, 2004). This dimension enables notions that describe 'political self-organisation' and

'distribution of relationships and reliance' (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003, p. 45) such as the master-slave relationship to be arranged along the lines of internal societal division (Krzyżanowski, 2010, p. 127).

Although DHA and BG are different approaches at first sight, they are more similar on a theoretical, analytical, conceptual, and interpretive level than one might think. Similar research foci in BG and DHA often revolve around themes such as Europe or identity or both. Indeed, DHA is a research tradition that has created various connections with BG. For both approaches '*language (and discourse) constitute social and political reality*' (Krzyżanowski, 2010, p. 128, original in italics). As a result, according to Krzyżanowski (2010, p. 128), BG and DHA both emphasise the importance of combining synchronic and diachronic dimensions of analysis to learn how various language realisations recur in various situations and how this serves as a symptom for the recurrence of deeper social and political meanings and viewpoints. In addition, both concepts share the idea that language plays a role in structuring or re-structuring society and history (Krzyżanowski, 2016), and with regard to recontextualisation, that is, that forms of language (concepts/discourses) reappear in different fields, spaces, or genres, both approaches are very similar. BG relies on in-depth knowledge and investigation of social and political contexts in which concepts merge, and this strong reliance on contexts constitutes another link to DHA (Krzyżanowski, 2010).

The aforementioned semantic field concept of BG is widely used in DHA analyses. The aim is to investigate arguments and themes 'which are used in relation to different widely debated social and political concepts or other highly-connotative and necessarily polysemous lexemes incl. proper names' (Krzyżanowski, 2010, p. 129). While DHA examines several semantic fields primarily synchronically, similar to BG, it continues to be committed to 'diachronic comparisons of similarities and differences within and between those fields over time' (Krzyżanowski, 2010, p. 129). Since the aim of this first step is to conceptually investigate climate change in the discourses of mainstream parties, I provide a conceptually oriented analysis of political connotations present in the different text genres of these actors (for similar analyses see e.g. Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2012; Krzyżanowski, 2002, 2019; Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2011). This investigation mainly consists of an analysis of semantic fields, whereby I will apply a diachronic analysis of the meaning of climate change in the three national contexts. The study focuses on content-related elements (themes or discourse topics), as well as on the diversity of arguments. The analysis will be performed to trace a possible changing meaning of climate change within the national contexts over time (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2011). By including the three different countries, another level of synchronic analysis within Europe is included, which makes this study unique in a certain way.

The discourse about climate change in populist far-right communication: DHA

Using DHA I will shed light on the process of how, when, and in which context PFRPs intervene in the discourse about climate change (e.g. relation to

traditionalism, homeland). The analysis shall explore the extent of climate obstruction among various PFRPs in European countries. DHA is multidimensional and includes the identification of contents or topics (T. A. van Dijk, 1991), the investigation of discursive strategies as well as linguistic means and context-dependent linguistic realisations (Krzyżanowski, 2010; Reisigl & Wodak, 2017; Wodak, 1996, 2001; Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2008). More concretely, I rely on a multi-level pattern which follows two steps in the analysis (Krzyżanowski, 2010; Wodak, 2014). In the first step of DHA – the entry-level analysis – discourse topics and specific contents of discourses are identified. The second step – in-depth analysis – investigates and categorises discursive strategies (see Reisigl, 2017; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2017) and focuses on key patterns of argumentation – so-called *topoi* (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017).

In the entry-level analysis, each individual text was read very carefully and one or more discourse fragments or discourse topics that 'conceptually, summarize the text, and specify its most important information' (T. A. van Dijk, 1991, p. 113) were defined and coded in NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020). As common practice in the exploration of discourses, I proceeded inductively, that is, by coding all documents and texts individually, and finally generated a list of topics for the different contexts/text types and also, cumulatively, for the entire discourse of one or more actors. The basic unit of analysis is the paragraph in which the predominant codes were identified. Due to the short length of social media posts, especially Twitter (now X) with its 240-character limit, most consist of only one paragraph. The entry-level analysis acts as a basis for the further steps of identifying discourse strategies and identifying arguments or *topoi* in the in-depth analysis.

The in-depth analysis examines discursive strategies, linguistic means, and context-dependent linguistic realisations. One goal is to define the central argumentations or argumentation schemes and in turn to trace them back to the discourse topics or to connect them (Krzyżanowski, 2018). Hence, this step of the DHA not only defines argumentation schemes but also focuses on the way language is utilised and how elements such as metaphors are used in different contexts.

For the in-depth analysis I relied on existing literature, namely on Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 2017), who speak of (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 44) five types of discursive strategies that help to identify the self- and other-presentation. Strategy implies 'a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal' (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 94), and the following paragraphs briefly outline the five strategies that are included in this paper, focusing on the first three in particular.

First, as part of the argumentation-oriented investigation, the in-depth analysis draws on the discursive strategies of nomination (see Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), by which social actors, objects, events, and phenomena are constructed. In other words, the ways social actors, objects, and phenomena are presented; what expressions are used; and what professional (e.g. policymaker), economic (e.g. taxpayer), or ideological anthroponyms (e.g. environmentalists) are adopted are examined. The analysis focuses mainly on self- and other-presentation, which allows the identification of so-called in-groups and out-groups that are particularly relevant in the

literature on populism and the far-right. The in-group is the group where an actor creates a sense of belonging or identifies with it. The out-group consists of those actors, individuals, or groups who do not belong to the in-group. I will analyse the frequent mentions of other actors by PFRPs regarding climate change and explore their context, emphasis, presentation, and comparison with how PFRPs present themselves and manage their in-group dynamics.

Second, the predication strategies focus on characteristics qualities and features attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena, events, and processes and help to label them more or less positively or negatively and more or less appreciatively or deprecatorily. They cannot be considered totally independent from the strategy of nomination, and they also help me, for example, to identify the in-groups and out-groups.

Third, argumentation strategies or *topoi* examine the arguments that are employed in a discourse. I focus here concretely on plausible argumentation schemes (i.e. *topoi*) which are described in argumentation theory as 'parts of argumentation which belong to the required premises' (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 102). The argumentation scheme or *topoi* permeate all other strategies and are the focus of this analysis. The term *topos* (plural *topoi*) was coined by Aristotle in his works on Rhetoric and Topics and is discussed and applied in current CDS in different ways (see e.g. Kienpointner, 1996; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2017; Rubinelli, 2009; Wengeler, 2003a, 2003b; Wodak, 2015). In argumentation theory, *topoi* are constituents of an argument that are a part of the necessary premises and 'are the formal or content-related warrants or "conclusion rules" which connect the argument(s) with the conclusion, the claim' (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 102). *Topoi* are not always directly stated or explicit, but they can always be identified by using conditional or causal clauses like 'if x, then y' or 'y, because x' (Reisigl, 2017; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2015).

Fourth, the perspectivation strategies present the speaker's or writer's perspective or point of view in expressing these nominations, attributions, or arguments. This can be, for example, an ideological perspective such as neoliberal or environmentalist-protectionist view.

Lastly, mitigation and intensification strategies help to 'qualify and modify the epistemic status of a proposition' by intensifying or mitigating the articulation of respective utterances (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 45).

Essentially, the present analysis is about qualitatively examining which features and aspects of different arguments are applied by the actors, how different strategies are used, how the argumentation is constructed, and what it ultimately concludes. DHA focuses on the ways in which positive self- and negative other-presentations ('us' and 'them', the good people and the scapegoats, the pro and contra of any topic/event) are constructed via power-dependent semiotic techniques (Wodak, 2015, p. 52). Here, mainly the strategies of nomination and predication play a role. Another focus relies on the analysis of *topoi,* which are analysed 'in terms of their discourse-pragmatic aspect' (Krzyżanowski, 2013, p. 117) and which – similar to the discourse topics of the entry-level analysis – also contain a quantitative aspect. Indeed, as for the entry-level analysis, the paragraph serves as basic unit of analysis

in which the predominant *topos* was identified. In that sense, I end up with a list of *topoi* that are present in the discourse of the PFRPs about climate change, whereby the number of codes also gives an overview of which *topoi* are more present and which are less present. However, as this is a qualitative critical discourse analysis, the quantitative component is not the main focus and should mainly be regarded as a summarisation. *Topoi* can be understood as realisation of the strategies and metaphors can likewise be seen as the strategies' realisations.

In fact, metaphors can help to grab and hold the attention of their audience and explain complicated concepts in straightforward terms since they have the capacity to evoke emotions and relate complicated or new concepts to real-world occurrences and commonplace experiences (Väliverronen & Hellsten, 2002). Metaphors are about 'understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5; Semino, 2008); are seen as integral tools of science, media, and everyday communication (Black, 1962; Condit et al., 2012; Hesse, 1970; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Nerlich, 2009); and have political as well as cognitive force (Schön, 1979). Furthermore, the rhetorical role of metaphors is well acknowledged in political communication 'where the deployment of cultural conceptual models, root metaphors and the formulation of ideologies is particularly crucial' (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017, p. 453; Charteris-Black, 2004; Chilton, 1996; Musolff, 2004). In particular, philosophy and linguistics have examined several views on metaphors (Black, 1962; Gentner, 1983; Hesse, 1970; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Wilks, 1978). These approaches revolve around the conceptual idea that the construction of a metaphorical expression involves a source domain and a target domain, where an interconceptual mapping of the source to the target domain takes place. For instance, in the expression 'the battle against climate change', climate change, which is the target concept, is viewed in terms of a battle (or a war), which is the source concept.

Regarding environmental problems which are often not immediately visible and apparent to the human observer, metaphors help to communicate what exactly the problem is or what is happening[1] (Väliverronen & Hellsten, 2002). Examples of metaphors used in the discourse about the environment or climate change include the Amazon rainforest as 'the lungs of the earth', biodiversity as 'the library of life' (see e.g. Väliverronen & Hellsten, 2002), or climate change as causing a 'greenhouse effect' (see e.g. Romaine, 1997). Furthermore, research found a rise in the usage of war metaphors to convey the need to implement measures to mitigate climate change (Asplund, 2010; Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017; Cohen, 2001). Studies that analyse how meanings of metaphors are shaped by specific socio-political contexts are particularly important for examining the current political communication about climate change and possible contentious representations of climate change by certain actors. I investigate how metaphors are used by political parties to make various arguments, starting from the perspective that analogies in public discourse make use of stereotypical depictions of ordinary circumstances to offer evaluative viewpoints on contentious matters and to justify and legitimise particular courses of action (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017, p. 454; Charteris-Black, 2006; Musolff, 2006).

Chapter summary

This chapter described the data, cases, and methods I used to analyse the communication of climate change of various political parties. I first introduced the time frame of 2016–2020 and the three cases under investigation, that is, the respective mainstream parties as well as the three PFRPs of Germany, Spain, and Austria. The data selection is based on the inclusion of different text genres and thus considers social media posts, parliamentary sessions, coalition papers, policies, and similar documents (see Austria) for the analysis of the mainstream parties. For the PFRPs I draw the analysis on party and election programmes, social media posts, and press releases (for Austria I used articles of the party newspaper instead of press releases due to data availabilities). The data of the three cases are not always exactly equal, as the national context has to be taken into account and different types of data exist and are available.

In the second part of the chapter, I introduced the method, which is divided into two sections. First, I described the discourse-conceptual analysis of climate change, which combines a DHA and BG. This is how I examine the understanding of climate change among the centre-left and centre-right parties in the three countries, which I describe as a policy field in the respective national contexts. Second, I analyse the discourse about climate change by PFRPs using DHA. In particular, I study different discursive strategies in the communication of the German AfD, the Spanish Vox, and the Austrian FPÖ parties.

In the subsequent three chapters, I explain and discuss the results of these examinations, putting them into context as well as referring to similar or competing research.

Note

1 Also visual elements, such as photographs, videos, or television images, help to concretise and simplify abstract issues and phenomena.

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4 Decoding climate policy fields in Germany, Spain, and Austria

A deep dive into mainstream parties' communication

This chapter provides a sequential analysis of the climate change communication strategies employed by mainstream parties in Germany, Spain, and Austria. Each analysis is preceded by a brief descriptive overview of the contemporary political and environmental histories of each country, aiming to illuminate the broader context of each case. The first section presents the analysis from Germany to provide a thorough understanding of how the three mainstream parties – the SPD, the CDU/CSU – communicate about climate change. Germany retains a self-image as a green nation which, especially after World War II, became the focus of their new, positive national identity together with characteristics of a strong social market economy and liberal democracy (Goodbody, 2019). Then I move on to the investigation of the Spanish case, where I also provide a thorough analysis of the two mainstream parties – the centre-left PSOE and the centre-right PP. Unlike in Germany and Austria where centre-left and centre-right parties have already formed coalitions, the PSOE and PP have not worked together as a government coalition. Lastly, I present the examination of the Austrian case with its two mainstream parties, namely the SPÖ and the ÖVP. Concerning this case, it is particularly important to recall that the FPÖ was also in government (together with the ÖVP) for part of the period under investigation, that is, from December 2017 until May 2019. As for Germany and Spain, this part furthermore reveals the similarities and differences in the understanding of climate change between centre-right and centre-left parties.

Germany and the climate

Since the end of World War II, a significant number of parties have emerged in Germany. For instance, there were 34 parties running in the 2017 election compared to 8 in the 1972 Bundestag election. Due to the electoral system, particularly the 5 per cent threshold (in place since 1953), the number of parties represented in the Bundestag is consistently far lower than the number of party candidates. This is done to avoid a difficult formation of government and an excessive amount of parliamentary fragmentation. A three-party system comprised of the CDU/CSU (in a parliamentary group), the SPD, and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) existed in the 1960s and 1970s (Niedermayer, 2020). In the 1980s, the Green Party joined and in the 1990s the Party of Democratic Socialism. The West German Greens failed to

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reach the 5 per cent threshold in 1990, but the Union of the Eastern German Alliance 90/Green Citizens' Movement were represented in parliament. The Greens and the Alliance 90 later merged in 1993 to the Alliance 90/The Greens, often simply called the Greens (Grüne). The FDP failed to surpass the 5 per cent threshold from 2013 to 2017, and the AfD was successful in joining the Bundestag in 2017.

Although the extremist far-right NPD has been present in Germany since 1946 (previously the German Reich Party (DRP), merged in 2011 with the nationalist German People's Union party), the AfD was the first PFRP that entered parliament since the end of World War II. The party is only ten years old and was founded as a reaction to the governments' decision on the Greek bailout during the Great Recession (Art, 2018; Grimm, 2015). Since the founding of the AfD, the party transformed from a moderate party to a PFRP, with immigration as its top issue. According to Küppers (2022), the radicalisation of the party's position 'on immigration and its general ideological stance, is paralleled by the radicalisation of its position on climate change' (p. 3), and as described in Chapter 2, the AfD shows versatile scepticism towards climate change.

The environmental history of Germany was examined by Frank Uekötter in his book *The Greenest Nation? A New History of German Environmentalism* (2014). According to his research, environmentalism was already an issue in the first half of the 20th century in Germany and was advocated also by the Nazis, although with inconsistency and the lack of a clear line on environmental protection. However, environmentalism rose prominently in the post-war period and can be observed both in Western and in Eastern Germany. Environmental protection was characterised by early nuclear power protests and concerns about deforestation. In the East, the *German Democratic Republic* (GDR), protective legislation, and a well-developed recycling system were also introduced early on (Uekötter, 2014). Environmental awareness in Germany can be also associated with the success of the Green Party since the 1980s.

Environmental and climate protection is a prominent topic in Germany at present. In a survey conducted by the German Federal Environment Agency, 65 per cent of respondents in 2020 indicated that environmental and climate protection was a very important issue, and a large proportion of the population favoured giving greater priority to environmental and climate protection in other policy areas, such as energy, agriculture, and urban development policy (Umweltbundesamt, 2021). Goodbody (2019) saw the cultural tradition and national identity, shaped by the works of writers (e.g. Klopstock and Goethe, Schiller, and Eichendorff) and artists (e.g. Caspar David Friedrich), as central reasons for the support for environmental protection. In addition, Yan et al. (2021) displayed the relative importance of climate change issues among all social issues in various countries and showed that German panellists 'ranked climate and environment as the most important social issue facing the country' (p. 9). However, especially in Germany, it is evident that environmental themes are not only exclusively a domain of the left but also on the political agenda of far-right actors. According to Olsen (1999), the anti-universalist anthropology that sees humans as inherently anchored in certain nations and cultural traditions serves as the foundation for the environmental

philosophy of Germany's far-right parties. Forchtner and Özvatan (2019) also described the historical development of far-right movements and their relation to the environment in Germany from the 19th to the 21st century and explained that there is a long history there of far-right and nationalist actors connecting land and the people (p. 230), promoting protection of the environment and thus one's own landscape and culture. Climate change mitigation, which is a transnational, global, and not-so-tangible issue, is not advocated by the far right (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015).

Germany supports the Paris Agreement and seems equally convinced of the European Green Deal. In addition to the CO_2 reductions that are planned, the Green Deal is seen as a growth strategy, where green technologies and economic growth should be in the foreground. However, Germany counts above-average emissions in relation to its population compared to other EU members. Concretely, according to a report from the European Parliament 'its CO_2 equivalent (CO2e) emissions per inhabitant were 10.1 tonnes, above the EU average of 8.4 tonnes' (Simões, 2021, p. 1). Germany, which has a strong automotive and fossil fuel industry, is currently responsible for 24 per cent of the EU-27 emissions of greenhouse gases, of which the energy industry accounts for 29 per cent and thus the largest share of emissions. Although the country has been able to steadily decrease its emissions since 2005, Germany has not managed to meet its EU reduction target of 14 per cent from 2005 levels in 2020. Germany's current 2030 target under the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) is to reduce its emissions by 38 per cent from 2005 levels (Simões, 2021).

As mentioned above, Germany is a country which has had environmental protection on its political and social agenda from an early stage. Extinction Rebellion and FFF have been very active in Germany since the beginning of 2019, with more than 150 local FFF groups that have organised numerous large and small protest actions and demonstrations. Luisa Neubauer, considered a leading figure and one of the main organisers of FFF Germany, advocates – both online and at live events – for climate justice and a climate policy that is compatible with the Paris Agreement.

As Germany exceeded its allocated emissions from 2016 to 2019 and did not fulfil its emission reduction goal, Neubauer and other climate activists filed a constitutional complaint with the Federal Constitutional Court in January 2020 challenging the Federal Climate Protection Act (KSG) (Bundes-Klimaschutzgesetz (KSG), 2019). Neubauer considered the decision of 24 March 2021, a success when the Federal Constitutional Court declared that the permissible annual emission level under the KSG was not compatible with fundamental rights. After the court ruling, Germany promised to strengthen its emission reduction commitment, aiming to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045. However, according to a study commissioned by FFF (financially supported by GLS Bank) from the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, the German government's climate plans are insufficient to achieve the Paris Agreement goals (Kobiela et al., 2020). And even despite the strong environmental tradition (see e.g. Goodbody, 2019), a 2016 poll showed that 16 per cent of Germans do not believe in climate change or in the human influence on the climate (Steentjes et al., 2017).

In order to show how present is the issue of climate change in Germany, I first looked into Google trends data to show the salience of the term ‘climate change’ in the Google search engine in Germany (see Lineman et al., 2015 for Google trend data as a method to measure the popularity of a topic).

Figure 4.1 displays a clear peak in September 2019 and otherwise a relatively constant presence between 2010 and 2020. The peak can be associated with various events, demonstrations and actions conducted by the climate movement and, more concretely, actors such as FFF in Germany and beyond.

In order to offer an overview of the salience of climate change in German national political communication, I rely on the social media data of nationally relevant political parties in Germany. Figure 4.2 reveals the number of posts about climate change issues on Facebook from 2010 until 2020. The data was collected and downloaded with the help of CrowdTangle, a public insights tool owned and operated by Facebook, with a keyword search using the term German climate ‘Klima’ (English climate) (CrowdTangle Team, 2021). This opened the search to different aspects concerning climate change such as climate crisis, climate emergency, and climate activism (Klimakrise, Klimanotstand, Klimaaktivismus). Posts that do not concern issues of climate change or related issues, such as the ‘political climate’, were eliminated. ‘Climate change’ has been identified as the buzzword of the last ten years, as I clarify in Chapter 2 (see Lineman et al., 2015). In Germany the following seven parties are relevant on the national level and all of them are part of the parliament: along with the centre-left party SPD, which is one of the two mainstream parties of Germany, the Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*) and The Left party (*Die Linke*) are on the left wing. On the centre right at the national level, the sister parties CDU and CSU form the political alliance called Union or the Union parties (German: *Union* or *CDU/CSU-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag*). The Free Democratic Party (FDP, German *Freie Demokratische Partei*) and the AfD are further on the right wing of the political spectrum. Climate change is especially notable in the Facebook posts of the Green Party (see Figure 4.2), and since 2019 the salience of the issue generally increased for all parties.

Figure 4.1 illustrates a clear peak in September 2019, when – as mentioned above – the FFF movement was very active in Germany, organising demonstrations

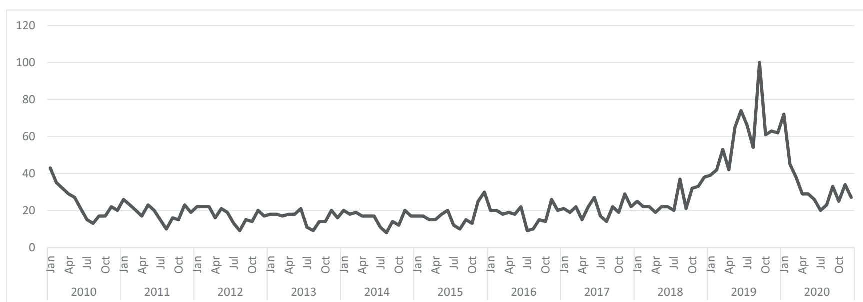

Figure 4.1 Google trends data in Germany regarding the topic ‘climate change’ (2010–2020)

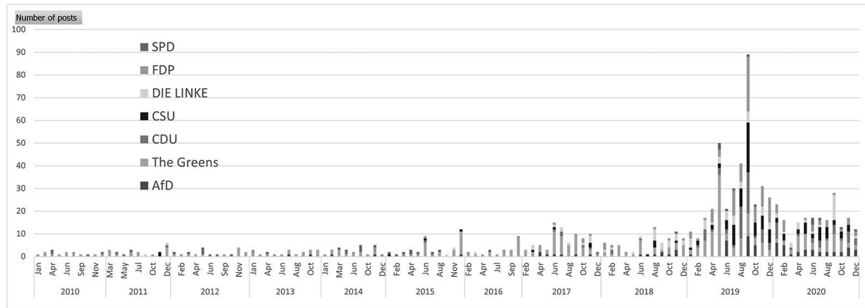

Figure 4.2 The salience of climate change issues in Facebook post of political parties in Germany (2010–2020) (CrowdTangle Team, 2021)

and other actions for climate protection. In addition, Angela Merkel's climate cabinet presented the 'climate package' that month proposing – amongst other measures – a price increase on carbon.

During the study period, that is 2016–2020, I identified a few other key moments for the issue of climate change. The months designated as key moments were those in which the number of posts increased by at least 30 per cent from the previous month, followed by a reduction of at least 30 per cent in the subsequent month, and where the number of posts in a month exceeded ten in absolute terms. The first month that meets these criteria is August 2018, which can be linked to different events such as the Earth Overshoot Day, meaning that on 1 August humanity had already used up all the natural resources that could be regenerated by the Earth in that year. Moreover, various reports spoke about exceptional drought in Germany and other severe weather events related to the climate crisis. May 2019 meets these criteria as well. This key moment can be traced back to the 2019 European Parliament election, in which many posts about the elections also took up the topic of climate protection. Lastly, the key moment in September 2020 can be linked to the global climate strike on 25 September 2020 called by the FFF movement. Additionally, the CDU/CSU proclaimed a Sustainability Week in the Bundestag, and there was a general discussion on sustainability in the German Bundestag on 16 September 2020.

The average number of posts about climate-related issues on the social media pages of those political parties increased greatly between 2016 and 2020. While two posts were recorded on average per month in 2016, 6.7 posts were recorded the following year; in 2018 it decreased slightly to 6.3, increasing again greatly in 2019 to 30.7. In 2020 the average number of posts decreased again to 16.4 posts per month. Table 4.1 displays the total posts between 2016 and 2020 of the SPD and the CDU/CSU, as well as the total posts on climate change, and reveals the percentage of the total posts on Facebook addressing climate change.

As Table 4.1 reveals, one striking aspect is that CDU/CSU is noticeably more active on Facebook than the SPD. It is important to mention that CDU/CSU consists of two parties, and each has its own social profiles, which is why a total of

Table 4.1 Number of Facebook posts between 2016 and 2020 published by the SPD and CDU/CSU

Party	*Total Facebook posts*	*Facebook posts about climate*	*Percentage of posts about climate*
SPD	643	26	4.04
CDU/CSU	7551	101	1.33

six social media profiles were examined for the CDU/CSU, while only three social media profiles were examined for the SPD. The SPD has fewer posts about climate in absolute terms, but in relation to the total number of Facebook posts, the centre-left party thematises climate more often than the CDU/CSU. (For details about the data corpus see Table 3.2 in Chapter 3). Now I move on to the results of the investigation of the understanding of climate change of the SPD and CDU/CSU.

The policy field of climate change in Germany from 2016 to 2018

The importance of climate change and protection was reflected in the policy documents of this period (BMU, 2016), which outlined guidance for Germany's process of achieving national climate protection targets in line with the Paris Agreement in different fields of action (energy supply, buildings, transport sector, industry and business, agriculture, land use and forestry).

Figure 4.3 represents a visualisation of the semantic field of climate change from the body of documents listed in Table 3.2 in Chapter 3 for period 1. The figure suggests climate change was extensively related to climate protection or, more

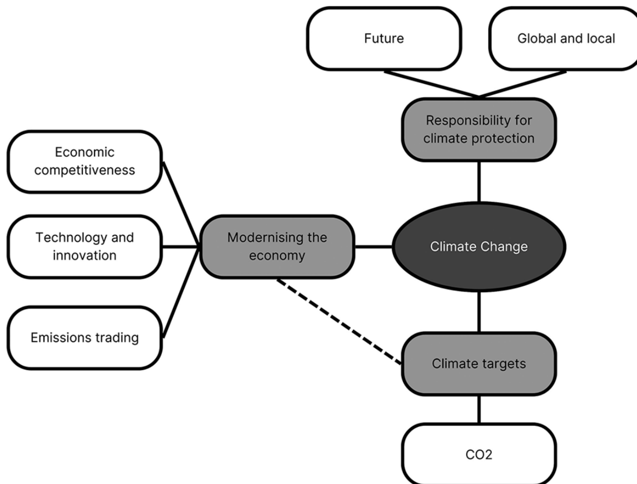

Figure 4.3 The semantic field of climate change in the communication of the SPD and CDU/CSU (2016–2018)

concretely, to climate adaptation, climate action, climate mitigation, or how the climate can be saved.

The signing of the Paris Agreement in particular prompted the three parties to plead concretely for more action: '"Now it's finally happening! All countries are setting out together to save our planet". Barbara Hendricks #ForthePlanet. Together for global climate protection: representatives of 171 countries sign the Paris Agreement at the UN in New York' (Facebook, SPD, 22.04.2016).[1] Further, the role of Germany in particular is underlined: 'For the first time, all the countries of the world are committing to meeting the climate targets that have been set. "I want to help ensure that Germany remains a pioneer in this," said Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks (SPD)' (Facebook, SPD, 22.04.2016). The unity or the common strategy of the countries is emphasised, and it gives the impression that a community has formed across all countries. The CDU/CSU also reaffirm their commitment to more climate protection to curb the consequences of global warming. These parties see climate protection as a global task, with the local level and Germany playing an important role:

> "Climate protection is a global task. We have to be pioneers, but we can't save the climate alone", Anja Weisgerber, Climate Protection Officer of the parliamentary group. "Not least the extreme weather this summer has shown: The issue of #climate concerns us all. We must advance #climateprotection – on a global level Earth globe europe-africa. "We cannot save the climate alone", says our Climate Protection Commissioner @anjaweisgerber.
>
> (Twitter, CDU/CSU, 29.11.2018)

Indeed, climate protection is to be ensured in the long term, and the three mainstream parties consider Germany to be a climate protection pioneer, which is emphasised throughout this first time period in all text genres. Furthermore, in the spirit of commitment to climate protection, the parties also criticise former US President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement: '#Merkel: US decision to phase out climate is profoundly regrettable. We are committed to protecting our planet' (Twitter, CDU, 02.06.2017). Special reference is made to the responsibility of industrialised countries towards countries of the Global South: 'All industrialised countries have a responsibility not to generate their prosperity at the expense of developing countries and the future of the world's climate. #COP23' (Twitter, SPD-Fraktion im Bundestag, 17.11.2017).

Responsibility towards the children and grandchildren is also raised as an argument for the international responsibility for climate protection, with climate protection framed as essential for the future and as a question of survival.

> That is why we need to be more committed to tackling what we describe as global warming. Yes, we have not reached our targets yet; global warming has not stopped. That's why we need to be very ambitious about this to move forward.
>
> (Parliamentary session[2] no. 38, 13.06.2018,
> (Svenja Schulze – Federal Minister for the Environment,
> Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, SPD) p. 3674)

All three parties reaffirm that they are committed and ambitious in climate action to stop global warming: ‘This is a responsibility we have for children and grandchildren; this is a responsibility we have internationally’ (Parliamentary session no. 38, 13.06. 2018, (Svenja Schulze, SPD) p. 3674). In a Facebook post, the SPD also explicitly points out that climate change is a reality and anyone who denies this is gambling with ‘the future of our planet’ (Facebook, SPD Fraktion im Bundestag, 13.08.2018).

In fact, climate protection and climate policy in general are also compared with innovation policy and modernisation policy (Parliamentary session no. 38, 13.06. 2018, (Svenja Schulze, SPD) p. 3668). But especially in the policy programme (Klimaschutzplan 2050), climate change and its protection are also presented as a modernisation strategy for the economy. The importance that Germany can maintain its economic competitiveness in a time of climate change is emphasised, and technology and innovation are presented as instruments to reach this goal.

> It’s about how we organise the building of tomorrow. This is the area where we now have the most start-ups, the most new companies. It’s about how we bring modern filter technologies forward, how propulsion technologies work. The most modern cruise ship is a German development. We have brought it forward here with our engineering skills. So: GreenTech growth, which is developing in these areas, is very positive and of course we support it.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 38, 13.06. 2018, (Svenja Schulze, SPD) p. 3675)

Indeed, the Climate Protection Plan 2050 is framed as a strategy for modernising the national economy, which is to initiate a paradigm shift towards renewable energies and energy efficiency. The focus is on the German economy, which should remain competitive in a decarbonised world. ‘The Climate Protection Plan 2050 describes the fields of action of the energy sector, buildings, transport, industry, agriculture, land use and forestry. In addition, overarching goals and measures are presented’ (p. 7). The outlined action plans are based on the goal of reducing Germany’s greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2050 compared to 1990.

In principle, technology and innovation are seen as playing an essential role in modernising the economy for climate protection, with a great deal of potential being attributed to climate-neutral buildings, for example, or innovations in the agricultural sector or in mobility. The Climate Protection Plan 2050 of 2016 states that ‘[s]uccessful climate policy must consistently focus on future opportunities, define clear framework conditions, promote research and innovation and support companies to invest in future-proof technologies and thus avoid bad investments’ (p. 11). Looking at the literature, some scholars point to ecomodern masculinities that acknowledge a crisis such as climate change and seek primarily, or often exclusively, technological solutions (Vowles & Hultman, 2021, 2022). Vowles and Hultman (2022) argue that such a focus on technology as a solution has become hegemonic in many regions of the Global North. In

German discourse, technological development and innovation go hand in hand with economic competitiveness:

> Use the market economy and the forces of competition to achieve the existing national, European, and international climate protection goals. In the development of new technologies, the innovative power of German industry and research offers enormous potential. We need open competition for the best ideas and the best technologies within the framework of the existing climate protection goals.
>
> (BMU, 2016, p. 11)

The coalition agreement between the SPD and the CDU/CSU also emphasises this aspect frequently: 'Maintaining the competitiveness of our business location is a basic condition for a successful energy transition and for it to become a successful model internationally as well' (Coalition Agreement 2018, p. 137). In addition, the mainstream parties seem clearly committed to emissions trading as a central climate protection instrument of the EU and see fields of action, especially in the industrial and energy sectors: 'We want to further strengthen EU emissions trading as a leading instrument. Our goal is a CO_2 pricing system that is globally oriented if possible, but in any case includes the G20 states' (Coalition Agreement, 2018, p. 143). This is indeed in line with the climate strategy of the EU, which focuses on decarbonisation using economic incentives, with emissions trading as one instrument (see Chapter 1). The different text genres also repeatedly refer to the fact that this emissions trading is an EU-wide instrument that can ensure the achievement of national climate targets. In fact, concrete climate targets are repeatedly linked to topics such as limiting global warming as a more general aspect and greenhouse gas neutrality and CO_2 reduction as more concrete aspects. These topics closely relate to each other:

> Within the framework of the agreed goals, the German government is focusing on technological neutrality and openness to innovation. It is convinced that open competition for the best ideas and technologies will move Germany forward on the path to greenhouse gas neutrality.
>
> (BMU, 2016, p. 7)

Greenhouse neutrality of the economy and society is seen as central to a transformation towards climate protection: 'The goal of a transformation towards a largely greenhouse gas neutral economy and society by the middle of the century is a major but achievable challenge' (BMU, 2016, p. 26). The subject of CO_2 is also commonly discussed in terms of specific climate goals. There are many specific numbers regarding where Germany wants to go in this context, but their communication is about CO_2 objectives and CO_2 reduction in general. The concept of CO_2 pricing, which is positioned as a tool for accomplishing climate goals, is occasionally raised. In this regard, potential CO_2 abatement incentives for the economy and consumers are also mentioned.

In sum, the semantic field of the first period is characterised by the claim that climate change is a problem that requires action, which is formulated relatively concretely for the national level of Germany. The SPD and CDU/CSU mention climate change as a global issue and Germany's role in addressing it, with major and minor changes envisaged at all levels of society, economy, and politics. However,

technology and innovation are certainly major aspects in their climate change discourse. They are also positive about emissions trading and attach great importance to the economic modernisation of Germany.

The policy field of climate change in Germany from 2019 to 2020

The second period includes the stage when the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) published the 'Climate protection programme 2030. Measures to achieve the climate protection targets 2030' (Original: Klimaschutzprogramm 2030. Maßnahmen zur Erreichung der Klimaschutzziele 2030). As Figure 4.4 reveals, this period does not provide a significantly different understanding of climate change than that of period 1, but several new areas and sub-areas are identified.

The area around responsibility for climate protection remains central, and the sub-area future continues to receive a lot of attention. Climate change or Germany's responsibility in climate protection is very much characterised by the fact that the future of 'our children and grandchildren', 'our planet', or 'future generations' will depend on it. The European Green Deal is also referred to very specifically as a 'future strategy for Europe' (see e.g. Parliamentary session no. 176, 17.09.2020 (Svenja Schulze, SPD) p. 22048). Now, in addition to the future and the global and local aspects, (economic) opportunities around climate protection are emphasised more strongly. In this sense, they argue that climate-friendly behaviour by companies and individual households will pay off financially (e.g. Facebook, SPD, 20.09.2019). They argue that there is a lot of potential in climate protection to develop innovative products that make companies internationally competitive (e.g. Facebook, CDU/CSU Bundestagsfraktion, 26.09.2019). Germany is noted as having the opportunity to combine energy supply with climate protection at the

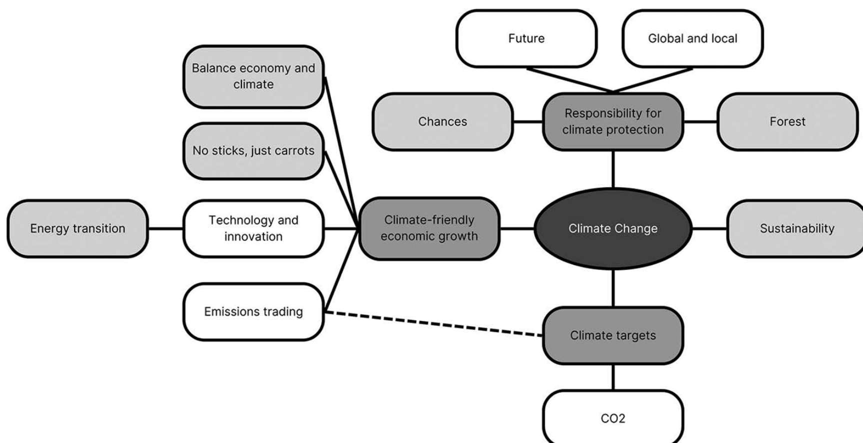

Figure 4.4 The semantic field of climate change in the communication of the SPD and CDU/CSU (2019–2020)

European and global levels and to be a pioneer in the development and implementation of hydrogen power (Facebook, CDU/CSU Bundestagsfraktion, 13.08.2020). Furthermore, it is frequently emphasised that the implications of a climate protection policy should not be detrimental to the economy or to social issues. It is also emphasised that in order for climate protection to be effective, people must accept it and execute it purposefully and moderately:

> Our policy, our sustainable policy, means: keeping a sense of proportion, making climate protection with a sense of proportion, considering the effects, on the economy, but also on the social side, in order to keep the acceptance of the people. Climate protection and environmental protection with people and not against them, that is our motto.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 176, 17.09.2020, (Anja Weisgerber, CDU/CSU) p. 22060)

In this period, the forest has been identified as a sub-area of climate protection, and different aspects of it are highlighted. For example, forests are framed as cultural assets of Germany and are frequently referenced with the hashtag ‘our forest’ (#unserWald), which was spread mainly by the CDU. ‘Trees and forests are all-rounders: Forests protect the climate, are an important economic factor, serve us for recreation and are part of our national culture’ (Facebook, CDU, 04.11.2020).

In the previous quotation, for example, the functions of the forest were mainly referred to on the one hand as an economic factor, and on the other hand as a recreational area. But the forest is also referred to as ‘national culture’, which means that the forest is seen as part of the German culture. According to Forchtner and Kølvraa (2015), who investigated the discourse of populist radical right parties on countryside and climate through the lenses of three dimensions – aesthetic, symbolic, and material – the focus on the ability to deliver resources, economic opportunities, or solutions represents the material dimension of environmental issues. Such far-right parties, however, also emphasise national sovereignty or the potential to maintain independence using their own resources. Although there are similarities with the populist far-right speech on the subject of forests at first appearance, this component of sovereignty is not addressed here, and the contrasts are substantial. Also in the following example, on the one hand, the functions of the forest for the environment or climate protection are emphasised, and on the other hand the metaphor of the ‘strong roots’ is thematised, which points to the forest as a cultural factor:

> The forest protects our climate. But how does it do that? It binds carbon and, in addition, the leaves act like a large purification system that filters pollutants and dust out of the air. The proverbial “good forest air” is therefore easy to explain. And the sustainable management of our forests also makes an important contribution to climate protection – because it helps to preserve the forest habitat. That’s why we want to give tomorrow strong roots. #unserWald.
>
> (Facebook, CDU, 07.11.2020)

Here, the forest is framed primarily in its technical aspects (see material dimension) that are related to climate protection measures (forest as a CO_2 bundler, as an economic sector, and as a recreational area). The strong roots could be assigned to the symbolic dimension (see Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015), which is present in populist far-right discourses about environmental issues. However, the framing of the forest by far-right parties, which primarily represent a romantic idea of the forest, still differs fundamentally from these aspects raised by the SPD and CDU/CSU. Indeed, in some far-right imaginaries 'Germans and "the land" are symbiotically interwoven' (Forchtner & Özvatan, 2019, p. 216) and the forest is a symbol of Germandom. But while the forest and the various aspects raised in this discourse (see material and symbolic dimension) are certainly a topic of the far-right, the forest on local and national levels has for a long time also been a subject of climate activism generally in Germany. In recent years, the Hambach Forest, an ancient forest in western Germany, was cleared by the energy provider RWE for coal mining. Protests against this have been ongoing, with the forest symbolising resistance to environmental destruction and climate damage caused by the coal industry. Between 2018 and 2020, approximately half of the remaining 200 hectares of forest faced slated logging, sparking confrontations between environmental activists (tree squatters) and the regional state government. These events significantly elevated the forest's prominence in national environmental and climate discourse.

Despite observing many economic arguments also during this second period, some elements change notably. While the economic area focused on a modernisation strategy in the first period, now the central argument lies on climate-friendly economic growth. Economic aspects still play a major role in the discourse but growth is at the centre of attention. Particularly the CDU/CSU assert that to win widespread public support for climate politics, the economic issues need to be at the forefront of discussion:

> We must not forget the economy when it comes to the climate. There is a threat of international recession. That's why it's important to use climate policy to stimulate the economy. The best and only real chance for climate protection is certainly not to ban cars or declare speed limits, but to establish a new technological leadership in electricity, hydrogen, or with synthetic fuels.
> (Facebook, CSU, 18.09.2019)

As in the first period, this quote clearly shows that technology is to play a decisive role in the future. The CDU and CSU are concerned with 'reconciling' the economy with ecology and are focusing on 'ecological progress'. It is not surprising that growth is in the foreground (e.g. Facebook, CSU, 16.07.2020). The CSU refers to a 'right balance' between economic activity and climate protection, whereby all people are to be included:

> The CSU is the first party to present a comprehensive concept that reconciles and does not divide, emphasised Bavarian Prime Minister and CSU leader Markus Söder. We manage to bring the economy and the climate into the right balance and to bring all people along with us. We are pioneers in

> climate protection. The climate conference in Feldafing on Lake Starnberg ended successfully.
>
> (Facebook, CSU, 07.09.2019)

This aims to ease the burden of climate protection on citizens, emphasising incentives over restrictions, as depicted in the section labelled 'no sticks, just carrots' in Figure 4.4. The parties point out that the climate can be protected without the need for restrictions on citizens or industry: 'We want to take off with an innovation premium and show that it is possible to do both: protect the climate and support the economy' (Facebook, CSU, 01.05.2020). This pertains to technology and innovation, with parties favouring them over prohibition and abandonment in climate change efforts, aligning closely with the EU strategy emphasising economic incentives since the 1990s. Some scholars also discuss masculinities in climate protection in this context (see above and e.g. Vowles & Hultman, 2022).

Regarding the sub-area technology and innovation, I want to highlight the following without repeating too much from the first period: 'The CDU/CSU parliamentary group is primarily focusing on technical solutions and innovations. It wants to motivate industry and consumers to avoid CO_2 by means of incentives' (Twitter, CDU/CSU, 04.09.2019). Parties highlight Germany's industrial and technological prowess, addressing criticism of the fossil fuel industry's impact on climate change. They prioritise innovation in the energy transition, focusing on renewables like photovoltaics, solar, wind, and hydropower to facilitate the phase-out of coal and nuclear power. Discussions include recent technological advancements and plans for a national emissions trading system to target companies at upstream trading levels rather than direct emitters. Parties aim to set up a national emissions trading system (nEHS) to address emissions from heat and transport, targeting companies at upstream trading levels instead of direct emitters as in the EU emissions trading system (EU-ETS) (BMU, 2019, p. 26). In the following example, it is described as an instrument which is not only the right way to go but which will also help Germany to reach the 2020 climate targets:

> The EU Commission has now announced that it will extend emissions trading to the areas of "heat" and "transport". This is exactly the right way to go, because we are creating climate protection with a market-based instrument. This emissions trading has led to us in Germany, despite all the prophecies of doom, now meeting our climate targets, our 2020 target, regardless of Corona.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 176, 17.09.2020, (Anja Weisgerber, CDU/CSU) p. 22061)

The climate targets also continue to be at the forefront of communication on the subject of climate change. The Climate Protection Programme 2030 (2019, p. 7) states:

> At the UN Climate Change Summit in New York, Germany committed to pursuing greenhouse gas neutrality by 2050 as a long-term goal. Germany is therefore committed with most Member States to the goal of greenhouse gas neutrality by 2050 in Europe.

Limiting global warming and targeting greenhouse gas neutrality remain present in the communication and the parties concentrated still on CO_2, its reduction and CO_2 pricing as an instrument:

> A CO_2 price in the non-EU-ETS sectors will contribute to financing the energy transition. A modern industrial policy that strengthens sustainable economic activity includes binding environmental standards and reliable price signals that reflect the ecological costs. This makes a CO_2 price not only an effective climate protection instrument, but also an innovation driver for the German economy.
>
> (BMU, 2019, p. 25)

This area intertwines with the previously discussed forest themes. 'Our forests' are perceived as carbon dioxide absorbers and their utilisation as a sustainable, renewable, and regional resource is emphasised:

> A lot grows in Germany in our commercial forests; because every hectare of forest binds 8 tonnes of CO_2 per year. That is as much as one person produces in CO_2 in Germany: 1 hectare of forest compensates for the CO_2 emissions of one person and also supplies the most important renewable raw material in Germany, which is regional wood. No sustainability without use!
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 176, 17.09.2020, (Gitta Connemann, CDU/CSU) p. 22049)

This leads to the final emerging area within the semantic field: sustainability has gained prominence in the discourse surrounding climate change.

> The integrity of creation [Die Bewahrung der Schöpfung] is in our DNA and we always think of consistent climate protection together with economic development and social security. This corresponds to the principle of sustainability with the three dimensions of ecology, economy, and social issues. Finding a balance here again and again is what we see as the special mission of the #CDU.
>
> (Facebook, CDU, 25.09.19)

The parties explicitly acknowledge the importance of the three dimensions – economy, ecology, and social aspects – in climate protection. Sustainability is frequently highlighted, possibly reflecting its current prominence since the Brundtland Report (Brundtland, 1987). Furthermore, sustainability is closely tied to concrete issues like forest preservation, considered crucial for Germany's sustainable development.

In summary, the analysis of mainstream party communication on climate change indicates an evolution in understanding during the second period. Notably, new themes like the forest have become prominent across the discourse. Germany's approach to climate protection emphasises economic incentives, emissions trading, and technological innovation.

Discussing party similarities and differences

In contrast to the Spanish and the Austrian cases, the German parties SPD and CDU/CSU have been in a governing coalition, which means that they have already found a common position or a compromise on many issues in the coalition paper (which is also part of the data corpus). In fact, the parties rarely talk about the respective other parties on the subject of climate change; rather, reference is made to the Green Party, which is criticised especially by the CDU/CSU.

However, differences in focus on specific topics were identified among the SPD, CDU, and CSU. While all three parties addressed technology and innovation in climate protection, the CDU particularly emphasised this area. Moreover, the CDU uniquely highlighted forests as both an economic sector and a component for sustainable development (see CDU website www.cdu.de/unserwald). Additionally, the CDU emphasised incentives over prohibitions in climate change policies (no sticks, just carrots) and underscored Germany's international responsibility and the existential nature of climate protection. The CSU also claims that climate protection is a question of survival but points out that this must be realistic. The Bavarian party is particularly keen to strike a balance between climate and economic activity and is fundamentally opposed to a speed limit on German highways and argues that Germany needs diesel technology. The CSU also agrees with the CDU on 'no sticks, just carrots', as they reject bans in the name of climate protection.

The SPD emphasises the future in climate change discourse and consistently highlights Germany's responsibility for climate protection. While acknowledging the role of technology and innovation, the centre-left party openly acknowledges Germany's failure to meet its climate targets and integrates social aspects, such as ensuring prosperity for all, into the discussion. Given its position as Germany's left-wing social democratic party, this stance is not surprising.

While the communication approaches of the three parties vary, differences lie more in the emphasis on specific themes rather than radical divergence. Table 4.2 illustrates the areas of the semantic field receiving the highest attention from the parties (from top to bottom).

Table 4.2 The top five areas that receive the most attention from the SPD and CDU/CSU in their climate change communication (most at the top, least at the bottom)

CDU	*CSU*	*SPD*
Technology and innovation	Responsibility for climate protection	Future
Forest (as economic sector)	Balance economy and climate	Climate targets
Responsibility for climate protection	No sticks, just carrots	Technology and innovation
Climate targets	Technology and innovation	Climate targets (were missed)
No sticks, just carrots	Economy and Work	Ecological trade and prosperity for all (Sustainability)

Table 4.2 displays not only the precise area of the semantic field figures but also some aspects that are a component of those areas or sub-areas. While there are undoubtedly distinct focuses among the parties, as I mentioned earlier, these differences are nuanced, and the parties share a significant amount in common in this regard.

Spain and the climate

After Franco's dictatorship ended with his death on 20 November 1975, and his successor Juan Carlos I started the democratisation process ('*transición*'), Spain became a parliamentary monarchy in 1978 with the adoption of the constitution. The government takeover of the social-democratic party PSOE led by Felipe González in 1982 terminated the 'transición'. At the same time, a two-party system was established, where the PSOE and the PP became the two counterparts. After decades of these two rotating as the governing party, the 2015 general election marked the end of the two-party system. In this election, both the PP and PSOE lost votes, while the left-leaning party Podemos achieved 20 per cent of the vote and the liberal party Ciudadanos received 13 per cent. After coalition talks failed and new elections were held in June 2016, Podemos and Ciudadanos were able to rely on their support and the PP managed to form a minority government under Mariano Rajoy with the support of Ciudadanos. In the 2019 general elections, the PFRP Vox in particular made major gains, winning a total of 15 per cent of the vote in the recalled elections in November of the same year. Thus, Vox became the third-strongest force and the first PFRP to enter parliament in Spain (see e.g. Torres, 2016).

The political party Equo can be considered the Green Party of Spain and has had little electoral success so far, but in order to improve its chances of entering the national parliament it has run in a national election together with the left-wing party Podemos.

The environmental movement started in Spain with the transition to democracy in the late 1970s on a mostly local level and concentrated at the beginning mainly on an anti-nuclear and a conservationist mode. The driving force behind the movements were mainly citizens' reactions to environmental problems, and political parties or other supra-local organisational structures played no relevant role for a long time (Jiménez, 2007). During the early years of the movement, the dominant discourse of an economic modernisation and a liberal orientation of economic policy clashed with many demands (e.g. the anti-nuclear contestation) of the environmental movements.

Environmental movements began to coordinate more with one another in the 1990s, and with a strong local foundation, they undertook a process of organisational consolidation. In 1997 the state-wide organisation and main umbrella organisation CODA (Coordinating Committee of Environmental Defence Organizations) counted about 170 mainly grassroots groups all over Spain. A few years later those groups jointly established 'Ecologistas en Acción' (Ecologist in Action), which today unites more than 300 groups (*Ecologistas En Acción*, 2022). The environmental movement has endorsed

protest actions and even after the process of institutionalisation of environmental policy started slowly, protests in the streets did not decrease, thus, social mobilisation in this field continued (Jiménez, 2007). In the early 2000s, the catastrophic Prestige oil spill on the northwest coast of the country strengthened the environmental movement and its mobilisation against the conservative government party PP. The PSOE and other institutional actors increasingly supported the movements.

Spain signed the Paris Agreement and commits to work to achieve the climate goals. The country accounts for 9 per cent of the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of the EU (Simões & Victoria, 2021). Currently, Spain depends strongly on the import of fossil fuel, which is also a main source of high GHG emissions (Camargo et al., 2020). However, Spain was able to reduce emissions by 27 per cent between 2005 and 2019, which is a better performance than the EU average of a 19 per cent reduction (Simões & Victoria, 2021). In 2006, this Southern European country approved the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (PNACC), which contains strategic actions at national, regional, and local levels and is mainly oriented towards European directives and mandates. According to Camargo et al. (2020, p. 157), ‘the lack of a general framework and the decentralized competences in Spain has generated important policy stresses’. Conflicts arose because some regions initiated faster and stricter climate policies than others or than the central administration (see proposed Catalan Law on Climate Change (Recurso de Inconstitucionalidad n.° 5334–2017, Contra Determinados Preceptos de La Ley de La Generalidad de Cataluña 16/2017, de 1 de Agosto, Del Cambio Climático. [Action for Unconstitutionality No. 5334–2017, against Certain Precepts of the Law of the G, 2017) and the proposal of law of the Government of the Balearic Islands (Proposición de Ley Sobre La Protección Del Mar Mediterráneo Bajo La Jurisdicción Española de Los Daños Que Pueda Producir La Exploración, La Investigación y La Explotación de Hidrocarburos y Otras Sustancias Minerales. [Proposed Law on the Protection of t, 2017)). The ‘Plan Nacional de Adaptacion al Cambio Climático 2021–2030’ targets climate neutrality by 2050, which is to be achieved with the help of changes to production, energy, and consumption models (MITECO, 2020). More than ten years ago, proposals for the adoption of a climate law were raised in the Spanish Parliament. Most parties as well as the two mainstream parties PP and PSOE reaffirmed the adoption of such a law, but no agreement was found until 2020.

At the beginning of 2020, the government declared a climate emergency and formulated thirty lines of priority, which defined the national climate action agenda (MITECO, 2021). A year later, in May 2021, Spain adopted the ‘Climate Change and Energy Transition Law’, in which Spain commits to cut emissions by 23 per cent by 2030, compared with 1990 levels. The law is in line with the European Green Deal and the commitments of the EU (European Climate Foundation, 2021). The country’s ambitions for the energy transition include 42 per cent of renewable energy by 2030, focusing primarily on the expansion of wind and solar power (Simões & Victoria, 2021).

Especially since 2019, the public awareness about climate change grew and the climate movements helped to increase attention on climate change issues in politics and in the public realm. In fact, in the beginning of 2019, after Greta Thunberg's actions for climate protection in 2018, the movements 'Juventud por el Clima' (JxC) (Youth for the Climate) and FFF Spain were created by young people, and various events, demonstrations, and protests for climate action were held. As in other European countries, many local groups emerged which are organised and cooperate regionally, nationally, and supranationally.

As for Germany, before analysing the discourse about climate change of the two mainstream parties, I first looked into Google trends data to learn more about the salience of climate change in the Google search engine in Spain. This data creates a first overview of how the search term 'climate change' (cambio climático) is used and when it is present (Lineman et al., 2015). Figure 4.5 shows a continuously relatively low presence since 2010 and two peaks in September and December 2019. The month of September 2019 coincided with a period of intense activity for climate activists such as FFF in Spain, which is likely to have increased public awareness of climate change issues. The peak in December 2019 could be linked to the COP 25 UN Climate Change Conference that took place in Madrid from 2 December to 13 December 2019.

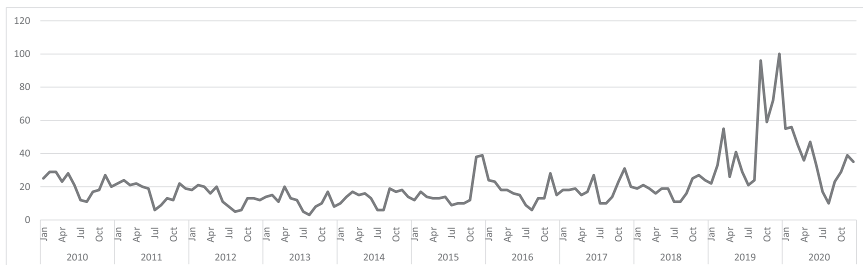

Figure 4.5 Google trends data in Spain regarding the topic 'climate change' (2010–2020)

Afterwards, I focus on the social media data of political parties in Spain. Figure 4.6 illustrates the posts on Facebook regarding climate change issues from 2010 until 2020 of the nationally relevant political parties. Concretely, the following parties which are active nationally are included: Vox (populist far right), the PSOE (major centre-left party), the PP (major centre-right party), *Podemos* (left-wing party), *Izquierda Unida* (IU, left-wing party association (federación) which the *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE) belongs to), *Ciudadanos – Partido Ciudadania* (C's) (liberal party), and *Más Pais* (left-wing party). Due to the Spanish electoral system, some regional parties are also represented in the national parliament (e.g. *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC) (Pan-Catalan left nationalist party), *Partit Demócrate Europeu Català* (liberal Catalan separatist party), *Nueva Canarias* (NC) (centre-left regional party in the Canary Islands), and *EH Bildu* (party federation of Basque left nationalist parties), which however are not included in 4.6 due to practical reasons. The social media posts were collected

using CrowdTangle by searching for the term 'climate' ('clima') to cover various aspects of climate change. The term 'climate change' has been recognised in the literature as the prevailing term over the past decade, as opposed to 'global warming'. (see Lineman et al., 2015).

Climate change was prominently discussed in the Facebook posts of left-wing parties like Podemos and the PSOE, with consistent attention to the topic. Overall, climate-related discussions surged in 2019, particularly around the time of the UN climate negotiations in Madrid, accompanied by demonstrations related to the Paris Agreement. Throughout the study period (2016–2020), several key moments saw a significant increase in posts, defined as exceeding ten posts per month with a subsequent 30 per cent increase followed by a similar decrease the following month.

The key moments in July 2018 can be associated with Royal Decree 355/2018 and Royal Decree 864/2018, which initiated the reform of ministerial departments and the establishment of a Ministry of Ecological Transition in Spain. During this time, discussions also revolved around a climate change and energy transition law. March and September 2019 saw significant activity due to FFF demonstrations and the Global Climate Strike, while December 2019 marked a peak, likely attributed to the COP 25 UN Conference held in Madrid.

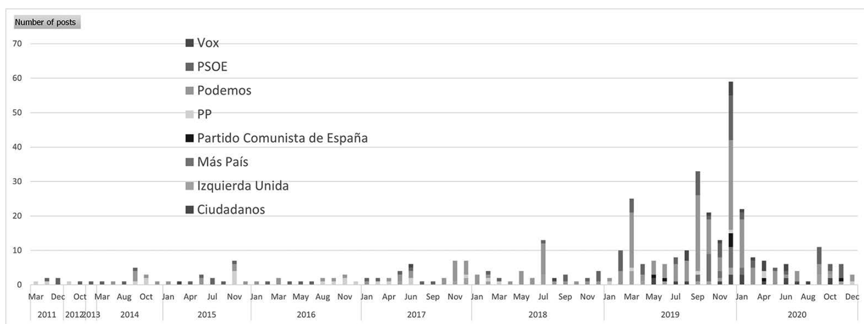

Figure 4.6 The salience of climate change issues in Facebook posts of political parties in Spain (2010–2020) (CrowdTangle Team, 2021)

Since 2016, there has been a notable rise in political party postings on social media concerning climate change. The monthly average increased from 1.8 posts in 2016 to 6.9 posts in 2020. By dividing the timeframe into two periods (2016–2018 and 2019–2020), as discussed in Chapter 3, I aim to explore not only the prevalence of climate change discussions but also potential shifts in discourse. Various factors, such as climate protests, elections, governmental changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic, influence the discourse surrounding climate change. However, this study focuses on analysing the evolving characteristics of this discourse and interpreting its contextual communication rather than establishing causal relationships.

Table 4.3 displays the overall number of PSOE and PP posts between 2016 and 2020, as well as the total number of posts on climate change. It also illustrates what proportion of all posts on Facebook are related to climate change. Like in Germany, the centre-left party (PSOE) in Spain gives greater emphasis to climate issues in its

Table 4.3 Number of Facebook posts between 2016 and 2020 published by the PSOE and PP

Party	*Total Facebook posts*	*Facebook posts about climate*	*Percentage of posts about climate*
PSOE	7018	70	1.00
PP	9208	19	0.21

Facebook communication compared to the centre-right. However, the percentage of climate-related content in Spanish party posts is notably lower than in Germany (SPD 4.04 per cent, CDU/CSU 1.33 per cent).

The policy field of climate change in Spain from 2016 to 2018

This phase coincided with the aftermath of the Paris Agreement adoption, during which various decrees were enacted to address specific aspects of climate change and the Paris Climate Goals, without comprehensive coverage of the entire issue (Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, 2022). Further elaboration on the policies deliberated and debated by the parties will be provided in the subsequent sections.

The semantic field of climate change during this period is shown in Figure 4.7, reflecting diverse areas of discourse within the PSOE and the PP. Notably, both parties frequently stress the urgency of taking action to address the effects of climate change.

The discourse highlights the prominence of transition (transición) and transformation (transformación) concepts, commonly used interchangeably albeit with nuanced differences in academic discourse (Brand, 2014; Stirling, 2015). Especially in debates on the ecological crisis and climate change, both terms have become fashionable. In political science research, however, transition is used to describe a change of political regimes (e.g. from authoritarian to liberal democratic) (Merkel, 2010; O'Donnel et al., 2004; Thomas, 2014) while transformation has been used to describe the process of changing from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy, for example in Eastern European countries. Yet in the current discussion on climate change, the context is different and expressions such as 'the great green technological transformation'[3] (DESA – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2011) refer to a green economy that is supposed to help a new development paradigm to break through (Brand, 2014). Here, the term 'transformation' is used normatively or 'heuristically', since a rethinking of development paths is considered necessary to cope with climate change, among other things. Without going into more detail here, I would like to note that a scientific as well as socio-political debate has opened up around the terms 'transformation' and 'transition', whereby in particular topics related to ecological crises confront analytical and normative perspectives but also complement each other. In short, and according to Brand (2014, p. 249), transition can be understood 'in the sense of political-intentional control, i.e. as a structured, especially political-state mediated intervention in development paths and logics as well as structures and power relations in order to give dominant developments a different

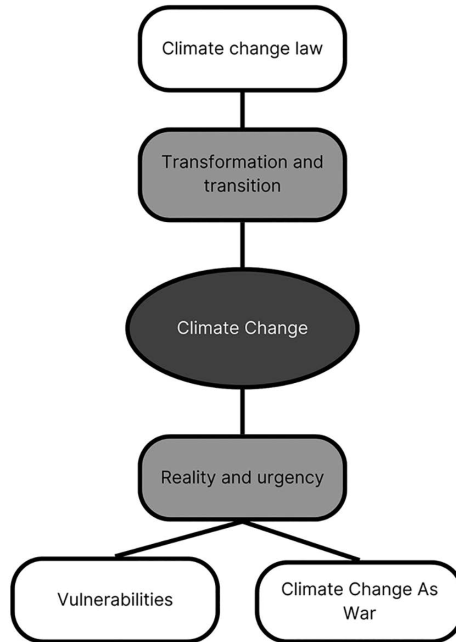

Figure 4.7 The semantic field of climate change in the communication of the PSOE and PP (2016–2018)

orientation' (my own translation). Following Karl Polanyi (1995) and his work *The Great Transformation*, Brand (2014, pp. 249–250) sees transformation 'as a comprehensive socio-economic, political and socio-cultural process of change, which also includes political steering and political and social strategies, but which is not reducible to these' (my own translation). However, in the use of the two terms in the Spanish context, differences could be identified but the boundaries are blurry, and both describe a process of change. Therefore, it makes sense for this kind of analysis to use both terms together.

First, transformation involves various aspects of society that need to be changed or transformed:

> The transformation to which we are committed is a transformation of all economic sectors – transportation, agriculture, energy, housing, water, tourism – and also of all social sectors – families, NGOs, universities, companies, individuals – as well as of all public administrations.
>
> (Parliamentary session[4] no. 143, 09.10.2018, (María Valentina Martínez Ferro, PP) p. 19)

The verb form is also often used, for instance: 'Air pollution and climate change are not challenges of the future, they are challenges of the present. We are committed to public policies that can transform our environment by making it more

accessible and walkable' (Twitter, PSOE, 22.09.2018). In the literature, the strand of transformational research related to ecological issues such as sustainable development or climate change is growing steadily (e.g. Hölscher et al., 2018; Stirling, 2015). Inter- and transdisciplinary research is particularly often referred to as the natural science data, and analyses suggest solutions but implementation in society has proven to be very complex. A significant part of transformation research is dedicated to this problem (see e.g. Feola, 2015).

Second, in this period, 'transition' typically refers to specific aspects like energy or economic transitions, while 'transformation' encompasses broader societal changes. For instance, a PP deputy discusses the shift towards a low-carbon economy:

> I would like to say that the People's Parliamentary Group is very aware of how the transition to a low-carbon economy can affect the most vulnerable sectors and population. . . . We need to identify the population and areas particularly affected by the effects of climate change and the effects of the transition to a low-carbon economy in order to establish the best measures to promote the economic and social reactivation of certain regions or industrial sectors.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 143, 09.10.2018, (María Valentina Martínez Ferro, PP) p. 20)

Transition, particularly towards a low-carbon economy, is presented as crucial for reducing emissions across various economic sectors. This economic transition is seen as central to climate change policies, highlighted in discussions on a climate change law (see sub-area *law on climate change)*. Such laws are deemed necessary to guide society through the needed transition and transformation. The PP initiated work on a draft law during its tenure, but it was the PSOE (in government since June 2018) that ultimately succeeded in passing its proposal.

The area of *reality and urgency* of climate change consists of two connected aspects. The parties often talk about a new reality of climate change: 'Water is essential for life and its use must be adapted to the new reality of a climate change that is modifying the planet's living conditions' (Twitter, PSOE, 22.03.2018). Or they acknowledge the reality of climate change while referring to science and possible effects in this regard: 'Climate change is a complex reality in its analysis, since its effects include scientific, technological, social and economic elements' (Parliamentary session no. 143, 09.10.2018, (María Valentina Martínez Ferro, PP) p. 19). In summary, they refer to the changing conditions of life due to climate change, which is a new reality that people must deal with. This is also accompanied by the urgency that something must be done, as argued in the following example:

> After today's Council of Ministers, Isabel Celaa stressed the importance of the draft of the future law on Climate Change, presented by the Ministry of Ecological Transition. In Celaá's words, this is an "urgent problem that cannot wait" and to which the Executive of Pedro Sánchez is ready to offer

> answers. Climate change is an "issue that seriously concerns Spanish society", said the Minister Spokesperson.
>
> (Facebook, PSOE, 16.11.2018)

The aspect of urgency is also often linked to the content of or the commitment to the Paris Agreement. For example, reference is made to wanting and having to comply with the agreement and that new paths can be taken to this end:

> Sustainability today must be at the core of political agendas. From the PSOE we want to express on World Earth Day, which coincides with the signing of the Paris Agreement, our firm commitment to the decisions adopted in the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the urgent need to implement the necessary measures to lead our country towards different patterns of life based on a growth model in which knowledge, innovation and social responsibility go hand in hand to ensure greater progress, more durable, secure with more welfare and more respectful of natural resources.
>
> (Facebook, PSOE, 22.04.2016)

Especially in social media, both parties write about the 'fight against climate change' ('Lucha contra el cambio climático'), thus referring to the metaphor *Climate Change As War* repeatedly. The use of the metaphor Climate Change As War helps to make abstract aspects of climate change or measures against climate change appear more tangible. As outlined in Chapter 3, when one concept is portrayed through the attributes of another, metaphors emerge. In this context, climate change is metaphorically depicted as a battle or war, with the source domain being 'war' and the target domain being 'climate change', as per Lakoff and Johnson (1980). These metaphors convey urgency and the need for action, as observed by Atanasova and Koteyko (2017). The notion of a fight evokes meaning and suggests a course of action, involving considerable effort, potential hardship, and the confrontation of adversaries. In this battle against climate change, the underlying aim is victory, which would signify the resolution of the issue. According to Atansova and Koteyko (2017, p. 459),

> metaphors do not only conceptualize preventative measures as an object of a political battle, but also alert us to the fact that the conditions and participants in the metaphorical battle have been radically altered: "US against climate change" became "US against THEM".

Both parties claim to be involved in this fight, but what exactly this fight entails is usually not specified in the texts.

For instance, the PP writes 'The European Union will continue to lead the fight against climate change and Spain will be part of this leadership together with our European partners' (Facebook, PP, 02.06.2017). The PSOE also uses this metaphor in a similar way and includes it often in its posts. For instance, they tweet: 'We have the renewable resources necessary to move towards energy sovereignty, fight

against climate change, make citizens' right to energy effective and boost the competitiveness of the productive fabric' (Twitter, PSOE, 20.01.2018). Climate Change As War was also present in the parliamentary sessions when a PSOE politician accused the members of the PP of having primarily excelled through inaction in the fight against climate change: 'You intend to cover up the shame of the inaction of two former ministers who disdained the fight against climate change in Spain, leaving a terrible legacy' (Parliamentary session no. 143, (Marc Lamuà Estañol, PSOE) 09.10.2018, p. 28).

A second sub-area highlighted is the *vulnerability* of Spain to climate change, particularly its coastal areas and islands: 'Ladies and gentlemen, Spain is a country that is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change − as has already been said here − due, among other things, to its geographical position' (Parliamentary session no. 143, 09.10.2018, (María Valentina Martínez Ferro, PP) p. 18). The parties stress Spain's susceptibility to the effects of climate change due to its geographical position. They advocate for heightened awareness, emphasising the need for adaptation plans across sectors such as health, water, and agriculture. Additionally, they express a willingness to educate the public on the impacts of climate change.

Overall, the discourse on climate change in the initial period centres around two key themes: 'transformation and transition' and 'reality and urgency'. Both the PSOE and the PP recognise climate change as a significant concern and underscore Spain's vulnerability to its consequences. Moreover, they demonstrate readiness to engage in combating climate change through proactive measures for adaptation and mitigation.

The policy field of climate change in Spain from 2019 to 2020

The second period presents a more diversified understanding of climate change. Analysis of Facebook posts indicates increased prominence of climate change since 2019 (see Figure 4.6). Figure 4.8 depicts the recurrence of previously identified areas from the first period, alongside several new areas and sub-areas.

The area *transformation and transition* remains prominent in the communication of both parties. This area maintains its core focus, with both parties emphasising the necessity of transformation, encompassing various societal aspects, and transition, such as energy or industrial transition, to mitigate climate change. Further analysis reveals additional, more specific sub-areas related to transformation and transition. Particularly noteworthy is the growing relevance of justice-related aspects alongside climate change in Spain's transformation efforts.

> Now is the time for our young people, for the self-employed and entrepreneurs to defend, above all, the pensions of our elders. Now is the time, because now and not tomorrow we are going to transform this country into the Spain we deserve. Now, Government. Now, Spain.
>
> (Facebook, PSOE, 30.09.2019)

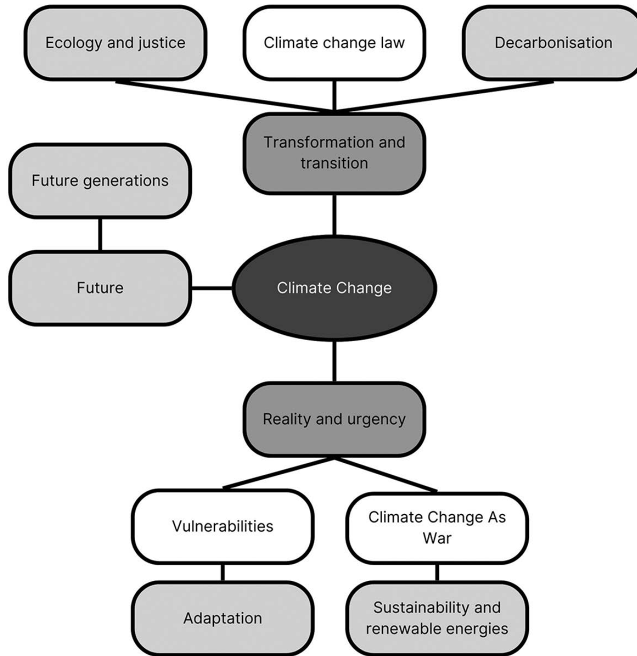

Figure 4.8 The semantic field of climate change in the communication of the PSOE and PP (2019–2020)

There is also a focus on ecology, which is referred to as an ecological transition (transición ecológica), that is, the change or transition goes more clearly in the direction of environmental protection.

> I do not need to remind you that we have signed the Paris Agreements, that we have implemented mechanisms for the registration of the carbon footprint, that we have agreed with the companies that public-private collaboration is essential for the ecological transition, a green growth strategy where the main companies of our country were included. All this has laid the groundwork so that today you can finally present a climate change law in 2020.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 34, 14.07.2020, (Diego José Gago Bugarín, PP) p. 24)

It is also worth mentioning here that there is now more frequent talk of 'green transformation' ('transformación verde'), which is also a sign that the transformation should feed directly into environmental protection, which emphasises the focus on environmental aspects. On 25 September 2020, in relation to the climate demonstrations, the PSOE wrote on Facebook, among other things, 'From the PSOE we not only join this mobilisation of young people, but we also share the

idea that the way out of the current crisis is to turn ourselves into a greener country and society' (Facebook, PSOE, 25.09.2020).

Furthermore, it's worth noting that Pedro Sánchez's new government in 2018 established the Ministry for the Ecological Transition, taking over responsibilities from the Ministries of Agriculture and Energy. By 2020, this department was renamed the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO). The shift from the centre-right PP to the centre-left PSOE in 2018 may have played a significant role in shaping the area *ecology and justice*. While Dobson (2000, 2007 see Chapter 2) distinguishes between environmentalism and ecologism, I interpret the Spanish terms 'ecología' or 'ecológico' as referring more to environmentalism. Dobson thinks of ecologism as a political ideology, while environmentalism is a more practical and managerial approach. In any case, I assume here that the Spanish terms 'ecologia' or 'ecologico' are not directed at the ideology of ecologism according to Dobson (2000) but are meant more as 'environmentalism' or 'environmental' and should be translated as such. Translations in online programs often default to 'ecologismo' for both terms, but 'ambientalismo' or 'medioambientalismo' may also be used for environmentalism. However, based on the context, I believe the focus is on environmentalism rather than ecologism in Spanish communication.

Additionally, aspects of social justice are also a traditional theme of left-wing parties, so this new focus needs to be considered in the national context. While the centre-left PSOE highlights aspects of ecology and justice, the centre-right PP focuses on transformation and transition processes on *decarbonisation:*

> We must work together on the objective of decarbonising all economic sectors by 2050, but proposing solutions cannot mean wiping out the industrial fabric of our country, it cannot mean putting workers out of work, we cannot afford to lose industry, the main primary aluminium industry in Spain, and we cannot afford to attack and put the maritime-fishing industry in check.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 34, 14.07.2020,
> (Diego José *Gago Bugarín*, PP) p. 23)

Here, the PP primarily focuses on economic aspects, highlighting the importance of decarbonising the economy while ensuring that Spanish industries and jobs are not adversely affected by climate protection measures. They also point to other countries as role models in decarbonisation, acknowledging the different conditions Spain faces and aiming to minimise costs for Spaniards.

The sub-area *climate change law* remains salient during this period, with parties often critiquing each other within this context. Nonetheless, both agree on the necessity of taking action to combat climate change, emphasising the need for legislation with concrete measures (The Climate Change and Energy Transition Act (Law 07/2021)).

Although *the future* is not completely excluded in the first period, it is only in the second period that it comes into focus and is identified in the understanding of climate change. In the policy document 'Plan nacional de adaptación al cambio

climático 2021–2030', for example, the future scenarios of different temperature increases (1.5° or 2°) calculated by the IPCC are explained (p. 8). The future is brought into the discourse all across this period, with both general and more concrete aspects addressed, as, for example, by a PP deputy: 'Let us hope that this government will be able to collaborate with the companies so that we can start up the countless key projects for the energy, business and industrial future of our country' (Parliamentary session no. 34, 14.07.2020, (Diego José *Gago Bugarín*, PP) p. 24).

It is unsurprising that discussions about the future frequently include references to youth, children, and future generations. The younger demographic is portrayed as active participants, with the PSOE notably backing their involvement in climate activism. Consequently, I have included the sub-area *future generations*, which receives more attention regarding concrete environmental protection measures, particularly in safeguarding biodiversity and natural resources. This aspect is notably addressed in the Climate Change Act:

> The law, aligned with the objectives of the green compact and the European recovery framework, will help us emerge from the crisis proud in the knowledge that we are nurturing the future of young people . . . we must put the future of our young people at the centre of our response to the current crisis and to the systemic crises generated by climate change and biodiversity loss.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 34, 14.07.2020, (Teresa Ribera Rodríguez – Minister for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, PSOE) p. 8)

For example, the policy also addresses the responsibility for future generations, writing that children and young people must be prepared for climate change:

> Strengthen the capacity of children and youth in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts by establishing and investing in environmental education and climate change, and providing children and youth with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves and contribute to a safe life and sustainable future.
>
> (MITECO, 2020, p. 9)

The FFF movements, through their demonstrations and activities, have effectively engaged both current and future generations. Aligned with climate scientists, they underscore the worsening repercussions of climate change in the forthcoming years and decades if decisive action isn't taken. Despite the observable impacts of climate change today, FFF contends, in line with scientific consensus, that future generations face heightened risks.

The pressing *reality and urgency* of climate change persistently receive attention, with frequent calls to action emphasising that the time to act is now. In social media posts, events or actions such as the 'Dia del Mundo' (The Earth Day) are often taken as an occasion to underline that urgent action can and must be taken, 'It's #TimeToAct. Wonderful initiative of the Museo Nacional Del Prado and

WWF Spain. We still have time to save the planet #PSOEPorElClima1' (Facebook, PSOE, 05.12.2019). In particular, the reality of climate change is underlined in parliamentary debates. This became particularly clear when the populist far-right party Vox (in parliament since 2019) questioned and criticised the draft law on climate change, and a parliamentary debate was held as a result. Both mainstream parties defended the importance and also the political responsibility of doing something about scientifically recognised climate change:

> It is pure physics and chemistry, alien to ideologies and religions. No, ladies and gentlemen, the IPCC forecasts are neither alarmist nor are they contradicted time and again by reality, as you [Vox] claim. On the contrary, they are unfortunately confirmed by the facts and the change in weather patterns over time.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 34, 14.07.2020, (Teresa Ribera Rodríguez, PSOE) p. 7)

Neither the PP nor the PSOE doubts the scientific evidence on climate change, and although there are disputes between the two parties on the implementation of a climate change law, they still agree that Spain should take action for climate protection in order to limit negative aspects of climate change.

Connected to the reality and urgency of climate change the metaphor *Climate Change As War* did not change fundamentally in terms of content or language in the second period. Throughout this period, both PSOE and PP communications remained entrenched in this metaphorical framework. While party politics played a role, both parties asserted their acknowledgement that combating climate change is not solely the responsibility of individuals but requires dedicated commitment from political parties due to its profound economic, societal, and environmental implications. Without delving further into detail, the metaphor of war persisted as a central aspect of the discourse surrounding climate change in this second period.

While *sustainability and renewable energies* have already been mentioned here and there in the texts, they only become of interest in this second period in connection with the fight against climate change. Renewable energies are coming more into focus, especially together with sustainability, as the following example shows:

> We believe in the sustainability of our future. Spain, with its great biodiversity, is called to be an absolute leader in renewable energies and the fight against climate change, so that the generations to come will have a better planet.
>
> (Twitter, PP, 22.10.2019)

Although distinct, sustainability and renewable energies are deemed significant in the context of addressing climate change. Sustainability, often abstract, necessitates precise definition due to its interpretive variability. When coupled with the more tangible concept of renewable energy, sustainability gains clarity and specificity. The repeated juxtaposition of these concepts elucidates renewable energies

while imbuing sustainability with a more concrete meaning. It's common for both aspects to be intertwined by both parties, yet noteworthy that each can independently carry weight.

As between 2016 to 2018, *vulnerabilities* are still very present. On the one hand, they refer to the same aspects, such as geography, coastal areas, and water, which make Spain vulnerable; on the other hand, the economic and social vulnerability of Spain is also present due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance:

> Spain is a country particularly vulnerable to climate change because this is where average temperatures are rising the most; this is where the effects of floods and drought are the most intense; this is where rainfall has fallen by an average of 18% and therefore affects the flow of our rivers; this is where there is the greatest loss of biodiversity and this is where fires are becoming more serious by the day.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 34, 14.07.2020, (Helena Caballero Gutiérrez, PSOE) p. 25)

Within this sub-area, the need to reduce risks is present and climate change *adaptation* becomes very salient during this second period. This is mainly introduced by Policy 2020 (The National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change 2021–2030), promoting a more resilient development in relation to climate change over the next ten years to build a safer and more inclusive nation. The policy 'aims to respond to the growing needs of adaptation to climate change in Spain, as well as to our international commitments in this field' (Plan nacional de adaptación al cambio climático 2021–2030, 2020, p. 11). Furthermore, it is not only about avoiding or minimising damages, but the policy highlights that adaptation measures to climate change 'provide economic and social stability and opens up new opportunities: investments in planned adaptation, whether public or private, . . . can create new economic activities and employment opportunities, while preventing economic losses and promoting a more resilient economy' (Plan nacional de adaptación al cambio climático 2021–2030, 2020, p. 10).

In summary, the second period witnesses a broadening of the discourse on climate change, marked by increased communication and the identification of new areas and sub-areas. Additionally, there's a clearer delineation of climate protection goals, the instruments to achieve them, and the aspects most pertinent to Spain's context.

Discussing party similarities and differences

During the second period, both parties significantly ramped up their communication about climate change on social media platforms, although the posts tended to be brief and lacked detailed information. Nonetheless, they shared a common stance on the urgency of addressing climate change in Spain. Overall, their communication styles regarding climate change were quite similar, with minor distinctions emerging, particularly in the latter part of the period.

Table 4.4 demonstrates which areas or topics received the most attention from the PSOE and the PP (from top to bottom). It shows that the two parties have a very similar focus, although they are not in government coalitions together like the SPD and CDU/CSU in Germany. There are only slight and nuanced distinctions between the parties, indicating that the perception of climate change in Spain is not heavily influenced by partisan politics. Despite Spain's historical two-party system, the parties demonstrate a relative consensus on climate change. This unity could stem from Spain's susceptibility to climate change impacts and the resulting costs to the environment, society, and the economy. With Spain already contending with consequences like heatwaves, droughts, fires, and water scarcity, the urgency of addressing climate change is clear across party lines.

Table 4.4 The top five areas that received the most attention from the PSOE and PP in their climate change communication (most at the top, less at the bottom)

PSOE	*PP*
Reality and urgency	Transformation and transition
Transformation and transition	Reality and urgency
Climate Change As War	Decarbonisation
Sustainability and renewable energies	Climate Change As War
Ecology and justice	Vulnerability

However, discussions surrounding the climate change law in both periods were evidently influenced by partisan dynamics. Challenges in reaching a consensus were apparent, as mutual criticism regarding climate issues emerged from both parties. The change in government in 2018, transitioning from the PP to the PSOE, underscores these differences. In the latter period, social issues championed by the Socialist Party increasingly shaped the discourse. Particularly, the PSOE introduced the themes of a just transition and transformation. Moreover, the PSOE stands out for its emphasis on inclusivity, advocating for the involvement of all citizens, workers, and marginalised groups in climate change discussions and initiatives.

The centre-right PP places greater emphasis on the decarbonisation of the Spanish economy, highlighting economic elements, while the centre-left PSOE prioritises social aspects. The discourse about climate change is also linked to the salient macro-strategy of the EU, which focuses on decarbonisation through mainly economic transitions (e.g. renewable energies). However, the FFF Spain, which raised awareness for climate change also in Spain as it received broad support from society and especially the youth, seemed to have had an impact during the second period, as the future and future generations – core issues of the movement – were included in the communication about climate change of both parties.

Austria and the climate

After the end of World War II, the Republic of Austria was re-established and the ÖVP, SPÖ, and Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) supported the reinstatement of the constitutional foundations of the First Republic (1919–1934). The KPÖ left the

government as early as 1947 and until 1966 (six legislative periods) the ÖVP and SPÖ governed together. After the ÖVP won the elections in 1966 with an absolute majority, they found themselves in government alone for the first time, contending with a sizable opposition. In 1970, the SPÖ replaced the ÖVP in government and remained in power for 13 years. The range of political parties represented in parliament began to widen in the middle of the 1980s. In 1983 the SPÖ lost its absolute majority and formed a coalition with the FPÖ to form a government. Three years later, new elections were held, and Austria experienced stability under the 'grand coalition' (SPÖ and ÖVP) until 1999. In those elections, the FPÖ, under the leadership of Jörg Haider, managed to double its share of the vote to almost 10 per cent, and the Greens entered the National Council as a fourth party. In response to social and political developments, parliamentary democracy has undergone numerous changes since that period and after Austria's entry into the EU in 1995, so did the political agenda of the Austrian parliament. In 1999, the ÖVP formed a coalition with the FPÖ and from 2002 with the FPÖ and the BZÖ (Alliance for the Future of Austria, a right-wing populist split from the FPÖ). From 2006 to 2017, the ÖVP and the SPÖ again succeeded in forming a grand coalition. Then the ÖVP was in government with the FPÖ from December 2017 until May 2019. Afterwards, a civil servant government was established and from January 2020 on, the ÖVP was in a governing coalition with the Green Party. Currently, the ÖVP, the SPÖ, the FPÖ, the Green Party and the NEOS (founded in 2012) are represented in parliament.

The environment and its protection have long been an essential issue in Austria, rooted in the identity and culture of the country. Both the mountains and the numerous lakes are seen as distinctive and shape environmental thinking in Austria. Indeed, the German-Austrian Alpine Association (*Alpenverein*), which is committed to the conservation and protection of nature, has been in existence since 1873. It is regarded as one of the first important milestones to have shaped environmentalism in Austria to this day. It also marked the start of the founding of numerous other environmental protection associations in Austria (Fischer, 2019). Schmid and Veichtlbauer (2006) speak of national narratives around the relationship between humans and nature, which also reflect political culture and its refractions and are considered places of memory and reference for the country's environmental movement. Such narratives include the construction and non-construction of nuclear power plants, the establishment of national parks, modernisation projects and preservation.

Politically, exactly 100 years after the founding of the Alpine Club in the 1970s, the Federal Ministry for Health and Environmental Protection (*Bundesministerium für Gesundheit und Umweltschutz*) and the 'Austrian Society for Nature and Environmental Protection' (*Österreichische Gesellschaft für Natur- und Umweltschutz,* ÖGNU) were established. The same decade witnessed the emergence of a strong anti-nuclear movement in Austria. In 1969, the construction of the Zwentendorf nuclear power plant was approved and the energy plan of the 1970s envisaged a total of three nuclear power plants in Austria. However, after many protests and a referendum in 1978, the commissioning of the completed Zwentendorf nuclear power plant was suspended. In the aftermath, the National Council passed a

Nuclear Ban Act (Atomsperrgesetz) that prohibited the construction of nuclear power plants and the commissioning of existing plants in Austria. After the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl, the Nuclear Ban Act was elevated to constitutional status. According to Breuss et al. (1995), Austrians have strongly associated their national identity with pictures of nature and the landscape, and since the Chernobyl disaster Austrians would credit themselves for having opposed nuclear energy.

In the early 1980s, the environmental movement in Austria prevented the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in the Hainburger Au on the Danube, downstream of Vienna. The aim was to preserve the natural Danube floodplains. The occupation of the Hainburger Au is considered to be of importance for Austria's environmental and democratic development.

In Austria the environmental idea has been developed across party lines. Moreover, the concept of an eco-social market economy has been present in Austria for decades but is classified as a term close to the ÖVP (discussed in Chapter 5 in more detail). In fact, Austria initiated the idea of a sustainable energy economy in the 1980s, as nature and landscape protection and energy (anti-nuclear power and reservation for hydropower) formed the two essential parts of environmental policy there. Environmental protection is still framed as a top issue on the political and social agenda in Austria and according to the Website Austria.org it 'is one of the leading countries in Europe in the field of environmental policy' (Austrian Embassy Washington, 2024). However, Schmid and Veichtlbauer (2006) underlined that in Austria's Second Republic nature frequently took a back seat, and that environmental groups will continue to have work to do.

Cross-party environmentalism has developed in Austria, and indeed today's PFRP FPÖ has included nature protection in its political agenda since the end of the 1960s (Riedlsperger, 1998), making it the pioneer party in Austria as well. In contrast to the AfD and Vox, the FPÖ was founded as early as 1956 and has succeeded in elections since then. The FPÖ has been part of a government coalition four times (1983–1986, 2000–2003, 2003–2005, 2017–2019). According to Voss (2020, p. 154) 'nature protection is a salient, comprehensive and fundamental concern for the FPÖ, covering an array of issues and sub-issues'.

Austria was one of the first European states to ratify the Paris Agreement together with the EU in October 2016. The National Council in Austria already voted in favour of ratification on 8 July 2016, with only the FPÖ showing opposition and voting against the global climate treaty. The national Climate Protection Act (Klimaschutzgesetz) was passed in Austria before this time period in 2011 and was amended in December 2013, December 2015, and April 2017 (see Chapter 4).

A report of the European Parliament revealed that Austria, with its 8.9 million inhabitants (2020),[5] contributes 2.2 per cent of the EU's overall GHG emissions, and since 2005, it has decreased emissions more slowly than the EU as a whole (Jensen & Carvalho Fachada, 2021). The nation's carbon intensity is lower than average for the EU and is on a decreasing trajectory. In contrast to the energy industry, which in 2019 accounted for barely 13 per cent of the overall emissions share, the transport sector continued to grow and now accounts for 30 per cent of all emissions in Austria. In 2019, Austria attained 33.6 percentage of renewable

energy. The generation of 100 per cent renewable electricity is a key component of the nation's 2030 goal of using 46–50 per cent renewable energy. The majority of the actions envisioned to reach the energy efficiency goals concentrate on the heating requirements of buildings and the transition of the transport industry. By 2040, Austria wants to be carbon neutral. According to EU effort-sharing regulations, Austria was obliged to reduce non-ETS emissions[6] by 16 per cent by the end of 2020 compared to 2005 and 36 per cent by the year 2030; however, according to current numbers, this result currently appears improbable (Jensen & Carvalho Fachada, 2021).

Notably, in January 2017 various NGOs and individuals convinced a panel of the Austrian Federal Administrative Court to overturn the government of Lower Austria's approval of the construction of a third runway at the main airport of Vienna. The main reasons were that the expansion of the airport would not be compatible with Austria's national and international obligations to mitigate the causes of climate change and would therefore be more harmful than beneficial to the public interest. In June, the Austrian Constitutional Court overturned this decision, stating various errors that led to an unlawful weighting of climate change and land use.

The FFF movement is also active in Austria since 2018. According to the FFF Austria website, there are many regional groups with varying formats in addition to climate strikes, and these groups aim to facilitate cooperation and conversation (Fridays for Future Austria, 2022). Therefore, they hold workshops, involve schools and universities, create platforms, and provide forums for interaction. Along with FFF Austria, other organisations engaged in climate action include ActJust, System Change not Climate Change, and Extinction Rebellion.

Also for Austria, Google trends data was used to get an insight into the presence of climate change in the Google search engine in Austria (see Lineman et al., 2015 for Google trend data as a method to measure popularity of a topic). The data in Figure 4.9, which shows when the research term 'climate change' (Klimawandel) is salient, reveals an increase in salience in 2019 with a peak in March and in September 2019. The high salience in March 2019 could be explained by many reports about the unusually dry weather and the warmest March since the beginning

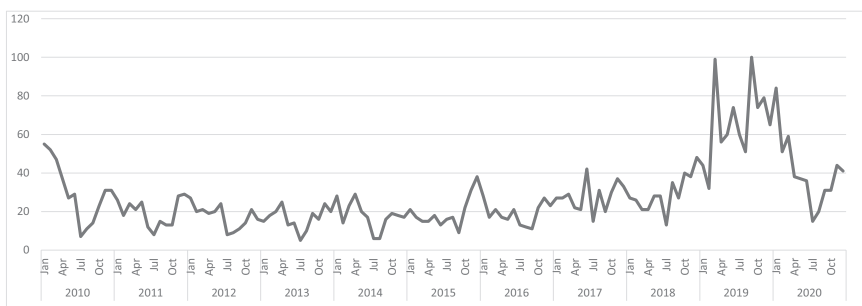

Figure 4.9 Google trends data in Austria regarding the topic 'climate change' (2010–2020)

of weather records (see e.g. ZAMG, 2022). In Austria, September 2019 was also the time when FFF was very active and probably raised public attention and awareness regarding climate change issues.

The social media data of political parties in Austria displayed in Figure 4.10 is used to explore how present the issue of climate change is among various political actors in Austria. Relying on the German and Spanish cases, Facebook posts were collected and downloaded with the help of CrowdTangle, by searching the term 'climate' (Klima).

Along with the two mainstream parties the ÖVP and the SPÖ, the Greens, the liberal NEOS ('Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum'), and the populist far-right FPÖ are also included in the graph. At first glance, two things attract attention: first, the Greens has by far the most posts about climate change, which is not surprising, and second, the presence of climate-related issues increased in 2019. Activity on Facebook was relatively low before this peak (except for the Greens in August, September, and October of 2017) and decreased again afterwards during 2020.

Figure 4.10 reveals a major peak in September 2019, which can be traced back to FFF demonstrations and various public actions of the climate youth movement. For the study period 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2020, I identified two other key moments in social media posts dealing with climate issues. October 2018 was the month when at the EU level the ambitions to reduce emissions were increased to 35 per cent, which was also communicated as a success for Austria and climate protection. The peak in November 2019 can be linked to climate protests in Austria and to some extent to the so-called Climate People's Petition (www.klimavolksbegehren.at), as it was mentioned in Facebook posts. August 2017 until October 2017 do not qualify as peak moments but seem worth mentioning because the Greens visibly increased their communication about climate change then. Indeed, based on the content of the Facebook posts and the timing, this increase might be due to the National Council elections in October 2017. More concretely, climate change was one of the election topics of the Greens, which is reflected in their social media.

The average number of posts about climate-related issues on the social media pages of those political parties increased greatly between 2016 and 2020. While an average of 1.5 posts per month was measured in 2016, the following year it increased to 8.2, in 2018 it was 5.8, in 27 April 2019 and in 2020 17 posts per

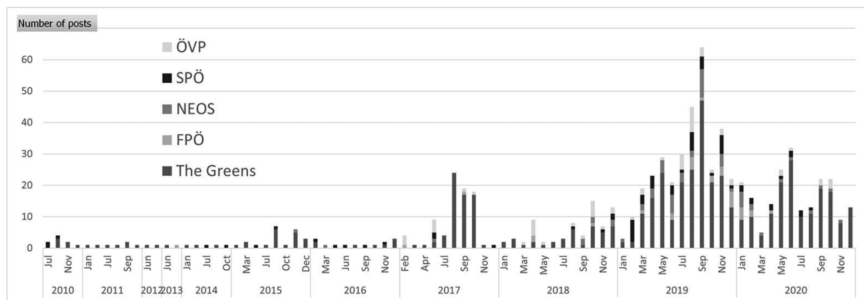

Figure 4.10 The salience of climate change issues in Facebook posts of political parties in Austria (2010–2020) (CrowdTangle Team, 2021)

Table 4.5 Number of Facebook posts between 2016 and 2020 published by the SPÖ and ÖVP

Party	*Total Facebook posts*	*Facebook posts about climate*	*Percentage of posts about climate*
SPÖ	5578	80	1.43
ÖVP	3603	37	1.03

month were registered. Table 4.5 reveals the total posts between 2016 and 2020 of the SPÖ and the ÖVP, as well as the total posts on climate change, and shows what percentage of the total posts on Facebook addresses climate change.

Both parties show a similar percentage of posts about climate change in their Facebook communication. For more details about the data corpus, see Table 3.4 in Chapter 3. Now I move on to the results of the analysis of the understanding of climate change of the SPÖ and the ÖVP.

The policy field of climate change in Austria from 2016 to 2018

The semantic field of climate change for the first time period is displayed in Figure 4.11. Different areas have been identified in the discourse about climate change of the SPÖ and the ÖVP, and the differences between both parties were substantial in some areas. These distinctions will be explored further in the upcoming chapter.

Both parties frequently link climate change to *sustainability* emphasising its importance for environmental protection. This connection is often framed in terms of future generations, as illustrated in the following example: 'Sustainability also means that we leave our planet to the following, future generations just as liveable as we found it'[7] (Parliamentary session[8] no. 15, 21.03.2018, (Pamela Rendi-Wagner, SPÖ) p. 74). In general, both the future and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), alongside specific topics like tourism and technologies such as electromobility, solar energy, and hydropower, are pertinent. The Austrian mainstream parties have shown interest in sustainability and sustainable development since the release of the Brundtland Report in 1987. However, criticism often arises regarding the disproportionate emphasis on economic aspects over social and ecological considerations. This discrepancy has been highlighted in various studies (see e.g. Gottschlich & Friedrich, 2014; ORF News, 2022). Nevertheless, there is a stark difference between the two parties in this regard: the concept of an *eco-social market* is primarily associated with the ÖVP, while *social justice* is attributed to the SPÖ.

The ÖVP defines the concept of an eco-social market economy as a sociopolitical, economic, and environmental goal that prioritises environmental preservation and sustainable economic activity. This model is considered a cornerstone of the social market economy. (Brüssel & Kronenberg, 2018; BWL Lexikon, 2022). According to the ÖVP's party programme, '[t]he economic and social model of the eco-social market economy combines the greatest possible economic freedom and performance with social and ecological sustainability' (ÖVP, 2015, p. 6).

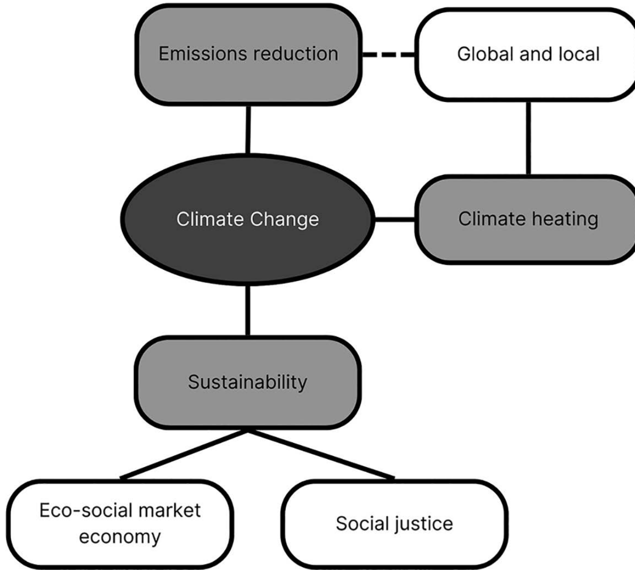

Figure 4.11 The semantic field of climate change in the communication of the ÖVP and SPÖ (2016–2018)

Indeed, the concept of the eco-social market economy was initially introduced in the 1980s by ÖVP politician Josef Riegler, who proposed utilising market dynamics for environmental protection (Ökosoziales Forum, 2022). Riegler emphasised the importance of ecological cost truth, wherein the polluter bears the cost, and advocated for eco-social tax reform to promote sustainable development. While the ÖVP declared itself the party of the eco-social market economy in its 1995 party program, 'ecologisation' did not play a role in practical politics in the early 1990s (Seidl, 2019). However, the party now emphasises that ambitious climate policy must align with economic growth, and nature conservation should complement economic and employment expansion. The ÖVP underscores the necessity of innovation in climate protection and sustainability. In addition, reference is often made to the innovative capacity that is needed in climate protection and in the area of sustainability. Furthermore, the ÖVP writes in its policy statement 'Eco-social action enables economic sustainability, improves quality of life, reduces pollution and noise, preserves biodiversity, expands renewable energy, and increases energy and resource efficiency' (ÖVP, 2015, p. 34). This topic is also prominent in the National Council, where Martina Diesner-Wais (ÖVP) argues that

> [i]n Austria we follow the model of the eco-social market economy, and this is a holistic model, it sees on the one hand the sustainability, the ecological situation, but on the other hand it also combines the social and economic aspects.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 15, 21.03.2018 (Martina Diesner-Wais, ÖVP) p. 78)

In contrast, the SPÖ focuses more on *social justice* when contributing to the discourse about climate change and when they raise aspects of sustainability within the discourse. On the one hand, the party refers to social injustice, which according to them is worsened by climate change, since socially disadvantaged groups in particular would suffer from the consequences. These groups are also already more affected by the consequences of environmental pollution. Indeed, they often live, for example, in cheap housing complexes near busy streets, where they are exposed to air and noise pollution. On the other hand, the party claims '[c]limate and environmental protection contribute to an equal society' (SPÖ, 2018, p. 45) and therefore ecological and social issues can only be addressed together. Thus, the SPÖ strongly connects sustainability approaches with social equality:

> The socially acceptable transformation of our society toward ecological sustainability will continue to set us apart from other approaches in this area. But in view of climate change, it is clear that the preservation of our livelihoods – also as a basis for social justice – must be given the highest priority.
>
> (SPÖ, 2018, p. 44)

Moving on to emissions reduction, both parties are roughly equal participants. For both, reducing emissions, along with expanding renewable energy sources, constitutes a crucial aspect of a comprehensive climate policy. This alignment is expected, given that emissions reduction is a fundamental component of the Paris Agreement. Reference is often made to Austria's role during the EU Presidency in the latter half of 2018. The ÖVP contends that Austria can advocate for more ambitious emission reduction targets in this capacity:

> During Austria's presidency, the climate agreement will be defined in more detail, and here we as Austria have the chance to address crucial points. For example, we can introduce the goal of a 40 percent reduction in CO_2 by 2030.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 15, 21.03.2018, (Martina Diesner-Wais, ÖVP) p. 78)

Later that year the ÖVP announced on Facebook 'We have succeeded in convincing member states – such as Germany – to increase their ambitions [in reducing CO_2 emissions from cars and vans] to 35 percent' (Facebook, ÖVP, 10.10.2018). Regarding the reduction of CO_2, the SPÖ writes in its party programme 'Austria should take the lead here and become CO_2 neutral by 2040' (SPÖ, 2018, p. 45).

The area *climate heating* is introduced as a global ecological survival issue by the SPÖ in the discourse. The party affirms that the effects are already destroying the livelihood of many people on a global level, but that the consequences of this are also being felt on a national level. Climate heating has destructive consequences

for humanity and therefore climatic protection measures must be implemented immediately, as they write for instance in their party programme:

> Global climate heating and the associated changes are no longer a theory, but a tangible reality. They are already destroying the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide and affecting the quality of life of hundreds of millions more. The concrete effects have long been felt in Austria as well.
>
> (SPÖ, 2018, p. 10)

Using the term 'heating' instead of the more commonly used 'warming' can be seen as a deliberate choice to underscore the reality and urgency of climate change. As we will see in the subsequent period, there will be a heightened discourse around climate catastrophe and climate crisis.

In the sub-area of global and local responsibility, the SPÖ's party program encapsulates the sentiment with the phrase: 'Global responsibility requires local action' (SPÖ, 2018, p. 45). The SPÖ emphasises the global aspect of climate change while advocating for local or national action. Furthermore, they stress the importance of addressing greenhouse gases and their reduction:

> The pollutants we emit locally do not add up to a climate catastrophe somewhere in the global distance, but cause serious problems directly and concretely on our doorstep. Climate policies that also reduce local air pollution contribute to greater environmental justice.
>
> (SPÖ, 2018, p. 45)

Similarly, the ÖVP also acknowledges global responsibility and claims to fulfil it through its ambitious climate and anti-nuclear policies (ÖVP, 2015). Additionally, the SPÖ asserts its commitment to international efforts aimed at phasing out nuclear power, citing the dangers associated with nuclear energy generation and the long-term burden of nuclear waste, particularly on future generations (SPÖ, 2018).

The policy field of climate change in Austria from 2019 to 2020

The understanding of climate change by the SPÖ and the ÖVP in this second period is – like Germany and Spain – characterised by a greater variety of areas, illustrated in Figure 4.12. The analysis of the Facebook posts (Figure 4.10) reveals the general higher salience of climate change in the parties' communication.

The first new area revolves around *investments in climate protection*, often portrayed as beneficial for Austria in the long term. The SPÖ, in particular, emphasises the necessity of investing in climate protection, asserting that such investments are worthwhile. They argue that a failure to invest now would result in greater costs in the future. In fact, they claim that '[e]very euro that we invest in climate protection pays off twice and three times over. There is a threat of payments of more than €6 billion if we do not start doing something immediately' (Facebook, SPÖ,

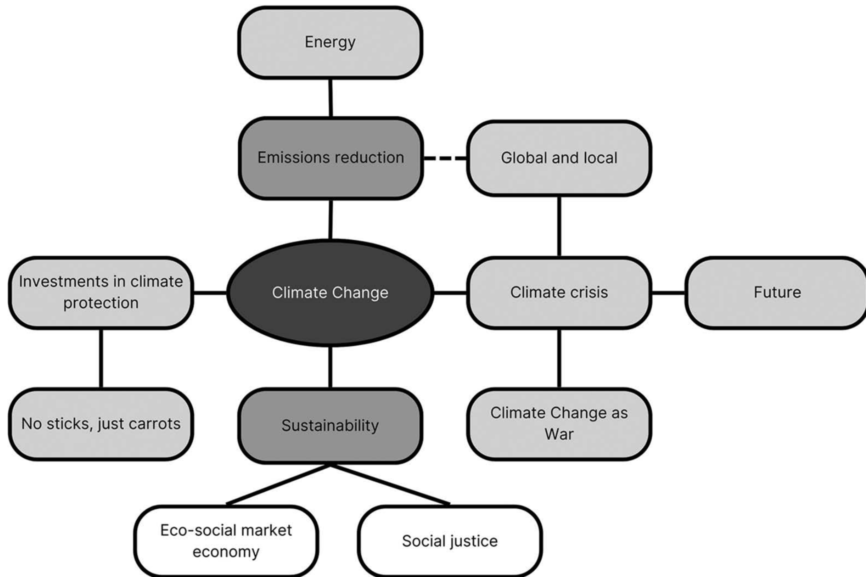

Figure 4.12 The semantic field of climate change in the communication of the ÖVP and SPÖ (2019–2020)

22.08.2019). Specifically, the SPÖ proposes a climate protection billion ('Klimaschutzmilliarde'), which is

> €1 billion per year for the expansion of public transport and for research, alternative energies, and renovation. These are sensible and wise investments in Austria in the fight against the social crisis, which are necessary for climate protection. With these climate protection investments, we secure existing jobs and create new ones.
>
> (Facebook, SPÖ, 22.08.2019)

The ÖVP is primarily responsible for the sub-area *no sticks just carrots* in climate protection. The centre-right party believes that 'climate protection concerns us all! However, we do not want to counter it with prohibitions or higher taxes but start a process of change with innovations and take a pioneering role in climate protection' (Facebook, ÖVP, 14.07.2019). The ÖVP is committed to the goal of climate neutrality but refers to common sense ('Hausverstand') being necessary, and according to the party only incentives and subsidies can solve the problem:

> It should also be clear to us that when it comes to further climate protection measures, we must above all also apply a targeted measure of common sense, i.e. incentives and subsidies instead of bans and sanctions, because we can

> only tackle this issue together and solve it together. In other words, we can only do this together with the economy and not against it.
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 3, 13.11.2019, p. 76)

I will show in the analysis of the populist far-right party that the FPÖ appeals to common sense as well, which according to Wodak (2015, p. 2) is an aspect of the correlation of right-wing populism with anti-intellectualism, which she calls the *arrogance of ignorance*. Also according to survey data, anti-intellectualism, or in other words the generalised mistrust of intellectuals and experts, correlates not only with populism but in particular with opposition to scientific positions on climate change and other environmental issues (Merkley, 2021). Anti-intellectualism is found especially in extreme political ideologies such as Fascism or Stalinism, where, for example, critical voices about the political system often came from intellectuals who were then treated poorly by the regime (see e.g. Hildermeier, 1989; Vander Zanden, 1960). Furthermore, the party is also against a meat tax in terms of climate protection on the grounds that this would only hit the poorest in the country but advocates European CO_2 duties on food because this would strengthen domestic agriculture:

> A higher tax on meat in #Austria would hit those who can barely afford to live anyway. The solution is much more: European CO_2 tariffs for food from the other end of the world. This strengthens domestic agriculture & protects our climate!
>
> (Twitter, ÖVP, 07.09.2019)

In a social media post, the SPÖ also states that they are against a CO_2 tax as this pits climate policy against social policy and one should not pit people against climate (Twitter, SPÖ, 15.09.2019).

In the second period, sustainability remains present but not as dominant as in the first. However, its role in climate protection is consistently emphasised, appearing as a natural complement in the discourse about climate change. Similar to the first period, the SPÖ continues to strongly emphasise social justice in discussions about climate change. This emphasis is evident in documents like 'Climate Justice' (Klimagerechtigkeit), published by the SPÖ in 2019, which is part of the data corpus for this period. In terms of content, the SPÖ has developed a 100-point concept 'for our future' that prioritises environmental issues and sustainability. This suggests that sustainability has become increasingly important for the SPÖ in this period. For example, the party argues 'The climate crisis tends to affect the poorer population more – and thus has a strong social factor, it affects cities, agriculture, water supply and finally peace. Climate protection affects virtually all areas of life' (SPÖ, 2019, p. 15). This sub-area is also still associated with sustainability aspects of climate change, or climate action: 'Socially disadvantaged populations are already disproportionately affected by climate crisis environmental pollution today. Sustainability strategies must therefore always take social justice distribution issues into account' (SPÖ, 2019, p. 9).

The ÖVP continues to emphasise the sub-area of the eco-social market economy, focusing on potential economic implications of climate protection policies. They argue that robust climate protection measures should not compromise Austria's competitiveness or employment. The party presents the eco-social market economy as a framework with positive incentives and innovation strategies. Additionally, Tanja Graf (ÖVP) emphasises in a parliamentary session the importance of supporting companies to implement creative ideas innovatively, stating 'the eco-social market economy is the best framework for this. And who could do that better than we from the ÖVP, because we are after all the inventors of this economic model!'(Parliamentary session no. 3, 13.11.2019, (Tanja Graf, ÖVP) p. 76).

In contrast to the first period where 'climate heating' took precedence, the second period sees a shift towards the use of the term 'climate crisis', particularly by the SPÖ. The party frequently employs this concept to underscore the seriousness and urgency of the issue: 'The climate crisis is a serious threat to all of humanity. Melting glaciers, extreme weather events, the rise in heat-related deaths and bee mortality are signs on the wall that can no longer be suppressed, even in Austria' (SPÖ, 2019, p. 7). Notably, in the Parliamentary session no. 3 (13.11.2019), climate crisis is mentioned 12 times by the SPÖ, Grüne, and NEOS. The right-wing parties ÖVP and FPÖ, however, do not use the term in the parliamentary debate. In that year, the British left-leaning newspaper *The Guardian* changed its terminology when writing about the environment (Carrington, 2019) because climate change 'is no longer considered to accurately reflect the seriousness of the overall situation' (Zeldin-O'Neill, 2019). *The Guardian* suggested the use of the terms 'climate crisis' and 'climate emergency' instead to include the broader impacts of climate change. Around the same time scientific papers also argued, '[W]e use the term climate crisis rather than climate change to reflect a terminology that more accurately captures the condition of urgency and danger engendered by a heated world' (Klinenberg et al., 2020, p. 650). The SPÖ also refers more often to 'climate damage' which is already occurring today in the form of mudslides, the death of bees, melting of glaciers, or forest fires, and underlines the seriousness of the climate crisis.

As seen previously in Spain, I identified the metaphor *Climate Change As War* in texts. However, unlike in Spain where both mainstream parties frequently employ this metaphor, in Austria, it is primarily used by the left-wing SPÖ. Their action plan on climate justice states: 'Massive efforts are needed, such as an environmentally compatible energy and mobility transition, to efficiently and sustainably combat the impending local and global effects of the climate crisis' (SPÖ, 2019, p. 17). The party highlights the urgency on social media: 'There is no more time to waste in the fight against climate change'(Facebook, SPÖ, 06.08.2019). This urgency is also made clear by basic relation to the area climate crisis:

> Our climate protection and environmental spokeswoman Julia Herr is putting pressure on to win the fight against the climate crisis. She demands an annual climate protection billion, embedded in a Green New Deal. This will make

> Austria climate neutral by 2040, it will make the economy CO_2 neutral and create tens of thousands of new jobs.
>
> (Facebook, SPÖ im Parliament, 15.11.2019)

As I already explained in Section 'The discourse about climate change in populist far-right communication: DHA', the use of this war metaphor represents the climate crisis as the enemy with which 'we' (in this case Austrians) must confront ourselves or which 'we' (Austrians) can and must fight. The goal is to win this war and thus to defeat the climate crisis (see e.g. Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017). For example, the ÖVP describes the fight as follows:

> We believe that Austria can be a winner in the fight against climate change. For example, we are the country of renewable energies. If we get better here, that's good for the climate, that can bring economic success and also create jobs.
>
> (Facebook, ÖVP, 02.09.2019)

Similar to the cases of Germany and Spain, the future perspective is a central element of the climate change discourse in Austria. It is not entirely absent in the first period, but it truly takes centre stage in this second period. Climate protection emerges as a central topic for both parties. For instance, shortly before the European elections in May 2019, the ÖVP states, 'Our future starts with climate protection. Without climate protection, our future has no chance'(Facebook, ÖVP, 03.05.2019).

The sub-area *global and local* continues to be present in the discourse. For example, the ÖVP claims that the global nature of climate change requires a global solution: 'Combating climate change globally. Climate change is not a problem that ends at Austria's borders. The current challenges are of a global nature and must therefore also be solved globally' (ÖVP, 2021, p. 16). In this regard, they specifically reference the European level, highlighting their pioneering role and Austria's potential to substantially influence and shape the EU, ensuring that sustainability and innovation remain central. Moreover, they frequently underscore the significance of the local: 'Protecting our climate and our environment concerns us all!' (Facebook, ÖVP, 09.08.2019) or 'Climate protection concerns us all' (Facebook, ÖVP, 07.08.2019). The SPÖ provides a more detailed description here, painting a relatively vivid picture of how emissions will result in a global climate catastrophe and also contribute to local environmental issues and pollution 'on our doorstep':

> In this context, greenhouse gas emissions, which are mainly responsible for the climate crisis, are also to a large extent responsible for local environmental problems. For what we emit locally in pollutants both adds up in other countries and leads to a global climate catastrophe, and furthermore ensures immediate serious burdens on our doorstep.
>
> (SPÖ, 2019, p. 17)

And further '[m]assive efforts such as a nature-friendly energy and mobility transition are needed to efficiently and sustainably combat the looming local and global impacts of the climate crisis' (SPÖ, p. 17).

The area *emissions reduction* continues to be salient in the discourse, with frequent reference to transport emissions: 'Our greatest challenge in climate protection is transport emissions. We want to make Austria the number one hydrogen nation, and at the same time greatly reduce CO_2 emissions' (Facebook, ÖVP, 02.08.2019). Energy efficiency is also addressed in the reduction of emissions: 'Radical measures are needed, not a bit of nit-picking. We need radical measures in the area of energy efficiency, in reducing emissions and in protecting natural resources' (Parliamentary session no. 3, 13.11.2019 (Sonja Hammerschmid, SPÖ) p. 72). This leads also to the sub-area *energy*. Here, both parties agree that renewable energies must be expanded. With regard to anti-nuclear power, nothing has changed among the parties either. As already mentioned earlier, at least since the Chernobyl nuclear plant exploded, the prevailing opinion in Austria rejects the country's commercial usage of nuclear energy.

Indeed, nuclear energy emerges as central to the understanding of climate change during this second period. To provide context, it's essential to outline the rejection of nuclear power in Austria. Until the mid-1970s, the implementation of nuclear power was rarely questioned. However, protests against the construction and operation of nuclear power plants began to gain momentum, particularly at the local level, in the following years. Research suggests that party-political disputes played a significant role in the outcome of the referendum in Austria regarding the commissioning of the Zwentendorf nuclear power plant (Kolb, 2007, p. 255). Bayer (2014) highlights that the ÖVP, which was basically in favour of nuclear power in the 1970s, refrained from mobilising its voters for the referendum, while the SPÖ mobilised against nuclear power for the Referendum. He further states that '[t]he result of the referendum also indicates, among other things, that the positioning of political elites – and not the agitation of anti-nuclear activists – was decisive for the short-term shift in public opinion' (Bayer, 2014, p. 177). It is noted that after the 1978 referendum, both parties declared their support for the result. However, the SPÖ shifted back towards supporting the operation of the Zwetendorf nuclear power station and the employment of nuclear energy in Austria under the SPÖ's all-party government from 1973 to 1983 and the SPÖ- FPÖ coalition of the Sinowatz government (until the reactor catastrophe of Chernobyl). During this time, the ÖVP appeared open to collaboration with the government. The FPÖ positioned itself as an anti-nuclear party yet was unwilling to jeopardise its participation in the government over the nuclear issue. It was only after the Chernobyl reactor catastrophe that the ambivalence surrounding nuclear energy in Austrian politics came to an end (Lackner, 2000, p. 224). Bayer (2014) emphasised that the formation of the anti-nuclear consensus in Austria should be seen as a top-down process and refers to a mystification of the 1978 referendum.

The energy topic takes centre stage in various areas, particularly in transportation, where the ÖVP predominantly advocates for hydrogen technology. There's a specific mention of the goal to generate 100 per cent of electricity from renewable

sources by 2030. Apart from CO_2 reduction, the focus is also on job creation. Nuclear power continues to be rejected, with the aim of achieving 100 per cent renewable electricity generation in Austria. Both parties frequently discuss the concept of transformation in this context: 'Energy and climate policy is currently in a state of transformation' (SPÖ, 2019, p. 18) and furthermore especially the SPÖ brings in (system) change and shaping or shapability (Gestaltbarkeit) of society through the climate justice paper.

Discussing party similarities and differences

In the preceding sections, I highlighted some differences between the parties. It's evident that both parties address and shape most areas, ultimately agreeing on the necessity of climate protection measures and supporting the expansion of renewable energies, while maintaining a principled rejection of nuclear power. Climate heating and the sub-area of social justice were prominently associated with the SPÖ, while the concept of the eco-social market economy was championed by the ÖVP. In the second period, only the ÖVP advocated for a 'no sticks, just carrots' approach in climate change politics, advocating strongly for policies focused on incentives rather than prohibitions or bans for climate protection. Table 4.6 illustrates once again which areas received the most attention from the SPÖ and the ÖVP (from top to bottom).

One further aspect that stood out during the coding process is the large difference in the number of codes in the different texts. Specifically, the SPÖ has almost twice as many social media posts and codes as the ÖVP. Ninety-seven codes for a sum of 92 posts were defined in the coding of the SPÖ, while 56 codes for a sum of 54 posts were defined in the coding of the ÖVP. Table 4.5 shows the percentage of posts about climate change of the total Facebook posts of both parties, where the SPÖ with 1.43 per cent posts a slightly higher rate on climate change than the ÖVP with 1.03 per cent.

Moreover, the document 'Klimagerechtigkeit. Das 100 Punkte Konzept für unsere Zukunft' (Climate Justice. The 100-point concept for our future) published by the SPÖ in 2019 contains a 71-page action plan for sustainable and socially just climate protection in Austria (SPÖ, 2019). This document indicates that the SPÖ is extensively concerned with climate protection and wants to play a decisive role in

Table 4.6 The top five areas that received the most attention from the two parties in their climate change communication (most at the top, less at the bottom)

SPÖ	*ÖVP*
Social justice	Energy
Future	No sticks, just carrots
Energy	Sustainability
Emission reduction	Emission reduction
Climate Change As War	Eco-social market economy

the development of corresponding policies. With its title highlighting a major focus of the SPÖ in the climate change discourse, this document revolves around social justice and equality.

The ÖVP also acknowledges the disadvantages stemming from climate protection and aims for policies that are as fair as possible. However, they place greater emphasis on economic aspects. In other words, they advocate for 'fair' climate protection by ensuring the continued functioning of the economy. They reject prohibitions or additional taxes as climate policies and view climate protection as vitally important, as reflected in the following quote:

> The ÖVP sees environmental protection as an imperative: "I would like to conclude by stating one thing here: Let's move away from the discussion of the last days and weeks, namely to think in terms of bans, let's think in terms of commandments! – Environmental protection is an imperative for the future".
>
> (Parliamentary session no. 15, 21.03.2018, (Johann Rädler, ÖVP), p. 80)

The SPÖ, in contrast, like many centre-left parties, advocates state intervention with the aim of establishing equal rights.

In the analysed text, the ÖVP refers sometimes to people's common sense (Hausverstand), which – as discussed earlier – can be interpreted as a sign of anti-intellectualism or, as Wodak (2015) calls it, the *arrogance of ignorance* that is often identified in the rhetoric of populist far-right actors. Indeed, in the literature a shift to the right in the Austrian party landscape was already discussed in 2018 (Wodak, 2018). This shift is primarily linked to the fact that the ÖVP has taken over various topics or concrete demands of the FPÖ, especially in relation to migration policy. Therefore, the joint government coalition of the two parties (Oct 2017–May 2019) was no surprise. Wodak (2018) speaks of a shameless normalisation of right-wing populist agendas. Looking back to the literature on the theoretical framework, or more specifically to the literature on populism and the far-right, one can also see some of the characteristics of the so-called fourth ideological wave starting in the 21st century (see e.g. Brown et al., 2021; Ivănescu & Filimon, 2022; Minkenberg, 2013; Mondon, 2013; Mudde, 2019). During this wave, populist radical right parties have become acceptable for coalitions by 'mainstream right' or centre-right parties, their ideas are increasingly discussed also in the political centre, and corresponding policies – possibly in a slightly moderate form – are adopted (Mudde, 2019, pp. 20–21). In fact, Mudde (2019, p. 22) specifically names Austria and former chancellor Sebastian Kurz as one example where populist radical right politics 'has become largely detached from populist radical right parties' and various '(right-wing) parties now advance a nativist, authoritarian, and populist discourse'. While the discourse about migration provides many indications of mainstreaming of the populist far right in Austria (Wodak, 2018), in my research on the understanding of climate change, I would need a more specific research focus in that direction to identify the implications of this development. As mentioned

above, especially when the ÖVP speaks of common sense ('Hausverstand') regarding climate change and its policies, I interpreted it as a hint, since – as will be shown – the FPÖ and other PFRPs use the same or very similar argumentation schemes.

Chapter summary

This chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of climate change communication by mainstream parties in Germany, Spain, and Austria. Initially, I provided an overview of contemporary political and environmental developments in each country, setting the context for understanding climate change issues. Subsequently, I delved into the policy fields of climate change, examining various documents including social media posts, policy documents, parliamentary sessions, coalition papers, and party programs.

In Germany, there is a notable emphasis on economic and technological aspects within the policy field. While there is agreement between centre-left and centre-right parties on many issues regarding Germany's responsibility for climate protection, the policy landscape became more diversified between 2016 and 2020, incorporating topics such as German forests and climate protection opportunities.

In Spain, the focus is primarily on the urgency of addressing climate change and related transformation and transition issues. Unlike in Germany, there are more differences between centre-left and centre-right parties in their communication. The policy field expanded during the period, encompassing subjects like ecology and justice, as well as sustainability and renewable energies. A shift in government from the right-wing PP to the left-wing PSOE during this period likely contributed to a stronger emphasis on social issues in climate change discourse.

Similarly, in Austria, there is a strong emphasis on sustainability issues and emissions reduction within the policy field. Like Spain, there are discrepancies in the communication between centre-left and centre-right parties. The policy field expanded to include topics such as investments in climate protection, with the ÖVP particularly focusing on incentives rather than prohibitions. Additionally, there was an increasing focus on the concept of a climate crisis in the discourse during this period.

Notes

1 All quotes pertaining to the German case are originally in German, and the translations provided are done by myself.
2 All references to parliamentary sessions in this chapter regard sessions of the German Bundestag (Deutscher Bundestag).
3 All quotes pertaining to the Spanish case are originally in Spanish, and the translations provided are done by myself.
4 All references to parliamentary sessions in this chapter regard sessions of the Spanish Congress of Deputies (Congreso De Los Diputados).
5 To put this number in perspective: The EU has 446.5 inhabitants (2020), which means that Austria represents 1.99 per cent of the total EU population.
6 Emissions that are not covered by the European Union's *emissions* trading system.

7 All quotes pertaining to the Austrian case are originally in German, and the translations provided are done by myself.
8 All references to parliamentary sessions in this chapter regard sessions of the National Council of Austria (Nationalrates der Republik Österreich).

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5 Understanding far-rights climate stand

Hostility, environmental self-perception, and climate obstruction

After examining the policy fields of climate change in the previous chapter for the three countries, I now transition to the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of the PFRPs, employing a two-step approach. As outlined in Chapter 3, I first identify discourse topics through entry-level analysis and then define various discursive strategies and argumentation schemes (*topoi*) through in-depth analysis.

To begin, I collected social media posts by searching the term ‘climate’ on the official party accounts. For Germany, this included @alternativefuerde (Facebook) and @AfD (Twitter); for Spain, @VOXEspana (Facebook) and @vox_es (Twitter); and for Austria, @fpoe (Facebook) and @FPOE_TV (Twitter). Figure 5.1 illustrates the presence of climate change discourse on these social media accounts.[1]

The AfD posted a total of 132 times on Facebook and Twitter combined (63 on Facebook and 69 on Twitter), significantly more than Vox and the FPÖ. On Facebook alone, the AfD made 3463 posts between 2016 and 2020, accounting for 1.82 per cent of their total posts addressing climate change. In comparison, the SPD addressed climate change in 4.04 per cent of their posts, while the CDU/CSU addressed it in 1.33 per cent of theirs. Vox had a total of 23 social media posts about climate change, with seven on Facebook. Out of 8015 Facebook posts from 2016 to 2020, only 0.09 per cent focused on climate change. In contrast, the PSOE addressed climate change in 1.0 per cent of their posts, and the PP in 0.21 per cent. Similarly, the FPÖ had 30 Facebook posts related to climate change, with no mentions on Twitter. Out of 6337 total Facebook posts during the same period, 0.47 per cent addressed climate change. In comparison, the SPÖ addressed it in 1.43 per cent of their posts, and the ÖVP in 1.03 per cent.

In September 2019, the AfD experienced a significant surge in climate change discourse across their social media platforms, likely influenced by various actions of the FFF movement, such as the organisation of the youth climate summit. This uptick aligns with peaks observed in other German political parties and corresponds with the peak in Google trend data for Germany. In contrast, Vox’s Facebook and Twitter channels exhibited comparatively low engagement with climate change, although a noticeable increase was observed in 2019, mirroring the overall trend of climate change salience in Spanish political discourse on Facebook.

The peak in August of that year did not align with major peaks observed in other relevant Spanish political parties, which instead peaked in December 2019.

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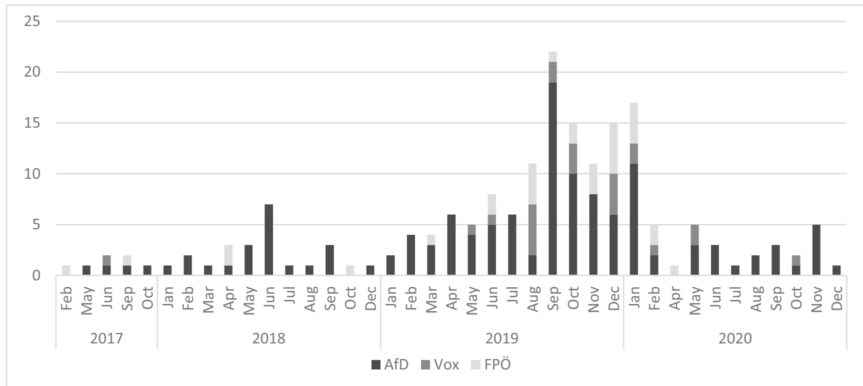

Figure 5.1 Number of posts by PFRPs (AfD, Vox, and FPÖ) on the topic of climate change on Facebook and Twitter

However, Vox demonstrated increased activity in December 2019, coinciding with the UN Climate Change Conference COP 25 held in Madrid. Generally, in Spain, a higher salience of climate change in the social media communication of political parties corresponds to increased attention from Vox on the topic.

Notably, the FPÖ's peak engagement with climate change does not coincide with those of other Austrian parties (see Figure 4.10 in Chapter 4). For instance, during the peak month of September 2019, the FPÖ only posted about climate change once.[2] Instead, the FPÖ saw a peak in December 2019, with five posts coinciding with the UN Climate Change Conference COP 25. However, the content of these posts varied widely, ranging from criticisms of Greta Thunberg to discussions on climate change as a reason for asylum, and debates on nuclear energy policies.

Transitioning to the DHA of the three parties, I delve into each PFRP with comprehensive detail in dedicated sections.

The AfD against the climate

As outlined in Chapter 3, the analysis included the AfD party manifesto along with two election programs, as well as social media posts and press releases from the AfD's official website. The AfD's manifesto, composed in 2016, comprises 14 chapters, with only Chapter 12 titled 'Energy Policy', directly addressing climate change. While the manifesto touches upon various topics related to environmental protection and nature conservation, the term 'climate change' appears only once. Furthermore, the IPCC's relevance in connection with energy policy, particularly renewable energy, is questioned and criticised. Chapter 13, focusing on nature conservation, environmental protection, agriculture, and forestry, discusses issues commonly associated with climate by mainstream actors; however, the AfD does not link these issues with climate aspects.

In the two election programmes, namely the 'Election programme of the Alternative for Germany for the German Bundestag on September 24, 2017' ('Wahlprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag am 24. September 2017', resolved at the Federal Party Congress in Cologne on April 22/23, 2017) and the 'Programme for the election to the 9th European Parliament 2019' ('Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 9. Europäischen Parlament 2019'), climate change was present as an issue.

Entry-level analysis of discourse topics

In the data corpus of the AfD, a diverse range of topics was identified. Table 5.1 highlights the discourse topics that were most prominent.

These discourse topics indicate that climate change is primarily addressed with a significant amount of criticism towards climate protection measures and policies. In the first discourse topic regarding the critique of renewable energies and the energy transition, the AfD emphasises various dangers and risks for Germany's economy as well as for individual citizens. The AfD argues that transitioning away from coal and nuclear power is deemed 'unrealistic' and poses a threat to Germany as a business hub. Concerns are raised regarding the safety and reliability of renewable energies, suggesting potential blackouts and predicting 'mass unemployment' due to the energy shift. Consequently, the party asserts that electricity insecurity may prompt major companies to relocate their production abroad, leading to the 'de-industrialization' of Germany. The AfD advocates for an energy mix comprising coal, mineral oil, natural gas, hydropower, and nuclear power.

With regard to energy policy, but also beyond that, the government also receives a lot of criticism for its climate policy. For instance, the AfD contends that '[t]his energy & climate policy of the #FederalGovernment lacks every ounce of common sense & decency towards workers'[3] (Twitter, 17.01.2020). The reference to the absence of common sense can be categorised as an 'arrogance of ignorance' (Wodak, 2015). In essence, as mentioned earlier, this argument is often used to disregard professional judgment or scientific evidence (anti-intellectualism), and it is notably widespread, although not solely, in the rhetoric of PFRPs. The AfD

Table 5.1 Topics and their weighting in the AfD's analysed texts into discourses about climate change. 'Frequencies' signifies the number of times the respective topic is raised in total

Topic	*Frequencies*
Criticism of renewable energies and energy transition	55
Criticism of climate politics and the government	26
Criticism of the EU	17
Criticism of the Green Party	16
CO_2 tax	11
Criticism of climate activists	6

contends that the government's climate policy would escalate costs for citizens without effectively addressing global climate change.

The AfD primarily associates the EU with inflation, expressing suspicion towards the European Green Deal, which they describe as 'clumsy actionism' and scientifically unfounded. They argue that both national and EU climate policies jeopardise Germany's prosperity and emphasise the importance of Germany's sovereignty. The party demands a reassessment of the EU's climate policy and calls for abandoning common climate targets. According to the AfD, the EU's climate policy undermines its ability to compete with China and the US.

The AfD's critique of climate protection actors, such as the Green Party or climate activists, is both vociferous and at times dehumanising. They spare no insults or accusations, particularly directed towards these actors. For instance, the party initiated a campaign titled 'Stop the Greens – Protect the Environment' ('Grüne stoppen – Umwelt schützen'), aiming to advocate for environmental protection by halting the Green Party's influence. The criticism towards these actors, along with the government, is further elaborated below within the framework of discursive strategies, offering insights into the nature of this critique. The AfD vehemently opposes proposed CO_2 emission reductions, asserting that CO_2 positively impacts plant development and global food supply. They reject the idea of a CO_2 tax or pricing, advocating for CO_2 to be seen beyond its role as a pollutant.

Overall, the AfD consistently disseminates criticism of climate adaptation and mitigation policies, actors, and projects, especially through social media and press releases. The aforementioned points indicate that the German PFRP opposes alterations in European and national policies, pricing mechanisms, and economic or individual behaviours related to climate change adaptation or mitigation, which have been, are, or should be discussed politically or socially. Their discourse often portrays the middle class and employees as the victims of these climate policies, reflecting a common narrative among populist far-right actors wherein elites enact policies detrimental to ordinary people. This recontextualisation of discourse surrounding climate change aligns with familiar patterns of far-right rhetoric. Further insights into various strategies and argumentation schemes will be presented in the following section.

In-depth analysis of discourse strategies

For the in-depth analysis I rely on various discursive strategies to delve deeper into self- and other-presentation, drawing primarily from the works of Ruth Wodak, Martin Reisigl, and Michał Krzyżanowski. These strategies – nomination, predication, perspectivation, and mitigation/intensification – were introduced in Chapter 3, and I now explore their key findings in greater detail.

The strategy of nomination asks how persons, events, and actions are referred to linguistically in the discourse about climate change in the AfD communication. Particularly noteworthy (and already mentioned in the entry-level analysis) is the high presence of actors with whom they disagree on the topic of climate change, particularly the Green Party. Considering not only the strategy of nomination but

also the strategy of predication that regards the characteristics which are attributed to social actors, events, or actions, I shed light on some aspects of the representation of the most present actors in their discourse about climate change. The Green Party is portrayed in a very negative light and often linked to the left-wing political spectrum, which is per se rejected by the AfD. For example, they are described as 'deep-left', 'eco socialists', as 'enemies of freedom with an increasing tendency towards totalitarianism', or as having a stunted understanding of democracy, who implement anti-economic policies The following press release quote exemplifies how the Green Party is depicted: 'The Greens want to waste billions and billions of taxpayers' money on measures such as climate protection, the effectiveness of which has not even been rudimentarily proven' (Press release, 18.11.2019). As previously mentioned, the AfD's campaign titled 'Stop the Green Party! Save the environment' positions the Green Party as detrimental to the environment, contrasting their own stance as protective. This campaign emerged following the 'Dresden Declaration' in 2019, where the AfD, ahead of crucial state elections in eastern Germany, asserted its stance on the environment and climate. The party's publication denies the impact of CO_2 on global warming and asserts that climate protection is 'expensive, useless and ineffective' (AfD, 2019, Europawahlprogramm, p. 4). While vehemently opposing climate protection measures, including renewable energies like wind and solar power, the AfD portrays itself as 'genuine environmentalists'. Additionally, in 2019, the party organised an 'alternative climate symposium', inviting purported experts who challenge climate mitigation efforts (Götze, 2019). The AfD's stance is further bolstered by the support of climate denial group EIKE (Europäisches Institut für Klima und Energie).

The federal government is also mentioned and criticised frequently by the AfD. They often refer to costs for the people which arise from a supposedly unnecessary climate policy. As victims of the climate policy of the federal government, the middle class, the motorists, the German/domestic economy, and the car industry are mentioned. For example, the AfD writes in a press release:

> With its absurd climate policy, the German government is making a decisive contribution to the further impoverishment of the middle class. . . . In its [the federal government] delusion that it has to tax CO_2, the German government is taking advantage of car drivers.
>
> (Press release, 27.09.2019)

Alongside these two actors, climate activist Greta Thunberg also joins the ranks as a subject of their criticism. She is described as a 'radical, underaged Swedish girl', 'truant', 'strategically managed by PR people', or a 'staged youthful icon'. Vowles and Hultman (2022, p. 424) indeed argued that a story 'about a girl being manipulated by the establishment, including her, in Sweden, well-known parents' in particular goes down well with readers of far-right media. Just as the two authors explained in the case of Swedish far-right media, in AfD discourse about climate change Thunberg is described as emotionally unstable, and well-worn stereotypes of female hysteria are attributed to her, opposed to masculine rationality (see e.g.

Forchtner & Özvatan, 2022 for similar anti-Thunberg arguments in the AfD communication). Research highlights the far-right media's propensity to make fun of Thunberg and the portrayal of her as someone who should not be taken seriously (Vowles & Hultman, 2021, 2022). Indeed, and as I will show later in particular in Section 'The FPÖ against the climate', such portraying of Greta Thunberg and other (female) climate activists is one of the commonalities of populist far-right actors.

Moreover, in line with Küppers' (2022) analysis of the AfD membership magazine *Kompakt*, ad hominem attacks on climate scientists are to a large extent absent in the current investigation (except for a few outputs on fake news regarding the court case Ball against Mann (see Section 'The FPÖ against the climate')). In contrast to the findings of this study, Küppers (2022) refers to a low presence of attacks on the political establishment. The analysed social media communication in particular of the AfD points to different results as the AfD spreads a lot of criticism towards actors such as the federal government, the EU, and party as well as non-party actors of the left wing (in particular the Green Party). Notably, such a polarising rhetoric towards the national Green Party has also been observed for the Sweden Democrats by Hultman et al. (2020).

In comparison to other actors, the AfD also describes itself in its discourses, for example, as the 'citizens party' (Bürgerpartei), or as a 'refuge for homeless conservatives', 'the only party that promotes civic and liberal values today' ('einzige Partei, die heute bürgerliche und freiheitliche Werte'), or 'AfD remains the advocate of the little people who already live here and the common good' (Press release, 11.06.2019). Regarding the environment, the AfD presents itself as a 'Civic-conservative force for an environmental policy that does not serve the climate industry alone, but protects our homeland, its people, and its nature' (Press release, 19.09.2019). Moreover, 'honest and responsible environmental protection is very close to the AfD's heart' (Press release, 20.09.2019). Many aspects of the AfD's climate change communication are a combination of traditional 'local' frames (e.g. energy transition) and 'global' frames (e.g. criticism of Greta Thunberg, withdrawal from the Paris Agreement). The creation of a dichotomous world view where PFRPs are the heroes and actors working for climate protection are the enemies can be viewed as melodramatic storytelling, which will be addressed in detail in the discussion in Chapter 6.

Moreover, drawing from these insights, I identified the in-group and out-group delineated within their discourse. Their in-group encompasses civic conservatives, the populace ('das Volk'), nature, homeland, the common folk ('die kleine Mann/die kleinen Leute'), German interests, and self-proclaimed responsible environmentalists. Conversely, their out-group comprises the elites, the Climate Industry, the EU, the Federal Government of Germany, the Green Party, eco-socialists, and the climate movement (refer to Figure 5.2).

This corresponds with the literature on the theorising of populism and climate change and concretely on the approach of the ideological agenda of PFRPs that 'the people' are ruled by a corrupt and illegitimate liberal, cosmopolitan elite. While the main targets here are immigration and, in Europe, the EU, 'the climate change

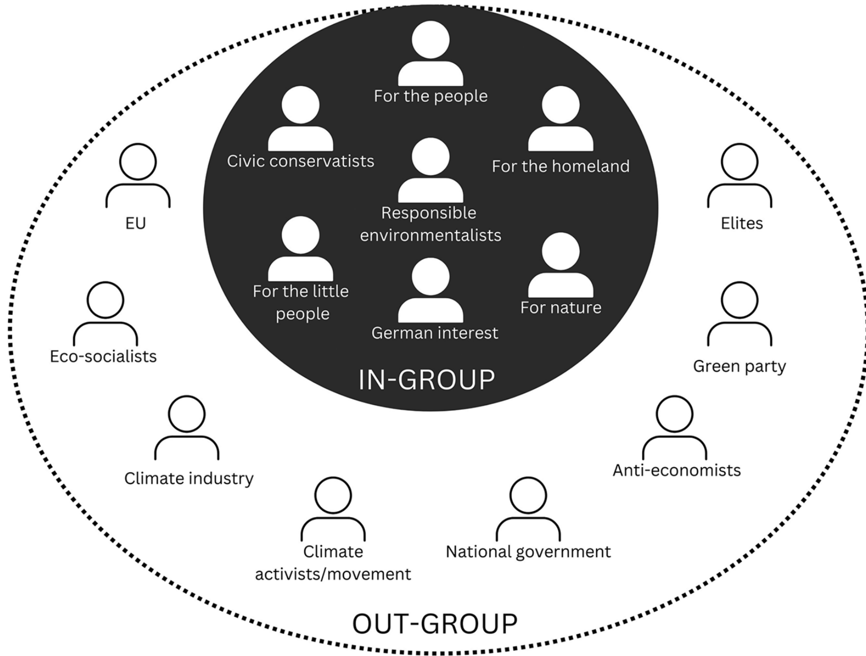

Figure 5.2 In-group and out-group of the AfD

agenda fits in well as collateral damage' (Lockwood, 2018, p. 726; see also van Dijk, 1984). For example, Hultman et al. (2020) describe the same rhetoric for the Sweden Democrats, who present themselves as a party for the man on the streets, rebelling against the establishment. The arguments of the Sweden Democrats that climate policies are bad for the national economy are also very similar to those of the AfD.

In this discourse, the AfD uses terms such as 'climate protection mania' (Klimaschutz-Wahn), 'populist climate actionism' ('populistischer Klima-Aktionismus'), 'pseudo climate protection' (pseudo-Klimaschutz), 'car hatred policy' ('Autohasspolitik'), or 'hare-brained climate policy' ('hanebüchene Klimapolitik'). Many of the ideological anthroponyms identified are also considered keywords for metaphors on religion (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017, p. 456), which – as outlined in Chapter 2 – are used especially to downplay the reality and urgency of climate change and 'conceptualize transitions from climate change belief to scepticism' (p. 452). More concretely, such terms include 'climate hysterics', 'eco-socialist world saviours' ('Ökosozialisitische Weltenretter'), 'German do-gooders' (deutsche Gutmenschen), 'left-green climate religion' ('linksgrünen Klimareligion) or 'climate believers' ('Klimagläubige').

After providing a descriptive overview of the AfD's discourse about climate change by examining strategies of nomination and prediction, I continue to discuss their *topoi* in more detail to give a thorough grasp of their argumentation strategies.

The primary and most present argumentation scheme is the *topos of economic harm* (‘if climate change policies/measures harm the economy, then we/Germany should not consider them’). The AfD emphasises potential economic repercussions for Germany and occasionally the EU owing to climate policy, climate policies, or climate protection measures. Here, a number of factors, like economic success, employment, industry, or global competition, come into play. Climate measures – especially those proposed by the Green Party, but also of the federal government – are presented with high costs and an additional financial burden for the citizens.

> Should the Greens actually take on the responsibility of implementing their climate measures, they will ask the little man to pay. Above all, they will be at the expense of workers and families who are already groaning under the enormous tax and contribution burden. Electricity will become more expensive. An even higher CO_2 tax will be imposed. Driving and meat consumption will become more expensive.
>
> (Press release, 18.11.2019)

The AfD opposes fees or taxes specifically targeting CO_2 emissions, driving, and meat consumption, concurrently criticising the Green Party. In another press release, they state: ‘On Friday, the German government’s climate cabinet will meet to once again decide on additional financial burdens for Germany’s citizens under the guise of saving the climate’ (Press release, 19.09.2019). These arguments are further emphasised when the AfD indirectly suggests that the Bundestag aims to save the entire world, implying that this endeavour comes at the expense of taxpayers: ‘The world is supposed to be healed by the German climate system. This megalomania at #taxpayer expense must finally come to an end. #AfD #Klima #Bundestag #Berlin’ (Twitter, AfDimBundestag, 08.01.2020). Regarding this topos of economic harm, the AfD manifesto and election programs marginally addressed jobs and industry, but these topics were notably present in their social media and press releases. Particularly when discussing specific aspects of climate policies, such as the transition away from coal and towards renewable energy sources, the AfD highlights concerns about the ‘de-industrialisation’ of Germany. They argue that such de-industrialisation would lead to job losses, especially for those working in the coal industry. For instance, a press release on the decision to close coal-fired power plants expresses concerns about investment security, rising prices, and the potential relocation of production abroad by large companies, which could result in deindustrialisation and job losses: ‘Investment security in Germany suffers from electricity uncertainty and rising prices. Large companies are considering relocating their production abroad, which results in deindustrialisation with loss of value added and jobs’ (Press release, 16.01.2020). The AfD often uses phrases like ‘mass unemployment’ (‘Massenarbeitslosigkeit’) or warns of the ‘loss of millions of jobs’, writes about the ‘endangerment of hundreds of thousands of jobs’ due to the coal phase out (Press release, 19.09.2019), and claims that ‘[t]he pseudo climate protection is a programme for industrial and job destruction’ (Press release, 11.09.2019).

The CO_2 tax under discussion is likewise viewed by the AfD as a danger to the German economy and prosperity. They assert that the introduction of a CO_2 tax, along with other policies like the nuclear phase-out and the energy transition, jeopardises numerous jobs in industries: 'The hasty introduction of a CO_2 tax, as well as the hasty nuclear phase-out and the so-called energy turnaround, endanger our economy and our prosperity' (Press release, 02.09.2019). This opposition to climate protection measures due to perceived economic costs aligns with what Van Rensburg's (2015) terms 'response scepticism'.

A closer look points extensively to the *topos of primary obstruction* ('if climate change or such policies are somehow doubtful, then there is no need to act'), where various characteristics of climate obstruction are observed that correspond to Ekberg et al.'s (2022) 'primary obstruction'. In fact, arguments where the AfD claims that CO_2 is not a pollutant but indispensable for all life are raised in this context more than once. Accordingly, the AfD argues that since CO_2 should not be framed as a pollutant, CO_2 emissions should therefore not be reduced by Germany. For instance, they write: 'We will end the perception of CO_2 only as a pollutant and refrain from any unilateral action by Germany to reduce CO_2 emissions' (AfD, 2016, p. 157). In other words, the AfD implies that the science regarding CO_2 is wrong, as they focus only on the argument that CO_2 is essential to all life and relate increasing CO_2 levels as causal to increasing world food harvests: 'Without CO_2, a main component of photosynthesis, there would be no plants, animals or humans. Not least due to the rising CO_2 content in the atmosphere, world food harvests have increased significantly' (AfD, 2019, p. 79). Such a denial of the core meaning of climate change, that is, that climate change is occurring, human-made, and harmful for nature and human and non-human animals, corresponds also to Van Rensburg's (2015) 'evidence scepticism' (for a detailed analysis of climate change denial present in the AfD party newspaper *Kompact*, see Küppers, 2022).

Moreover, the AfD questions the scientific validity of analyses, data, and statements from the IPCC, particularly criticising the calculation models as inadequate for climate research: 'The statements of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that climate change is mainly human-made are not scientifically proven. They are based solely on calculation models that cannot correctly describe either the past or the current climate' (AfD, 2016, p. 87). This aspect of their denial corresponds to Van Rensburg's (2015) 'process scepticism', criticising the process of knowledge production in climate sciences.

The party refers also to the weather to obstruct climate change mitigation: 'The claim of a "third warmest #summer since records has no basis whatsoever!" Our environmental spokesman Karsten @HilseMdb clears up the current #fakenews. #climate #climate change #climate crisis #AfD #fff' (Twitter, AfDimBundestag, 01.09.2019). Indeed, the AfD asserts that weather and climate have always undergone changes, entirely unrelated to human activity: 'The climate is changing as long as the earth exists. Climate protection policy is based on hypothetical climate models based on computer-based simulations by the IPCC' (AfD, 2016, p. 156). In the subsequent example, the AfD posits that climate change has

been a constant throughout history, dismissing the notion of a stable climate over extended periods:

> The climate in all climate zones of the earth − from tropical to polar − has been changing according to the laws of nature ever since the earth has existed. There is no such thing as a constant climate over long periods of time. We doubt, for good reasons, that humans have had a significant influence on recent climate change, especially the current warming, or could even control it.
>
> (AfD, 2019, p. 79)

The AfD specifically rejects the Paris Agreement of 2015 and demands that Germany terminates it or withdraws from it. Furthermore, they also reject the German government's Climate Protection Plan 2050 and all EU measures that justify a reduction in CO_2 emissions on the grounds of protecting the climate. Both *topoi* (*topos of economic harm* and *topos of primary obstruction*) include different forms of climate obstruction categorised in the literature (Ekberg et al., 2022; Küppers, 2022; Rahmstorf, 2005; Van Rensburg, 2015)

The *topos of energy supply* ('if Germany replaces coal and nuclear energy with renewable energies, then energy supply will be a risk') posits that renewable energies are highly uncertain, citing dependence on weather and seasons as too unreliable:

> The "renewable energies" wind and sun depend on the weather, the time of day and the seasons, and their yields cannot be calculated. It is not economically feasible to store electricity to balance the constantly fluctuating "renewables" up to longer dark periods without wind and sun.
>
> (AfD, 2019, p. 80)

Accordingly, the AfD presents the consequences of renewable energies for the environment and the people as very risky. According to the AfD, it is getting harder and harder to keep the interconnected grid stable and

> [t]he reason for this is the increasing complexity of the grid as a result of the energy transition due to the permanent shutdown of large power plants and the increasing unsteady feed-in of renewable energies. This means that the probability of a large-scale and long-lasting grid failure, a so-called blackout, is increasing.
>
> (Facebook, 22.12.2018)

Indeed, they call for the continuation of coal, nuclear, and gas-fired power plants not only due to energy uncertainty but also due to low power densities:

> Due to their low power densities, these "renewables" have a high land and material consumption and are harmful to humans, nature and the

> environment on a large scale. Coal, nuclear and gas-fired power plants should remain in operation as long as their operators consider it sensible under market-economy conditions.
>
> (AfD, 2019, p. 80)

Overall, renewable energies are not framed as a possible or realistic replacement for the coal or nuclear industry.

When the AfD talks about climate activism, the *topos of democracy* ('if climate activism and climate protection continues, then it is a threat for our democracy') stands out. Here they criticise climate activism as well as those actors working for climate protection and climate politics in general as undemocratic. For example, they refer to an 'eco-dictatorship' suggesting that well-educated and competence-oriented pupils may unwittingly support such a regime (Press release, 24.01.2020). Greta Thunberg frequently features in their social media posts and linked press releases, where she is accused of left-wing extremism that jeopardises not only prosperity but also the liberal social order: 'Thunberg's radical ecological demands combine precisely with the old familiar left-wing extremist hatred of "state and capital" to form a dangerous brew that endangers our prosperity, social peace, and liberal social order' (Press release, 20.09.2019). Similarly, the German climate activist Luisa Neubauer is targeted in AfD communications on climate change, albeit less frequently, with accusations of disregarding democratic principles:

> So the federal government is terrorising young people's space of freedom. Now I will certainly not be suspected of defending the disastrous work of this so-called "government", but if anyone is terrorising anything here, it is self-proclaimed activists of the ilk of Luisa Neubauer, who try to impose their own completely abstruse and fact-resistant will on all citizens in defiance of the rules of democratic will-formation. What presumption!F.
>
> (Facebook, 16.01.2020)

Moreover, they also accuse the Green Party of being a danger to democracy when they describe them as 'deep-left, eco-socialist enemies of freedom with an increasing tendency towards totalitarianism' (Facebook, 24.09.2019). Furthermore, the AfD speaks of the 'climate madness revealing its totalitarian approach' (Press release, 30.09.2019) and that behind climate activism hides 'an ideology that wants to abolish the free market and "develop" democracy. An ideology that instrumentalises immature children as moral leverage to achieve its authoritarian goals' (Press release, 23.01.2020). In fact, Küppers (2022) found in 10.3 per cent of her data corpus a warning from the AfD of an 'eco-dictatorship' and a 'totalitarian system' employed by climate policies.

The AfD espouses environmental protection while rejecting climate protection policies, asserting that the environment and climate are separate issues. This stance is encapsulated in the *topos of environment* ('if we want to save our livelihood, then we must protect our environment'). They focus on landscape preservation, air quality, pollution reduction, and noise control in their environmental agenda.

Emphasising the need to protect the homeland, they criticise 'gigantic wind farms' for encroaching on nature and cultural landscapes (Press release, 19.09.2019). This aligns with literature on the far right and environmentalism, which claims that such actors concentrate on the direct environment or ecosystem of the people, which has to be protected against capitalist or materialist globalist forces (Forchtner & Özvatan, 2019). In AfD's view, climate change and those advocating for climate protection are seen as part of the global elite, whose actions are believed to undermine the interests of the people.

With the *topos of pro nuclear energy* ('if nuclear energy is a safe/environmentally friendly technology, then we should stick to it'), the AfD underlines the need to continue with nuclear energy as it is a safe technology. Indeed, it refers to the overall safety of nuclear power plants several times and claims that there can also be solutions for nuclear waste. They do not point to a concrete solution, but refer to the example of Finland, which supports nuclear power:

> The use of fossil fuels can be reduced in the medium and long term primarily by continuing to use emission-free nuclear power. The generation of electricity through nuclear power is one of the safest technologies today. There are solutions for the disposal of highly radioactive fuel elements, the so-called nuclear waste, which is deliberately kept open in Germany. Plants in Finland show that geologically safe final storage is feasible. . . . The AfD demands that Germany again participate in the far advanced development of new types of nuclear reactors.
>
> (AfD, 2019, pp. 80–81)

In this instance, they also highlight the emission-free nature of nuclear power. Additionally, they propose Germany's involvement in the advancement of nuclear technology. Moreover, the AfD contends that the decision to phase out nuclear power lacks factual justification: 'The hasty decisions to phase out nuclear power in 2002 and 2011 were not factually justified and were economically harmful' (AfD, 2016, p. 164).

In sum, the AfD's communication regarding climate change is present in all text genres and their topics and arguments can be found throughout. In their social media and press releases they notably use a harsher tone in communication than in the party and election programmes. Content-wise the AfD expresses many concerns about climate protection policies in a rather strong way. Figure 5.3 provides an overview of the topoi identified and their respective presence, which is based on the number of codes.

As can be seen, the *topos of economic harm* (53 codes) is one of the most salient argumentation-schemes, as the focus relies on economic arguments in the sense that climate policies are bad for the prosperity, economy, and industry of Germany. In the *topos of primary obstruction* (43 codes), various strategies are employed to contest the existence of human-caused climate change, including hostile discourses towards actors who support climate actions (e.g. the Green Party, climate activists). These findings correspond with previous research claiming that 'response

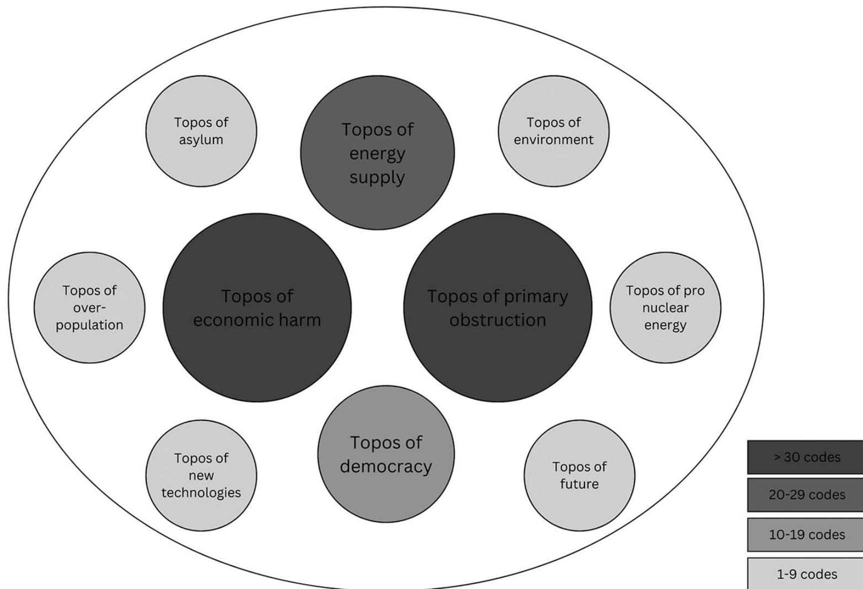

Figure 5.3 Visual representation of *topoi* in the AfD's discourse about climate change

scepticism is employed more frequently than outright denial of the scientific evidence' (Küppers, 2022, p. 2).

The *topos of democracy* (14 codes) places a lot of criticism on activities that fall within the umbrella of climate activism and labels such activities and actors as undemocratic. The *topos of energy supply* (20 codes) highlights risks and dangers of renewable energies and regards them as unstable and an unsuitable substitute for coal and nuclear energy. Indeed, the *topos of pro nuclear energy* (6 codes) highlights nuclear power as safe technology that should not be abandoned. According to *the topos of environment* (7 codes) home and environmental protection are important and the AfD wants to stand up for them.

Other topoi identified in the discourse about climate change of the AfD, albeit less prominently (as indicated by the small number of codes), include the following: the *topos of future* (4 codes) suggests that climate protection measures and policies could jeopardise Germany's future. The *topos of asylum* (4 codes) asserts that claims for asylum cannot be based on climate change. The *topos of overpopulation* (3 codes) views the growth of the global population as a primary cause of ecological degradation (see e.g. Forchtner & Gruber, forthcoming on the Swiss Democrats). Lastly, the *topos of new technologies* (2 codes) emphasises the importance of investing in technological sectors for environmental preservation.

Vox against the climate

As I move on to the DHA of the populist far-right Vox, I describe distinct discursive strategies and argumentation schemes (*topoi*) in the in-depth analysis after

identifying the discourse topics in the entry-level analysis, as before for the AfD and as explained in Chapter 3.

I included various text genres in the analysis (see Chapter 3, Table 3.6), namely their party programmes ('100 medidas para la España Viva', and 'Programa protejamos España'), parliamentary activity reports, social media posts, and press releases. With regard to discourse about climate change, the content of both documents '100 medidas para la España Viva', and 'Programa protejamos España' was insufficient for the DHA. Therefore, the two following paragraphs can only descriptively portray how Vox addresses issues in relation to climate change in their party manifestos.

The document '100 measures for a living Spain' was written in 2018 and consists of 24 pages divided into the following chapters: (1) Spain, Unity and Sovereignty, (2) Electoral Law and Transparency, (3) Immigration, (4) Defence, Security and Borders, (5) Economy and Resources, (6) Health, (7) Education and Culture, (8) Life and Family, (9) Freedom and Justice, and (10) Europe and International. In the chapter on economy and resources Vox addresses the issue of sustainability in the context of water (see measure 34).[4] Furthermore, the 38th measure sets a focus on achieving energy self-sufficiency 'on the basis of cheap, sustainable, efficient and clean energy'.[5]

The second document 'Programa protejamos España' of 2020 includes 'ten urgent measures to safeguard the health and economy of Spaniards' and climate change is addressed as follows: 'In the face of EU paralysis, demand that Brussels uses the billion euros "earmarked for climate emergency" for this health and economic emergency. Reach urgent bilateral agreements with other countries to guarantee the supply of essential materials and products'.[6] The descriptive presentation of these documents shows how climate change is not or is only implicitly addressed by Vox in this text genre. With this general overview, I move on to the entry-level analysis.

Entry-level analysis of discourse topics

In the entry-level analysis of Vox's communication about climate change, I identified the following topics listed in Table 5.2.

This first step of the analysis reveals a range of topics characterised by criticism concerning climate change measures such as renewable energies, as well as critique of the government and its policies. With the first topic 'criticism of renewable energies', Vox highlights potential negative impacts on the economy, increased costs for the people and uncertainties or dependencies of such technologies. Vox called the shift to renewables a 'historic mistake' because the wind would not blow the way 'we' want it to: 'Spain imitates the German model. Our law provides for an energy mix dominated by renewables. It is a stubborn repetition of a historical mistake. The wind is untamed, it does not blow according to our interests' (Parliamentary activity report, 09.10.2020). This is also connected to their criticism of the government, which, among other things, advocates energy policy and specifically the promotion of renewable energy. As with renewable energies, this would increase the costs for citizens, for example, for light and electricity. This would also put the Spanish economy in danger, as it would become less competitive. They also criticise the government for focusing environmental policy only on the climate

Table 5.2 Topics and their weighting in the Vox's analysed texts into discourses about climate change. 'Frequencies' signifies the number of times the respective topic is raised in total

Topic	*Frequencies*
Criticism of renewable energies	17
Criticism of the government	14
Agriculture and forest policies	9
Water	7
Social and national emergency	4
Ecological transition	4
CO_2 emissions	4

agenda, which would be bad for Spain's future. Vox also specifically addresses the climate change law, which they fundamentally reject.

In communications addressing climate change, Vox frequently voices criticism regarding the insufficient discussion or action concerning agricultural and forestry policies: 'There is a lot of talk about climate change but very little about new forestry policies to prevent fires such as #DonanaArde #ProgramaVOX' (Twitter, 26.06.2017). Vox also claims that the climate agenda would demolish agriculture in Spain. The government and the so-called global elite ('élites globalistas') do not understand and take too little account of farmers, even though they contribute so much to Spain. The issue of water seems particularly important for Vox and the party demands fair water policies for the people. The country has been suffering from increasing water scarcity for several years, and it is a topic that Vox takes up to blame the government and its climate policy for it.

The 'social and national emergency' is best explained by this Facebook post 'Before a "climate emergency" there is a social and national emergency. Poverty wages, chronic unemployment, demographic crisis, migratory invasion, and a separatist coup' (Facebook, 7.10.2019), where Vox relativised a climate emergency referring to a social and national emergency in Spain, which should be prioritised. The topic of ecological transition is also linked to these issues. In particular, the danger of rising energy prices due to renewable energies and the climate change law are repetitively taken up here. Lastly, Vox often talks about CO_2 emissions and discusses different aspects of them. The party makes comparisons of CO_2 emissions between countries and highlights that Spain's CO_2 emissions are very low, especially in international comparison.

These discourse topics exhibit similarities to the first case of the AfD, yet intriguing differences emerge, particularly in the emphasis on subjects such as agriculture, forestry, and water. While undoubtedly influenced by the national context, I intend to delve into these distinctions more extensively in Chapter 6.

In-depth analysis of discourse strategies

The purpose of this section is to give insights into the self- and other-presentation in Vox's discourse about climate change by addressing various aspects of the

discursive strategies examined in this inquiry (Reisigl, 2017; Reisigl & Wodak, 2017; Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2017). I then move on to the presentation of the topoi and discuss them in detail.

The strategy of nomination, which asks how persons, events, and actions are referred to linguistically in the discourse about climate change, reveals a generally negative presentation of actors who fight for climate protection measures, in particular on the global level, for example, global elites (elités globalistas) or the climate lobby. At the national level, Vox criticises the government and so-called chiringuitos[7] – a term used by the party to describe a variety of groups and organisations that get public funding and are seen by Vox as merely advancing the government agenda. The latter, which they more explicitly also call 'public chiringuito of the climate' ('chiringuito público del clima'), supposedly steals a lot of money for unnecessary climate protection measures instead of investing it in the agricultural sector or the environment. For example: 'The oligarchies of the "open societies" will be caught riding their new industrial course at the expense of "climate change". Ordinary Spaniards will pay for both parties: those of false environmentalism and those of weak multiculturalism' (Facebook, 29.02.2020).

Vox also critiques climate activist Greta Thunberg, suggesting, for instance, that 'the numbers are no longer with Greta', implying that Thunberg's references to scientific data are incorrect, resulting in fearmongering by climate activists. Similar to the AfD's perspective on Greta Thunberg, Vox directs the climate change debate towards criticising individual figures who raise the issue, rather than addressing the core problem of climate change. However, unlike the AfD, Vox adopts a more moderate tone in its communication and argumentation concerning Greta Thunberg. While Thunberg is utilised and criticised as the symbol of climate protection and activism on an international level, there are fewer dehumanising arguments present in Vox's discourse. Vox tends to stay more on the surface level. While the AfD in Germany often describes Thunberg in misogynistic terms, such as having 'climate hysteria' or being emotionally unstable, such language is not prevalent in Vox's discourse.

Vox describes climate activists in general as opponents of agriculture and tourism, portraying them as part of the corrupt and evil global elite.: 'VOX rejects the exaggerated and unfounded scaremongering about #ClimateCamel by globalist elites that demonises our fishing, livestock and industrial sectors. We are at the #COP25 #ClimateSummit to say yes to sensible environmental conservation' (Facebook, 02.12.2019).

Unlike Germany, Spain has no established, nationally successful Green Party,[8] but in particular the left spectrum of the political dimension mobilises 'green issues' such as climate protection in its political agendas. Vox repeatedly refers to left-wing parties who support climate change policies as radical and driven by ideology. According to Vox, the 'new ideological battle of the left only leads to higher energy prices, to hinder the birth rate and to limit eating habits' (Press release, 24.11.2020). For example, Vox accuses the left-wing ruling party PSOE of rejecting a bill to regulate the use of electric scooters only because Vox put forward an amendment to the Climate Change Law. In addition, in a press release they state that a captive electorate and a subsidised economy are the goals of the left: '[t]he

aim of this misgovernment is to prevent the export of [agricultural] products in order to create a subsidised economy and a captive vote as they did in other parts of Spain where the left has governed' (Press release, 25.09.2020).

Vox presents itself as patriotic and as 'the only party not falling into the "climate" trap of the left in the Senate' (Facebook, 27.08.2019). In addition, Vox declares itself as 'lovers of nature and aware of the importance of the countryside and its people, so mistreated by the environmentalists of banner' (Press release, 24.11.2020). Most of Vox's climate change communication criticises the European and global level and its implications regarding climate change.

Based on these strategies, I was able to define the in-group and the out-group they created within their discourse (see Figure 5.4). Vox's in-group includes people who are patriots, who love nature, who declare themselves to be on the right of the political spectrum, and who fight for national interests. The out-group are the so-called global elite, parties, and actors who are on the left of the political spectrum, climate activists, what Vox calls the climate lobby and the EU. The out-group created by Vox is very similar to the out-group of the AfD. Indeed, it corresponds with the literature on populism as a thin ideology, which describes 'the people' that are ruled by a corrupt (and global) 'elite' (see Chapter 2). Moreover, Vox uses terms such as 'climate apocalypse' ('Apocalipsis climático'), 'climate hoax' ('camelo climatico'), 'fake environmentalism' ('falso ecologismo'), 'so-called climate emergency' ('supuesta emergencia climática'), and dogmas. They write for

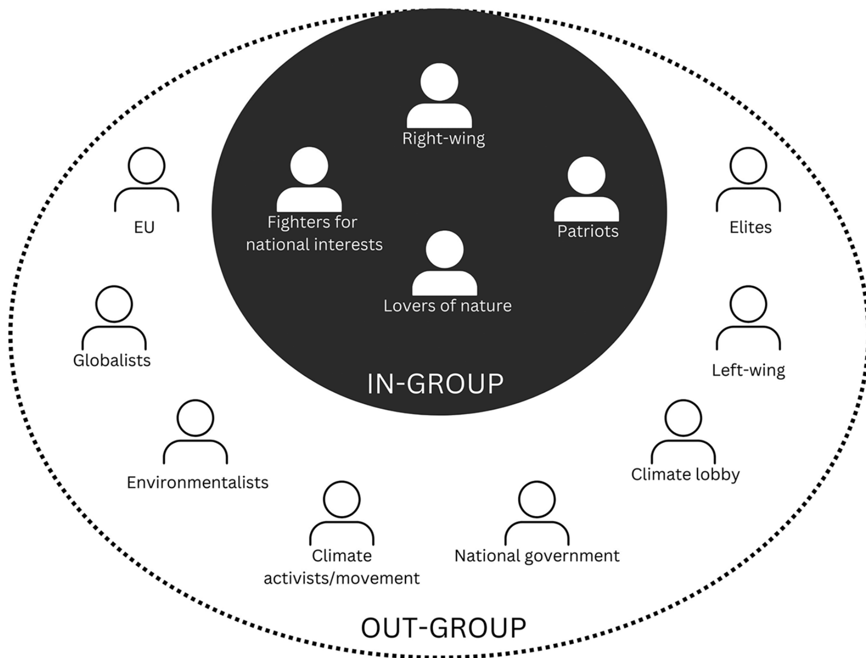

Figure 5.4 In-group and out-group of Vox

instance: 'We are concerned that there is a kind of climate religion where you can't disagree, there is an obvious totalitarianism on this issue' (Twitter, 05.12.2019). This quote is an example of how Vox also uses religious metaphors to play down climate change (see e.g. Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017).

After reviewing nomination and prediction strategies to give a descriptive summary of Vox's climate change communication, I now go on to analyse their *topoi* in more detail to provide a full understanding of their discourse about climate change.

Climate change and its policies are typically depicted with a negative connotation. However, Vox demonstrates ambiguous beliefs regarding climate change. In the following citation, the party rejects climate change denial and alludes to a relativisation of it based on verifiable data:

> To nuance the obvious challenge of climate change is not to deny it, to reject it, to underestimate it, but simply to put it into perspective with verifiable and predictable facts, even if it contradicts the single and indisputable idea that many have uncritically and sectarianly embraced.
>
> (Parliamentary activity report, 10.11.2020)

In other words, Vox acknowledges on the one hand that climate change is a challenge that cannot be denied but on the other hand questions the veracity of the facts behind it. They imply that climate science is often regarded too uncritically and along sectarian lines and suggest that this perspective should be reconsidered. However, Vox consistently criticizes the government's climate policy and particularly denounces the specific measures it entails. They emphasise, similar to other PFRPs, that they are in favour of environmental protection. Vox does not completely deny climate change but rather rejects climate change policies, which is best summarised with the *topos of secondary obstruction* ('if climate change is inadequately managed, then it is better to abolish current measures or to refrain from taking action altogether'). As I have already shown in Chapter 2, climate obstruction encompasses different aspects (see e.g. Cohen, 2001; Ekberg et al., 2022; Rahmstorf, 2005; Van Rensburg, 2015) and the criticism about knowledge production can – according to Van Rensburg (2015) – be considered process scepticism. Indeed, Vox criticises the accuracy of scientific predictions related to climate change or, more specifically, global warming: 'All predictions made by the climate lobby have failed to date. Global warming cannot be considered a disturbance of the natural equilibrium, as there never was such an equilibrium' (Parliamentary activity report, 09.09.2020). This example alone can also be classified as a primary obstruction according to Ekberg et al. (2022), as it suggests the absence of a natural equilibrium and fundamentally questions the accuracy of climate science. However, the boundaries between primary and secondary obstruction are not always clear-cut, and since Vox often does not question the existence of human-induced climate change, I primarily refer to Vox as exhibiting secondary obstruction.

In combination with this process of scepticism, Vox shows hostility towards climate policies, which Van Rensburg (2015) calls response scepticism. In parliament,

the party voted against a climate law in the parliament because according to Vox, climate predictions of the IPCC have failed to come true:

> We voted against this law because we question the dogmas it imposes. In the last three decades it has been predicted at least five times that the Arctic glacial ocean would be navigable. However, the dates have expired and the ice is still there.
>
> (Parliamentary activity report, 09.09.2020)

In this example, they also question the so-called dogmas of climate activists and question the scientific nature of climate research. Specifically, Vox defines climate change and its policies as a fixed doctrine that bases its irrefutable claim to truth on divine revelation or religious authority (see definition of dogma). As already shown with the AfD and alluded to earlier in this chapter, Vox also uses religious metaphors here, calling climate science into question (see e.g. Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017). In a way, calling it a dogma, Vox raises ideological criticism on policy responses and key authorities working for climate protection.

Vox often draws a comparison between France and Germany, saying that France has ten times less CO_2 emissions than Germany due to France's commitment to nuclear power. In this relation, another two *topoi* could be identified. First, the *topos of pro nuclear energy* ('if nuclear energy is a safe/environmentally friendly technology, then we should stick to it') is used in this context. In fact, much of their argument is aimed at highlighting advantages and positive aspects of nuclear energy, especially in comparison to renewable energies. For this argument, Vox uses Germany as a comparative example in the following quote and describes the results of the high investments in renewable energies as disappointing, because it led to an increase in electricity prices and Germany also shows one of the highest emissions in Europe.

> Germany will have invested up to 580 billion euros in renewable energies by 2025; the results are clearly disappointing: the price of electricity has increased by 50 per cent in ten years, 40 per cent higher than the European average. All this is done in the name of ecology, yet German CO_2 emissions are among the highest in Europe, above France. This explains why France is the nuclear country par excellence, since 71 per cent of its energy is based on nuclear power.
>
> (Parliamentary activity report, 02.10.2020)

Vox refers to the environmentalist leader Michael Shellenberger, an American author who publishes about the intersection of climate change, nuclear energy, and politics. He regards 'nuclear as the true environmentalist dream' as energy may be produced by nuclear power quite effectively. Based on Shellenberger's position, which has been criticised widely by environmental scientists and academics (e.g. Bliss, 2020; Forrester, 2020; Gleick, 2020; Ziser & Sze, 2007), Mireia Borrás assured in a press release 'that nuclear energy is the one that emits less waste per unit of energy produced' (Press release, 15.09.20). Vox describes many supposed advantages of nuclear energy, emphasising its efficiency, low land consumption,

and low CO_2 emissions. In addition, in doing this, Vox *appeals to authority*, that is, Shellenberger.

Second, the *topos of comparison (*'if Spain produces less emissions than other countries, then Spain needs less emission restrictions') is based on the comparison that Vox uses to show that Spain emits very little CO_2 compared to other countries such as China and India. Based on this comparison, the party concludes that Spain should therefore implement fewer measures within the framework of climate protection.

> Spain emits 80 times less kilotonnes of CO_2 than the five main emitters in the world and nine times less than the total for the whole of Europe. We are not so relevant as to condemn the entire economy of our country to model transformations with a suicidal transition that causes unemployment, lack of protection and misery.
> (Parliamentary activity report, 10.11.2020)

While Vox's comparison may hold some truth, there are two notable flaws in their argumentation. First, their conclusion that Spain should limit emissions less strictly due to its lower emission levels than other countries is illogical, as it would imply that only the country with the highest emissions should implement limitations. Second, Vox employs a slippery slope argument, suggesting that a transition to lower emissions will inevitably lead to unemployment, lack of protection, and misery. This tactic resembles the argument used by former Danish energy spokesman and member of the Danish People's Party Jørn Dohrmann in 2011, where he claimed that investing in lowering emissions made no sense for Denmark due to potential increases in CO_2 emissions by countries like China, India, and Brazil (Kølvraa, 2020). Vox sets a particular focus on drawing comparisons with China, but also India, which they describe as the 'main CO_2 country' (Press release, 09.09.2020) or as in the following example, as 'big emitters':

> The Podemos spokesperson tells us that "whites are the ones who emit CO_2, and the other races suffer the consequences". She seems not to know that the big emitters are China (30%) and India. EU only 10%, and Spain 0.7%.
> (Twitter, 10.09.2020)

As mentioned above, mainly China and India are taken as examples for comparison to claim that Spain's portion of the global CO_2 emissions is so small that its efforts to decrease emissions do not make a difference.

The *topos of economic harm* ('if climate change policies/measures harm the economy, then we/Spain should not consider them') is identified, and Vox refers in this regard mostly to the climate change law ('ley del cambio climatico') and the energy transition towards renewable energies outlined in the law proposals. As in the previous part, Vox assumes that the ecological transition, which, among other things, is based on an energy mix with a focus on renewable energies, would seriously damage Spain's economic competitiveness:

> The energy design that this law is going to impose in an authoritarian manner based on renewable energies is going to cause very serious damage to the competitiveness of the Spanish economy. It seems to us that the supposed

> climate emergency is the new excuse for the classic interventionism of the left, for economic dirigisme.
>
> (Press release, 02.10.20)

Again, they use a slippery slope argumentation by speaking of a 'suicidal transition' that brings misery: 'We are not so relevant as to condemn the entire economy of our country to model transformations with a suicidal transition that causes unemployment, lack of protection and misery' (Press release, 10.11.20). This is an example of the strategy of predication, that is, the ecological transition described as suicidal transition. Here Vox also criticises the transition towards renewable energies for its uncertainty, which is again bad for the economy of Spain: 'The taxation of renewables will have very negative consequences on the economy' (Press release, 04.11.2020) and moreover, '[w]e fear that, as the price of energy is a fundamental factor in the competitiveness of any national economy, this increase in energy prices will be the coup de grace for the Spanish economy' (Press release, 09.09.2020).

Similar to what I showed in the first case of Germany for the AfD, the *topos of economic harm* is very present in Vox's communication about climate change. In the case of the AfD, this *topos* is even more present than in the case of Vox, but here, too, one can see that economic arguments are very often used. In other words, both PFRPs assume or argue that efforts to combat climate change directly impact the economy of the country, suggesting that competitiveness, employment, and prosperity are intrinsically linked to these actions.

Unlike the German AfD, Spain's Vox is very much concerned with agriculture. This has already been shown in the entry-level analysis and the in-depth analysis reveals that the *topos of agriculture* ('if climate change policies/measures harm the agricultural sector, then we/Spain should not consider them') is also quite present. Vox accuses both climate activists and decision-makers of criminalising farmers in demands and policies for more climate protection: '[Climate change advocates] are experts in wars even over what is an essential good for all Spaniards, water, and experts in singling out and criminalising farmers' (Parliamentary activity report, 09.09.2020). Vox also sees the EU as responsible for climate policies that discriminate against the agricultural sector and farm workers:

> "It would be unjust and alarming if the EU wanted to finance the ecological transition by cutting support for farm workers. The choice is yours: save jobs in the countryside or Greta Thunberg's climate homily", said Carlos Fernández-Roca, who regretted that the Socialist-Communist government is "obstinate in dismantling the agricultural sector".
>
> (Parliamentary activity report, 08.06.2020)

Spain's agriculture industry is significant, and Vox frequently covers the topic in its climate change communication. Additionally, climate change and notably drought have had a particularly negative impact on agriculture in several regions of Spain, such as Murcia. In a Politico article, Mathiesen (2022) explains how Spain's

Vox hopes to gain electoral advantage from the worsening climate in the rural agricultural areas of Los Palacios. Vox's argument that technology advancements and inventions would mitigate climate change and restore prosperity and continuity to rural areas resonates with farmers, while the socialist left PSOE, which Spanish farmers generally elect, is dismissed more and more. Mathiesen (2022) argues: 'What's happening in Los Palacios shows how political opportunists can take advantage of the advance of climate change – and that, when the basics of economic life become scarce, a politics that pits communities against one another can thrive'.

Vox's argumentation strategy also includes criticism of the intention behind climate policies, which the *topos of interventionism* ('if climate policies will be implemented, the left-wing can determine our life') summarises. In sum, Vox claims that the 'radical left' uses the 'alleged climate emergency as an excuse for interventionism' (Parliamentary activity report, 02.10.2020). Furthermore, according to Vox, the politics surrounding climate change will result in the 'radical left' exerting greater influence over matters such as lifestyle choices, dietary preferences, and economic sectors. The Vox spokesman also criticised the 'radical left' that they have turned climate change into 'a new ideological battleground aimed at dictating how we should live, what foods we can consume, and which industries can thrive' (Parliamentary activity report, 02.12.2019). Similarly, Vox claims to oppose

> this new ideological battle of the left, which only leads to higher energy prices, hindering the birth rate and limiting eating habits, and we declare ourselves lovers of nature and aware of the importance of the countryside and its people, so mistreated by the environmentalists of the left.
>
> (Press release, 24.11.2020)

In this sense, climate change policies are criticised as an ideological battle with the aim to implement interventionist politics that ignores that Vox are themselves the real environmentalists.

Much like the AfD, Vox expresses significant scepticism and doubts regarding the efficacy and objectives of climate change policies, particularly the climate change law and the shift towards renewable energies. A key focus of their argumentation is Spain's comparatively minor contribution to global emissions. They underscore potential adverse effects on the Spanish economy and society in this context. Similarly to the AfD, Vox also displays hostility towards proponents of climate protection, such as Greta Thunberg or left-wing activists. The topoi detected and their relative presence, which is based on the number of codes, are summarised in Figure 5.5.

The most present *topos of secondary obstruction* (20 codes) illustrates how Vox opposes climate change mitigation and adaptation through various means (Ekberg et al., 2022). *The topos of pro nuclear energy* (15 codes) highlights nuclear energy as a secure technology that should not be abandoned. The *topos of economic harm* (13 codes) argues that the national economy will be harmed due to the ecological

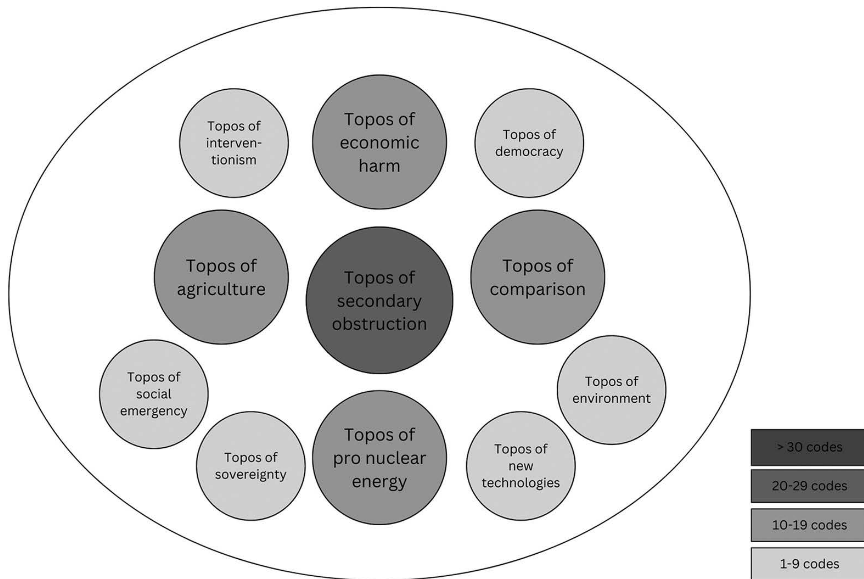

Figure 5.5 Visual representation of *topoi* in Vox's discourse about climate change

transition, jeopardising competitiveness and prosperity. Similarly, the argument of the *topos of agriculture* (13) asserts that climate change policies are detrimental to Spain's agricultural sector. In the *topos of comparison* (11 codes), Vox references countries like China and India, suggesting they should reduce emissions before Spain. Finally, the *topos of interventionism* (9 codes) includes Vox's claim that advocates for climate change are interventionists, suggesting that the 'radical left' aims to control various aspects of Spaniards' lives through it.

The following *topoi* have been found in Vox's discourse about climate change but, due to the low number of codes, were not described above in detail. However, I will briefly name them in this paragraph: the *topos of social emergency* (4 codes) argues that if national and social emergencies arise, climate change should not be a priority. The *topos of sovereignty* (3 codes) concludes that 'if we want to implement policies, we need to be sovereign'. According to the *topos of environment* (4 codes) – which is present also in the AfD's communication about climate change – in order to save our livelihood, the environment must be protected. This *topos* regards environmental protection as much more important than climate protection. The *topos of new technologies* (2 codes) considers innovation and technology as crucial for preserving the environment. Lastly, the *topos of democracy* (1 code) regards climate protection and activism as a danger for democracy.

The FPÖ against the climate

In the analysis of the FPÖ, I incorporated a diverse array of documents, specifically the party manifesto of the FPÖ (which was first published in 2011 and still

represents an important part of the actual FPÖ's official website), official FPÖ publications containing an Interim Government Review (2018), social media posts, and the party newspaper *Neue Freie Zeitung* (NFZ).

The party manifesto is divided into ten sections, namely: (1) Freedom and Responsibility, (2) Homeland, Identity and Environment, (3) Law and Justice, (4) Family and Generations, (5) Prosperity and Social Balance, (6) Health, (7) Security, (8) Education, Science, Arts and Culture, (9) Openness to the World and Self-Reliance, (10) Europe of Diversity. The subtitle of the document is 'Austria first' ('Österreich zuerst'), which is elaborated in the contents of the programme. While climate or climate change is not mentioned, the second point is about the environment. In this second section of the document, the FPÖ addresses many aspects, which, as the title already implies, connects the topic of environment with national aspects. Austrian culture and identity play a major role, along with basic values to which they refer (European worldview or Christian values). They clearly address sovereignty and the right of peoples to self-determination, but they point out that Austria is part of the European cultural order and that this is decisively characterised by Christianity. Since Ancient times, European culture has been further developed through humanism and the Enlightenment, and the FPÖ calls the basic values to which they subscribe 'Cultural Christianity' (Kultur-Christentum'), which is based on the separation of church and state. They are also prepared to defend European values and the free democratic foundation against fanaticism and extremism and to preserve and further develop 'our Leitkultur' (guiding culture).

Entry-level analysis of discourse topics

As already stated, this first part of the analysis focuses on identifying discourse topics in climate change communication. Table 5.3 provides a comprehensive list of these dominant topics. While the frequency of each topic may be relatively low, the analysis reveals a wide range of discourse topics. Specifically, the FPÖ addresses climate change and climate activism through various lenses, predominantly adopting a critical stance. Their discourse on climate change is particularly pronounced in social media platforms and their weekly party newspaper, *Neue Freie Zeitung*.

The most present topic includes criticism of social and political figures, primarily situated on the left of the political spectrum. The party criticises climate protection measures and advocates, such as the Greens and climate activists. They denounce climate demonstrations, portraying them as responsible for traffic disruptions, violence, and environmental disregard. Moreover, they vehemently oppose 'green policies', which they view as a threat to the livelihoods of many Austrians. These critiques, along with those of the government, suggest a tendency towards melodramatic storytelling, a point I will further explore in Chapter 6. Additionally, I will delve into the criticism directed towards actors like climate activists, Greta Thunberg, and the Greens when discussing self- and other-representation later on.

The next topic is mobility and transport, which is not surprising, as Norbert Hofer of the FPÖ was Federal Minister of Transport, Innovation, and Technology from December 2017 until the dissolution of the government coalition in

Table 5.3 Topics and their weighting in the FPÖ's analysed texts into discourses about climate change. 'Frequencies' signifies the number of times the respective topic is raised in total

Discourse topic	*Frequencies*
Criticism of climate demonstrations (including Greta Thunberg) and green politics	18
Mobility and transport	11
Criticism of the Second Kurz government	7
Criticism of climate scientists and the IPCC	6
Asylum law	4
Meat industry, meat tax, and animal welfare	4
CO_2 tax	4
Criticism of (EU) climate policy	3

May 2019. The document called 'Finally Fairness for Us Austrians' (Endlich Fairness für uns Österreicher), summarises in 2018 the 'FPÖ Government Interim Balance 2.0' (FPÖ-Regierungs-Zwischenbilanz 2.0) and includes a resume of the FPÖ's government activities since they governed in coalition with the ÖVP. Specifically, a page is dedicated to each FPÖ government minister, and on the page of Norbert Hofer and his Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology, climate is a topic. They write '[i]n addition, Minister of Transport Hofer is jointly responsible for the implementation of the climate strategy #mission2030'[9] and further it is described as follows: 'Climate protection project "#mission2030": Make transport more effective, ensure a high-quality transport offer, ensure the efficiency of the overall system, meet the requirements of freight mobility' (p. 15). Regarding emissions, they support electric mobility and at the same time they clearly reject a diesel ban in Austria. Another climate-relevant topic (but not only) is the 'introduction of the "Austria Ticket"', whereby 'with only one purchased ticket all means of public transport, such as ÖBB, regional lines or even the Vienna lines can be used' (p. 15).

In fact, they write mostly negatively about the 'Second Kurz Government' (since 2020) as well as climate scientists and IPCC scientists. A possible CO_2 tax is also discussed and criticised in detail. The FPÖ rejects such a tax. Related to this, the issue of the meat industry is often raised, with the FPÖ arguing that the EU's climate policy promotes cheap meat imports and disadvantages or endangers agriculture and animal welfare in Austria. This is also a framework that the FPÖ uses to criticise the EU's climate policy, whereas they address concretely the EU's promotion of nuclear energy in the context of climate policy, which the FPÖ firmly rejects. They warn that climate change is being used to apply for asylum, which in their view should be rejected.

The discourse topics observed in the FPÖ's climate change communication exhibit similarities to those found in Germany and Spain, yet intriguing differences exist, which will be explored in detail in Chapter 6. In summary, the FPÖ's approach to climate change communication blends 'global' frames, such as criticism of Greta Thunberg and climate scientists, with traditional 'local' frames, including discussions on CO_2 tax and critiques of the Austrian government.

In-depth analysis of discourse strategies

The following section addresses various aspects of the discursive strategies that are included within this investigation in order to present insights into the self- and other-presentation in the discourse about climate change of the FPÖ. I then present and discuss the argumentation schemes, that is, *topoi*.

The strategy of nomination, which studies how persons, events, and actions are referred to, reveals a high presence of actors with whom the FPÖ disagrees. In particular, climate activists (e.g. FFF) and their actions (climate demonstrations) are criticised widely in the discourse. Particularly creative seems the FPÖs' naming of actors who advocate for climate protection. Indeed, the party refers to climate activists among others as 'climate-alarmist's', 'climate hysterics', 'climate Misses Association' ('Klima-Fräuleinverein'), or as followers of a cult, and they often accuse them of criminal activity (see below, NFZ, 27.06.2019, p. 8) or hypocrisy. More concretely, Greta Thunberg is brought up constantly, not merely in a very negative way but presented as a threat, making her the most present villain in the FPÖ's discourse about climate change. Indeed, the FPÖ creates the impression that Greta Thunberg would be a dictator and accuse her actions or activities as not being democratic. In addition, the FPÖ alludes to the implication that she primarily earns money with her climate protection actions, at the same time she would play into the hands of the nuclear lobby. The FPÖ seeks to delegitimise her credentials by asserting that her lack of a university degree renders her inexperienced in economics, thus implying her lack of credibility. A telling example of how the FPÖ portrays Greta Thunberg and the climate movement surrounding her is evident in the following quote:

> A part of the young generation that goes demonstrating and adores Greta Thunberg today, for example, likes to ski on artificial snow, fly on vacation with their parents or use a smartphone from China. Those who criticize this system are themselves using it. This is just more absurd. Moreover, Greta Thunberg does nothing but play into the hands of the nuclear lobby. We will certainly not let ourselves be taken over by Greta. The FPÖ says: environmental and climate protection with common sense – of course without climate hysteria and braids-dictatorship [Zöpferldiktatur].
>
> (Facebook, 31.12.2019)

This is an example of the *argumentum ad hominem*, that is, attacking the person making an argument rather than attacking the argument itself. This has been identified in particular for the German AfD. Discrediting Greta Thunberg and the FFF movements by populist far-right actors has already been covered in the current analysis as well as in the literature. One more word of caution, Vowles and Hultman (2022) use the conceptualisation of industrial/breadwinner masculinities (Hultman & Pulé, 2019 and see Chapter 2) to explore the hostility to Thunberg in the far-right media discourse. Thunberg and the FFF movement made unequal carbon emissions and resource usage visible and the far right used conspiracy theories and

'historical tropes of irrational femininity' (p. 414) to protect their environmental privileges. Also, the FPÖ's accusation of hysteria echoes long-standing patriarchal stereotypes and misogynistic perceptions of women being irrational and unreasonable (Benegal & Holman, 2021; Scull, 2011).

Similarly, the Austrian Greens is also highly present and criticised in the discourse: 'with the Greens, the German de-industrialisation mania could also find its way into Austrian politics, keyword CO_2 tax' (NFZ, 17.10.2019, p. 5). The FPÖ claims that the Greens burden the people with their 'green climate fantasies' and 'climate nonsense', and they describe climate policies proposed by the Greens as 'green paternalistic fantasies and utopias' ('grünen Bevormundungsfantasien und Utopien'). They also accuse the Greens of putting the climate ahead of the welfare of citizens:

> Unbelievable and outrageous! While numerous Austrians fear for their existence and have lost their jobs, the GREENS in the government can think of nothing better than to burden the people additionally with their green climate fantasies! The green infrastructure minister Gewessler demanded for example that in the economic stimulus package money may flow only if it helps the climate! Dear Greens: It must go now in the first place to help the Austrians! Leave the people alone with your green paternalistic fantasies and utopias!
>
> (Facebook, 17.04.2020)

Since May 2019, when the FPÖ was no longer part of the government, the new government coalition between the ÖVP and the Greens is highly salient in the FPÖ discourse about climate change. They explicitly attack the climate protection policies of the new government agenda: '"The present turquoise-green [ÖVP-Green] government programme could become expensive fun for our municipalities", warned Lower Austria's liberal municipal spokesman Dieter Dorner. Obviously [the government coalition] has sacrificed economic reason at the altar of climate phobia' (NFZ, 16.01.2020, p. 12). Above all, the FPÖ refers repeatedly to additional costs for citizens, municipalities, and farmers (see below in detail). According to the FPÖ, the governing coalition is pursuing an 'anti-social course', as many new taxes would follow:

> In their government programme, the [ÖVP-Green government] avoid the term "new taxes" like the devil avoids holy water. Instead, they talk about a "national emissions trading system" or CO_2 pricing via "existing levies. After the Green "showcase policy" in Vienna, no one believes any more that this will not result in additional burdens "for the economy and for private individuals", as Green Party leader Werner Kogler is never tired of swearing.
>
> (NFZ, 09.01.2020, p. 5)

The FPÖ rarely describes itself in this discourse, but they sometimes provide descriptions of what they stand for and work for: they claim to advocate for

environmental and climate protection with ‘common sense’ (see e.g. above Facebook, 31.12.2019) and point out that a strong FPÖ is needed to end the prevailing ‘climate hysteria’. Concretely, they claim, ‘[o]nly a strong FPÖ can end this completely misplaced climate hysteria in Austria again in the future. Because one thing is clear: taxes and burdens do not protect the climate!’ (Facebook, 08.01.2020). This also includes an economic aspect, in which taxes and other costs for citizens are strictly rejected. Other studies have already shown that economic arguments are very present in the discourse about climate and environmental issues of the FPÖ (see e.g. Forchtner, 2019), and it will be discussed further below.

The FPÖ emphasises their stance on limiting immigration and asylum, asserting that climate change should not serve as grounds for seeking asylum: ‘The FPÖ says quite clearly: asylum is protection for a limited period of time and not a cover for the immigration of economic refugees. Poverty and climate change are not reasons for asylum’ (Facebook, 02.11.2019). This highlights also the nationalist and nativist perspective (strategy of perspectivisation) from which these nominations and attributions are expressed. With regard to intensification and mitigation, it is noticeable that the FPÖ uses a lot of quotation marks for expressions such as climate-neutral, climate-emergency or events such as the world climate summit.

As for the AfD and Vox, based on the analysed strategies, I am able to identify the in-group and out-group in their discourse (see Figure 5.6). Their out-group includes people who fight for climate protection, such as climate activists (Greta Thunberg), FFF, actors at the European level (EZB, European Commission), ‘mainstream’ climate scientists, immigrants and asylum seekers, the Greens, and since 2020, also the government coalition (ÖVP and the Greens). They often also criticise the media, especially for reports about climate activism. Their in-group includes the taxpayers, the working population, the farmers, and the ‘normal’ Austrian citizen. These in-group and out-group correspond to typical elements of populism of attacking the ‘elite’.

In the presentation and portraying of other social actors (nomination and predication), such as describing climate activists as ‘followers of a cult’, the FPÖ accentuates the pronounced use of religious metaphors. Indeed, the FPÖ uses various religious metaphors to downplay the reality and urgency of climate change mainly by de-legitimising the actors identified in their out-group to advance anti-climate change arguments or reveal hostility towards climate change (policies). One illustrative example of this usage focuses on portraying European media as ‘prophets of doom’ (NFZ, 30.01.2020, p. 9) during the World Economic Forum in Davos, leveraging the widely understood connotations of a prophet as an individual called by God to proclaim divine truths and recognised as a religious authority. Moreover, they present climate change activists as climate saviours and simultaneously as extreme and violent, alluding to ‘historical associations between religion and violence’ (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017, p. 460):

> The peaceful “Fridays for Future” demonstrations are yesterday’s news. In Germany, the “climate saviours” are already taking more drastic and violent paths, such as the violent storming of a coal mining area or the arson of car

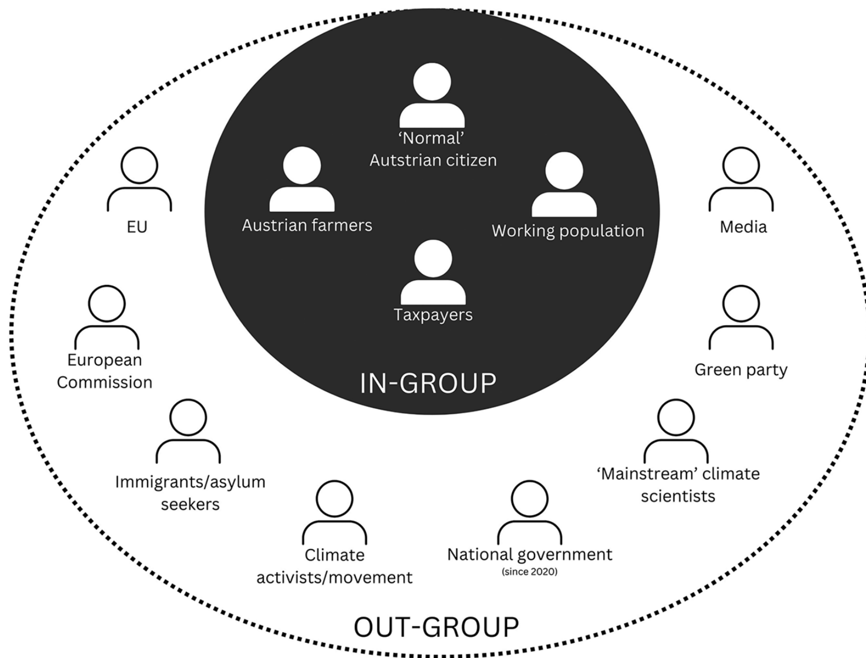

Figure 5.6 In-group and out-group of the FPÖ

> dealerships. And are also earning applause for this in the media and from politicians.
>
> (NFZ, 27.06.2019, p. 8)

Elsewhere the FPÖ describes climate change as 'climate-religion', climate policies as 'climate-salvation politics', and climate change reporting as a 'climate-apocalypse' or they speak of 'sacrificed economic reason at the altar of climate phobia'. Such use of religious metaphors for climate activists and scientists draws on the widespread notion that religion denies rationality and requires unconditional followership (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017). Another example is the following Facebook post in which the FPÖ speaks of a dogma and an 'inquisitorial persecution of all sceptics', drawing aspects often associated with religion such as intolerance, extremism, and exclusiveness: 'How big is the share of CO_2 emissions in climate change? There should be an open scientific discussion about this – and not the cementing of a dogma together with inquisitorial persecution of all sceptics!' (Facebook, 02.11.2019). In addition, when it comes to climate activists, a religious metaphor comes into play when they call FFF sectarians.

Having offered an initial descriptive introduction to the discourse about climate change by the FPÖ for the in-depth analysis by looking at the strategy of nomination and predication, I now move to *topoi* to provide an in-depth understanding of

their argumentation schemes. I noticed that the FPÖ raised the majority of *topoi* in their social media posts and in their party outlet *Neue Freie Zeitung (NFZ)*. This is certainly due to a lack of attention paid by the FPÖ to climate change in its party programme. In short, their argumentation in the party programme targets an environmental protection that is based and concentrates on the connection between home, identity, and the natural environment.

With the *topos of economic harm* ('if climate change policies/measures harm the economy, then we/Austria should not consider them'), the FPÖ criticises climate politics for having negative economic consequences. For example, they refer to the costs that will be incurred by 'taxpayers' due to climate protection measures as a result of the reduction of CO_2 (see above NFZ, 12.12.2019, p. 9). The FPÖ questions the connection between the increasing CO_2 content in the atmosphere and the temperatures which, according to them, have not fundamentally increased:

> The previous indulgence trade in CO_2 certificates has cost the economy around 2,775,000 billion euros since 2013. But the "measures against climate change" financed with them have had zero effect. Even the green German Öko-Institut admitted that in 85 percent of the projects no additional emissions were saved, i.e. billions of euros were burned senselessly.
>
> (NFZ, 12.12.2019, pp. 8–9)

Furthermore, they often refer to concrete 'burdens' for Austrians resulting from climate protection. They speak of 'cashier mania' of the ÖVP-Green government coalition and raise fears of additional costs for commuters, for example:

> What burdens can Austrians already prepare themselves for? A fixed uniform tax of twelve euros on air travel, a further "greening" – i.e. an increase in the price – of the standard consumption tax for new cars, and a "more ecological design" of the commuter tax and truck toll. Frequent drivers, i.e. commuters, will be asked to pay more in the future.
>
> (NFZ, 09.01.2020, p. 5)

In other texts, the party argues that many people in Austria rely on a car to get to work and they strongly oppose 'penalising' them through higher tax levies. Basically, the FPÖ rejects a CO_2 tax and argues that this would create enormous costs for the economy:

> We therefore decisively reject the "air tax" on CO_2 discussed in the European Union and also in this country on its own, because this would do absolutely nothing to combat climate change and would only unilaterally harm Austria's economy and destroy jobs.
>
> (NFZ, 05.09.2019, p. 5)

In addition, according to the FPÖ the fulfilment of the Paris Agreement costs too much for Austria and Europe as it would be 'nothing more than a multi-billion-dollar

economic stimulus for China' (NFZ, 17.10.2019). In this regard, the FPÖ repeatedly speaks of unsocial policy in the discourse about climate change, and they claim, for example, that climate policy serves purely to 'cash in' on the population, which ultimately leads to a redistribution from rich to poor:

> Fully eco-friendly, fully anti-social is roughly how the black-green tax reform can be summed up. Above all, it contains a lot of hot air to conceal the rip-off under the eco-covering cloak. Increasing fuel prices, abolishing the diesel privilege, increasing the airline ticket levy and much more – a bagging of the working population is on the agenda.
>
> (Facebook, 16.02.2020)

The party also claims that the federal government is 'shamelessly exploiting' the broad mass of the population under the guise of climate change and ecology, and especially the lower income classes will feel the negative consequences of this policy (e.g. Facebook, 04.02.2020195F). The FPÖ rejects policies on climate protection and claims that they would create incentives in climate protection and that the ruling parties should refrain from bans or taxes: 'We are clearly focusing here on positive incentives instead of senseless bans, as is the order of the day in Vienna, for example, vis-à-vis motorists' (NFZ, 05.09.2019, p. 5). In other words, the FPÖ advocates incentives ('carrots') and completely rejects bans ('sticks') in this discussion: 'Norbert Hofer was on a completely correct path as transport minister, recalled the Burgenland FPÖ regional chairman: "Not punishing commuters who rely on their cars but expanding public transport is the right path"' (NFZ, 19.09.2019, p. 13).

Especially in the topos of economic harm, fears are stirred up that climate protection measures will impose more and unjust costs on citizens. A comparison of climate policy and immigration policy is particularly interesting here: 'German Chancellor Angela Merkel's climate rescue policy is playing out just like her "We can do it" policy on mass immigration, which ended in the well-known disaster: it is not known if the measures will help at all, but billions are generously provided' (NFZ, 19.09.2019, p. 8). In this example, it is certainly no coincidence that the FPÖ makes the comparison to migration policy. In doing so, they create a connection with what they see as failed migration policies in Germany, which according to them have led to mass immigration. It seems that with such comparisons, the FPÖ tries to create or recall similar fears through 'politics of fear' (Wodak, 2015) as they have done/are doing in the discourse about migration.

The *topos of democracy* ('if climate activism and climate protection continue, then it is a threat for our democracy') criticises the actions of climate activists as undemocratic and calls Greta Thunberg and other climate activists not democratically legitimate to make demands on climate protection. They contrast 'climate religion or democracy' and argue that climate action is decided at the European level based on 'prophecies of a minor Swedish climate siren' (NFZ, 05.12.2019, p. 8). As already outlined earlier in this section, the use of religious metaphors in their discourse about climate change is identified. Here they also criticise the

proclamation of a 'climate emergency' and thus corresponding 'emergency legislation' that could evade democratic procedure:

> While politicians of the German Greens and the Left Party actively support these "peaceful" actions and provide legal assistance to less peaceful "activists" in criminal proceedings, resistance is stirring among citizens. "I would never have believed that so many people in Germany would again be willing to give up basic democratic rules and liberties because they see themselves morally in the right," one person put it on Twitter, before resignedly stating: But with the keyword "climate protection" anything seems possible.
>
> (NFZ, 27.06.2019, p. 9)

In this context, the FPÖ also speaks of 'eco-populism' ('Ökopopulismus'), which leads to symbolic politics that contribute to stirring up fear among the population. They also accuse the EU of surveillance on behalf of the climate, as new safety features for motor vehicles were discussed at EU level. (NFZ, 05.12.2019, p. 9).

The *topos of primary obstruction* ('if climate change or such policies are somehow doubtful, then there is no need to act') has been largely raised in their texts. This *topos* is in fact very complex, as it encompasses different aspects of denial of scientific evidence and hostility towards climate policy. For instance, they insist that there should be a discussion about the contribution of CO_2 to climate change (Facebook, 02.11.2019). Such argumentation corresponds to 'evidence scepticism' (Van Rensburg, 2015), where the knowledge about facts regarding causes, trends, and consequences in climate research is questioned or criticised. Then, the FPÖ challenges the calculation models and scientific findings published in reports like the IPCC: 'The CO_2 content in the atmosphere has almost doubled in the last 100 years, but the temperature on the planet – contrary to all "IPCC forecast models" – has not even increased by one degree Celsius' (NFZ, 12.12.2019, p. 9). This citation can also be labelled as 'evidence scepticism' (Van Rensburg, 2015) because scientific proof of trends is questioned or denied. The FPÖ debated elsewhere whether climate protection measures accomplish anything at all, which basically also calls climate science into question, since political measures such as the reduction of CO_2 are based on scientific findings that imply that CO_2 emissions must be drastically reduced in order to limit global warming and thus climate change. In this *topos*, their suggestion that the climate has never been stable and therefore cannot or must not be stabilised is striking – a statement that does not correspond to the current state of climate science. Nevertheless, in the following example, the FPÖ refers to physics and apparently to the lack of knowledge of a Green politician:

> A reduction of 55 percent by 2030 would have to be included in the European "Green Deal" in order to achieve a "stable climate", as the German Green (Franzi)Ska Keller fantasized. Since the young woman has learned more Antifa than physics, it has escaped her that the "climate" has never been stable since the existence of our planet and will never be stable – and is

> beyond human control, because we do not even know yet which influencing factors determine climate events at all.
>
> (NFZ, 05.12.2019, p. 9)

The first part of the quote, where the party questions the Green Deal target of a 55 per cent CO_2 reduction, corresponds to 'response scepticism' (Van Rensburg, 2015), in which public (or private) responses to climate issues are criticised and questioned. The FPÖ claims that humans have no control over climate change (which they put in quotation marks) and that there is no knowledge about which factors influence climate events (see primary obstruction). Again, such statements ignore the current state of research which clearly identifies (human-made) emissions as a factor in climate change (see e.g. IPCC, 2014, 2022). Another example of response scepticism is the populist far-right party's questioning of the utility of climate targets and the goals of the Paris Agreement:

> The core of the Black-Green climate plans is submission to the de facto unachievable climate targets of Paris: Austria is to be "climate-neutral" by 2040 at the latest and thus a pioneer in Europe. This is the political smoke grenade par excellence, because no one knows how "climate neutrality" is to be calculated. The only thing that is cited for this is CO_2 emissions, which, however, only contribute a negligible effect to climate change. But with this killer argument new burdens for economy and private households can be justified wonderfully.
>
> (NFZ, 09.01.2020, p. 4)

Besides various clear statements, where the FPÖ questions the reality and human impact on climate change, they also use arguments of secondary obstruction. For instance, when the FPÖ claims that 'Humans are only responsible for up to five percent of CO_2 emissions on our planet, Europe alone for around 0.5 percent. And with the reduction of these five or 0.5 percent, the world climate shall be saved' (NFZ, 12.12.2019, p. 8). Especially interesting is the following quote in which Norbert Hofer in an interview affirms the reality of climate change to argue that it would not be 'rationally explainable' how Austria with a low share of emissions could change anything:

> We make serious environmental policy. The protection of our natural livelihoods must not become a marketplace for resourceful profiteers. Climate change is a reality and cannot be denied. On the other hand, it is also not rationally explainable that, in view of an emissions share of ten to twelve percent of global carbon dioxide emissions, a CO_2 reduction in Austria or Europe could change anything.
>
> (NFZ, 05.09.2019, p. 5)

While this quote acknowledges the reality of climate change, it fails to recognise the human contribution to it. Moreover, the FPÖ often makes comparisons to the

extent that China owns and builds much more emissions or coal-fired power plants than Europe. The party writes for instance: ‘Moreover, sustainable CO_2 reduction is ineffective and pointless without the involvement of the US or the economic giant China’ (NFZ, 05.19.2009, p. 5). The party underlines that European climate protection and the fulfilment of the Paris Agreement are of no use because other countries’ emissions are too large, and that an emission restriction in Europe could not achieve anything in relation to climate protection. For example, they write, ‘Little food for thought: if Europe meets its targets under the Paris Agreement, that changes zero. China alone would make up for this CO_2 reduction with its emission increases (!) in three years! But facts have never interested do-gooders’ (NFZ, 05.09.2019, p. 2).

I identify all three of Van Rensburg’s scepticism categories (evidence, process, and response) in the FPÖ’s discourse about climate change. However, while I also observe signs of secondary obstruction, arguments that constitute primary obstruction are much more prominent and evident in the FPÖ’s discourse (Ekberg et al., 2022). In addition, the FPÖ attacks climate scientists such as Michael E. Mann, one of the most famous climate scientists. Mann calculated and published with colleagues the data of the so-called ‘hockey stick curve’,[10] and has become a victim of defamation campaigns of climate change deniers. The FPÖ pounces on fake news that includes him as a person as well as his scientific publications. Among other things, the FPÖ claims that Mann would refuse to disclose scientific data:

> The seller of the “climate crisis”, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is suspected of having fallen for a charlatan. For the man on whose “calculations” the crisis hysteria is based refuses – in defiance of all scientific principles – to disclose the data with which he calculated his “field hockey stick curve” 21 years ago – not even in court.
>
> (NFZ, 05.09.2019, p. 2)

Furthermore, in its outlet *Neue Freie Zeitung,* the FPÖ spread the false report (which was originally disseminated by climate denialists) that Mann had lost a court case against Timothy Ball because he was not willing to publish the mentioned data. The court decision was hailed as a victory against ‘climate hysterics’ and was seen as proof that the famous ‘hockey stick data’ was manipulated and falsified and, thus, that the climate change predicted by the IPCC was based on false data and was pure alarmism:

> One of the icons of the “climate crisis” and the IPCC (UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), U.S. climatologist Michael Mann, has lost a lawsuit in the Supreme Court of the Canadian province of British Columbia against a critic of his infamous “field hockey stick curve”.
>
> (NFZ, 05.09.2019, p. 9)

These reports can be easily identified as false information. The truth, in contrast, is that the Supreme Court of British Columbia dismissed Mann’s defamation lawsuit

against him because of the long duration of the trial (2011–2019) and due to the poor health of Ball. In addition, climate change was not the subject of the trial and the court never demanded the disclosure of the hockey stick data, which have been freely available on the internet since at least 2003[11] and have been verified by other scientists many times (Rahmstorf, 2013). It has been identified as feature of populist rhetoric to frequently target scientific elites (Mede & Schäfer, 2020), which is employed to promote scepticism and disillusionment against scientists who are seen as a part of the 'corrupt' elite, thus their out-group (Hameleers & Van der Meer, 2021).

In summary, while the FPÖ spreads some ambiguous beliefs, such as acknowledging natural climate change trends, the primary obstruction in their discourse is unmistakable. In particular, religious metaphors are often used to underscore this rejection, as well as hostile attitudes towards climate-friendly actors. In addition, their strong rejection of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures emerges from the broad variety of discourse topics as well as the different topoi. Figure 5.7 provides an overview of the topoi identified and their respective presence, which is based on the number of codes.

As can be seen, the topos of economic harm (31 codes) is by far the most present, which is also confirmed by the existing literature (see Forchtner, 2019). This topos highlights various negative aspects of climate protection and argues, among the general argument, that the Austrian economy will be harmed, that climate policy will lead to social injustice, and that especially workers, commuters, and the little guy will suffer. Different techniques are used to refute the presence of

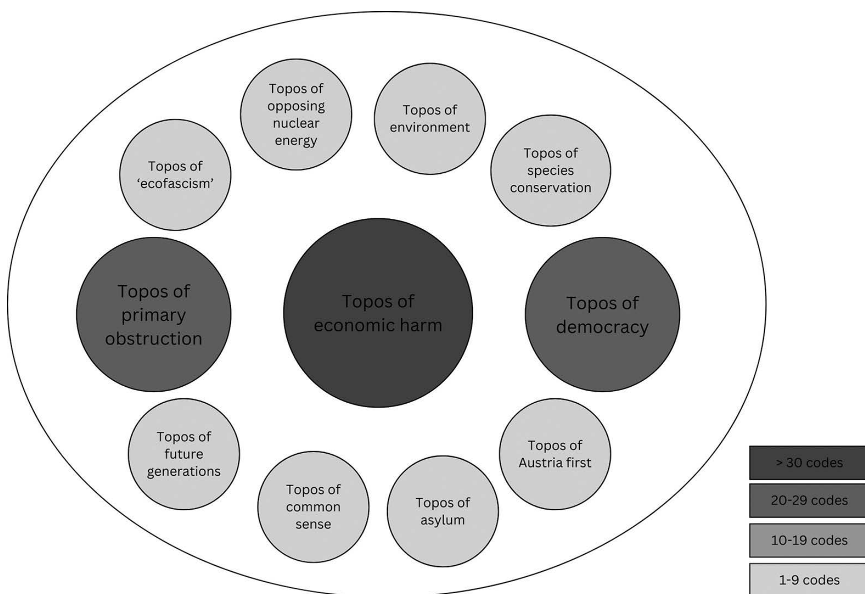

Figure 5.7 Visual representation of *topoi* in the FPÖ's discourse about climate change

human-made climate change in the topos of primary obstruction (28 codes). Here, for instance, fake news about climate science is propagated, and climate scientists themselves are denigrated as a result. The topos of democracy (21 codes) focuses particularly on actions within the framework of climate activism. The FPÖ categorises the attention and possible consequences of this in terms of climate protection as undemocratic. Concrete actions and activists are also seen as not democratically legitimised or as a danger to democracy.

Other *topoi* that have been identified in the discourse about climate change of the FPÖ but are not as present due to a small number of codes are the following: the *topos of Austria first* (4 codes) argues that 'if we consider climate/environmental protection, Austrians must be helped first and foremost'. The *topos of common sense* (3 codes) concludes that 'if we implement climate protection policies, then they must be based on common sense'. Climate change is not a valid asylum-seeking ground, according to the *topos of asylum* (2 codes). According to *the topos of environment* (2 codes), we must preserve our environment if we are to preserve our livelihood. The *topos of species conservation* (1 code) emphasises the threat that wind energy poses to numerous species, including bats and birds ('if wind energy is implemented, species conservation and biodiversity will suffer'). The *topos of future generations* (1 code) states that 'if we protect our homeland and the environment, we act responsibly for future generations'. The promotion of nuclear energy at the EU level is seen as damaging by the *topos of opposing nuclear energy*, which also calls into question European climate policy. Lastly, the *topos of 'ecofascism'* (1 code) compares ecofascists with left-wing climate hysteria and implicitly points out the risks of the latter.

Chapter summary

This chapter offered a detailed examination of the discourse about climate change by the German AfD, the Spanish Vox, and the Austrian FPÖ. All three PFRPs strongly reject climate adaptation and mitigation policies and, in this regard, showed a lot of hostility towards actors such as climate activists, left and Green parties, or the respective national government. The in-depth study of the PFRPs reveals distinct depictions of their in-groups and out-groups, with the EU, 'globalists', environmentalists, climate campaigners, the left-wing, and elites being categorised as the out-group. While the out-groups among the three parties are quite similar, their in-groups exhibit more diversity.

In the communication of the AfD, numerous arguments were found regarding the potential adverse economic consequences of national climate policy, with a significant focus on primary obstruction. They also emphasised the threat to energy supply and highlighted a negative impact on democracy. In contrast to the AfD, which prominently featured climate change in its communication, Vox made considerably fewer references to climate change overall. Content-wise, Vox focused on agricultural aspects and highlighted the potential negative economic repercussions of climate change mitigation. They also emphasised the emissions of other countries such as China and India, arguing that these countries should prioritise

climate adaptation before Spain does. What stood out with the FPÖ was a focus on science and scientists, often discrediting them. The in-depth analysis revealed various instances of ad hominem arguments directed towards Greta Thunberg and climate activists, as well as the use of religious metaphors to downplay the urgency of climate change. The FPÖ also highlighted possible harmful consequences for the national economy due to climate protection measures, along with a potential democratic backlash.

Notes

1 Posts that either had no written textual content at all (e.g. if only a video was posted) or were classified as not relevant to the discourse about climate change were omitted.
2 As a matter of fact, especially for social media data, it cannot be assumed that no posts have been deleted after being published.
3 All quotes pertaining to the German case are originally in German, and the translations provided are done by myself.
4 Measure 34 is called ‘Design and implement a new National Hydrological Plan under the principle of solidarity and the common good. A Plan that, while respecting the sustainability of water resources and ecosystems, allows for efficient water management’ (‘Diseñar y aplicar un nuevo Plan Hidrológico Nacional bajo el principio de la solidaridad y el bien común. Un Plan que desde el respeto a la sostenibilidad de los recursos hídricos y de los ecosistemas, permita una gestión eficiente del agua’).
5 Measure 38 is called ‘Develop an Energy Plan with the objective of achieving energy self-sufficiency in Spain on the basis of cheap, sustainable, efficient and clean energy’ (‘Desarrollar un Plan de la Energía con el objetivo de conseguir la autosuficiencia energética de España sobre las bases de una energía barata, sostenible, eficiente y limpia’).
6 All quotes pertaining to the Spanish case are originally in Spanish, and the translations provided are done by myself.
7 Chirinquito often refers to an open beach bar, but it is also a derogatory expression used in Spain to refer to state offices or agencies which exist almost exclusively to employ friends of politicians in high positions with large salaries and most often doing unnecessary work.
8 For more information, see Chapter 4, where I make reference to the political party Equo, which may be called Spain’s equivalent of the Green Party but has had limited electoral success and has competed in national elections alongside the left-wing party Podemos.
9 All quotes pertaining to the Austrian case are originally in German, and the translations provided are done by myself.
10 The hockey stick diagram is based on scientific studies of global warming published by Michael Mann, Raymond S. Bradley, and Malcolm Hughes in 1999. The data show the temperature trend over the last millennium and resemble the shape of a hockey stick. Best known for its publication in the IPCC Report 2001, the diagram shows rapid warming in the Northern Hemisphere since the beginning of industrialisation.
11 Index retrieved November 2, 2022, from of/holocene/public_html/shared/research/MANNETAL98 http://www.meteo.psu.edu/holocene/public_html/shared/research/MANNETAL98/ and https://www.mimikama.at/faktencheck-urteil-stuerzt-co2-papst-vom-thron/

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6 Contextualising and comparing

Climate obstruction within the national policy field

In this chapter, I delve into an analysis and comparison of the three cases (Germany, Spain, and Austria), contextualising the discourse on climate change within each nation while also linking my findings to the broader research landscape. I interpret my findings, highlighting their significance in relation to prior studies, and underscore how they enrich the existing literature. One focal point is elucidating several key theoretical aspects of populism. By doing so, I aim to shed light on the broader implications of my research findings gleaned from these European countries.

Research on populist far-right actors' communication about environmental issues such as climate change has rapidly increased during the past few years (e.g. Bulli, 2020; Forchtner, 2019, 2020b; Huber, 2020; Hultman et al., 2020; Lubarda, 2019; Voss, 2020). However, I am not aware of any empirical study that analyses the understanding of climate change by systematically examining the policy field to get a better insight into where the PFRPs' discourse about climate change is embedded. I argue that the systematic examination of the policy field by studying the communication of the mainstream parties of a country is beneficial especially for qualitative research and especially studies relying on CDS. The context is the environment in which a discourse takes place and a premise of discourse analysis is knowledge of context (Song, 2010). For this study, the national policy field defined by the understanding of climate change of the mainstream parties of a country serves as the environment in which the discourse about climate change by PFRPs occurs. Indeed, the 'discourse elaborates its context and the context helps interpret the meaning of utterances in the discourse' (Song, 2010, p. 877). The present study recognises that the national context plays a crucial role for individual actors. In the following sections, I will discuss some key elements of this aspect.

Specifically, I divide this chapter into four major sections. Following a brief overview of the temporal evolution of climate change prevalence across the mainstream and populist far-right parties, the analysis delves into the discourse surrounding climate change within each policy field. This exploration investigates the connections to the discourse of the respective PFRPs. Next, a comparative examination of the climate change discourses of the AfD, Vox, and the FPÖ is conducted, with particular attention to elucidating the role of populism in their communication strategies. This analysis draws on insights from existing populism literature.

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Finally, the chapter addresses practical implications and limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

Starting easy: how does the presence of climate change among mainstream parties and PFRPs correlate?

Most political parties are now addressing climate change in some manner and to some extent. The examination of mainstream parties in Germany, Spain, and Austria has demonstrated that, despite certain variances, climate change is present in all of their communication. More specifically, centre-left parties (i.e. the SPD, PSOE, and SPÖ) stress climate change more than their right-wing counterparts (i.e. the CDU/CSU, PP, and ÖVP) as shown in Table 6.1. The presence of climate change in populist far-right communication evolved between 2016 and 2020, similar to the pattern of the mainstream parties). Notably, the AfD counts 2.22 per cent of their Facebook posts addressing the subject of climate issues. This frequency not only surpasses that of both Vox and the FPÖ but also exceeds that of the centre-right CDU/CSU in this aspect.

Despite some variations, all three countries exhibit a similar presence of climate change as a policy area. The analysis further unveils an uptick in the topic's relevance between 2016 and 2020, reaching its zenith in each instance during 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted societal and political landscapes globally, allegedly affecting the frequency of climate change-related posts on Facebook in 2020. Emergency measures implemented to tackle the crisis overshadowed other socially and politically pertinent issues. Similarly, non-state actors such as the FFF movements found their activities, protests, and school strikes for raising public awareness substantially curtailed in 2020, if not rendered altogether unfeasible.

It is not particularly surprising to observe Vox's infrequent posting rate. The scarcity of social media content concerning climate change suggests that Vox prioritises other matters over this issue. This inclination may also reflect Spain's distinct environmental ethos, which diverges from the environmental traditions prevalent

Table 6.1 Number of Facebook posts between 2016 and 2020 published by the mainstream parties and PFRPs of Germany, Spain, and Austria

Party	*Total Facebook posts*	*Facebook posts about climate*	*Percentage of posts about climate*
SPD	643	26	4.04
CDU/CSU	7551	101	1.33
AfD	3463	77	2.22
PSOE	7018	70	1.00
PP	9208	19	0.21
Vox	8015	7	0.09
SPÖ	5578	80	1.43
ÖVP	3603	37	1.03
FPÖ	6337	30	0.47

in the two German-speaking nations. In many Southern European countries, environmental conservation is a relatively recent focus and thus lacks the deep-rooted association with national identity observed in Germany and Austria. Nonetheless, this distinctive characteristic renders Spain and especially Vox an intriguing case study deserving of closer examination.

While the low number of posts by Vox does not provide a good indication of the temporal evolution of the topic, one can see that the development of social media posts by the AfD and the FPÖ correlates with the mainstream parties. There are subtle differences, but overall, the development is very similar. In 2019, the presence of Facebook posts concerning climate change issues was the highest (also for Vox).

Gaining traction: how do discourses about climate change by PFRP relate to their respective national political fields?

The understandings of climate change in Germany, Spain, and Austria are very individual. As a result, each policy field which is based on the mainstream parties is conceptualised differently. Germany stands out for its emphasis on economic factors. Spain highlights the reality and urgency of climate change and that various sectors, such as the energy sector, should be transformed. In Austria, the first period focuses on sustainability in terms of reducing emissions and combating climate change. The analysis demonstrated that such differences in the understanding of climate change can often be traced back to unique aspects of the national contexts. However, in all countries, climate change is communicated as a crucial area of policy, and all the parties analysed support climate protection in various ways.

Germany and its economy

Germany aspires to modernise its economy and communication revolves around preserving innovation, technology, and competitiveness while also implementing emissions trading. The fact that Germany focuses on the economy while Spain points to the urgency is no coincidence. Germany is the largest economy in Europe in terms of gross domestic product and one of the largest in the world (Statista, 2022). Factors in Germany's economic strength include the important role played by industry, specifically vehicle manufacturing, the electrical industry, mechanical engineering, and chemicals. Moreover, its high export ratio (approx. 40–50 per cent), its high foreign trade ratio (approx. 84.4 per cent) and strong medium-sized enterprises are important factors for Germany's economic performance (Orth, 2018). The essential role of the economy is also reflected in this research on climate change communication. The analysis has shown that the market-based instrument of emissions trading, introduced by the EU in 2005 and reformed in 2017, for the reduction of climate-damaging greenhouse gases is very much supported by Germany. Not only does it provide lucrative business opportunities for the German market, but certain industrial sectors have also benefitted from it; not necessarily because of their climate-friendly behaviour but because of the features of the ETS.

It is precisely this aspect that has been widely criticised: between 2005 and 2018, there was an oversupply of emission certificates resulting in an acute drop in prices on the markets (Gilbertson & Reyes, 2012). The price for one tonne of CO_2 was below €10 for six years. In addition, free certificates have been repeatedly given out to coal-fired power plants and the steel industry, among others, which has even allowed these industries to make additional profits. Trading in CO_2 certificates is primarily a market-based instrument that does not envisage a fundamental restructuring, rethinking or disruptive change in the economy.

Regarding the development of understanding climate change between 2016 and 2020, Germany remains primarily focused on the economy and emphasises growth even further. One ongoing debate within the climate change discussion, both within the scientific community and beyond, revolves precisely around this issue of growth. The Club of Rome famously contributed to this debate with its report 'The Limits to Growth', published in 1972. In this report, the scientists came to the conclusion that previous forms of economic activity would exhaust planetary resources within a few decades (Meadows et al., 1972). Since then, climate change has greatly promoted the critique of growth along with the idea that less growth and a rethinking of global capitalism is good for the climate. This view seems to resonate in many social circles. Post-growth (Eversberg, 2018; e.g. Jackson, 2011, 2021), degrowth, (Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2018; Schmelzer et al., 2022) the Doughnut Model (e.g. Raworth, 2012, 2017), and Economy for the Common Good (e.g. Felber, 2018) are just a few examples of alternative economic models. The opposite pole or countermovement currently claims that poverty and environmental problems can only be combated with more economic growth. However, I cannot engage with the wider growth debate but wish to emphasise that in the global climate change debate there is a focus on alternative economic models to capitalism and growth, while economists and proponents[1] of the free-market economy and neoliberalism continue to strive for traditional growth methods. This focus on the economy and the preservation of economic competitiveness and growth, which according to the main German parties must be protected or further promoted in times of climate change, in some ways represents a rivalry between ecology and economy. It is intuitively difficult to make a cost-benefit calculation of climate change or climate protection, which is abstract for many people, that builds on the preservation of the planet in the long term. A short-term calculation regarding current economic losses due to climate protection, however, is much easier to grasp. When climate protection and economic prosperity are contrasted and presented as rivals, it is not surprising that a decision in favour of the economy for personal or national advantage might seem more desirably.

In addition, the parties emphasise opportunities provided by new technologies and, at the same time, stress the importance of incentives instead of bans in climate policy. Meanwhile, mission-oriented research and innovation in the EU is increasingly being discussed and promoted. This goes beyond technical innovation to include any kind of innovation that could create market-changing processes (Mazzucato, 2018; Mazzucato & Dibb, 2019). For example, socio-technical innovations

are to take centre stage in order to change systems in such a way that they can cope with or mitigate major challenges such as climate change and benefit a large part of the population. In addition, the German forest as an economic factor and CO_2 binder also gains importance in the understanding of climate change. As already discussed in Chapter 4, there is no romanticisation of the forest as is often done by nationalist and far-right parties, where national identity and German values are associated with the forest. Indeed, the focus here is primarily – once again – on economic aspects.

In sum, the German policy field about climate change focuses strongly on a balance between climate protection end economic growth and the German mainstream parties underline their intention, to base climate policies mainly on incentives rather than bans or costs for the people. Therefore, I identified various parallels or links between the national political landscape in Germany and the arguments presented by the AfD in their discourse about climate change.

With its *topos of economic harm*, which is most prominent in AfD communication, the party primarily addresses such economic themes. The AfD emphasises the dangers of climate policy for Germany's economy and portrays only negative consequences of climate protection for the country. Indeed, the AfD clearly portrays the economy and climate protection as adversaries, suggesting that only one can be pursued. This creates a fallacious image based on the abstract nature of climate change and certain fears of economic loss. It must be acknowledged that the AfD attempts to stoke fears in a particular way by discussing mass unemployment or deindustrialisation. However, they capitalise on present issues, exacerbating uncertainties already communicated by mainstream parties. Similarly, with the *topos of energy supply*, the AfD taps into the highly visible technical aspects of climate change in the country. The fear that energy supply could collapse during the transition to renewable energy due to climate policy is paramount for the AfD.

In summary, I contend that the AfD's pronounced emphasis on economic factors, and to a certain extent, on technical aspects, is intertwined with the German policy field. However, the PFRP takes this a step further by exclusively examining potential risks, which are framed as unmistakable consequences.

Spain and its urgency

The Spanish mainstream parties communicate climate change differently from Germany. The country already experiences its effects in various ways, particularly through worsening droughts, heat waves, forest fires, water shortages, and crop failures. However, the Spanish understanding of climate change also encompasses economic considerations, focusing on communication regarding the transition and transformation of sectors and the economy as a whole. This transition/transformation is viewed as opportunities for the creation of new jobs, industries, and growth in economic sectors. In essence, Spain emphasises economic opportunities through climate protection, whereas Germany appears to believe that climate protection should adapt to the economy rather than the other way around.

In the context of evolving perspectives on climate change between 2016 and 2020, Spain has also seen a shift towards greater emphasis on certain aspects, particularly since 2019. This includes a heightened focus on sustainability, renewable energies, and considerations for future generations and their well-being. The latter can be traced back to FFF, among others, who point out the consequences of climate change for their and future generations. Here, the attention of the two mainstream parties is now divided: the PSOE focuses more and more on justice and ecological topics, while the PP thinks economically and emphasises the decarbonisation of the economy.

The Spanish parties PSOE and PP in particular use the metaphor Climate Change As War, which is not surprising given the national context, that is, the vulnerability of Spain and the focus of the discourse on the urgency for climate policy. Metaphors occupy a central place as a rhetorical device in climate change communication and their popularity as well as their promotional potential increases through repetition in media. Different metaphors (re-)conceptualise climate science, climate change mitigation, and adaptation efforts (Koteyko et al., 2010; Wise et al., 2014). Metaphors link complex issues to concrete phenomena and experiences, conveying them in a simple way, and their ability to appeal to emotions enables their use to capture and sustain the attention of a readership/audience (Väliverronen & Hellsten, 2002). The framework of a critical metaphor analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004) 'specifically developed for interrogating the pragmatic aspects of metaphor use' (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017, p. 453) was not part of this research, but metaphors were identified in the analysis. The metaphor Climate Change As War implies the necessity but also the possibility to act and to tackle climate change and possibly defeat it. This work also shows that more attention can be paid to the use of metaphors in climate change communication by political parties and beyond (Asplund, 2010; Cohen, 2011; Koteyko et al., 2010; Romaine, 1997; Russill, 2010). Especially with such a complex and sometimes controversial topic, metaphors and their development are an interesting and important research topic in the context of climate (in)action. In the next section, I will go into metaphors again and discuss the use of metaphors by various actors with different approaches and beliefs on climate change, that is, the populist far right.

Overall, Vox's emphasis on agriculture in its discourse about climate change reflects the focus within the Spanish policy field on the country's vulnerabilities to climate change and the urgent need for action. The agricultural sector has already been experiencing the effects of climate change for several years, including excessive and prolonged heat and drought. Therefore, Vox directly addresses those affected by climate change and possibly dissatisfied with politics due to the perceived lack of solutions, promising improved 'climate policy' in this regard. Additionally, Vox is likely seeking voters from that sector (see Mathiesen, 2022). In this sense, while Vox sharply criticises knowledge production and dissemination, as well as climate mitigation and adaptation measures, they largely refrain from denying the existence of climate change (see Moreno & Thornton, 2022). Nevertheless, they are critical of the actions taken to combat climate change, obstruct climate

policy, and assert that other actions would be more effective, or that the struggles of farmers result from climate measures implemented by the government.

Austria and its opposition to nuclear power

In Austria, the focus on sustainability in the discourse about climate change refers to responsibility for climate and environmental protection. Notably, the centre-left SPÖ and centre-right ÖVP differ in their discourse. Especially in Austria, it became evident that the SPÖ focuses much more on social justice aspects and the ÖVP much more on market aspects. Notably, the SPÖ underlines the urgency of the problem by using the term 'climate heating' ('Klimaerhitzung') instead of 'climate' or 'global warming'. One major aspect that distinguishes Austria from both Germany and Spain is Austria's adamant opposition to nuclear power. I already provided an explanation regarding Austria's nuclear energy opposition in Chapter 4, but it is worth highlighting again that this opposition is not necessarily related to climate change or climate protection. Rather, it has seemingly become part of the Austrian national identity. While party politics played a role in the beginning of this anti-nuclear 'journey', today the rejection of nuclear energy cuts across party lines. This makes Austria one of the European countries with the strongest rejection of nuclear energy. The continued significance of this opposition can be seen at the EU level, too; Austria filed a complaint against the EU's classification of nuclear energy as environmentally friendly in 2022.

In Austria, I observed a growing discourse surrounding the concept of a climate crisis between 2016 and 2020. Additionally, discussions about the future and energy are gaining prominence. Investments in climate protection are taking on a more important role, with the ÖVP emphasising 'no sticks, just carrots', claiming for instance that environmental protection is an imperative for the future but not a prohibition. Bans or the narrative of renunciation play on the fear of being unjustly incapacitated and unable to cope with a crisis. Here, rational regulatory approaches that are applied in all policy fields are often seen as exaggerated and sometimes even dogmatic restraints. By focusing on this 'no sticks, just carrots', the ÖVP seems to want to counteract this argument of wanting to take something away from people. Indeed, actors who stand up for climate protection, such as activists, scientists or (green) politicians, are often portrayed as attackers of the individual's lifestyle and prosperity.

The pronounced rejection of nuclear energy, which seems to have become ingrained in the Austrian identity, is also reflected in the FPÖ's discourse on climate change. Unlike the German AfD and Spanish Vox, the FPÖ firmly opposes nuclear energy. They capitalise on the aversion towards the nuclear lobby to criticise specific figures such as Greta Thunberg, whom they accuse of working for the latter. Moreover, they utilise this argument to rally against the EU, which still does not plan to phase out nuclear energy.

Similarly to the German AfD, the FPÖ places significant emphasis on economic issues in their discourse on climate change. However, this aspect of the FPÖ's

communication does not resonate as strongly with the policy field in Austria as it does in Germany. In Austria, it is primarily the centre-right ÖVP that incorporates economic themes into their climate change communication. The ÖVP aims to base climate protection predominantly on incentives rather than bans to safeguard the economy. Wodak (2018) argued already in an article about the Austrian discourse about migration, that the ÖVP moved closer to the FPÖ on the right. Given the allegedly already existing closeness between the ÖVP and the FPÖ (see government coalition 2017–2019), it is possible that the SPÖ demarcated itself more clearly on the issue of climate change towards the left. This demarcation is reflected in the climate change policy field, by incorporating social and justice concerns. This means that other issues (e.g. nuclear energy) are more likely to be linked to the policy field in Austria than these economic aspects.

Closing thoughts

The analysis of the understanding of climate change in the countries studied is a methodological enrichment for the critical examination of discourses of individual actors on a particular issue (in this case climate change). The analysis of the understanding of climate change is not only a comparison of how mainstream political parties communicate climate change in contrast to PFRPs, but it also represents the basis and the broad context in which the PFRPs' discourse about climate change is embedded. As usual in CDS, context plays an important role, but I argue that in the case of single-party analysis, a sole focus on their communication gives a limited picture. Understanding or analysing the policy field of an issue is crucial to study the role of individual parties and their discourses holistically and be able to compare different parties. Thus, I draw on the definition of discourse (and discourse analysis) proposed by various scholars and discussed in Chapter 3 (see Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2012; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009; Wodak, 1996, 2001). In particular, I draw on Wodak (1996, p. 19), who claims that discourses 'are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as to those which are produced synchronically or subsequently' and the fourth level of context as conceptualised in DHA in terms of 'the broader socio-political and historical contexts, which the discursive practices are embedded in and related to' (Wodak, 2001, p. 67) (for more details and research practice, see Reisigl, 2017, pp. 53–55).

Furthermore, the difference between the centre-left and centre-right parties, especially concerning Spain and Austria, is interesting. It is not at all surprising that the centre-left PSOE and SPÖ cared more about social issues and the centre-right PP and ÖVP more about market issues. However, the data forms a starting point for the literature on 'sustainable welfare' and connections between attitudes towards climate and welfare policies (e.g. Fritz & Koch, 2019). Furthermore, this and similar studies could be useful when considering associated concepts, such as so-called 'crowding-out', which assumes that climate-related and social concerns are substitutes for each other (e.g. Jakobsson et al.). For example, analysing communication with a comparative focus on social/welfare issues and climate issues could provide

intriguing insights. Indeed, considering such aspects at the political/policy level and in context could be enriching for this literature.

Delving further: how do PFRPs interact with each other and what does that say about populism?

The entry-level analysis of the communications of the PFRPs has unveiled a multitude of discourse subjects across the three parties. However, notable similarities also emerge.

All three parties criticise the respective government in their discourse. Here it must be specified that the FPÖ does this only in 2019, that is, after the party left a government coalition with the ÖVP. It is however not particularly remarkable that opposition parties criticise the administration; on the contrary, it may be said that this is a common trait of opposition parties.

In particular, the AfD and the FPÖ share many discourse topics. Both countries have nationally relevant Green parties, which both PFRPs strongly disagree with. Additional criticism is levelled especially at climate activists and their protest-related activities. Other research on far-right actors has found similar forms of criticism, (e.g. antifeminism, ableism, anti-environmentalism) towards activist Greta Thunberg in particular (Barla & Bjork-James, 2022; Vowles & Hultman, 2021, 2022; White, 2022). A CO_2 tax is also opposed, as is the EU and its policy on climate protection. The AfD and Vox share a rejection of renewable energy sources, while the FPÖ is fundamentally opposed to nuclear energy (see above).

All other identified discourse topics are peculiarities of the respective parties. Since these have already been described and discussed in the respective chapters, I now turn to the self- and other-representation of these parties. This has also been portrayed by drawing on the notion of discourse strategies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2017), and in order to avoid repetitions I offer a broad overview and briefly contrast the in-groups and out-groups of the parties.

When drawing up in-groups and out-groups, it is striking that the out-groups of the three parties are very similar. The notions may have national facets, but looking at the three out-groups, I find a very similar picture of how PFRPs describe the elites. As is already clear from the analysis of discourse topics, the government, as well as climate activists, so-called globalists, the left spectrum, the EU/EU-level actors, and, if present, Green politicians are highlighted.

In Chapter 2 I wrote about the heartland in populism (see Taggart, 2000) and discussed it as part of the populist ideology, which specifically defines 'the people' or the imagined community that populists define as their 'people'. I mentioned that it is easier to identify what populists oppose (Mudde, 2004) than to define the heartland of populist actors. These aspects are exemplified here: identifying the out-group is relatively straightforward and exhibits similarity across all three PFRPs. Conversely, the in-groups are more distinctive and varied.

The AfD creates an in-group that not only sees national interests as a priority but also considers environmental, homeland, and nature protection to be very present

characteristics. The national policy field is characterised by one focus on sustainability, which highlights not only climate protection but also environmental protection. As mentioned earlier, Germany has a long environmental tradition, which can be also seen in the discourse about climate change of the relatively young AfD. It is similar but somewhat less so with Vox, which also places the in-group's closeness to nature in a central position, with the national interest and consequently patriotism always in mind. The FPÖ focuses on an in-group that is oriented towards the little guy: the working population, taxpayers, ordinary citizens, and farmers. Environmental protection plays a minor role.

The in-group cannot be compared with Taggart's heartland; it could at most be a help in defining it. However, my aim was not to define the heartlands of the parties, as this would have gone beyond the analytical strategy of this paper. Nevertheless, these individual in-groups, as opposed to a relatively common out-group, can provide clues as to the direction of the creation of this imagined community of the people for the three parties if this concept is applied. Taggart (2000, 2004) argues that populism is very context-dependent, which is also reflected in the results. Despite some commonalities among the PFRPs, the uniqueness of the individual discourses cannot be denied. In other words, while the AfD, Vox, and the FPÖ have certain similarities in their climate change communication, each party also has various eccentricities, diverse foci, and substance in their individual climate change discourse. The in-depth analysis of the *topoi* paints a picture that is comparable to that of the discourse topics above. Differences and similarities are depicted in Figure 6.1.

The AfD, Vox, and the FPÖ have several topoi in common: the *topos of economic harm*, the *topos of democracy*, and the *topos of environment*. The *topos of economic harm* is prevalent across all of them, as they frequently cite potential negative economic impacts of climate protection measures. This aligns with findings from previous studies on far-right climate change communication (e.g. Forchtner, 2019; Küppers, 2022; see also Sommer et al., 2022). Ecology and economy are pitted against one another, and any short-term losses that fossil fuel-driven sectors of the economy (like the automobile industry) could experience are depicted as terrifying. It is believed that the only development that makes economic sense is to maintain the status quo, particularly with relation to the national economy.

To remain with the economic aspects: in the Spanish policy field of climate change, the economy plays a comparatively subordinate role. Although it, too, deals with the transition and transformation of economic sectors, it also emphasises the opportunities of climate protection for the economic competitiveness of the country. This aspect is somewhat mirrored by Vox, who shows a focus on economic issues, but it is less present than in Germany.

Furthermore, I found the *topos of democracy* in all three parties. In a nuanced manner, the narrative of renunciation is also at play here, particularly portraying advocates of climate protection as protagonists who undermine democratic processes and threaten citizens' lifestyles and national prosperity. This argument, which I term 'no sticks, just carrots', is notably prominent in the Austrian and German policy fields. Interestingly, the *topos of democracy* is most prevalent in

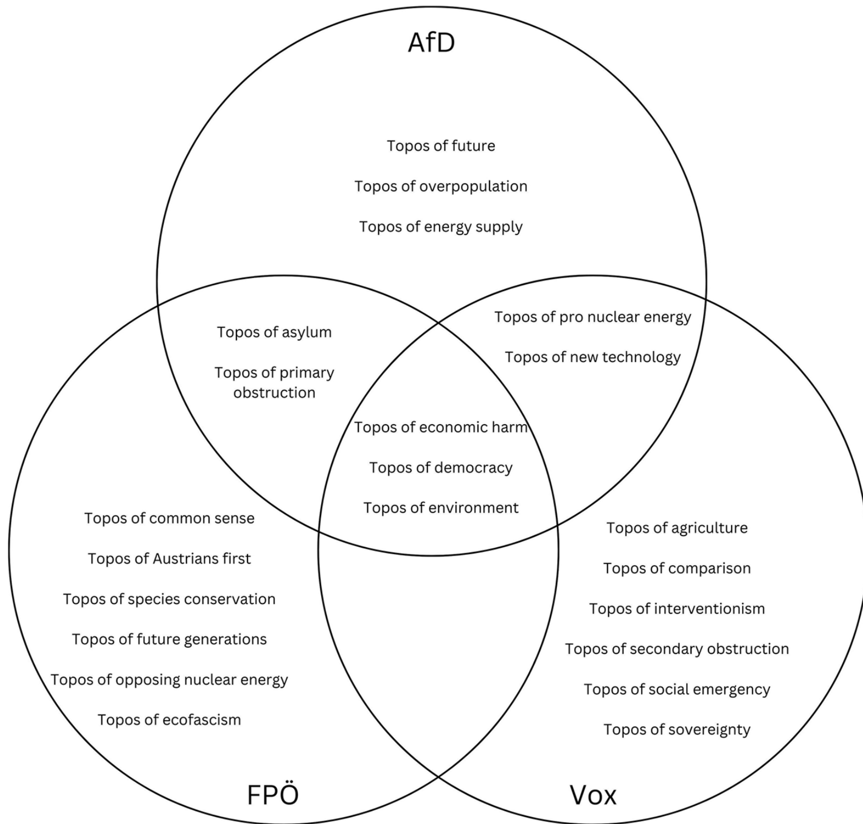

Figure 6.1 Topoi identified for the AfD, Vox, and the FPÖ

Austria and least pronounced in Spain. In Austria, the FPÖ leverages elements of the climate change policy field to evoke additional fears, suggesting that climate protectors and their efforts represent an assault on the democratic principles of consent and participation. Conversely, in Spain, where aspects of 'no sticks, just carrots' are less prominent in the policy landscape, the *topos of democracy* is only marginally present in Vox's discourse.

The *topos of environment* refers to the will to protect the environment. The analysis has shown that with this *topos* the parties clearly separate environmental protection from climate protection. The parties probably want to present themselves as responsible actors who are committed to environmental protection (see e.g. Turner-Graham, 2020). The latter primarily addresses national and vulnerable environmental problems and ignores the more abstract and globally relevant climate change. Environmental and climate issues have received a lot of attention in recent years (Stecula & Merkley, 2019). Ignoring an issue of a broader public concern completely would probably not be politically beneficial, for example could

lose voters. Indeed, environmental protection in particular is classified by many scholars as a valence issue, that is, an issue that most people agree on (Dunlap, 1995; Farstad, 2018; Jordan & Rayner, 2010; Mertig & Dunlap, 1995; see also Chapter 2). However, the PFRPs' understanding of the environment remains very nationalistic and often reminiscent of right-wing conservation ideologies (Götze, 2019). Indeed, scholars have observed that nature is frequently a central issue in far-right imaginaries (Forchtner, 2020b; Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015), which can partly be traced back to the role of aesthetics, symbolism, and materiality of the national countryside (Cosgrove, 2004; Palmer, 1998) as well as to a variety of biological/racial metaphors (Olsen, 1999; Olwig, 2003) that have long had a significant place in the ideology of nationalism (Kølvraa, 2020, p. 107).

Moving on to climate obstruction, all three PFRPs obstruct climate change in one way or another. Drawing on Van Rensburg's (2015) dimensions of scepticism, it becomes apparent that the similarities outweigh the differences. In the communication of the AfD and the FPÖ, all three dimensions could be identified. That is, with regard to evidence scepticism, they deny the core aspects of climate change or its existence; with regard to process scepticism, they criticise the processes of knowledge transfer; and, finally, with regard to response scepticism, they show pronounced hostility towards climate change policies and measures. Only Vox did not identify that strong the evidence scepticism as clearly as the two German-speaking parties. Therefore, the AfD and FPÖ share the *topos of primary obstruction*, while I categorised climate obstructionism for Vox as secondary obstruction.

Both the AfD and the FPÖ employ the *topos of asylum*. This is hardly surprising as both advocate a strict immigration and asylum policy. They do not see climate change as a reason for asylum in any way, but by suggesting that climate change could become a reason for asylum, they play on people's fears that mass immigration would follow. Both parties regard climate change as only a possible excuse for asylum seekers or immigrants (see e.g. Jylhä et al., 2022). Compared to many other *topoi*, the *topos of asylum* has limited salience in their discourses, thus asylum or migration are present but only marginally (see also Forchtner, 2019).

The AfD also has two *topoi* in common with the Spanish Vox (*topos of pro nuclear energy* and *topos of new technologies*). As explained above, both parties are in favour of nuclear power and, accordingly, advocate an extension of the lifespan of nuclear power plants. The technology argument is not surprising, especially in Germany, since the policy field also puts a relatively large focus on it. Finding innovative solutions to problems, threats, or crises is a familiar argument, mobilised by the AfD and the FPÖ. The antagonists of this argument are those who assess the potential of technology in a more critical way, who are framed as pessimistic or 'climate hysterics'. In contrast to the German context, the Spanish understanding of climate change does not provide much reference to this.

Since I have already explained and discussed the *topoi* that are not shared by the PFRPs in detail in the preceding chapter, I will only touch on some interesting subtleties in the three countries here. The communication of the three parties, especially with regard to major criticism of climate activists like Greta Thunberg, green and left-wing politicians and parties, and actors like the EU, which they contrast

with ordinary people who have to pay for the ‘excesses, demands and policies of these actors’, confirms some previous studies (e.g. Forchtner, 2019; Forchtner et al., 2018; Küppers, 2022). This can be attributed to melodramatic storytelling. Melodramatic narratives (literature on the form of melodrama see e.g. Anker, 2014; Heilman, 1968; Wagner-Pacifici, 1986) represent a dichotomous worldview (good and bad), where very clear boundaries are found and the main protagonist or the hero/heroine of the story is on the ‘right side’ (Forchtner, 2020a). The AfD, Vox, and the FPÖ each portray themselves as a hero on the right side (willing to protect the environment and homeland), while the political establishment, environmentalists, climate activists, and the EU are painted as villains. I identified especially Greta Thunberg as one of the enemies (see Vowles & Hultman, 2022) othered by all three parties, but especially by the AfD and the FPÖ. Melodramatic stories intervening in a discourse rarely promote inclusive methods of interacting with and organising the social reality. Melodrama is a narrative mode that can be viewed independent of ideology.

The analysis of the FPÖ has identified the *topos of common sense*, which represents a kind of anti-intellectualism, with the ‘mainstream’ scientists in their out-group. It is precisely this combination of these two aspects that points to science-related populism (Mede & Schäfer, 2020). The attribution of blame to the out-group is central in populist communication (see e.g. Busby et al., 2019; Hameleers et al., 2017; Vasilopoulou et al., 2013). According to Hameleers and Van der Meer (2021, p. 4711), science-related populism can be defined ‘as the emphasis on an antagonism between the good and honest ordinary people and the culpable scientific elite’. Accordingly, within this antagonism, scientists are blamed for lying to the people and for not accurately representing the people’s reality. Alternative, people-centred realities are validated as true, whereas the truth claims made by purportedly dishonest scientific elites are debunked or seen as misleading (Hameleers & Van der Meer, 2021, p. 4711). This is not representing the ordinary people’s common interest but only the parties’ own opportunistic agendas (Hameleers et al., 2017).

This brings me to the theoretical component of populism’s contribution to communications about climate change. Due to the nature of this study, it is not within its scope to identify populism’s causal effects on climate obstruction. This would require a different research design. However, I can show if and how populist core beliefs are reflected in PFRPs climate change communication. In Chapter 2, I revealed that there are different perspectives and results in the literature on the role of populism in climate obstruction. One side claims that other factors such as nationalism (see e.g. Kulin et al., 2021), antifeminism (see e.g. Jylhä et al., 2020), anti-elite sentiment (see e.g. Meijers et al., 2022), or free-market ideologies (see e.g. Küppers, 2022) are more important for climate obstruction, while the other side argues that populist far-right climate change denial derives from populism (see e.g. Huber, 2020; Lockwood, 2018). The populist backlash against globalisation makes environmental degradation and climate change excellent targets (see e.g. Huber, 2020; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Indeed, populists might downplay climate change challenges as elite schemes because of their abstract and complex nature

(Huber, 2020). The obstruction of climate change mitigation found in all three parties indicates a link between populism and climate obstruction, but it is not sufficient for strong conclusions.

Theoretically, these findings on the discourse about climate change offer support for a discursive affinity between populism and climate obstruction. Based on Mudde's (2004) approach to populism as a thin-centred ideology, I looked at its basic feature, that society is divided into two homogeneous societal group of which one is the pure people and the other the corrupt elite, and that populists represent the will of the people. In order to label the discourses as populist, scholars point out that two dimensions of populism – people-centrism and anti-elitism – need to be identified. In particular, anti-elitist communication is present in the communication of the three PFRPs, which can be seen for example in the in-groups and out-groups, but also in other discursive strategies such as the strategy of nomination and the strategy of predication. I find *ad hominem* attacks in the AfD and the FPÖ, especially in the direction of climate activists and specifically Greta Thunberg. Vox does not support Greta Thunberg or climate campaigners, but the Spanish party is much more restrained in its criticism. The FPÖ additionally criticises climate scientists and disparages their moral character by charging them with spreading false information on purpose. Since the scientists, notably the climate scientist Michael E. Mann, are accused of falsifying evidence, one might also mention conspiracist arguments in this context. Research on Austrian far-right media supports this (Forchtner, 2019). The *topos of common sense*, and thus anti-intellectualism, which refers to people's common sense and relativises scientific and expert knowledge, is another indication of a populist characteristic (see 2015). The same climate scientist, Mann, is only mentioned once as 'climate pope' in one such allusion by the AfD, but as it only occurs once, it is not particularly noteworthy.

The elite and anti-establishment rhetoric tends to be more prominent at the national level in all three PFRPs. Although also criticised, the EU and European actors receive much less attention than national ones. With the attacks on climate activists or movements like the FFF, one could assume a global dimension. However, they are not directly framed as a global elite or part of the establishment. In Vox, the title of 'chiringuitos' stands out, which the Spanish Vox uses as a negative label for various organisations that are recipients of public funds, which according to Vox are promoters of the government agenda.

People-centrism is also clearly recognisable in all three parties. In the eyes of populists, climate change and related policies are the work of a global elite cut off from the struggles of the 'common man' (see e.g. Huber, 2020; Lockwood, 2018). Here, however, the focus is particularly on economic harm for the people. In fact, the people centrism of all three parties refers to rising costs for the normal people, the 'citizens', due to climate change policies.

Indeed, both anti-elitism and people-centrism are present in the discourses about climate change of the AfD, Vox, and the FPÖ. The latter stands out because anti-elitism is especially present. Thus, the FPÖ's discourse can be described as the most populist of the three. However, as with the AfD and Vox, all three parties tend to focus on other arguments. Thus, the following paragraphs summarise why

populism is perhaps not the main important ideological stance in the discourses about climate change of three PFRPs.

The dominant argumentation of all three PFRPs concerns the economy. Indeed, various studies reveal a connection between pro-market attitudes and doubt about climate change (see e.g. Bohr, 2016; Cann & Raymond, 2018; Hornsey et al., 2016; McCright & Dunlap, 2000; Panno et al., 2019). PFRPs in Europe show very different and somehow peculiar economic positions. While, the so-called old 'winning formula' was initially one connected to a free-market stance (see Kitschelt & McGann, 1995), PFRPs have shifted their positions to the centre on economic issues since they began to draw voters from the working class (the 'new winning formula', according to De Lange, 2007). The AfD and the FPÖ, however, still pursue a neoliberal agenda (Ausserladscheider, 2022; Franzmann, 2018; Havertz, 2020), with sometimes ambivalent economic positions. For instance, the FPÖ refers to its pro-welfare impact, but a recent study shows that this is limited to the mitigation of benefit cutbacks for the core workers (Rathgeb, 2020).[2] In contrast, the party has been a champion of tax cuts, trade union disempowerment, and, more recently, welfare chauvinism (Rathgeb, 2020). Vox is often described as sharing the demands of liberalism or neoliberalism, along with some anti-liberal ideas of protectionism and anti-globalisation. All three parties frequently attack climate mitigation and adaptation policies as well as climate protection actions because they claim that they harm the countries' national economy and interest. Here, reference is often made to the ordinary people who have to finance what they see as unnecessary climate protection policies and who have to bear the high costs.

At the core of radical-right ideology within the far-right is the 'nation' (Mudde, 2007, p. 16), in that the radical right promotes the defence of cultural identity and sees immigration and immigrants or asylum seekers as a threat to the monocultural state (Mudde, 2007). In the discourse about climate change, climate refugees, for example, would have to be presented as a threat (see e.g. Kulin et al., 2021). This holds true for the FPÖ and the AfD, where the *topos of asylum* was discerned. While present in both countries, it did not feature prominently in the discourse. Other topics, particularly economic issues, commanded much greater attention. Furthermore, Forchtner and Kølvraa (2015) have already pointed out the global dimension of climate change, which requires transnational solutions and action and can thus be seen as undermining national sovereignty (see e.g. Kulin et al., 2021). This would also entail, as Küppers (2022) already noted for the AfD, the AfD's rejection of renewable energies, since the country is seen as self-sufficient due to its own coal-fired power plants and, partly, nuclear power energy. As already explained, renewables are rejected by both the AfD and Vox. Vox also explicitly refers to Spain's sovereignty, which must be protected (see *topos of sovereignty*). In contrast, the FPÖ, which rejects nuclear power in principle, does not talk about renewable energies, but rejects wind energy because of the possible threat to different species (see e.g. Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015; Lockwood, 2018).

Therefore, these findings suggest that future studies should examine various ideological positions related to the climate change issue. This analysis is another indicator for the literature that does not see the role of populism in climate change

communication as central (e.g. Kulin et al., 2021; Küppers, 2022) in contrast to the scholars, who assume a more central role of populism (e.g. Huber, 2020; Lockwood, 2018).

However, my analysis is not only enriching and academically relevant to provide one of the two sides with a further indicator for their argument; it also provides methodological insights that are relevant for future research. Especially the comparative approach in combination with the application of the apparatus of CDS and the related inclusion of the policy field by means of a systematic discourse analysis is new and enriching for this field of research. With this research design, I have demonstrated how insightful it is to analyse the respective context to categorise and interpret results of CDS. In order to combine a CDS approach with a multiple case study, I had to ensure a systematic analysis of the respective contexts so that the comparative approach makes sense and brings added value to the research. I have done this by combining the investigation of the national policy field by analysing the understanding of climate change with the DHA of the PFRPs' communication on climate change.

In sum, this investigation contributes to the existing body of empirical research on populist far-right climate change communication. In addition to uncovering various new empirical insights into the discourse surrounding climate change in the three countries, the findings also validate numerous previous observations: 'Ideology-driven affinity for environmental protection does not necessarily extend into the area of climate change' (Forchtner, 2019, p. 175). However, populism understood as a 'thin' ideology rarely stands alone, but tends to be combined with other elements, such as the classic left- or right-wing views, nationalist or cosmopolitan world views, authoritarianism, and nativism (Lockwood, 2018, p. 714).

Practical implication, limitations, and future research

Governments around the world have ratified international agreements like the 2015 Paris Agreement, which are based on scientific data that demonstrates the human contribution to climate change and actively promotes the benefits of climate protection measures. While many politicians agree that mitigating measures are necessary, not all political parties and citizens share this urgency. In fact, various studies found denial of human-made climate change present amongst individual citizens (e.g. Capstick et al., 2015; Fieldhouse et al., 2015; Howarth, 2014) and the view that environmental activism is elitist (Morrison & Dunlap, 1986; Wetts, 2020). Given that public support is a requirement for comprehensive climate and environmental protection policies (Anderson et al., 2017), it is central to understand where such obstruction comes from and how it is communicated. I already explained in detail that political orientation is among the most powerful explanations of attitudes towards climate change politics and (in)action (Beiser-McGrath & Huber, 2018; Hornsey et al., 2016).

Understanding the nature and content of climate change communication by individual actors within their respective contexts can serve as a strategic approach to systematically counteracting climate obstruction, and potentially prevent its further

occurrence. In Chapter 2, I discussed a mainstreaming of the far right (see among others Mudde, 2019), which increases the relevance of an investigation of far-right actors in particular. Results such as those presented in this study are therefore also significant for actors such as politicians and journalists, because they help to classify communication and concrete arguments, and to consider them in context. The critical aspect of the DHA is an additional added value here and draws an insightful picture of their communication about climate change.

It is important to acknowledge some limitations regarding this study. First, although the nature of this research is based on qualitative methods, the diversity of data mobilised is newsworthy. The different data and text genres included in this research do not allow drawing strong conclusions for a comparative analysis. The data are context related and based on availability as well as relevance. However, by integrating a variety of different text genres, a qualitative descriptive comparison between the cases is possible. Second, due to the inclusion of various cases and the combination of the understanding of climate change of the mainstream parties with the DHA of the discourse about climate change of the PFRPs, I limited the quantity of the data for each case. Further studies could increase the quantity of data. Third, I concentrated mainly on the examination of discursive strategies focusing on *topoi*. Further studies could also include an analysis of narratives as well as visuals that such actors create and disseminate (see e.g. Audikana & Kaufmann, 2022; Espinosa et al., 2017; Forchtner, 2021; Forchtner & Özvatan, 2022).

Despite these limitations, I believe that this study has important implications, and the findings suggest great potential for future research. First, by contrasting right-wing/radical right, left-wing, and valence populist parties, the distinctive role and impact of populism might be further investigated (see e.g. Zulianello, 2020 for a conceptual distinction). Second, Antilla (2005) has argued that the US media falsely claim that there is controversy or uncertainty in the international scientific community about the reality of anthropogenic climate change, and this portrayed scientific disagreement may have far-reaching consequences for action in climate change mitigation (see also Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Boykoff & Smith, 2010). Thus, it is not only important for scholars to analyse actors such as governments, with much formal power, and the media, who actually present and frame discourses but rather go deeper and analyse the very process. To analyse the process means to investigate various actors with different (power) positions, their relations to each other as well as their links to various documents or outputs (e.g. news outlets, policy documents, press releases). Only by analysing the process of certain discourses can I display a wider picture of how actors actually frame certain topics and how this can influence making policies. While the present study tried to include various text genres, it is up to future research to analyse and critically examine climate change communication across party boundaries.

There are already some studies that examine the climate change communication of far-right media outlets such as party newspapers (e.g. Forchtner, 2019; Küppers, 2022) and studies that analyse the climate change communication of mass media (e.g. Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Dolšak & Houston, 2014; Feldman & Hart, 2018; Stoddart & Tindall, 2015). But it would certainly be of value if investigations could

somehow combine these two and examine correlations, interrelations, or even causalities.

As shown in Chapter 2, research about far-right climate change communication is growing fast. Literature, including the present work, reveals that many PFRPs show hostility towards climate-change policies (see e.g. Farstad, 2018; Forchtner et al., 2018; Żuk & Szulecki, 2020). This often places them outside the political mainstream (see Lockwood, 2018). But what if the PFRPs are becoming the political mainstream (see Mudde, 2019)? Here it would also be interesting to examine the discourses over time and see if there is a change between the periods when a far-right party is in parliament/government/in a government coalition and before or after when they are in opposition/not in government/no longer in parliament. A comparative approach to such research would certainly be of value.

Chapter summary

This chapter offered an overview of the key findings of this investigation and its methodological as well as theoretical contributions. Moreover, I discussed practical implications of this analysis as well as limitations of the work. The analysis of the understanding of climate change in Germany, Spain, and Austria helped to integrate the context in a systematic way. I integrated the previous results in this chapter and discussed them within the respective context.

The methodological contribution of this study thereby relates to the systematic combination of the conceptual analysis (combining BG and DHA) of the context and more concretely of the policy field. This is where the DHA of an individual actor then builds. This combination or systematic integration of the policy field enabled a broad understanding and interpretation of the results. The comparative aspect of the three cases requires a structured procedure and came to the fore in this chapter. It underlined the role of context, that is, the national policy field, in the analysis of the discourse of individual parties. The systematic integration of the comparative approach with CDS represents an innovative approach that can be a model for empirical studies in CDS.

The theoretical contribution of this dissertation refers to the interpretation of the discourse about climate change by PFRPs as a reference to populism. After discussing various perspectives on the role of populism in climate obstruction, my findings lend credence to a discursive link between populism and climate change communication. The division of society into two homogeneous groups, features of anti-elitism and people-centrism support this indication. I made it clear that I did not look for a causal relation of populism and climate obstruction, but I was able to include populism literature in an essential way that helped to understand the discourses about climate change by PFRPs.

There are limitations regarding the genre affordances of the collected and analysed data. Due to the context relatedness of the data a strong comparative analysis is restricted. I also discussed a limited quantity of data, which could be tackled in future studies. In addition, an integration of the analysis of narratives could consolidate and enrich further studies.

The new empirical results produced with this book regarding the discourses about climate change by PFRPs within their national policy fields highlighted various aspects of communication around where and how climate obstruction is present. In this chapter I discussed various arguments around how climate obstruction is communicated, which should help to strengthen and create counterarguments that are based on current scientific findings. Further research can tie in here and systematically investigate the prevention and counteraction of further dissemination of climate obstructionist communication.

Notes

1 In capitalist systems, for example, trade unions are also among the actors that are in line with the idea of growth (Grebing, 1973; Pirker, 1960).
2 In Austria notably not only the FPÖ and ÖVP but also the SPÖ moved closer to neoliberal positions in recent years (Grimm, 2018)

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7 Conclusion

This study started from the problem that environmental issues such as climate change have long been present on the political agenda of European countries and beyond, but responses, adaptation, and mitigation measures have often been insufficient. I have argued throughout this work that the understanding of climate change communication of various political parties – focusing on PFRPs within the respective policy field – is essential for present and future climate change policies. I examined how present the issue of climate change was among mainstream parties in Germany, Spain, and Austria and how its communication changed from 2016 to 2020. These results provided an understanding of climate change as a policy field, building the basis for the investigation about the presence of climate change in PFRPs' communication between 2016 and 2020 in the countries mentioned. Finally, I analysed how these PFRPs addressed the issue of climate change. I worked from the perspective that language use – more precisely, discourse − is shaped by society and contributes to society, which is why I resorted to the methodological apparatus of CDS. This was particularly suitable because I was able to consider climate change communication in its extensive socio-political and historical context, different data, and their relationship to each other. In other words, I could provide insights into how, when, and in what context different political parties participate in the conversation about climate change.

In particular, I demonstrated that a systematic analysis of the respective national policy field – based on the investigation of communication of the mainstream parties of a country – is of great benefit to the understanding and interpretation of the discourses of individual parties. While the analyses of the national policy fields showed very different national understandings of climate change, I claim that economic arguments prevail in PFRPs' discourse about climate change, which are also characterised strongly by climate obstruction.

Concretely I investigated how mainstream parties in Germany, Spain, and Austria communicate climate change in their social media channels (Facebook and Twitter), policy documents and parliamentary sessions to conceptualise the respective national policy field of climate change. I revealed, using the language-sensitive and discursive methodology, that not only is climate change a common topic of conversation in all three countries but that it is, moreover, seen as a crucial issue for both current and future politics. However, the understandings of climate change

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are different in each national context, and individual characteristics and special features most often can be traced back to national peculiarities, which are related to the respective history, tradition, and culture. In short, Germany focuses most on economic and technological aspects in its climate change communication which is characteristic of its strong industry – related also to coal and fossil fuel – and its vast economic power in Europe. Spain focuses on the immediate reality and necessary actions as it is a country already allegedly strongly affected by climate change, for example, with excessive heat and drought in many regions. The particularity of the Austrian case is the strong rejection of nuclear energy, which is a cultural feature of the country generally, and the recognition (like Spain) that responsibility for climate protection must be taken. What is striking in Austria is the gap between the centre-left SPÖ, focusing much more on social aspects, and the centre-right ÖVP, engaging more in the economic aspects of climate change.

Regarding the development of understandings in the three countries: these become more diverse. This may be connected to the fact that from 2019 onwards there was more communication on climate change in the social media in all countries. In Germany, the focus on economic growth and technologies was further emphasised regarding climate policy. In Spain, the change of government from the conservative PP to the socialist PSOE was reflected in the discourse about climate change, because more social and justice issues were addressed. And in Austria, the crisis aspect of climate change as well as energy and the future were brought more into focus.

In order to integrate the PFRPs discourse in these policy fields, I examined how PFRPs of the three countries communicate about climate change in their social media channels (Facebook and Twitter), press releases (for Germany and Spain), and party newspaper (only for Austria), as well as party and election programmes. The German AfD includes climate change issues most in its communication and Spain the least, whereby the national environmental tradition might be one important factor for such differences. In other words, Germany draws from a long history of public debates over nature and environmental issues, while these aspects have long been secondary at the national level in Spain. The AfD, Vox, and the FPÖ address climate change in very different contexts or combine the issue with various other topics. What they have in common is the strong criticism of the respective governments, which is very typical of opposition parties (the FPÖ in fact did this only when they were no longer part of the government). In addition and drawing on the concept of discursive strategies (Reisigl, 2017; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), I analysed the self- and other-representation, where I identified similar out-groups for all three parties. These include the respective national governments, climate activists, left or green politicians, and the EU. In their arguments, the investigated PFRPs shared the themes of climate obstruction, the focus on economic harm of climate policy, and their commitment to protect the environment. Although less present, all three parties also considered climate change dangerous for democracy.

Findings of this study are in line with existing research and emphasise a relationship between PFRPs and climate obstruction. Moreover, while the results clearly show an affinity with populism in the PFRPs discourses about climate change, they

also show that other arguments, such as those regarding economic harm due to climate policy, are prevalent. Thus, neoliberal or market-free ideology, for example, plays a greater role in all three PFRPs. Indeed, aspects of people centrism mainly focused on economic arguments. This is certainly also connected to one of the strongest arguments all PFRPs raised about climate protection, which is that measures would harm the national economy. While the mentioned out-group served as one indicator of anti-elitism, the global elite or the global establishment was rarely subject to criticism (with the exception of Austria). Rather, actors such as climate activists, Green and left parties/politics as well as governments were mentioned. However, this is typical of opposition parties and need not be attributed to populism.

Due to the fact that PFRPs are strong in many European countries (see e.g. the latest election in Italy, where Melonis populist far-right Fratelli d'Italia won) this research investigating climate change communication is of great relevance. In particular, the comparison of three members of the EU made it possible to learn something about their roles, and even though this was not the focus or goal of the work, it was an interesting by-product. For instance, the EU context on climate change played a different role in each of the three countries: to name just a few examples, in Germany the focus on the EU-ETS as well as on technology is an indication of its relationship with the EU. In Spain, on the other hand, the focus was more on the development of a climate change law, which, among other things, needs to correspond to EU policies. In Austria, the criticism of the EU for a possible promotion of nuclear energy is interesting. Furthermore, combining theoretical aspects of populism literature and empirical results adds to the existing literature. This project challenges the idea that populism is the most important driver for climate scepticism but indicates that other ideological elements play a more central role in climate change communication.

But this work is not only relevant in terms of content and empirical results; the research design, which systematically analyses the context in which PFRPs move and thus makes it part of the analysis, is also innovative. Especially in the case of populist parties, because populism is described as substantially context-dependent in the literature (Taggart, 2004, p. 275), such a research design adds value. This study demonstrates how to consider the political context that a party's communication is immersed in. This is also an approach that makes it easier to combine comparative aspects with CDS, as a systematic analysis of the context facilitates comparisons. In fact, in a special issue that revisited trends and traditions regarding theoretical and methodological approaches in CDS, Leipold et al. (2019) have argued that, among other things, more comparative and cross-case studies that also examine non-English-speaking contexts is needed. This book thus makes an important contribution to this research field, too. In my case, the national policy field of climate change served as context. The analysis of this was not only interesting in itself but also allowed me to better understand and interpret certain arguments in the PFRPs' discourse. Moreover, mainstream parties are often neglected in studies of climate change communication, which allows this work to address another aspect.

As already noted in the introduction, according to Hulme (2009), climate change exists both as an observable physical phenomenon and as an idea shaped by one's cultural and social background. I have dealt with the latter in this research and have shown how unique both the national policy field and the discourse about PFRPs are. I have been able to relate components of climate change communication back to national circumstances, environmental tradition, or economic, ecological, or social traits and trends. Climate change communication has an impact on citizens' views, attitudes, and behaviour (Ballew et al., 2022; Deeg et al., 2021), making it critical to understand such communication and its developments. It is also important to understand what, for example, influencers, origins, or drivers of climate obstruction are, not only to advance and enrich the scientific debate but also to frame climate change (in)action and, if necessary, to address issues at their source. I argue that many such roots can be found in the national political and cultural context of individual countries.

An added value of future studies would be an exploration of the level of citizens regarding climate change communication and climate change beliefs and attitudes in the context of the larger political and especially party-political context. Future analysis could focus not only on ideological factors and political orientation but also on other aspects such as environmental tradition and cultural aspects as factors influencing climate change communication. Furthermore, a focus on climate obstruction makes sense, as the identification of different strategies of obstruction (see Ekberg et al., 2022; and also Rahmstorf, 2005; Van Rensburg, 2015) and possible new forms of obstruction facilitates counter frames tailored to them and can possibly prevent or better counter future climate obstruction movements. It would also be important to identify and document climate obstruction or denial networks, where the sources are, how they are financed, and which actors are involved. Such studies could be conducted within CDS framework as well as go beyond it, so I advocate combining different methods (e.g. social network analysis) and working in an interdisciplinary way.

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