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Radical-Right Climate Skepticism

A comparative analysis of climate skeptic attitudes in radical right parties in Norway, Sweden and Denmark

Bachelor's thesis in European Studies w/ Political Science
Supervisor: Carine S. Germond
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Abstract

The goal and objective of this paper will be to give the reader a better understanding of climate skepticism in three radical right parties in Norway, Sweden and Denmark in the period of 2019 to 2022. The thesis will attempt to carry out a comparative case study grounded in party manifestos and interviews during the general elections in the respective countries. The subjects of analysis in this thesis are Fremskrittspartiet (Norway), Dansk Folkeparti (Denmark) and Sverige Demokraterna (Sweden).

This thesis applies two conceptual formulations of different types of climate skepticism by Stefan Rahmstorf and Willem Van Rensburg. By not focusing on to what degree climate skepticism shines through in radical right parties' policies, this thesis can offer a more nuanced and insightful approach typologizing the parties' arguments. Having a conceptual framework that can be utilized to categorize different types of climate skepticism will make for a deeper analysis of the specific climate skepticism narratives used in the political campaigns. This will hopefully provide a rich understanding of the parties' perspectives on the issue.

The study finds that even though these parties operate in different countries, they seem to reflect similar types of skepticism towards climate change and "symbolic" mitigation policies set out by the political left. A skepticism anchored in the doubt about the man-made aspect of climate change, resentment towards tax policy targeting the individual taxpayer and businesses that contributes to the national economy. All parties seem to focus on the problem being global rather than a local one, emphasizing that one nation would constitute an insignificant difference in the emission levels without the help of the biggest countries who contribute to most of the emissions today (FRP, 2021; Dansk Folkeparti, 2019; Sverige Demokraterna, 2021).

Sammendrag

Målet med denne oppgaven vil være å gi leseren en bedre forståelse av klimaskepsis i tre høyre-radikale partier i Norge, Sverige og Danmark i perioden 2019 til 2022. Oppgaven skal forsøke å utrede en komparativ case studie med utgangspunkt i partimanifester og intervjuer i stortingsvalgs-periodene i de respektive landene. Analyseelementene i denne oppgaven vil være Fremskrittspartiet (Norge), Dansk Folkeparti (Danmark) og Sverige Demokraterna (Sverige).

Oppgaven anvender to konseptuelle formuleringer av ulike typer klimaskepsis utarbeidet av Stefan Rahmstorf og Willem Van Rensburg. Ved å ikke fokusere på «til hvilken grad» klimaskepsis blir formulert i høyre-radikale partiers politikk, men heller legge fokus på hvor denne skepsisen er forankret, vil denne oppgaven kunne tilby en mer nyansert og innsiktsfull tilnærming til klimaskepsis i høyre-radikale partier i Skandinavia. Ved å anvende et konseptuelt rammeverk som kan brukes til å kategorisere ulike typer klimaskepsis, vil avhandlingen være i stand til å gi en dypere analyse av klimaskepsis som framvises i de politiske kampanjene.

Analysen finner at selv om partiene operer i ulike land, som stort sett er relativt like, ser de ut til å reflektere samme typer skepsis, rettet mot klimaendringer og «symbolpolitikk» fastsatt av den politiske venstresiden. Mye tyder på at denne skepsisen er forankret i usikkerhet rundt i hvor stor grad dette problemet er menneskeskapt, forbitrelse mot klimaskatter rettet mot individer og bedrifter som bidrar til den nasjonale økonomien og fokus på at problemet først og fremst er et globalt problem hvor én nasjon vil utgjøre en minimal forskjell i globale utslippsnivåer uten hjelp fra de største landene som står for de største utslippsprosentene i dag (FRP, 2021; Dansk Folkeparti, 2019; Sverige Demokraterna, 2021).

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List of Abbreviations

NTNU	The Norwegian University of Science and Technology
FRP	Fremskrittspartiet
SD	Sverige Demokraterna
DF	Dansk Folkeparti
EU	European Union
MSSD	Most Similar Systems Design
MDSD	Most Dissimilar Systems Design
EIB	European Investment Bank

1 Introduction

Traditionally it is the political left and green parties that have been the advocates for climate change and climate mitigation policy. Climate change has become subject to a tremendous debate among politicians and interest groups, and even though the science may be clear, some radical right parties choose not to believe it. The radical right has had an immense focus on immigration, which has been their dominant issue since 2015 (Widfeldt, 2023). In recent years however, the climate debate has drawn attention away from the immigration issue and over to climate change problems such as global heating and emission mitigation (Widfeldt, 2023). The radical-right have been recognized as "skeptical" to the damages that fossil fuel emissions inflict on the climate and environment. Some radical right parties deny the fact that climate change is happening and some show skepticism towards the science behind it (Forchtner, 2019, p.1-2).

The climate change debate has been on the political agenda since the late 1980s, but it is only in recent years that radical right parties has started to give it attention (Jackson, 2007). With the climate issue becoming one of the most important political issues for the electorate in Scandinavian countries it is implicit that radical right parties have had to provide climate mitigation policy to satisfy and mobilize this electorate (EIB, 2021). Even though the radical right has been giving climate change more attention, the immigration issue still dominates their agenda (Widfeldt, 2023).

The focus of this thesis will be three radical right parties in Scandinavia - (Fremskrittspartiet, Sverige Demokraterna & Dansk Folkeparti), exploring how they project skepticism in their communication on climate and environment issues. It will attempt to answer the main research question: (1) "How did Fremskrittspartiet, Sverige Demokraterna and Dansk Folkeparti express climate skepticism in their political discourse during the general elections in the period 2021-2022?". After discussing RQ.1, the paper will answer two subsequent research questions: (2) "What climate sceptic typologies can be identified in their communication on environmental and climate issues?" and "Are there variations between the three parties in their climate skeptic positions?". Firstly, it will explore how three Scandinavian radical-right parties express climate skepticism in their political communication, leading up to, and during the general elections in the period of 2019-2022. Second, it investigates how climate skeptic positions of radical right parties can be typologized, and lastly, a comparison of the three parties' climate skeptic attitudes.

With this thesis I hope to shed light on any similarities or differences that have been observed in the arguments from the three radical right parties in Scandinavia and how climate skepticism can be typologized based on these arguments. In addition to this I hope to supplement existing literature on climate skepticism in Scandinavia, when most of the literature on climate skepticism encompasses central-Europe where radical right climate movements have made the greatest progress.

The analysis will begin with a brief overview of existing literature on the topic of climate skepticism in general before it dives deeper into climate skepticism in the three radical right parties in Scandinavia. Following the literature review is a presentation of Rensburg and Rahmstorf's conceptual frameworks on climate skeptic typologies. The main section consists of an in-depth analysis of each of the three radical right sister parties in Norway,

Denmark and Sweden before a comparison of climate skeptic attitudes identified in all parties. Considering the scope of this study, the analysis is limited to the climate sceptic attitudes of FRP, SD and DF in the period of 2019-2022. The value of studying the Scandinavian Radical right lays in the interest of researching an element of radical right politics that is often overlooked or not put in focus by the parties themselves. It is however highly relevant considering the rise in radical right popularity in Europe today, and with these parties gaining power and influence in governments, their climate policy is something that could affect decision-making in governments across Scandinavia (Henly, 2023).

2 Literature Review – Climate Skepticism

In recent decades climate change has evolved from a topic primarily dealt with by natural scientists to being socially constructed as the key contemporary environmental crisis becoming meaningful to a wider audience than purely climate scientists (Forchtner, 2019, p.1). Data from the 2023 Eurobarometer suggest that 93% of Europeans believe climate change is a serious problem facing the world and 58% consider it important that the green transition is sped up (European Commission, 2023). Looking at these numbers, one might expect the climate debate to be a valence-issue where all parties agree on the end goal of a better climate, however, many of the radical right parties in Europe can be understood as skeptical to the concept of climate change (Gemenis et.al, 2012; Schaller & Carius, 2019). According to Daniel Fiorino, many world leaders and elite politicians tend to be skeptic and hostile towards policy prescribing action on climate change. This skepticism is oftentimes reflected in rejection of climate science, opposition to multilateral institutions and agreements, domestic exploitation of fossil fuels, and a deep mistrust in climate advocates and experts (Fiorino, 2022, p.801).

According to existing research conducted by Kirsti Jylhä, Pontus Strimling and Jens Rydgren, there is a correlation between political right-wing identification and anti-environmentalism in western countries, suggesting a possible explanation for this might be protection of the prevailing economic system (Jylhä et al. 2020). Another analysis conducted by Matthew Lockwood of right-wing populism and the climate change agenda, suggest that Right-wing populist parties have gained both strength and reach in recent years with the Brexit referendum in the UK and Donald Trump's election victory in 2016. According to Lockwood, this rise of right-wing populism can be a serious challenge to the current climate agenda seeking to lower emissions and reduce global heating (Lockwood, 2018, p.712). He states that radical-right populist party platforms tend to be hostile towards policy designed to address climate change. In countries where such parties have attained power, they seek to scale back climate policies with examples being the Law and Justice Party in Poland who have been hostile towards renewable energy and wider climate policy suggested by the EU, but positive towards continuing and committing to the coal-industry which is an important source of energy for the Polish people (Lockwood, 2018, p.712). An important variable in radical right party's climate skepticism are the concerns of dependency on energy imports. Lockwood states that in countries where they "have domestic fossil fuel resources, national energy independence will be framed in terms of maintaining and developing those resources". Whereas in countries where there are no such resources "can be expected to frame energy independence in terms of finding alternatives to fossil fuels, while at the same time resenting the idea of climate policy imposed by supranational bodies" (Lockwood, 2018, p.724).

A trend among the European radical right wing (populist) parties, according to Kostas Gemenis et al., is that a majority of radical right parties used to be the advocate for anti-environment messages to the electorate (Gemenis et al, 2012). These parties were found to advocate nuclear energy instead of "limited resources" such as solar, water and wind because they are insufficient ways of meeting the countries energy needs (Gemenis et al,

2012, p.15). A second find in the study is the radical right parties' linkage between the environment and the "quality of life", where parties who do not mention it directly link "the ways in which people connect to their land and the quality of life and the preservation of national cultural heritage" prominent in both Germany and France (Gemenis et al, 2012, p.15). Lastly, the study found that radical right parties tend to be highly critical towards any form of environmental taxes imposed on the population because of the negative effect they have on the development of the economy (Gemenis et al, 2012, p.15). As for the Scandinavian countries, Jens Hoff suggest in "The Routledge handbook of Scandinavian politics" that there seems to be a consensus that the Nordic countries operate as forerunners for climate and environmental policy, an argument strengthened by the fact that these countries were the first to establish minsters of the environment (Nedergaard and Wivel, 2018).

3 Conceptual Taxonomy: a taxonomy of climate skepticism

The conceptual framework used in this analysis will make it possible to categorize climate skepticism across all three parties. A conceptual taxonomy suggested by Willem Van Rensburg suggest that the sceptic arguments can be divided into three centers of skepticism, that are (1): "evidence skepticism", (2): "process skepticism" and (3): "response skepticism". He argues that these three conceptual positions allow observers to make qualitative distinctions between sceptics based on where the "skepticism is anchored" (Rensburg, 2015, p.1). Rensburg suggest a taxonomy or a conceptual hierarchy for these three categories, identifying two types of "critiques". Where (1): "Core critiques" consist of the "evidence sceptics", and (2): "Concomitant critiques", consisting of the "process sceptics" and the "response sceptics", illustrated in *Figure 1* (Rensburg, 2015, p.6).

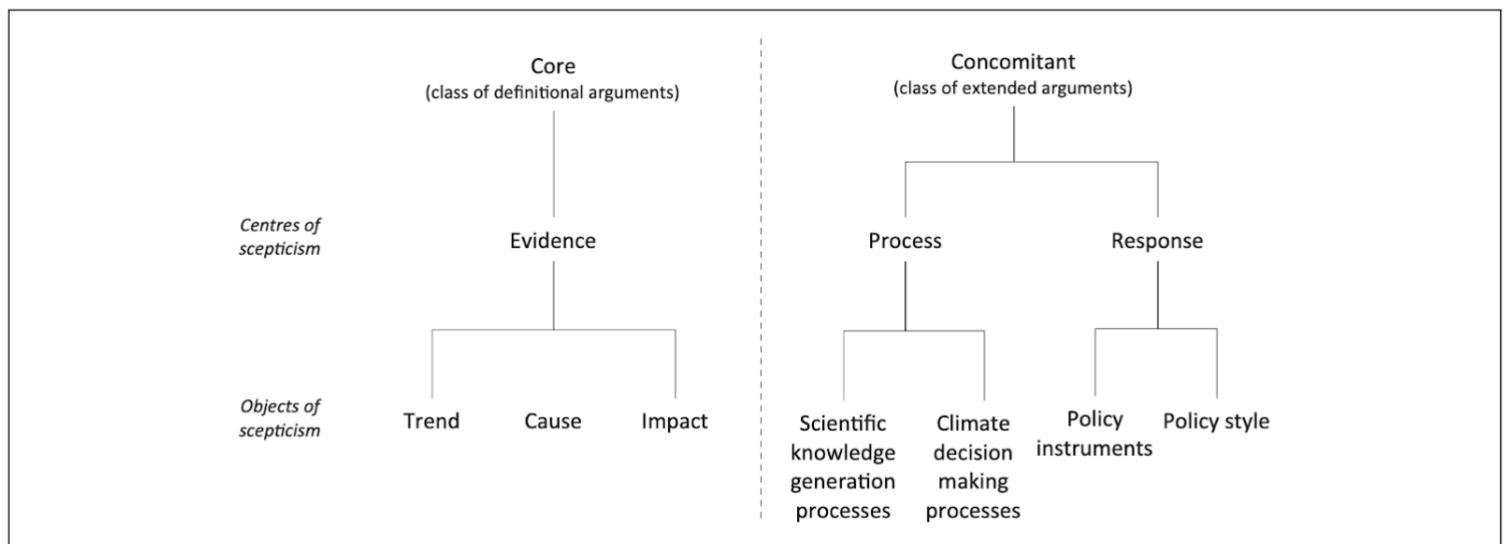


Figure 1: Rensburg's conceptual hierarchy of sceptic critiques (Rensburg, 2015, p.6).

Figure 1 illustrates how Rensburg suggests to conceptually organize and categorize different sets of climate sceptic arguments in a hierarchical order (Rensburg, 2015, p.6). Identified at the bottom level are seven "objects" of skepticism and considering the nature of these objectives, Rensburg suggest three "centers of skepticism" emerge; evidence, process and response (Rensburg, 2015, p.6). To describe the top level of categorization Rensburg coins two terms, "core/definitional sceptics" and "concomitant sceptics" (Rensburg, 2015, p.6). The "evidence skeptic" arguments he suggests, are, "core" and "definitional" critiques. Labelled "core" because of their "antecedent nature", in other words, that they are propagated in pre-existing beliefs. They are "definitional" according to Rensburg because they seek to keep the "integrity of "climate skepticism" as the antithetical climate view" (Rensburg, 2015, p.6). The second pillar of arguments are categorized as "concomitant arguments" and consists of the two remaining critiques, "process" and "response". These are labelled "concomitant arguments" because the

arguments are corresponsive with evidence arguments, but not entirely dependent on them (Rensburg, 2015, p.6).

Rensburg emphasizes the importance of the distinction between the core critiques and the concomitant critiques (Rensburg, 2015, p.6). "The core critiques define a sceptic as a sceptic and attracts the concomitant critics who are supportive of the evidence-based skepticism" (Rensburg, 2015, p.6). The concomitant arguments have a tendency to dominate the sceptics' argumentative rationales although this is skepticism where evidence deficiencies are inferred without an informed assessment of the physical science. In other words, the difference between the core and the concomitant sceptics is that concomitant skepticism is dependent on the scientific research of evidence-based skepticism which the core critiques offer (Rensburg, 2015, p.6).

A second conceptual framework is applied in the thesis, firstly to better understand the "objects of skepticism" that Rensburg conceptualizes, and secondly to understand what the essence of these arguments are. This framework is based on Stefan Rahmstorf's conceptual formulations of the lowest level of climate skepticism suggested by Rensburg. Rahmstorf suggests that "the various climate sceptics hold very different positions" (Rahmstorf, 2004, p.78). He describes and defines the three "lowest levels" of the core sceptics in Rensburg's conceptual hierarchy where Rahmstorf suggest that the "trend sceptics" are those who deny any global warming is taking place, "attribution sceptics" are those who accept global warming trends, but attribute them to natural causes and the "impact sceptics", those who think global warming is harmless or even beneficial, underscoring the possible positive consequences of climate change (Rahmstorf, 2004, pp.78-79). Considering that the concomitant skepticism builds on these evidence-based arguments of climate skepticism, these two conceptual models may be useful in identifying what type of skepticism the three Scandinavian radical right parties corresponded with in their political campaigns leading up to the 2021-2022 general elections.

The concomitant sceptics and the lowest levels of "process" and "response" sceptics in Rensburg's conceptual hierarchy, are addressed by Stuart Bryce Capstick and Nicholas Frank Pidgeon as "epistemic skepticism" and "response skepticism" (Capstick & Pigeon, 2014, p.389). The "process" skepticism Rensburg identifies, referred to as "epistemic skepticism" by Capstick and Pidgeon, is characterized as "doubts about the status of climate change as a scientific and physical phenomenon". This group of sceptics relates to the perceptions of the legitimacy of climate science claims, and individuals connected to this skepticism tend to doubt the reality, causality and impacts of climate change, and the climate science as well as the scientists (Capstick & Pidgeon, 2014, p.397).

The "response skepticism", according to Capstick and Pidgeon, is characterized as "doubts about the efficacy of action taken to address climate change". This group of sceptics tend to doubt the "effectiveness, willingness and capacity of responding to climate change at the personal, political and societal levels" (Capstick & Pidgeon, 2014, p.398). Individuals holding this view consider climate change as a problem that is too complex and too large for politicians to address alone, leading to a construct of climate change as "too late" to address effectively (Capstick & Pigeon, 2014, p.389). This, Capstick and Pidgeon suggest, leads to a fatalistic view of climate change, associating "response" skepticism more strongly with a lack of concern about climate change than the epistemic skepticism (Capstick & Pigeon, 2014, p.389). In his analysis, Rensburg argues that "response skepticism" is the most distant from evidence skepticism, which is the definitional heart of climate change skepticism. However, he also suggests that many might see response

criticism as the epitome of climate change skepticism, the reason being that it addresses issues concerning governance that hold significance beyond the climate debate. According to Rensburg, Capstick and Pidgeon these issues regard; “desired level of government regulation, the timing and efficacy of tax/pricing mechanisms, and strategic considerations of a nation’s global responsibilities and capabilities, which make it accessible to a wider and a general audience” (Rensburg, 2015, p.5).

These modes of categorization, or typologies that Rensburg and Rahmstorf suggest, will make it easier to separate those sceptics who are critical of climate change evidence and those sceptics who are more concerned with government issues associated with climate change policy responses and government action towards reduction in emissions (Rensburg, 2015, p.6). Moving forward with the thesis, these typologies will be used as a guideline to find arguments in party programs and public statements that fit or diverge from the types of skepticism that is suggested by both Rahmstorf and Rensburg. By operationalizing both conceptual typologies, it will be easier to differentiate the parties in their arguments and identify any specific skeptic attitudes projected by the party.

4 Method and Data

The main section of the thesis consists of a comparative case study where the three radical right sister parties in Norway, Denmark and Sweden will be compared to find any similarities or differences in attitudes on climate change. Considering the nature of the research questions "What climate sceptic typologies can be identified in their communication on environmental and climate issues?" and "Are there variations between the three parties in their climate skeptic positions?" a comparative case study is the most relevant method. The study will be limited to identifying the climate skeptic attitudes of FRP, SD and DF in the period of 2019-2022 projected in party programs and statements from the three party-leaders.

Material for the contextual framework and the literature review is gathered through search on J-store, Google-scholar and Oria - NTNU University library with key words for search being "radical right parties", "climate skepticism", "climate skepticism in Scandinavia". Rensburg's taxonomy was found through literature applying the same framework for different analyses. Rahmstorf's elaboration was found through Rensburg's own paper.

Sources and material for the empirical section (section 4) were gathered through search on the Google search engine. The acquisition of material was done in Norwegian, Swedish and Danish to make it easier to find material relevant to the respective parties, this was a considered element when the researcher is competent in all languages. Key words being "FRP miljøpolitikk 2021", "DF miljøpolitik 2022", "SD klimapolitik 2021" and "Climate skepticism in radical right parties Scandinavia" (and different variations of these). By elaborating on a specific period, I was able to limit the search and find data that would be relevant for the scope of this study. However, The Danish peoples party did not publish any party program for the 2022 election that I could find online. I reached out to the party via e-mail requesting the party program for 2022 but was left with no response. The timeframe and time-period were therefore extended to 2019-2022. Searches that gave results on primary sources include "Sylvi Listhaug klima 2021", "Jimmie Åkesson klimat 2021" and "Morten Messerschmidt Klima 2022". These key sentences gave access to several of the newspapers that were used to find interviews and material on the parties' climate policy and their attitudes towards climate change. These include the Norwegian news outlet "NRK" and "Dagsavisen", the Danish news outlet "TV2" and the newspaper "Document" used to gather information on Jimmie Åkesson.

To ensure that the sources used are of good quality, establishing the validity and reliability of them are crucial. The validity ensures that the research studies what it is set out to study (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p.98). Primary sources for this thesis are interviews and party programs. Since the author of this study was not the one conducting the interviews used, it is difficult to assess the validity (if any questions were loaded or leaning and if the subjects were honest and responded in good faith) of these interviews. An assumption that these interviews were professionally conducted is therefore laid as basis for the validity of these sources. Interviewer effects are also difficult to assess considering the scope of this study. The reliability of the sources is, of the same reasons, difficult to assess. However,

an assumption that the party leaders are loyal to their party program policy is made. Considering that answers in the interviews used correspond to the respective party's climate policy, it is reasonable to assume that the same questions, asked in other settings, would produce the same answers. Since party programs and interviews are used as primary sources and methodological considerations as reinforcement, this study yields reliable conclusions about the parties' climate skeptic positions.

Analyzing the collected data on climate skepticism in radical right parties was done using a comparative case study with a most similar systems design (MSSD). According to John Stuart Mill, MSSD or "the method of difference", involves a process of "comparing instances in which a phenomenon does occur, with instances in other respects similar in which it does not" (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p.98). In other words, it is a method where cases appear to be similar in many important characteristics (constant variables), but end up with different outcomes on a particular matter (Y). This process involves comparing a series of independent X-variables to see if they will increase the probability of the constant Y-variable (the outcome). Comparable cases that satisfy these terms allow the establishment of relationships among a few variables while many other variables are controlled for (Lijphart, 1971, p.687).

This case study compares three Scandinavian radical right parties who share ideological considerations such as nationalism, neoliberal policies, authoritarian positions on sociocultural issues such as pro-military and skepticism towards gender equality and gay rights etc. (Jungar & Jupskås, 2014). By comparing parties who are largely similar, we can limit the impact of several variables that may affect the outcome of the study such as political structures, multilateral cooperation and differences in the interests of the electorate. A shortcoming of this method that Mill points to is that "Two nations which agreed in everything except their commercial policy would also agree in that" (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p.98). Supposing that that the three parties are mostly similar, the goal of this thesis was to find a difference in the parties' climate skeptic attitudes where one would deviate from the two others, ending up with different political radical-right climate skepticism types (the Y-variable for this thesis). However, the analysis finds that these three parties, seemingly similar in many respects, also end up with mostly similar positions on climate change according to Rensburg and Rahmstorf's climate skeptic typologies. A find that is consistent with Mill's theory that cases similar in all instances save one, will also be similar in that one instance (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p.98). After reading through the party manifestos, looking for "climate policy" or "environmental policy" in which the parties mention their beliefs and views on "what the issue is" and "what might be done to deal with this problem" I found the empirical data relevant for the analysis. Findings that these three radical right parties end up with similar attitudes towards climate change was not surprising, but it is a deviant case, falling between the most similar and the most dissimilar system designs (MDSD). These similarities and differences are presented in figures 2-5 in the empirical data and analysis to make it easier to differentiate the nuances in the arguments that fit the same centers and objects of skepticism, giving depth to the analysis.

5 Climate Skepticism in the Scandinavian Radical Right

5.1 Sverige Demokraterna – Sweden Democrats (Sweden)

According to data collected by the European Investment Bank in 2021, a significant majority of Swedes, 76%, expressed the expectation that national government should take substantial measures to address climate change (EIB, 2021). It is worth noting that research on climate skepticism among radical right actors in Sweden has been limited, however, after Greta Thunberg's school strikes in 2018, many of the far-right social medias were discrediting the green-movement and began spreading doubt about climate science (Vowles & Hultman, 2021, p.414). Although, according to the EIB, a majority of Swedes expects climate change mitigating measures at a national level, the SD has become a growing opposition to this mainstream.

Party leader Jimmie Åkesson has questioned if it is reasonable that Sweden who currently accounts for 1,5% of total CO₂ emissions, should be on higher gasoline taxes and expensive railways, while China and India, who account for the largest emissions globally, should be allowed to increase their share of emissions (Schaller & Carius, 2019, p.10)

The party's 2019 program underscores a belief that a greener society should be pursued through cost-effective and balanced means that avoids excessive taxation on individuals, opposing punitive measures that could undermine Swedish competitiveness, favoring instead a strategy centered on technological innovation, awareness raising, and positive incentives for sustainable practices (Prop 20:595(2019) p.3; SD, 2019).

Although SD does not completely reject climate science, they are skeptical of the current response policy which is apparent in their party program for 2022 where the Sweden Democrats state that "there are great reasons to feel confident about man's innovative ability to manage and combat climate change. The climate is a global issue where national borders are irrelevant" (SD, 2022: my translation). They also believe that since Sweden cannot have a direct impact on climate change, a policy that strongly deviates from the EU and the rest of the world's policies in the area can damage the Swedish competitiveness. Contributing to moving production from Sweden to other countries which can then contribute to increase emissions on a global scale (SD, 2019). According to the SD, a Swedish climate policy should be ambitious without counteracting Swedish competitiveness (SD, 2019). They do however acknowledge that some sort of punitive measure may be necessary in the most crucial cases to deal with the most urgent problems in addition to weighing the environmental political issue up against other important societal and political

issues and that resources that can be put aside to improve the environment should be invested where they are most beneficial (SD, 2019).

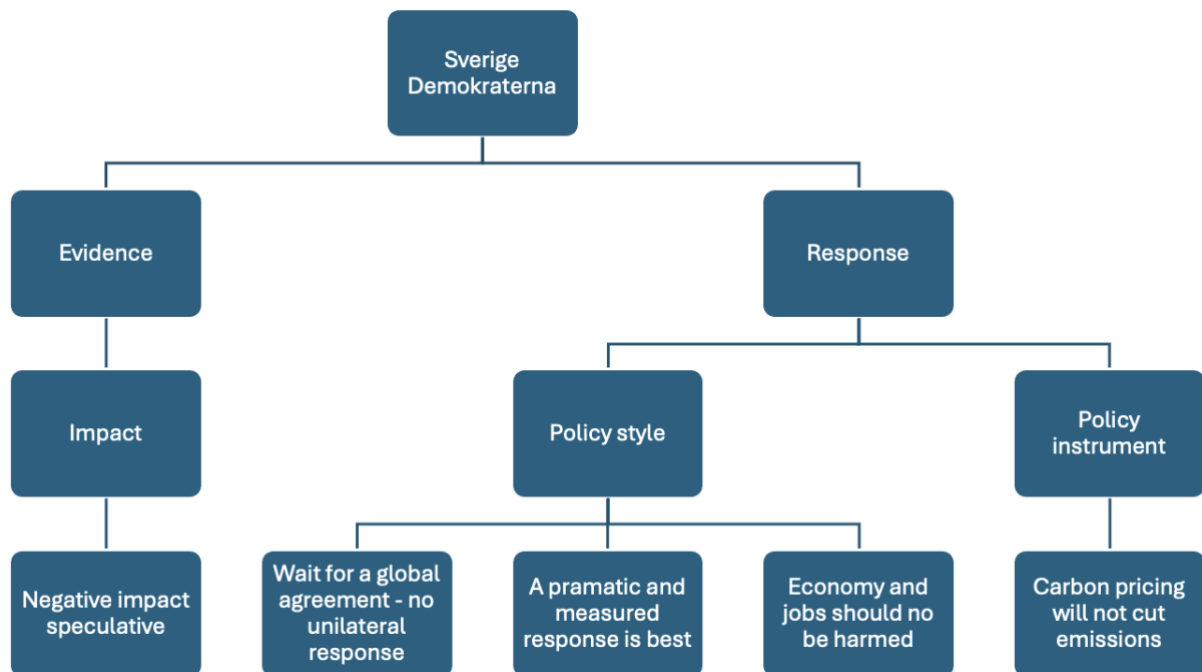


Figure 2: Visualization of SD’s climate skepticism based on Rensburg’s taxonomy on climate skepticism (author’s creation)

Figure 2 visualizes how statements from SD’s climate policy strongly correlate to Rensburg’s description of “response skepticism”, addressing issues concerning governance that hold significance beyond the climate debate, such as “desired level of government regulation, the timing and efficacy of tax/pricing mechanisms, and strategic considerations of a nation’s global responsibilities and capabilities, which make it accessible to a wider and a general audience”. The table has a structure where the SD’s attitudes/arguments are identified in the bottom sections and categorized upwards. Showing that the attitudes portrayed have elements of “Evidence skeptic” and “response skeptic” typologies that have been identified by Rensburg and Rahmstorf and that a majority of SD’s arguments and attitudes can be categorized in the “policy style” type (Rensburg, 2015, p.6). Based on this, it is reasonable to suggest that the SD portray a “response skeptic” approach to climate change which is described by Rensburg as “concomitant sceptics” who tend to be “less rigorous and less intense when they project their views because they have not committed to one or more of the core evidence objects, like the more virulent and outspoken skeptics” (Rensburg, 2015, p.6).

5.2 Dansk Folkeparti – Danish People’s Party (Denmark)

As of 2021, 79% of the Danish electorate believe that climate change and its consequences are the biggest challenges in the 21st century according to the EIB (2021). This is a bigger percentage than any other EU member, and in addition to this, 62% support stricter government measures that impose changes on people behavior (EIB, 2021). While historically opposed to domestic climate policies due to perceived burdens on Danish business and taxpayers, recent indications suggest a softening of DF’s stance (Schaller & Carius, 2019).

According to their 2019 party manifesto, the DF stresses the fact that climate policy should not be conducted on the basis of ideologically conditioned considerations and warns against climate taxes evolving into mere mechanisms for funding government expenditure. They advocate for a pragmatic approach that maximizes the utility of economic resources and concentrates environmental efforts where they yield the greatest benefit (DF, 2019). In their 2019 climate policy program, the Danish Peoples party positions themselves skeptically towards “overly optimistic emission reductions” that may lead to higher unemployment and a relocation of CO2 emissions, stating that a long-term goal for Denmark is to become climate neutral by 2050 at the latest. The DF is then concerned that the current goal of reducing emissions by 70% towards 2030 will become an extensive diversion maneuver that costs Danish jobs, and at the best has no positive effects, and at the worst has a negative effect by pushing production out of Denmark and moving it to less energy-efficient countries (DF, 2019).

In an interview leading up to the 2022 general election, party leader Morten Messerschmidt made several statements that the Danish Peoples party acknowledges the reality of climate change, claiming that there are lots of good reasons for a green shift (Krogh, 2022). Messerschmidt says he distances himself from determining whether climate change is 1 or 100 percent man-made, focusing on the positive effects a green shift with “green technology” will have on human life (Krogh, 2022). For the DF’s skeptic position, this entails that there is, as Rensburg suggests, a loss of concern for climate change which correlates to the effects “response skepticism” can lead to (Capstick & Pidgeon, 2014, p.398).

Consistent with their 2019 party manifesto, Messerschmidt expresses the need for technological evolution to keep emissions down, focusing on the problem being a global one and that the only way Denmark will be able to solve this problem alone would be if they “came up with a device that would make it more attractive for the rest of the world to lower emissions” (Andersen, 2022;DF, 2019; Krogh, 2022). In addition to a focus on combating emissions with technological developments, the party leader mentions that the best climate-measure that Denmark can adopt is to produce more oil and buy back central infrastructure so that they can become independent of “dictatorship states”. This, Messerschmidt suggest, might be within the transportation sector from China or Russia when it comes to energy (Krogh, 2022). With the outbreak of war in Ukraine, Messerschmidt understate the importance of being self-sufficient with energy, arguing that keeping the Russian regime “artificially alive” will damage the security on the entire continent. This was an issue that was given more importance than climate change in the 2022 election from the Danish people’s party (Krogh, 2022).

Although the party does not completely deny the fact that climate change is a human induced problem, they state that “everyone agrees that we need to organize the society such that man-made climate change is reduced. But even if we succeed in that, global heating will continue. The planet’s natural processes will inevitably lead to temperature increases in the following decades. It is therefore crucial that Denmark develops a modern and well-considered adaptation policy, where society is set up to deal with the climate changes that will inevitably occur.” (DF, 2019; my translation).

The DF discusses multiple challenges with the current climate policy. From their party program and statements from their party leader, there are three dominant arguments that can contribute to the effort of typologizing the party’s climate skepticism. The first argument is the argument of “maximizing the utility of economic resources and concentrate environmental efforts where they yield the greatest benefit” categorized as “a pragmatic and measured response is best” in Figure 3 (DF, 2019). This argument revolves around the fact that DF sees the threat of climate taxes becoming mere mechanisms for funding government expenditure, as with the SD, this argument is also consistent with Rensburg’s description of a skepticism connected to “policy instruments” and the argument that “carbon pricing will not cut emissions” visualized in figure 3. The second argument is the argument of a global effort to solve climate change problems rather than “insignificant efforts” from individual nations such as Denmark, which also corresponds with Rensburg’s categorization of the “policy style” argument of “no unilateral response”. The third argument is an argument of becoming self-sufficient when it comes to energy-availability. Arguing that the most important climate-measure was for Denmark to become independent of “dictatorship states” such as Russia and China by producing more oil and regaining control of central infrastructure so that national security would be more stable, corresponding to the “policy style” argument that “a pragmatic and measured response is best” as shown in Figure 3 (Krogh, 2022; Rensburg, 2015, p.6).

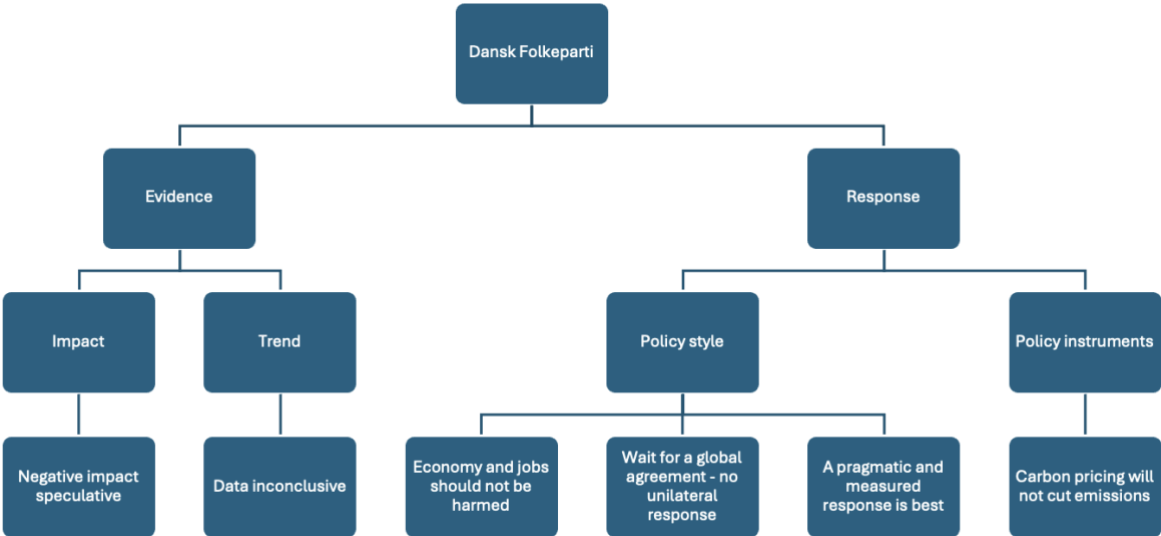


Figure 3: Visualization of DF’s climate skepticism based on Rensburg’s taxonomy on climate skepticism (Author’s creation)

Figure 3. represent the party’s most prominent arguments, corresponding with Rensburg’s “response skeptic” typology. From the table, one can see that issues concerning “governance that hold significance beyond the climate debate” are central to the party’s climate policy even though they are also recognized as having a mild “evidence skeptic” approach, but these are, as Rensburg suggest, difficult to differentiate because the concomitant arguments (response skeptic) build on the evidence skeptic arguments, but are presented in a less intense way by individuals (Rensburg, 2015, p.6). Based on the DF’s arguments it is logical to typologize the party as mostly “response sceptic”.

5.3 Fremskrittspartiet – The Progress Party (Norway)

In Norway, the electorate has been less concerned with climate change than the Danes. In the autumn of 2021, 54% of the Norwegian electorate was highly concerned with climate change, which was a significant increase compared to numbers from 2018-2021 (Gregersen, 2023). The FRP have spent some time to discuss climate change in their party manifesto. They align with both the SD and DF's perspectives on climate change as a global issue. In their 2021 manifesto preceding the general election, the FRP emphasizes the global nature of climate policy, advocating against the relocation of Norwegian industries to countries like China or the transfer of oil and gas production to the Middle east. They assert that such actions only result in carbon leakage, shifting emissions to other parts of the world while undermining domestic wealth, employment and welfare (FRP, 2021).

The FRP advocate for a nuanced climate debate, cautioning against attributing all extreme weather event solely human activities and man-made climate-hostile emissions (FRP, 2021). FRP, similar to the DF, criticizes what they perceive as symbolic policies in Norway's current climate agenda, advocating for market-driven solutions over politically driven symbolism. The radical right party opposes policies that they deem burdensome to Norwegian citizens without significant impact on global emissions, such as bans on gasoline and diesel cars by 2025, taxes on red meat production, and ineffective environmental levies (FRP, 2021). They argue against imposing carbon taxes without viable alternative technologies, particularly noting potential adverse effects on the transportation and maritime sectors (FRP, 2021).

Furthermore, in their 2021 party program they call for broader research and open, critical debate on the causes of climate change, asserting that the climate policies advocated by the Norwegian political left are unrealistic, ineffective, and costly, which negatively impact the Norwegian taxpayers and Norway's industrial competitiveness (FRP, 2021). Sylvi Listhaug (party leader in 2021) characterized other Norwegian parties as overly preoccupied with climate issues at the expense of other pressing concerns, suggesting a lack of concern for climate change (Dagsavisen, 2021). She denounces emission mitigating actions as wasteful of public funds, advocating for their allocation to more critical issues (Dagsavisen, 2021). In this interview with Dagsavisen, Listhaug suggest that FRP's intent is to lead in opposition to climate activist parties, emphasizing that Norway's welfare was built on oil revenue without shame (Dagsavisen, 2021). In a "party-leader questioning" leading up to the 2021 election, Listhaug states that she believes that man-made activity has an impact on the climate, but responding to whether she believes that "most of the global warming can be attributed to man-made activity" she states that "that is not what is important, we need to focus on cutting emissions", similar to Messerschmidt, who suggest that the cause of the problem is not so important, but that it is important to prevent the problem from getting worse (Hellesnes et al, 2021).

There are three main arguments that can help identify the type of climate skepticism projected in their formulations on climate change. First is the argument that green initiatives are ineffective and negatively impacting taxpayers without significant impact on global emissions, such as bans on gasoline and diesel cars by 2025, taxes on red meat production, and ineffective environmental levies (FRP, 2021). Visualized in figure 3, this is categorized by Rensburg as "policy instrument" arguments identified as "carbon pricing will not cut emissions".

A second argument prominent in FRP is that they advocate against the relocation of Norwegian industries to countries like China or the transfer of oil and gas production to the Middle east. Reasoning that it only results in carbon leakage, undermining domestic wealth, employment and welfare, categorized as “policy style” arguments by Rensburg and identified with “economy and jobs should not be harmed” in Figure 3 (FRP, 2021). These two arguments resonate with Capstick and Pidgeon’s typology of “response skepticism”, questioning the “effectiveness, willingness and capacity of responding to climate change at the personal, political and societal levels” which may lead to a lack of concern about climate change (Capstick & Pidgeon, 2014, p.398).

A third argument suggest a degree of “evidence skepticism” cautioning against attributing all extreme weather event solely human activities and man-made climate-hostile emissions, in addition to Listhaug’s statement that FRP will lead in opposition to climate activist parties, emphasizing Norway’s welfare built on oil revenue without shame (FRP, 2021). This argumentation speaks loudly for the “evidence sceptic” tendencies of FRP wanting to be in opposition to the current climate change agenda, identified in figure 3 under “impact”, “cause” and “trend” suggesting that FRP is more aggressive and more rigorous in their formulation of the skepticism than their neighboring countries, may be because they have not committed to one or more of the core evidence objects (Rensburg, 2015, p.6).

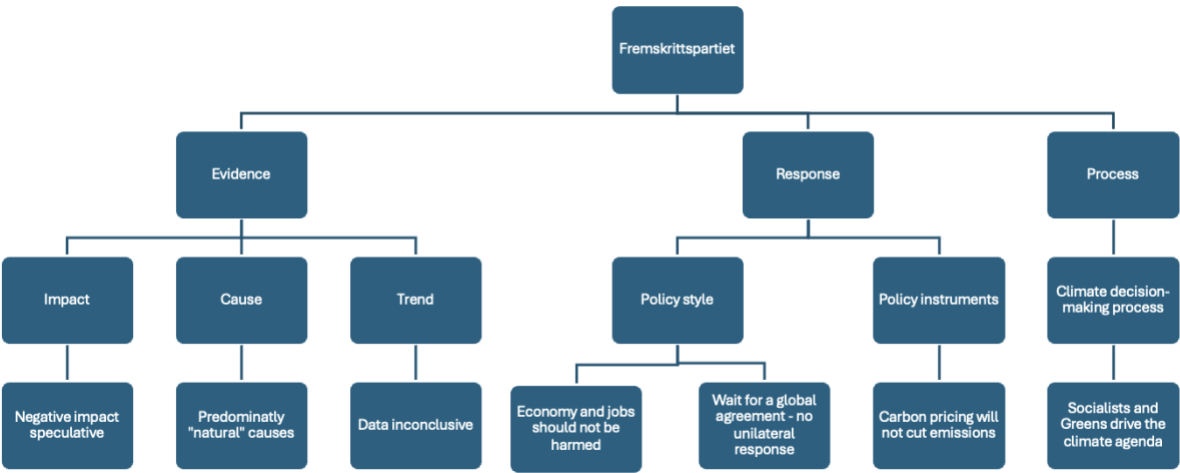


Figure 4: Visualization of FRP’s climate skepticism based on Rensburg’s taxonomy on climate skepticism (author’s creation).

Figure 4 shows that FRP’s arguments can be categorized as “evidence skeptic”, a more traditional and rigorous form of skepticism, where one questions the science in and of itself. They are also critical to the “policy style” and “policy instruments” that the “socialist and greens” are adopting. Figure 4 shows how FRP draws on multiple of the same elements of the climate skeptic arguments that DF and SD has adopted, where the major difference is the “evidence skeptic” element and the “process skeptic” element. FRP blames the socialists and the greens for current “unnecessary symbolic policy” in a larger degree than the other two parties. The reason for this being clear with Listhaug’s intent to lead in opposition to climate activist parties, emphasizing that Norway’s welfare was built on oil revenue without shame (FRP, 2021). Following this empirical data, the upcoming section will discuss further the differences and the similarities of the climate skeptic attitudes portrayed by the three radical right parties.

6 Comparison: Climate skeptic attitudes in Fremskrittspartiet, Sverige Demokraterna and Dansk Folkeparti

All parties have dedicated some time to incorporate climate change into their agenda before and during the 2021-2022 general elections. This last section of the thesis will be dedicated to comparing climate skeptic types identified in the three parties in the previous section. For this part, I seek to answer the question; "What climate skeptic typologies were prominent in Scandinavian radical-right parties communication on environmental issues during the last round of general elections in the period 2021-2022?" and "Are there variations between the three parties in their climate skeptic positions?". The previously identified arguments are presented in Figure 5. to provide clarity and context to the discussion.

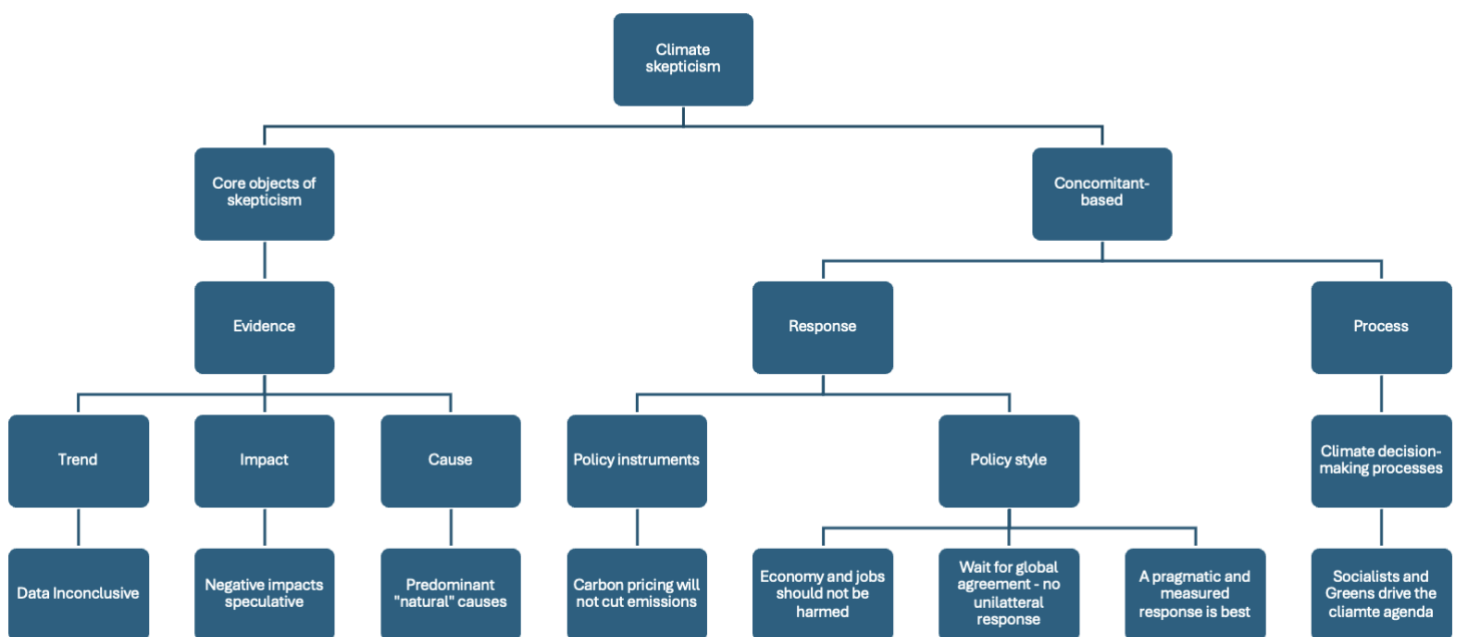


Figure 5: Overview of climate skeptic attitudes projected by FRP, SD and DF based on Rensburg's taxonomy on climate skepticism (author's creation).

A common denominator within the Scandinavian radical right parties is a "response sceptic" argument closely linked to a view where individuals consider climate change as a problem that is too complex and too large for politicians to address alone (Capstick & Pigeon, 2014, p.389). This argument is categorized by Rensburg under the "policy style" argument, further categorized as "wait for global agreement - no unilateral response". The argument that Sweden will not be able to solve this problem domestically, since they emit only 1,5% of the world's emissions, seem to be dominant in the SD's climate change stance. Official statements from the party state that "The Sweden Democrats

stand for a responsible and effective climate policy, where the global perspective is given a central role" (Prop 20:595(2019) p.3). The DF's party program for 2019 states that:

"Even if the causes of (climate change) do not seem unequivocally determined, much indicates that human activities contribute to global warming, and from an international perspective, addressing global warming is therefore a concern for all nations, not just Europe and the US. For the Danish People's Party, it is important that high-growth countries like China and India are also involved in global climate policy. Without the participation of these countries, environmental measures aimed at reducing CO2 emissions will be far less effective" (DF, 2019; my translation).

For the Norwegian progress party "pollution knows no borders and a majority of the pollution in Norway is due to other countries emissions" (FRP, 2021). In addition to this, FRP similar to the DF, discuss the importance of participation from countries such as China and the Middle East, stating "Norway does not have its own atmosphere. This means that climate policy must be understood and conducted on a global scale. CO2-emissions will not be reduced by moving Norwegian industrial workplaces to China, or by moving the oil- and gas production to the Middle East" (FRP, 2021). This is a similarity which is strengthened by Rensburg's categorization of "response skeptic" attitudes, a similarity worth noting, because it suggests mitigating a "non-man made" problem by reducing "man-made" emissions.

As Rensburg suggest, response criticism addresses issues concerning governance that hold significance beyond the climate debate. According to Rensburg, Capstick and Pidgeon these issues regard; "desired level of government regulation, the timing and efficacy of tax/pricing mechanisms, and strategic considerations of a nation's global responsibilities and capabilities, which make it accessible to a wider and a general audience" (Rensburg, 2015, p.5). This seem to be a prominent focus in all three parties climate agenda. They are reluctant towards climate taxes and "wasteful" allocation of funds dedicated to the climate issue in addition to holding pessimistic views of what impact one country can have with regards to limiting emissions, when there are bigger nations such as China or India, who are reluctant towards cutting emissions on the cost of industry and economic development. This taxation policy, all parties suggest, would make it more costly for companies to operate in their country only making the problem worse (DF, 2019; FRP, 2021; SD, 2022). Listhaug asserts that efforts on climate change from the political left are unrealistic, ineffective, and costly, stealing both focus and funds away from other more important domestic issues (Dagsavisen, 2021). This argument is identified in figure 5 with "policy instruments" argument under "response skepticism" and is prominent in all parties.

A second unanimous argument is the importance of technological development to mitigate emissions. The DF states in their climate program for 2019 that "it is therefore important that the green shift does not retard the economic and technological development, but that it maintains and improves it. The green transition should go hand in hand with economic growth - not the opposite" (DF, 2019). The FRP states that "it must pay off for individuals and companies to make smart and environmentally friendly choices. The FRP therefore wants to facilitate for technological development and support for research and development programs" and "FRP wants to facilitate a technology-neutral system where low emissions throughout the entire life cycle are rewarded. Examples of this are hydrogen and biogas, both of which can be developed from natural gas and will be able to contribute

to reduced emissions in the transport sector and agriculture" (FRP, 2021). This type of climate policy is not directly identified as a climate skeptic category in Rensburg's taxonomy, but it is compatible with Rensburg's "impact sceptic" typology which "is commensurate with a wide range of possible policy responses. Some impact sceptics dismiss mitigation because for them it is addressing a nonexistent problem. Others have a pragmatic view, believing that even if you do not expect severe negative climate impacts, climate mitigation measures might deliver positive spin-offs in terms of greater energy efficiency and the promotion of cleaner technologies" (Rensburg, 2015, p.5).

Furthermore, there are significant similarities in the argumentation of these parties, hence the differences in what type of skepticism they project in both the party manifestos and public announcements from the party leaders are limited and few. The few differences observed are often nuances of the same arguments. One example of this difference among the SD, FRP and DF is when it comes to the "evidence skepticism" and the "predominant natural causes" argument. In their official government plan for an "effective climate policy" the Sweden Democrats state that "it is possible that the world is facing significant temperature increases and the consequences of this must be taken very seriously. At the same time, the debate among researchers is lively about the consequences of different degrees of temperature increase" (Prop 20:595(2019) p.3). The DF states that "Everyone agrees to organize society so that man-made climate change is reduced, but even if it succeeds, climate change will occur. The planet's natural processes will inevitably in the following decades lead to temperature increases", suggesting that neither of the parties doubt the science and the impact that man-made processes can have on the climate, but that they believe temperature increases to be inevitable (DF, 2019). Suggesting a mild "epistemic skepticism" towards the climate science and its accuracy in both the SD and DF, but less in DF's party official party program (DF, 2019). Statements from FRP's party program for 2021 suggest that they agree with both SD and DF in that "earth's climate is changing over time, and we do not know enough about what is causing these changes" (FRP, 2021). Considering Listhaug's statement that FRP's intent to lead in opposition to climate activist parties, emphasizing Norway's welfare built on oil revenue without shame, suggests that FRP's view of climate change policy is to be the opposing view, a prominent feature of Rensburg's description of the "Core objects of skepticism" and the "evidence based" attitudes that seek to keep the "integrity of "climate skepticism" as the antithetical climate view" (Rensburg, 2015, p.6; Dagsavisen, 2021).

Contrary to my initial beliefs, all parties seem convinced that a change in human activity is necessary for problems such as global heating to stop. This is evident in all parties' manifestos and party programs, indirectly acknowledging that climate change is a man-made problem, which deviates from the traditional and most radical form of "impact skepticism" where one would deny climate change as a scientific and physical phenomenon (Rahmstorf, 2004, p.78-79). Although all parties seem skeptical to attribute the full responsibility of climate change to man-made problems such as CO2 emissions, they do acknowledge that some measures to cut emissions would be positive for both the environment and the climate. This signifies a contradictory line of thought where measures to reduce emissions would solve parts of the problem, even though they assume that we do not know enough about what is causing a change in the climate. There may be several reasons why this contradiction occurs. In FRP's case it may be because of the interests vested in Norway's oil and gas industry that is incompatible with a green view that this is a major contributor to emission damages. However, a wish to mobilize voters and the electorate may be a motivation to contribute with a solution to the problem. For the DF, a

motivation to dismiss the man-made element may be a case of energy sovereignty and the wish to be independent of larger nations such as Russia to control their energy prices and the energy market. The Danish electorate does however put climate change as one of the most important political issues, creating a demand for green policy to mobilize them. For the SD, rejecting the man-made element may be an ideological case of wanting competitive participation on the internal market, believing that restricting themselves with more drastic limitations than the EU applies to their member states, will weaken their bargaining power, a typical "policy style" argument from "response skeptics" as Rensburg suggests.

7 Conclusion

This research paper has attempted to answer the research question (1) "How did FRP, SD and DF express climate skepticism in their political discourse during the general elections in the period 2021-2022?". It has also attempted to answer two subsequent research questions, that are: (2) "What climate sceptic typologies can be identified in their communication on environmental and climate issues?" and "Are there variations between the three parties in their climate skeptic attitudes?".

The study has found that all parties seem convinced that a change in human activity is necessary for problems such as global heating to stop and, although all parties seem skeptical to attribute the full responsibility of climate change to man-made problems such as CO2 emissions, they do acknowledge that some measures to cut emissions would be positive for both the environment and the climate. With regards to the conceptual framework, all parties seem to project a "response skeptic" attitude with regards to their formulations and communication of climate change and climate policy. These findings were not surprising, considering the ideological similarities of the three parties, but it is however relevant because of the industrial differences between the three countries considering that Norway and Denmark have a long history of profits from the petroleum industry whereas Sweden does not. It is also interesting considering the differences in electorate demand for policy on climate and environment.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. This is an analysis of party manifestos and party leader statements in the period of 2019-2022, leading up to and during the general-election campaign. A more complete research paper of climate skeptic attitudes and typologies projected by the parties would have to consider the nuances in their arguments, a comprehensive analysis of the parties' positions on climate policy in parliament would also be sufficient and may result in finds that the parties deviate from their ideological and political communication when it comes to policy-action. Another aspect of this study that needs to be considered is the methodological approach. Other studies applying single case studies analyzing the parties in and of themselves might find other aspects of climate skepticism than what is discovered here. It would also be interesting to see if these attitudes and typologies would be found in either continental, southern or eastern Europe considering the different political climates and cultures.

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