

'Why do political parties adopt dismissive, accommodative or adversarial strategies towards environmental legislation? A comparative study of the successes and failures of passing key environmental legislation in Scandinavia.'

The UK Climate Change Act was the first and most ambitious piece of legislation of its kind: creating legally binding targets to reduce UK GHG emissions by 80% below 1990-levels by 2050. One remarkable feature of this legislation was its crossparty popularity, which raises wider questions as to how it is possible to pass such ambitious environmental legislation. What makes or breaks a bill's chances of becoming reality, and what factors are involved in shaping the final text? Specifically: **Why do political parties adopt dismissive, accommodative or adversarial strategies towards environmental legislation?** "A major research challenge is to identify the factors that encourage mainstream parties to embrace the environment and turn it into an issue of party competition." There is growing evidence that "the way mainstream parties respond to the environmental dimension is important because *parties matter*." Knill et al.'s major comparative study of environmental policy outputs in 18 OECD countries finds that the number of environmental outputs increased if government parties adopted more pro-environmentalist positions. So, to identify the conditions required to pass more ambitious environmental legislation entails examining how political parties respond to the issue. Environmental protection has become a major policy challenge, and is increasingly perceived to be a valence issue, i.e. few wish to be seen supporting explicitly anti-environmental policies. Though political parties frequently proclaim their green credentials, few empirical studies have examined how legislatures actually behave when dealing with the environment and whether the issue is in fact a valence issue. In particular, there are few country case studies, a lack of focus on the roles of political parties, and little differentiation between 'climate change legislation' and 'other forms of environmental legislation'. Thus quantitative data needs to be supplemented by in-depth studies of national legislatures in order to identify and explain the strategies of the parties involved and reveal the prerequisites for ambitious environmental legislation. To address these shortcomings in the literature the following questions will be explored:

- Does the party's positioning on the left-right political continuum influence its response towards environmental legislation, and how significant is this factor?
- How does the 'electoral pull' and the 'activist pull' affect left and right wing parties when making environmental legislation a reality?
- How has the growing influence of neoliberal approaches to environmental governance affected the parties and the likelihood of passing legislation?
- Do parties' responses vary depending on whether the legislation concerns 'climate change' or 'other forms of environmental protection', i.e. is one form more of a valence-issue? What can this tell us about the parties involved as well as the chances of passing ambitious environmental legislation?
- To what extent do left and right wing parties respond to public opinion/ NGOs/civil society/media/scientific community/business community when developing environmental legislation?

My research topic will allow me to engage with public policy literature for models that explain policy change as well as literature on parties, 'old'/'new' politics and debates about ideology. I will focus on key pieces of legislation in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. These Scandinavian countries provide examples of progressive environmental legislation and all countries are multi-party systems with a wide range of party positions. I am also comfortable with the languages, allowing me to read un-translated documents, listen to debates and conduct interviews. I will utilise various sources of information: legislative documents, white/green papers, committee reports, transcripts from debates, newspaper articles, interviews, independent reviews, manifestos and expert surveys. By examining a host of sources I will be able to piece together how and why political parties adopt either dismissive, accommodative or adversarial strategies towards environmental legislation, and how this might be adjusted in order to create more ambitious environmental legislation.