

A conflictual climate ? The politicisation of climate change in Europe

To what extent climate change has been the object of intensified political conflict in Europe ? What are the drivers of this politicisation ? More broadly, how, when and why do policy issues become conflictual among parties ?

1. What is politicization

The first element is issue salience. As Schattschneider put it, “visibility is a factor in expanding of the scope of conflict”. However, salience do not necessarily lead to conflict (De Wilde 2011, Hoglinger 2012). For Hutter and Grande (2014), it is a necessary but not sufficient condition.

Green-Pedersen (2010) in his sleeping giant answer, views politicization only as a matter of salience, what Hutter and Grande (2014) disagree. These components are not always linked and should be considered separately.

- Number of people involved
- Schattschneider 1975 [1960] : “nothing attracts a crowd as quickly as a fight”
- Green-Pedersen 2010 : see politicization as salience only. Hutter and Grande (2014) pas d'accord : plusieurs composantes qui ne sont pas tout le temps liées
- Debate on the extent of politicisation

A partir de la littérature sur la politisation, on peut identifier deux principaux types de facteurs expliquant la politisation d'un enjeu.

#2. Structural drivers of politicization

#2.1 Societal developments and RWI

Basic accounts of politicization argue that societal developments such as “real-world” indicators facilitate the politicization of an issue : as problems become more important, they get more attention.

Such accounts can be found in the literature on the politicization of immigration for instance, taking the number of migrants.

Cette hypothèse cependant est limitée, on sait bien que l'intensité des problèmes, mesurés par des indicateurs reflète rarement l'importance de leur prise en charge par les acteurs publics.

2.2

A large body of literature on politicization also point the importance of historical and critical events in triggering issue politicization (Hutter and Grande 2015, Hutter and Kriesi 2016). For instance, the Maastricht Treaty and the increasing authority transfer from the member states to the European Union as lead to more and more politicisation (De Wilde and Zurn 2012). For Hooghe and Marks (2012), this event has led to a transformation from a permissive consensus to a constraining dissensus. Other events such as the enlargement, deepening of the EU, treaty reforms, referenda create opportunities of politicization by raising the public attention to the issue and leading to the possibilities of different political alternatives to form.

2.2 Public opinion

Another bottom-up view is that politicization happens because citizens want it. Hence, public opinion changes can lead to increased attention from policymakers (Stimson, Soroka, Wlezien.)

Political economy, policy feedbacks

3 The issue mobilization by parties

3.1 The importance of political parties

The factors aforementioned do not lead to politicization per se, they have to be articulated and mobilized by political actors that politicized the issue (Beaudonnet and Mérand 2019) in public debates (Hutter and Grande 2014). Politicization is not only a process but also a strategy of political parties that can take different forms.

Research on polarization of attitudes in the United States also emphasize the role of political elites. Political issues gain relevance when a conflict appears among parties and that conflict is salient among voters. Elites have an effect on voters when their positions are clearer (Carmines and Stimson issue evolution.)

3.2 What parties can do regarding issues

3.2.1 Issue emphasis

First, according to *salience theory*, political parties should politicize the issues that benefit them through issue emphasis.

3.2.2 Position-taking

- Dissenting attitudes (Hoeglinger 2016)
- Party competition through changing party positions either on left-right scale but also on specific issues (Abou Chadi and Green-Pedersen)

3.3.3 Framing

- Some part of the issues, policy justifications (Field and Hamman 2015)

Research on the politicization of European Union also show that conflicts have arisen with specific frames. Hutter and Grande (2014) make the hypothesis that the politicization of the EU is the product of the increasing of cultural and identity-related frames. Hence politicization (and polarization) may arise because more distinct framing of an issue arises.

3.3 How different parties react to new policy issues ?

3.3.1 Issue profile and ideology

3.3.4 Other parties and system-agendas

However, empirical research shows that political parties tend more to converge than avoid each others. Scholars have identified that there are convergence, trespassing, overlap etc between the issues that parties raised (Uptake Sulkin 2005, issue convergence Amoros et Puy 2013, Damore 2005 Sigelman et Buell 2004, issue trespassing (Damore 2004, Norpoth et Buchana 1992, Sides 2006, reentered Pedersen 2007, Green-Pedersen et Mortensen 2011, cf aussi Grossman et Guinaudeau). Parties do not always have the capacity to emphasize only the issue they prefer in political competition. They also have to respond to the party-system agenda. When issues are set at the party-system agenda, it is hard for parties to avoid them (Pedersen et Mortensen 2011)

3.3.2 Party position in the party system

- Challenger vs mainstream parties
- Party size
- Issue entrepreneurship theory (Vries and Hobolt 2020), and sleeping giant

In the issue entrepreneurship theory, **challengers** have incentives to mobilize new issues and politicize them and dimensions of conflict to mobilize new voters. Challenger parties could then differentiate themselves and pose an electoral threat to mainstream parties (de Vries and Hobolt 2012, De Vries 2015). Two scholars have both worked a lot on the EU. De Vries on his seminal article on the sleeping giant argues that challenger parties have incentive to politicize the European Integration issue because it creates divisions across party lines, it has a potential.

Radical Right parties have been for instance identified as the main driver of the politicisation of the European integration by raising the salience of the issue, adopting eurosceptic positions (Kriesi et

al 2012, Hutter and Grande 2014, Hutter and Kriesi 2016) ::: {.content-hidden when-format="pdf"}
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Im not sur how the sleeping giant thesis could be relevant for climate change, more realignement
on left-right after having been more consensual. ::: :::

3.3.2 Party status

3.3.2 Internal divides and party politics

Mainsteam parties have incentives to depoliticize, to de-emphasize an issue to avoid internal conflict
: see the Eu case.

Conflict through position-taking

Political conflict could appear when political parties take different political positions on the same
issue. But why would they change their positions ?

- Abou-chadi and green-pedersen : do parties whange their positions when issue is salient
- But size is important, according to Abou-Chadi, it is the most important factor
- Constraints on party policy change : organization

Conflict as differenciation, but conflict also as backlash.

3.4 Missing mechanisms on what makes an issue turn positional 3.5 What is the government doing

3.6 Issue characteristics

where does the mobilization potential come from ?

- Policy costs
- Climate inaction
- Literature on party comeptition : mainstream parties have no incentives to introduce new
issues but we see that mainstream parties have clear incentives to do se when in government
- Many right-wing parties have emphasize climate change before when in government.
- Claiming leadership

What about issue characteristics ?

The limits of the literature on issue competition is that if they recognise the importance of issue characteristics, they do not consider how these characteristics evolve and how it changes the incentives for political parties to. The only indicator that they consider is how the severity of the problem affect the incentives of political parties to adress it.

- Distributive issues : some are more distributive than others in terms of how they allocate costs and benefits
Issue characteristics evolution, do not articulate with wider context

4. A Theory of issue politicization

Problem of existing accounts are specific to the EU issue for instance, or immigration to a lesser extent.

4.1 From consensus to polarization
4.1.1 Valence and positional issues - Framing issues as valence or positional is a strategy in itself (De Sio and Franklin) - From the goals to the means (van der brug) : but how - The importance of strategic legislation
4.1.2 Capacity of government to claim credit
4.1.3 Capacity of government to avoid blame

Changing opportunities ?

5. An application to climate change

Our goal is thus to apply this theoretical framework to understand the dynamics of climate change at the domestic level. While climate politics have long been studied at the international level, we aim to open the “black box” of domestic climate politics (Harrison and Sundstrom 2007). We want to explain why (*incentives*), how (*strategies*) and when (*opportunities*) some political parties at certain moment mobilize climate change as a political issue.

Issue characteristics

At the center of our model are political parties that we consider as the drivers of issue evolution through their strategies of political conflict mobilization. We argue that climate change involve a

dilemma for political actors, creating different incentives and leading to different strategies. This dilemma relies on the double nature of climate change as a political issue. On the one hand, climate change is a really salient issue : most people consider it as serious and important, it may be high on the agenda and it is hard to ignore. It is easy to be “in favor of climate action”. On the other hand, climate policies are highly distributive and impose costs on people, may be electorally costly with risk of backlash [Stokes (2016) ; Lachapelle and Kiss (2019) ; paper Australia, paper Patterson]. Hence some political actors could avoid political cost with ignoring the topic to avoid backlash (see Stokes on wind turbines) and even gain some electoral benefits adopting adversarial strategies (ex: Trump, Australie, Ontario);

But this incentives depend on the structure of opportunities they face and we argue that these opportunities have changed over time, in particular in recent years due to the evolution of climate governance. In particular, we hypothesise that the benefits for parties in government to politicise climate change have decreased while the electoral costs of action have increased. I argue that two primary factors contribute to the politicization of climate change by political parties: the ability of mainstream parties in government to take credit for their leadership on climate action, and the perceived costs associated with the implementation of climate policies. Structural factors affecting these opportunities have then lead to different dynamics of politicsation.

From the literature on climate governance and leadership on the one hand and political economy on the other hand, we derive two mechanisms affecting the opportunities that political parties have to politicize climate change.

Changing opportunities : the Paris Agreement critical events

Although the two issues are very different and the intensity of change as well, we can make a parallel between the Maastricht treaty and the Paris Agreement, as a critical event. But indirect effects, not direct, effects. We do not suggest that there was controversy around the Paris Agreement itself.

Hence it transform a performance contest over the goal to a contest of the means, around public policies.

Indeed, the Paris Agreement has led to changing “logic” of climate politics through *National Determined Contributions* and the rise of blaming and shaming. The Paris Agreement has changed these structure of opportunities through two mechanisms.

Climate change has long been perceived as a *collective action problem* requiring international coordination across countries to ratify agreements (Keohane and Oppenheimer 2016). Climate change constructed as an international problem but evolution of governance giving more weight to national level : change in the structure of opportunities and incentives political parties have to mobilize this issue.

Degree of conflict manifest through the capacity of governments to effectively implement ambitious climate policies.

- Colgan, Green, and Hale (2021)

I argue that two primary factors contribute to the politicization of climate change by political parties: the ability of mainstream parties in government to take credit for their leadership on climate action, and the perceived costs associated with implementing climate policies.

First, we argue that the *new logic* of the Paris Agreement decreases the ability of national governments to claim credit on climate action. In this framework, national governments have to set themselves voluntary pledges of emissions reductions. This offer opportunities for opposition actors to hold them accountable for meeting those targets. This idea of naming and shaming has been seen as a mean to force states to comply with their objectives (Falkner 2016). Since the agreement implementation, the denunciation of politicians' inaction and non-compliance with climate goals is actively used by NGO's and climate movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future. Several of these groups track these pledges and their compliance to call out those who fall behind. For instance, it was as a result of legal action launched by several NGOs (the "Affaire du siècle") that the French government was convicted in 2021 for failing to comply with the international commitments made under the Paris Agreement. These examples demonstrate the potential politicization of these pledges derived by the Paris Agreement.

If many research have insisted on the highly distributive and interest based nature of climate politics, the importance of this to explain public support, we do not really now how these groups are mobilized by political elites.

Driving actors : which parties drive the politicisation of climate change ?

Government vs opposition

Before the Paris Agreement, we expect that government parties act as a driver of climate salience more than the opposition in parliament because of their “competitive advantage”. After the Paris Agreement, this should decline because opposition parties have more and more opportunities to politicize the issue and the competitive advantage decreases as the contestation increases. - Governments may have lost their competitive advantage and being increasingly contested : from credit claiming to blame avoidance. After the Paris Agreement, there should be less and less differences of politicization between opposition and government parties. Expectation that mainstream parties in government have lost a “competitive advantage” on climate change related to executive leadership in international climate politics. While they could strategically use this leadership to credit claim on climate action, the nationalisation of climate politics have made this harder, giving more opportunities for the opposition to criticize the government. Les partis au pouvoir pouvaient plus facilement paraître vert et leaders sans oppositions alors que ce n’est plus le cas aujourd’hui, opposition cherche à montrer les contradictions des gouvernements sur ces questions : on serait passé d’un agenda-setting power de la majorité à celui de l’opposition. Ainsi, le leadership potentiel tiré de l’action climatique a été de plus en plus contesté.

Ability to set the agenda.

Center parties

Should we formulate hypothesis regarding conservatives parties and liberal parties regarding climate change ? We could suppose that when they are not in government, they do not have incentive to really talk about it but should still not ignore it giving its high salience.

The radical right and climate change

Radical Right parties could be one of the driver of polarization around climate change in Europe (Lüth and Schaffer 2022). In the literature, these parties have been depicted as more prone to climate-skepticism, mostly because of their ideology (Lockwood 2018). Even though they have moved away from purely science scepticism, existing research shows that they have a negative effect on climate policy outputs and outcome when they enter national governments as well as erosion

of international cooperation (Jahn 2021). Their effect on public attitudes however it is not clear, the only research looking at their effect on climate attitudes show limited evidence (Duijndam and Beukering 2021). Different scholars also suggest that opposing climate policies may benefit radical right parties (**otteni_global_nodat?**).

As perceived climate policy costs increase due to the nationalisation of climate politics, radical right parties could try to reap electoral benefits appealing to climate losers of decarbonization. At the same time, they could also try to avoid the topic.

- Climate change politicisation is driven by the **nationalisation** of climate politics, giving more weight to domestic politics, critical juncture
- Climate change politicisation is due to increasing conflicts over climate policies and not climate change per se.

Nevertheless, there is high heterogeneity among radical right parties stances on the topic, over time and across countries. It is not clear when do they change, why do they adapt more accommodative or adversarial stances in different countries. We don't know neither what is driving their stances. And what is their effect on electoral competition (paper Cetkovic suggest pro climate effect because centre-right want to differentiate itself from the radical right.)

The left-wing hypothesis

Left-Wing parties do increasingly appeal to educated, young and urban voters that are the most concerned about climate change and vote for that issue. If they could have some trade-off because carbon intensive constituencies, this could be less and less the case.

Opposing strategies : making government accountable for their pledges and policies.

- Increase salience
- Increase pro-climate content
- Contest ownership of the green
- Less and less divided

The interaction hypothesis

Rather than coming from the right, the polarization may also come from the left. Out-group cues.

Final predictions

7. transformation d'un consensus relatif entre gauche et droite où parti au pouvoir avait avantage compétitif car potentiels bénéfices du leadership international à competitive disagreement ou partis sont en désaccords.

Structural impacts of the Paris Agreement	Opportunities for government parties	Opportunities for opposition parties
Costs of implementing climate policies	Harder for parties in government to implement climate policies fear of electoral costs	Easier for opposition parties (particularly right wing) to politicize the costs of action
Benefits of implementing climate policies	Harder for parties in government to claim climate leadership	Easier for opposition parties (particularly left-wing) to politicize the costs of inaction

Testable hypotheses

Polarisation hypothesis

H1 : Polarization between political parties on climate change has increased over time and particularly after the Paris Agreement. Hence, it should be easier and easier to distinguish political parties on their climate-related discourses. Clarity of alternatives.

H2 : Governments have increasingly less capacity to impose the the climate agenda

H3 : **Perceived electoral costs** : increased presence of economic costs framing. That climate policies are more and more opposed because of their economic costs. And this should be higher for **domestic cost framing**. - Costs and who should bear them ? This line of argument could be extended to the left that has potentially more and more oriented its discourses on climate inequalities and taxing the rich. If the literature suggests that the salience of perceived climate policy costs has increased, it has never been really tested.

H3 : The left and greens should increasingly “pro” climate policies and oppose climate government policies

H4 : **Radical Right** : - Radical Right parties should emphasize the domestic economic costs framing of climate change

H5 : **Backlash hypothesis** : The more the left emphasize climate change, the more the right adopt more distant positions on the issue

H6 : Structure of competition : structure of conflict should have shifted from gov and opp from left to right. While ideology was not the main driver of politicization in the 2000's, it should be a better predictor now. Symbolic performance between gov and opp before the Paris Agreement and positioning conflict between left and right afterwards (competitive disagreement). Ainsi, se développeraient de conflits de plus en plus importants entre ceux promouvant une action climatique plus importante et ceux qui rejettent la mise en place de politiques climatiques (Zilles and Marg 2022). On pourrait ainsi observer une contestation croissante des politiques climatiques depuis deux pôles

Operationalization

Measuring polarization

As climate change is a really complex issue, it is difficult to measure precise positions. However, what really interests us is how they differ, how coherent and clear they are on the topic. Indeed, the increased clarity of positions of the elites are an indicator of issue evolution. For this, a first way is to use SML to try to predict the label of the political party on a climate speech. This could be used to measure inter-party and intra-party variance based on the predicted probability.

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