

The Radical Right and the Politicization of Climate Policy

Presentation for UCD School of Politics and International
Relations

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(co-authored with Sara Hobolt) London School of Economics

Motivation

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- ▶ But implementation remains contentious
- ▶ *Despite growing consensus on the need for climate action, implementation remains politically contentious. **Why?***

The Radical Right and Climate Change



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- ▶ Entrepreneurial parties seek to **change the status quo** by politicizing new issues
- ▶ **Argument:** *Radical right parties are politicizing climate change as a wedge issue to divide mainstream coalitions.*

Climate Change as a Wedge Issue

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 - ▶ A significant share of voters hold sceptical views of climate change policies

Expectations

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- ▶ RR parties will take an **adversarial position** on climate policy
- ▶ A significant share of voters who *do not already* support the RR hold **sceptical views**

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 - ▶ Generative summarization

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Energy Security & Net Zero

Antony Nailer • 13 February 2023

[News & Social Media / Post](#)



Antony Nailer

Energy Spokesman for the UK Independence Party

Grant Shapps has been in government quite a long time and as well as being Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party he has also had the following appointments.

1. Minister for state for International Development, May 2015 till November 2015. This department finds ways to throw taxpayers money at foreign governments.
2. Secretary of State for Transport, July 2019 till September 2022. He used the Covid period to have towns in his constituency and elsewhere block off through roads with planters making them into cul-de-sacs, to continue the war against the motorist.

The justification was to encourage people to walk or cycle or use public transport to reduce pollution from car use and ultimately save the planet. His action has just speeded up the use of on-line shopping the decline of the high street.

3. Secretary of State for the Home office under Liz Truss 19-25 October 2022.
4. Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, (BEIS). This had an emphasis on building more wind farms which continued the decline in granting licences and planning permissions for mining of coal, drilling for oil, and included a moratorium for fracking for gas. Now we have to import these things at enormous expense, if they are available, and with the Russian gas turned off we will need to import enormous amounts of Liquefied Natural Gas from the USA to prevent gas rationing.
5. Rishi Sunak has done a mini reshuffle, a bit like tidying the deckchairs on Titanic

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[UKIP & Reform UK - What's the Difference?](#)

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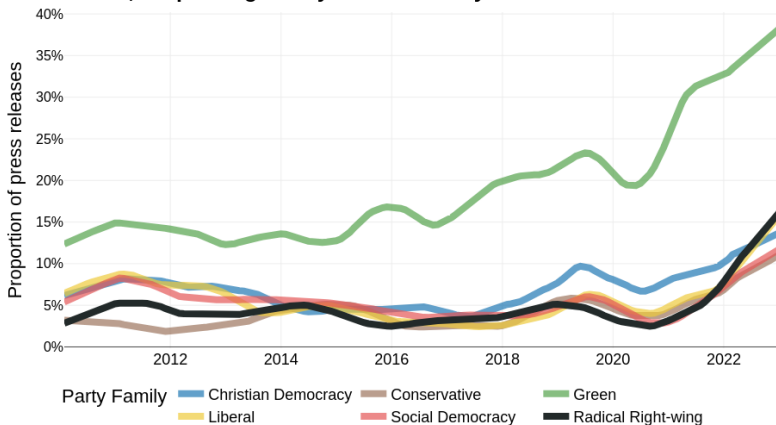
[Starmer's Energy Security Policy](#)

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Results: Saliency

Radical right parties are increasingly focusing on climate issues

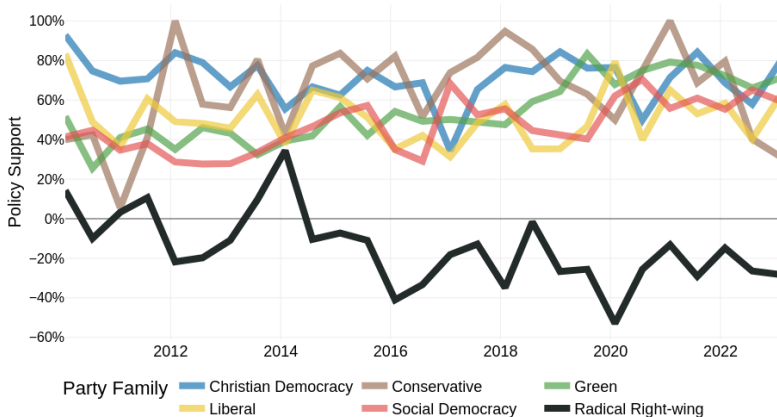
Radical Right Parties have Increased their Focus on Environmental Issues, Surpassing Nearly All Other Party Families



Results: Adversarial Position

Radical right parties are uniquely oppositional on climate issues

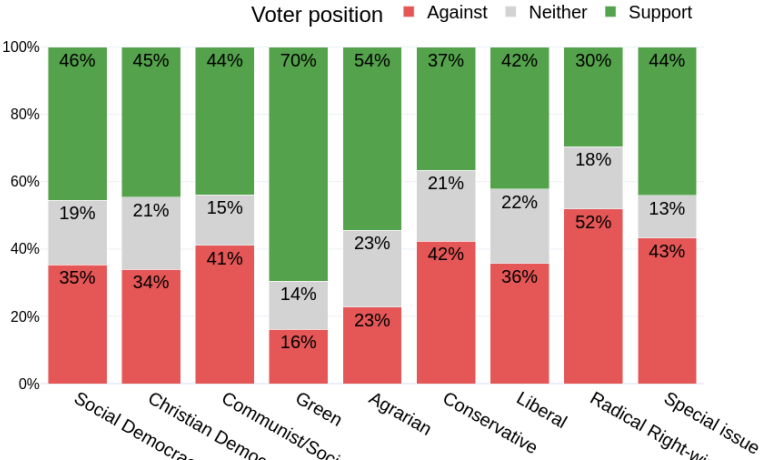
Radical Right Parties are the Least Supportive of Climate Policies... And the Gap is Growing



Results: Mobilizing Potential

A significant share of voters across parties hold sceptical views

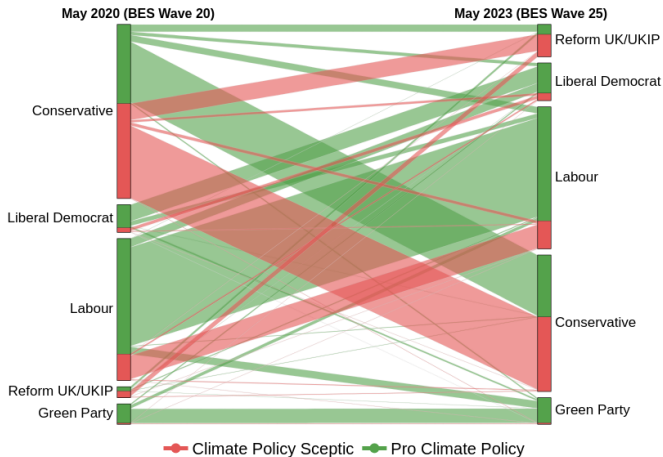
Voters who Typically Support Other Parties Report Opposition to Costly Climate Change Policies



Vote Switching

Radical right parties are mobilizing voters

The Majority of Voters who Switch from Supporting the Conservatives to Reform UK or UKIP are Climate Sceptics



Discussion

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- ▶ **Build Broader, Cross-Cutting Coalitions for Climate Action**

- ▶ Parties should proactively engage non-traditional climate constituencies—rural voters, working-class communities, small businesses—to increase ownership and reduce vulnerability to wedge strategies and radical right parties.

Thank You!

- ▶ **Contact:** z.dickson@lse.ac.uk
- ▶ **Article:** Dickson & Hobolt (2024). Going Against the Grain: Climate Change as a Wedge Issue for the Radical Right. *Comparative Political Studies*

Comparative Political Studies

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Going Against the Grain: Climate Change as a Wedge Issue for the Radical Right

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Abstract

Political parties often mobilise issues that can improve their electoral fortunes by splitting existing coalitions. We argue that by adopting a distinctively adversarial stance, radical right-wing parties have increasingly politicised climate change policies as a wedge issue. This strategy challenges the mainstream party consensus and seeks to mobilise voter concerns over green initiatives. Relying on state-of-the-art multilingual large language models, we empirically examine nearly half a million press releases from 76 political parties across nine European democracies to support this argument. Our findings demonstrate that the radical right's oppositional climate policy rhetoric diverges significantly from the mainstream consensus. Survey data further reveal climate policy scepticism among voters across the political spectrum, highlighting the mobilising potential of climate policies as a wedge issue. This research advances our understanding of issue competition and the politicisation of climate change.