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## Article

# Victims of Nasty Rhetoric in Swedish Climate Politics

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**Abstract:** Hate speech with racist, religious and misogynist motives is well-known, but hate speech and related crimes have increased also in climate politics over the past five years. It is used by right-wing and far-right populist political leaders to polarise climate politics, mobilising ingroup followers, and denigrating and delegitimising outgroup advocates of strong climate policy criticising a radical deterioration of climate policy as climate deniers gain powers. Crime victim discourse is gaining greater prominence in political and public debates since it can affect rationales for punishment, equality before the law, and other legal safeguards. This paper add knowledge to such debates by exploring and theorising, with Swedish climate politics as a case, how nasty rhetoric is perceived by the victims among climate scientists, climate journalists and climate activists and what it does to them, emotionally and behaviourally. Based on qualitative analysis of secondary data from written and audio-visual media, combined with interviews with victims, it is found that climate scientists and climate journalists are victimised as persons for what they do professionally. They report fear of being followed, insecurity and angst, making them withdraw from public debate, change research subject or change job. In comparison, climate activists are victimised twice for their political opinions and actions, first as a group by hate speech, then personally by state repression for alleged criminal acts. Contrary to previous research on hate crime victims, climate activists desensitise the content of hate speech and rather get scared and angry from the message effect of hate speech by top politicians, legitimising collective hate speech and inciting hate crime. However, secondary victimisation makes some activists react with fear of crime and choose to revert to more friendly actions. But core group activists react with anger and plan new actions. In all, the results show the importance of analysing crime victim discourses to avoid lumping victims together in public and policy debates on how to curb hate speech and hate crime, as well as to handle victims.

**Keywords:** Climate politics; emotions; far-right populism; hate crime; hate speech; nasty politics; victimisation

## 1. Introduction

Analysing the strategic agency of policy entrepreneurs in the radical transformation of Swedish climate policy since 2022, von Malmberg (2024a) identified systematic use of toxic language with insults, accusations, denigration, and related criminal acts such as physical, economic and legal violence, towards advocates of strong climate policy. It was a tactic of leading politicians, including the prime minister (PM) and cabinet ministers of the right-wing government, supported by a far-right populist nativist party, to use such *nasty rhetoric* (Zeitsoff, 2023) to delegitimise and dehumanise climate scientists, climate activists and climate journalists to make them silent. A leading Swedish newspaper recently described Swedish climate politics as “a musty rant with accusations of betrayal,

sin and devil pacts”.<sup>1</sup> Politics, including climate politics, has become increasingly emotional (Beattie et al., 2019; Shah, 2024), with nasty rhetoric having an important role in emotional governance (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022).

Use of nasty rhetoric, including hate speech and hate crime, as a tactics in strategic agency of far-right populists is well-known in policy domains such as migration and identity policy (see e.g. Yilmaz, 2012; Lutz, 2019; Peters, 2020; Weeks & Allen, 2023; Svatoňová & Doerr, 2024). For instance, members of the Jewish diaspora, the Muslim community and the LGBTQ communities in EU countries are victimised by online hate speech on an almost daily basis (Berecz & Devinat, 2017). It is now used also to polarise climate politics in a ‘cultural war’ to demount national climate policy and governance in line with far-right populist whims (von Malmborg, 2024a). This is a dangerous development that counters the need for pluralistic approaches to democratic governance of climate change, a truly wicked problem (Goodman & Morton, 2014; Lindvall & Karlsson, 2023).

Polarising rhetoric used to frame contesting views of political advocates and deniers of climate change have been studied extensively (e.g. Eubanks, 2015; Sharman & Howarth, 2017; Bsumek et al. 2019; Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022; Pandey, 2024), but research on nasty rhetoric in climate politics and policy processes is sparse. Knight and Greenberg (2011) analysed adversarial framing for discrediting reputation of Canadian social movement/counter-movement relations. Both sides discredited their opponents based on combinations of practices, moral character, competence and qualifications, social associations, and real versus apparent motivations. Then President Donald Trump openly called newly elected congress woman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, initiator of the US Green New Deal climate policy, a “nasty woman” and said that many of the newly elected congress women should “go back to their countries” (Miller & Bloomfield, 2022). This shows the power dynamics circling climate policy and female politicians simultaneously. Combining climate denial and antifeminism, Donald Trump and many other male politicians also directed and instigated hate and treats towards Greta Thunberg, the figurehead number one of the climate justice movements (Andersson, 2021; Vowles & Hultman, 2021a; White, 2022; Arce-García et al., 2023).

Nasty rhetoric is increasingly found in social media, particularly X/Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok, where perpetrators can be anonymous (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2015; Oltmann et al., 2020; Tom Tong, 2025). As for climate policy related cyberhate, Anderson and Huntington (2017) found that while instances of incivility were low overall in Twitter discussions on climate politics, such rhetoric was mainly used by right-leaning people. The climate justice movement has been particularly targeted by hate speech in social media, often related to gender (Agius et al., 2021; Andersson, 2021; White, 2022; Arce-García et al., 2023). Incivil hate of climate sceptic far-right people is also targeting climate journalists, aiming to discredit individual journalists and newspapers but also to undermine the deliberative function of online user forums (Björkenfeldt & Gustafsson, 2023; Schulz-Tomančok & Woschnagg, 2024).

In summary, research on nasty rhetoric or hate speech in climate politics has mainly focused on its role in polarisation, the combination of climate-denialism and antifeminism, and hate campaigns towards specific groups of targets, such as the climate justice movement and journalists. Less is known about the use and harms of nasty rhetoric as strategy and tactics in radically changing national or international climate politics and governance. The nature of nasty rhetoric in climate politics and politics more generally, as seen from the perpetrators’ perspectives – the initiators and the followers – was recently analysed by von Malmborg (2025). He suggests that nasty rhetoric is a *double-edged sword* to initiators, aimed at silencing opponents in the outgroup, but also at mobilising ingroup followers to expand nasty rhetoric. To the followers, nasty rhetoric can be described as a *weird kind of sport*. Sociological research has found that followers in nasty rhetoric and hate speech spread hate and threats in social media for reasons of social gratification, including as entertainment and having fun (Walther, 2025).

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<sup>1</sup> Article in independent conservative newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, 21 December 2023, <https://www.svd.se/a/3EneLP/torehammar-svek-och-djavulspakter-i-klimatpolitiken> |

Adding to the understanding of the nasty rhetoric phenomenon from the perspectives of perpetrators, this paper qualitatively explores and theorises, with Swedish climate politics as a case, how nasty rhetoric is perceived by the people targeted – the victims – and what it does to them, emotionally and behaviourally. Crime victim discourse is gaining greater prominence in political and public debates in areas such as racist, religious and misogynist hate speech and hate crime since it can affect traditional legal principles such as rationales for punishment, equality before the law, and other legal safeguards (Tham et al., 2011; Hagerlid, 2021; Atak, 2022; Glad et al., 2024). Given that nasty rhetoric in Swedish climate politics is found to be part of a strategy for radical change of policy and governance (von Malmborg, 2024a), crime victim discourse is important also in the field of climate politics. Addressing the following research questions, the aim is to contribute to better understanding of the nature of nasty rhetoric:

Who are the victims of nasty rhetoric and how are they victimised?

How do victims of nasty rhetoric react emotionally and behaviourally?

The paper is outlined as follows. Section 2 presents the theory of nasty rhetoric and emotional governance, as well as findings from the literature on effects of nasty rhetoric and related areas such as hate speech, cyberhate and hate crime in other policy areas. Section 3 presents the method and material used to analyse nasty rhetoric in the case of Swedish climate politics. Section 4 presents the case study context, while section 5 presents the empirical results. Section 6 discusses the results, draws conclusions and presents areas for future research.

1.1. Theory of Nasty Rhetoric

*Nasty politics* was coined by Zeitzoff (2023, p. 6) as “a set of tactics that politicians can use to insult, accuse, denigrate, threaten and in rare cases physically harm their domestic opponents”. *Nasty rhetoric*, central to nasty politics, is characterised by divisive and contentious rhetoric with insults and threats containing elements of hatred and aggression that entrenches polarisation and ‘us vs. them’ narratives, designed to denigrate, deprecate, delegitimise, dehumanise and hurt their target(s) to make them silent (Kalmoe et al., 2018). In that sense, nasty rhetoric covers offline and online hate speech (the latter often referred to as cyberhate) as well as hate crime (Whillock & Slayden, 1995; Chetty & Alathur, 2018; Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021; Vergani et al., 2024). Hate crime is “a crime motivated by prejudice and discrimination that stirs up a group of like-minded people to target victims because of their membership of a social group, religion or race” (Peters, 2020, p. 2326). Zeitzoff (2023) has proposed a typology of nasty rhetoric, to which economic and legal violence, e.g. repression, has been added since it is increasingly used against climate activists in Europe (Table 1).

Table 1. Typology of nasty rhetoric.

| Type of nasty rhetoric | Description   | Level of aggression |
|------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Insults                | Name-calling that influences how people make judgement and interpret situations and could sometimes include dehumanising and enmity rhetoric.   | Hate                |
| Accusations            | Blaming opponents of doing something illegal or shady, or promulgating conspiracy theories about opponents.   | Hate                |
| Intimidations          | Veiled threats advocating economic or legal action against an opponent, e.g., that they should get fired, be investigated or sent to prison.  | Threat              |
| Incitements            | The most aggressive rhetoric includes people threatening or encouraging sometimes fatal violence against opponents. If the statement is followed, which happens, it implies physical harm to, or in the worst case, death of opponents. | Threat              |



|                                      |                                 |          |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| Economic/legal violence (repression) | Denunciation, detention         | Violence |
| Physical violence                    | Assault, beating, rape, murder. | Violence |

Modified from Zeitzoff (2023).

Social psychology research on hate, described as a strong, intense, enduring, and destructive emotional experience intended to harm or eliminate its targets physically, socially, or symbolically (Opotow & McClelland, 2007; Martínez et al., 2022a), finds a causal relationship between hate and aggression in terms of aggressive tendencies and hurting behaviour experienced towards specific individuals and entire outgroups (Martínez et al., 2022b). What starts with different expressions of hate soon escalates to different forms of threats, one more aggressive than the other, and further to violence. Thus, hate speech can be a type of terrorism or trigger event of terrorism, i.e. any intentional act directed against life or related entities causing a common danger (Chetty & Alathur, 2018; Piazza, 2020).

1.2. *Nasty Rhetoric and Far-Right Populism*

Populist parties have increased their votes in every election to national parliaments in Europe since the 1980s and autocratisation is increasing (Mudde, 2004, 2021; V-Dem Institute, 2024). Recently, far-right populist “insulter in chief” Donald Trump was elected to President of the USA a second time (Vargiu et al., 2024). To reach their political aims, populists disseminate conspiracy theories about the state of society and use incivil and nasty rhetoric with coarse, rude, and disrespectful language (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013; Moffitt, 2016; Lührmann et al., 2020; Mudde, 2021; Zeitzoff, 2023; Törnberg & Chueri, 2025). Dellagiacomma et al. (2024) report that people adhering to right-wing authoritarianism are significantly more likely to produce online hate than people with a social liberal orientation.

Narratives of ‘disaster’ or ‘anxiety’ are important for the success of far-right populists (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022). These refer to a fictional fantasy of a constant crisis, rather than an actual crisis of the nation, caused by long-term mismanagement by a corrupt ‘elite’ (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022; Ketola & Odmalm, 2023; Abraham, 2024). Entrenching an ‘us vs. them’ narrative, far-right populists refer to a homogeneous ‘people’, the popular (the ingroup), as a counterpoint to the ‘elite’ (the outgroup). They portray themselves as the savior of the nation and the people, and the ‘elite’ should be punished for their crimes against the ‘people’. While sometimes talking the language of the ‘people’, populists are not responsive to popular will. Their ideology is based on a unitary and non-pluralist vision of society’s public interest, and they themselves are rightful interpreters of what is in the public interest – a putative will of the ‘people’ (Caramani, 2017), systematically presenting misinformation (Törnberg & Chueri, 2025). They act on their own will and invite their audience to identify with them (White, 2023).

1.3. *Nasty Rhetoric and Emotions*

Based on the work of Mouffe (2013), Chang (2019) and Olson (2020) show that nasty rhetoric is not only about what is conveyed explicitly by use of language. Political sentiments are often emotional and affective, determined by viscerally experienced sentiments and a physically imagined sense of rightness or wrongness. Political persuaders, particularly populists, use language or images to affect emotions, perceptions of knowledge, belief, value, and action (Shah, 2024). This aligns with notions of persuasion that stress pathos as an equally important part of rhetoric as logos and ethos respectively (Olson, 2020). Populist rhetoric operates in a world where it is not required for “every statement be logically defensible” (McBath & Fisher, 1969, p. 17).

Populism is based on emotional appeals to the ‘people’ as the ingroup, anti-elitism, and the exclusion of outgroups who are routinely blamed and scapegoated for perceived grievances and social ills (Aalberg & de Vreese, 2016). Emotions are central in nasty rhetoric, thus in the structural and affective changes that underlie populist mobilisation and the polarisation of everyday insecurities in general (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022). Such emotional governance “affords individuals

with a sense of what is regarded as appropriate and inappropriate behavior” (Crawford, 2014, p. 536). Emotional rhetoric is central in reproduction of structural power and power relations between ‘us’ and ‘them’ as it pays attention to collective emotions as patterns of relationships and belonging (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022), thus central in policy entrepreneurship aimed at changing other actors’ beliefs and perceptions and enhancing governance influence by altering the distribution of formal authority (von Malmberg, 2024a).

#### 1.4. *Harm of Nasty Rhetoric*

Focusing on politicians’ use of nasty rhetoric against political opponents, Zeitzoff (2023) and other political scientists only analyse effects of nasty rhetoric on politics and democracy. Nasty rhetoric including hate speech feeds political intolerance, defined as the support or willingness to denounce basic democratic values and the equal rights of people belonging to a defined outgroup in a particular society (Gibson, 2006). This is considered one of the most problematic phenomena in democratic societies.

But prior to affecting politics and democracy, nasty rhetoric – aiming to demonise and dehumanise people in the outgroup and mobilise more followers and offenders in the ingroup – does something to people, emotionally, cognitively, normatively and behaviourally (Cassese, 2021; Wahlström et al., 2021; Abuín-Vences et al., 2023; Renström et al., 2023). Hence, to understand the effects of nasty rhetoric on politics and democracy, it is important to analyse the emotions it provokes, how individuals perceive this type of messages, and how their behaviour is affected. Since the theory of nasty rhetoric lack these perspectives, valuable insights can be learned from multidisciplinary research on harmful effects of hate speech and hate crime, including cyberhate (see e.g. Boeckmann & Turpin-Petrosino, 2002; Leets, 2002; Chetty & Alathur, 2018; Roseman et al., 2018; Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021; Farrell & Lockwood, 2023; Vergani et al., 2024).

##### 1.4.1. Emotional and Cognitive Effects

Theory on political communication proposes that emotional and cognitive effects provoked by hateful messages will not depend so much on the content of the message as on the ideological affiliation of the receiver with that of the sender (Crawford & Brandt, 2020). This makes great sense in politics of Manichean polarisation, where hate speech is used to mobilise ingroup followers and dehumanise outgroup members. Emotions influence cognitive processing, which varies depending on which emotions are elicited by a certain stimulus (Izard, 2010). Emotional and cognitive responses to hate speech seem to differ depending on ideological adherence of the audience. Abuín-Vences et al. (2022) found that more negative emotions are detected in progressive audiences when the hate speech is contrary to their ideology, while conservatives show less negative emotion in all cases. This is a consequence of normative pressure and outgroup cognitive biases.

Nasty rhetoric evokes feelings and harms its outgroups targets emotionally (Chang, 2019; Olson, 2020). Previous studies have reported that victims of nasty rhetoric react emotionally with fear, unrest, discomfort, frustration, angst and sometimes anger (Lazarus, 1991; Calvert, 1997; Lang et al., 2000; Wagner & Morisi, 2019; Cowan & Hodge, 2022; Renström et al., 2023; Glad et al., 2024). Fear and angst, in turn, evoke psychic trauma and feelings of distrust, suspicion and insecurity (Hagerlid, 2021; Allwood et al., 2022; Glad et al., 2024). Dreißigacker et al. (2024) reports that victims of online hate speech exhibit a more pronounced feeling of insecurity outside the Internet, while victims of other forms of cybercrime do not differ in this regard from non-victims. Victims of offline hate speech did not show the same sense of insecurity, indicating that insecurity rise from the uncontrollable spread of hatred on the Internet reaching its victims even in protected private spheres.

Recent research provides evidence that exposure to hate speech can predict posttraumatic stress disorder and depression symptoms (Wachs et al., 2022; Wypych & Bilewicz, 2024). Both effects were mediated by acculturation stress and were significant after controlling for experienced discrimination.

##### 1.4.2. Behavioural Effects

Emotions are important to political behaviour because they are modes of relating to the environment: states of readiness for engaging, or not engaging, in interaction with that environment (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner et al., 2014). Emotions are likely to influence action tendencies because they inform an individual about a situation and prepare the body for a certain course of action (Frijda, 1986). Hence, emotions can influence behaviour, such as basic fighting or fleeing (Izard, 2010). When targeted with hate speech and threats post-terror, survivors of the terrorist attack on Utøya island, Norway, not only reacted emotionally, but also behaviourally by withdrawing socially and politically (Glad et al., 2024).

People react to threats in different ways depending on the nature of the threat. Threats to worldviews, values and identity, i.e. symbolic threats (Stephan & Stephan, 2017), predicts hatred which in turn predicts aggressive tendencies and hurting behaviour (Martínez et al., 2022b). In comparison, threats to safety, goals or resources, i.e. realistic threats, give rise to anger and dislike which makes the offender wanting to change the target, not hurt it (cf. Martínez et al., 2022b). Thus, hate is a destructive force, while anger is a constructive force (Martínez et al., 2022a). The stronger emotional reactions to symbolic threats, facilitating hate and aggression, may be explained by the strong emotionality with which people endorse values, moral convictions and worldviews (Skitka et al., 2005; Pretus et al., 2022).

Exposure to derogatory language can lead to political radicalisation and deteriorates intergroup relations (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020; Schäfer et al., 2022). The increased presence of hate speech in one's environment creates a sense of a descriptive norm that allows outgroup derogation, which leads to polarisation and the erosion of existing anti-discriminatory norms. Renström et al. (2023) found that individuals reacting to threats with anger and hate or more aggressive emotions, are more prone to affective polarisation and intergroup differentiation with increased reliance on stereotypes. Bilewicz and Soral argue that through basic psychological dynamics, societies become more accepting of derogatory language and less accepting of religious, ethnic, sexual and political minorities groups.

In addition, hearing hate speech delivered by people having ideas aligned with your own reduces people's ability to recognise the offensive character of such language (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020). Through a process of desensitisation, where individuals gradually learn to ignore these messages, empathy is replaced by intergroup contempt as a dominant response to others. After desensitisation, people are less sensitive to hate speech and more prejudiced toward hate speech victims than their counterparts in the control condition (Soral et al., 2018). This aligns with analyses of hate speech effects using the ritual model of communication, illustrating a reinforcement of racist attitudes and disparate treatment of minorities that occurs with the repetitive use of hate speech (Calvert, 1997).

Neuropsychiatric research finds a relationship of human aggression to traumatic central nervous system injury and neurobiology (Dunbar, 2017, 2022). Neuroimaging of traumatised individuals, particularly people that have developed post-traumatic stress disorder, show abnormalities in brain function, structure and biochemistry in the fear-learning system of prefrontal cortex, hippocampus and amygdala (Andrewes & Jenkins, 2019; Harnett et al., 2020), with physical changes in prefrontal cortex and amygdala leading to difficulties in regulating social emotional action.

But Salmela and von Scheve (2018) suggest that desensitisation and radicalisation differ between political-ideological groups. Referring to partially different emotional opportunity structures and distinct political strategies at exploiting these structures, they suggest that right-wing populism is characterised by repressed shame that transforms fear and insecurity into resentment and hatred against perceived 'enemies' of the precarious self (Salmela & von Scheve, 2018). Left-wing populism, in turn, associates more with acknowledged shame that allows individuals to self-identify as aggrieved and humiliated by libertarian and neoliberal policies and their advocates. The latter type of shame holds emancipatory potential as it allows individuals to establish bonds with others who feel the same, whereas repressors remain in their shame or seek bonds from repression-mediated defensive anger and hatred.

### 3. Method and Materials

#### 3.1. A qualitative Case Study

This paper analyses the nature of nasty rhetoric, with a focus on the victims’ experiences and the implications for democracy. The research is undertaken as a qualitative case study of Sweden, chosen since the use of nasty rhetoric has sky-rocketed in only a few years, linked to a recent far-right turn of Swedish politics entrenching a populist ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ polarisation of Swedish climate politics (von Malmborg, 2024a).

As discussed in section 2.3.1-2, there are many studies of emotional and behavioural harm of hate speech, but none of nasty rhetoric. Most of these are quantitative, giving a rather soulless understanding of nasty rhetoric, which in essence is emotional. The aim of this paper is not to quantitatively analyse how many climate scientists, activists and journalists that have been targeted by nasty rhetoric, or how many that reacted in different ways (cf. Hagerlid, 2021). Nor to analyse gender related differences.

To add a more human and emotional dimension, I follow the tack of Glad et al. (2024) and analyse emotional and behavioural effects of hate speech qualitatively, giving room to self-reported testimonies of victims. The paper analyses the harm of nasty rhetoric targeting three groups of victims from early 2022 and onwards, i.e. climate activists, climate scientists and climate journalists. The analysis is qualitative, exploring and illustrating how victims are self-reportedly affected emotionally and behaviourally by nasty rhetoric, and how this affects democracy. The latter is brought up by several victims themselves. Being aware of the critique of assessing emotions elicited by political speech based on self-reports, which address emotions produced implicitly at a pre-conscious level and thus often unreliable (Smith, 2020), I consider self-reported emotional effects accurate for the purpose of this study. The paper explores types of experiences and reactions, it does not analyse causal relationships.

3.2. Materials

The analysis of emotional and behavioural effects in the case draws on secondary written and audio-visual data from newspapers, magazines, blogs, radio, podcasts etcetera describing the use and effects of hate speech (Annex A). News articles, essays, editorials and op-eds in newspapers, magazines and blogs were identified through Boolesk searches during April 2024–February 2025 in *Retriever Mediearkivet*<sup>2</sup>, the largest media archive in the Nordic countries. Searches were made using “climate” in combination with different search terms in Swedish, translations of which are presented in Table 2. I also analysed programmes in radio discussing hate speech, hate crime and increasing legal repression of climate activists, searching webpages of state-owned and privately owned national television and radio using the search terms ‘climate politics’ and ‘climate activism’. As for blogs, videos (YouTube) and social media, posts on the largest pro climate, libertarian and far-right extremist accounts from January 2022 to February 2025 were screened and analysed.

Table 2. Search terms for articles, editorials and op-eds.

|                |            |            |              |           |
|----------------|------------|------------|--------------|-----------|
| Activist       | Dehumanise | Emotion    | Polarisation | Scientist |
| Aggression     | Democracy  | Fear       | Politics     | Silence   |
| Anger          | Demonise   | Hate       | Populism     | Terrorist |
| Antidemocratic | Depression | Insecurity | Repression   | Threat    |
| Anxiety        | Disappear  | Journalist | Research     | Violence  |

Nasty rhetoric is usually emotional and affective, but emotions are not always contained in the written or spoken language itself, but they can be triggered by it and be used to anticipate a phenomenon (Chang, 2019; Olson, 2020). Nasty rhetoric can also be expressed visually (Bleiker, 2018), where far-right populism deploys a range of visual images to portray its ideas, such as Pepe the Frog memes (Bedford, 2017). In attacking climate activists, far-right populists also use memes of Greta Thunberg showing emotions to distinguish ‘rational men’ from ‘emotional women’ (White, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.retrievergroup.com/sv/product-mediearkivet>



Thus, subtle expressions of nasty rhetoric, e.g. refusal to give interviews, photos and videos of rhetorical actions were also identified.

As for newspapers, magazines and blogs, editorials, op-eds and articles reporting or commenting use and harmful effects of Tidö nasty climate politics were found in left, green, social democrat, liberal, conservative and far-right extremist media. In total, 85 editorials, op-eds, news articles, blogs, social media posts, videos, podcasts, television and radio programmes were identified, showing, reporting or discussing the use of and responses to nasty rhetoric in Swedish climate politics between January 2022 and February 2025 (Table 3).

Table 3. Sources of secondary data.

| Type of media            | Media source  | No. of sources |
|--------------------------|---|----------------|
| Newspapers and magazines | <i>Sub total</i>  | 64             |
|                          | <i>Aftonbladet</i> (independent social democrat)                                  | 11             |
|                          | <i>Dagens Arena</i> (independent progressive newspaper)                           | 2              |
|                          | <i>Dagens ETC</i> (independent left)  | 6              |
|                          | <i>Dagens Nyheter</i> (independent liberal)                                       | 21             |
|                          | <i>Expressen</i> (independent liberal)  | 5              |
|                          | <i>Fokus</i> (independent right-wing)   | 3              |
|                          | <i>Frihetsnytt</i> (far-right populist)   | 1              |
|                          | <i>GöteborgsPosten</i> (independent liberal)                                      | 3              |
|                          | <i>Landets Fria Tidning</i> (independent green)                                   | 1              |
|                          | <i>Magasinet Konkret</i> (independent liberal democratic)                         | 3              |
|                          | <i>Publikt</i> (journal of labour union for state employees)                      | 2              |
|                          | <i>Svenska Dagbladet</i> (independent conservative)                               | 6              |
|                          | <i>Tidningen Syre</i> (independent green liberal)                                 | 3              |
| Blogs                    | <i>Sub total</i>  | 5              |
|                          | <i>Anna from the Swedish Energy Agency</i> (personal)                             | 1*             |
|                          | <i>Klimataktion</i> (climate activist)  | 1              |
|                          | <i>Smedjan</i> (independent libertarian, Timbro)                                  | 1              |
|                          | <i>Supermiljöbloggen</i> (independent green deliberative)                         | 2              |
| Podcasts                 | <i>Yttrandefrihetspodden</i> (Podcast on liberal democracy freedom of expression) | 1              |
| Social media             | X/Twitter, Instagram, Facebook  | 3              |
| National television      | <i>Sub total</i>  | 7              |
|                          | <i>Sveriges Television</i> (public service)                                       | 4              |
|                          | TV4 (private)   | 3              |
| National radio           | <i>Sveriges Radio</i> (public service):   | 2              |
| All media                | <i>Sum total</i>  | 85             |

\* This blog describes the hate and threats and reactions of a climate activist that lost her job due to her activism. It contains several sections describing the process. It also links all articles in Swedish and international press about the case.

Additional data on emotional and behavioural responses of victims of hate speech and hate crime was collected from personal testimonies provided in a call for an end to hate speech and hate crime to safeguard Swedish democracy signed by 74 victims of nasty rhetoric.<sup>3</sup> To follow up on these testimonies, interviews were also made with six climate scientists, four of which also being climate activists, one climate journalist and 18 climate activists, the latter representing *Extinction Rebellion Sweden* (XR), and its subgroups *Mothers Rebellion* (MR) *Fathers Rebellion* (FR), *Scientist Rebellion* (SR), *Restore Wetlands* (RW) and *Take back the Future* (TBF). Several activists are members of more than one organization. Six people were interviewed in person, while 19 were interview in two focus groups. Interviewees were asked about their experiences of hate speech and different kinds of threats, the emotional impacts thereof, and how they reacted behaviourally.

Table 4. Interviewees.

| Victim group | Role  | Gender                   | Cross-group membership | Type of interview |
|--------------|---|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Scientists   | Professor climate and geopolitics   | Male                     | -                      | Personal          |
|              | Associate professor environmental science                                 | Male                     | -                      | Personal          |
|              |   | Female                   | MR, SR                 | Personal          |
|              | PhD sustainable forestry  | Female                   | XR, SR, RW             | Focus group       |
|              | PhD psychology  | Male                     | XR, SR                 | Focus group       |
|              | PhD psychology  | Male                     | XR                     | Focus group       |
| Journalists  | Sweden’s first climate journalist, 20+ years of experience from the field | Female                   | -                      | Personal          |
| Activists    | Member of RW  | Male                     | XR                     | Personal          |
|              | Member of MR  | Female                   | -                      | Personal          |
|              | 16 members of XR, MR, FR, SR, RW, TBF                                     | Female, male, non-binary |                        | Focus groups      |

3.3. Data Analysis

In this written, visual and audio-visual material, different emotional and behavioural responses to insults, incivil hate and threats were identified and coded in relation to a typology developed from previous research on effects of hate speech and hate crime in neurobiology, psychology, sociology and political science, outlined in section 2.3.1–2.3.2 (Table 5).

<sup>3</sup> Dagens Nyheter, 22 September 2024, <https://www.dn.se/kultur/upprop-detta-maste-fa-ett-slut-for-demokratins-framtid/>

Table 5. Typology of victim responses to nasty rhetoric.

| Type of effect | Response   |
|----------------|--|
| Emotional      | Anger  |
|                | Fear   |
|                | Frustration                                      |
|                | Hate   |
|                | Insecurity                                       |
|                | Robustness                                       |
|                | Worry  |
| Cognitive      | Desensitisation                                  |
| Psychological  | Anxiety  |
|                | Depression                                       |
|                | PTSD   |
| Behavioural    | Fight: Resistance, counterattack                 |
|                | Flee: Withdrawal (scientific, social, political) |

Based on Lazarus (1991), Frijda & Mesquita (1994), Calvert (1997), Lang et al. (2000), Izard (2010), Keltner et al. (2014), Wagner & Morisi (2019), Allwood et al. (2022), Cowan & Hodge (2022), Renström et al. (2023), Dreißigacker et al. (2024) and Glad et al. (2024).

4. The Case of Nasty Rhetoric in Swedish Climate Politics

4.1. A far-Right Populist Takeover

Sweden has been considered a bastion of strong liberal democracy since the end of World War II, able to develop and maintain a green and equitable welfare state (Boese et al., 2022; Silander, 2024). However, the 2022 elections to the Swedish parliament (Riksdag) marks a shift. Then, far-right nativist populist Sweden Democrats (SD) won 20.5 % of the votes and 73 out of 349 seats, becoming the second largest party in the Riksdag after the Social Democrats (S). This progress made SD gain formal powers in the Riksdag, holding the chairs in the committees of justice, labour market, foreign affairs and industry, and having direct influence over the government in most policy areas.

Bargaining on who was to form a government for the 2022–2026 term resulted in the *Tidö Agreement* (Tidö parties, 2022) between SD and a liberal-conservative troika of the Moderates (M), the Christian Democrats (KD) and the Liberals (L). SD supports the Tidö government, under the condition that SD takes part in decisions in six policy areas to undergo a rapid paradigm shift: climate and energy, criminality, economic growth and household economy, education, migration and integration, and public health, of which criminality, migration and climate change are deemed the most important (Rothstein, 2023). SD holds no seats in the cabinet but has political staff in the PM’s Office within the Government Offices of Sweden. In that sense, SD holds tangible powers but is not accountable for the government’s decisions. In all, the Tidö quartet holds majority with 176 of 349 seats in the Riksdag, while the opposition, consisting of S, the Centre Party (C), the Green Party (MP), and the Left Party (V), holds 173 seats.

When formed in 1988, SD was extremist and violent rooted in neo-fascism, but with the election of current party leader Jimmie Åkesson in 2005, SD tried to distance itself from its neo-fascist past and show a more respectable façade to gain legitimacy (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2016; Widfeldt, 2023). However, SD has continued to combine populism, anti-pluralism and authoritarianism with nativism – the longing for a homogenous nation state – and propose populist and illiberal policies in many areas, primarily migration but also social, justice and environmental policy (Hellström, 2023). SD hails Victor Orbán’s Hungary, the worst example of autocratisation in the world (Meléndez & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021; Mudde, 2021; Boese et al., 2022; Silander, 2024; V-Dem Institute, 2024), as a role model of democratic governance. Due to the success of SD, Sweden is currently one of the strongholds of far-right populists in the EU (Widfeldt, 2023). To understand SD political agency, they

“sacralize their core ideas and predominantly employ virtue ethical justification strategies, positioning themselves as morally superior to other parties” (Vahter & Jakobson, 2023, p. 1). They assign essentialist value to their key political concepts, a stance that sharply contrasts with the moral composition of the rest of the political spectrum adhering to liberal or deliberative perspectives on democracy.

Accusing Swedish established media of belonging to a “left-liberal conspiracy”, SD and other nationalist right-wing groups built their own ecosystem of digital media news sites, blogs, video channels and anonymous troll accounts in social media, which did not have to relate to the rules of press ethics (Vowles & Hultman, 2021b). Normalising knowledge resistance and using nasty rhetoric were central to their strategy of structural policy entrepreneurship (von Malmberg, 2024a).

Nasty rhetoric is an outspoken tactic of SD to entrench the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ and the ‘people vs. elite’ narratives. It was recently revealed by Swedish news media that SD’s communications office, inspired by Donald Trump and directed by party leader Åkesson, runs a ‘troll factory’. Using anonymous ‘troll accounts’ in social media, SD has deliberately and systematically spread misinformation and conspiracy theories to shape opinion, manipulate voters and incite outgroups by spreading insults, hate and threats.<sup>4</sup> SD Party leader Åkesson has confirmed that SD, representing the ‘people’, use and will continue to use ‘troll accounts’, particularly on TikTok, to avoid getting public accounts reported and closed due to their frequent use of hate and threats:

To you in the Cry...we are not ashamed. It is not us who have destroyed Sweden... It is you who are to blame for it.

#### 4.2. From climate Policy Role Model to International Scapegoat

Sweden used to be considered an international role model in climate policy (Matti et al., 2021), advocating high ambitions in global and EU climate governance as well as nationally. In 2017, the Swedish Riksdag adopted with support of all parties but SD a new climate policy framework, including:

1. A target that Sweden should have net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) by 2045;
2. A Climate Act, stating among other things that the government shall present to the Riksdag a Climate Action Plan (CAP) with policies and measures to reach the targets, at the latest the calendar year after national elections; and
3. Establishment of the *Swedish Climate Policy Council* (SCPC), an independent and interdisciplinary body of climate scientists, to evaluate the alignment of the government’s policies with the 2045 climate target.

Sweden’s GHG emissions in total decreased by approximately 37% from 1990 to 2022 and a decoupling of emissions and economic growth began in 1992, when Sweden introduced carbon dioxide taxation. This long-term trend of emissions reductions made a U-turn when the Tidö government supported by SD entered office. They advocated a radical change of Swedish climate policy and governance. SD has long since been vocal as a climate change denier (Jylhä et al., 2020; Vihma et al., 2021), wanting to abort national climate targets and climate policies. SD is culturally and cognitively motivated by conflicting ‘evil’ beliefs of previous governments for decades, both S-led and M-led. Like other European far-right populist parties,<sup>5</sup> SD is mobilising a ‘cultural war’ on climate change, making climate policy less ambitious (Hultman et al., 2019; Buzogány & Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2022; Marquardt et al., 2022; Cunningham et al., 2024). Climate policy was purposefully included in the Tidö Agreement by SD, opening a window of opportunity for SD to dictate and veto the government’s climate policy. Bargaining on finalising the Tidö CAP in 2023, SD now accepts the

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. article in leftist newspaper *Dagens ETC*, 26 August 2022, <https://www.etc.se/inrikes/haer-aer-sd-s-hemliga-trollarme-faar-order-av-aakesson>, and undercover journalistic TV programme in national TV4, 7 May 2024, <https://www.tv4play.se/program/cd339dace9a80bb132d9/kalla-fakta-undercover-i-trollfabriken>

<sup>5</sup> Briefing in *CarbonBrief*, 28 January 2025, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/daily-brief/lets-kill-the-green-deal-together-far-right-leader-urges-eus-conservatives/>



2045 target but managed to reduce overall climate policy ambitions by deleting short- and medium-term targets and actions important for reaching long-term targets. The Tidö quartet focuses entirely on emission reductions by 2045, ignoring climate science saying that reducing every ton of GHG emitted from now to 2045 is what counts (Lahn, 2021).

Tidö climate policy can be characterised as anti-climate action with increased GHG emissions. The CAP was welcomed by the *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise* (CSE) and its libertarian thinktank *Timbro*, but heavily criticised domestically by the political opposition, climate scientists, economists, government authorities, the environmental and social justice movement, business associations other than CSE, citizens and editorial writers in leading national newspapers, for its lack of short- and medium-term domestic action, manipulation of information, and a large focus on new nuclear power and climate compensation in other countries.<sup>6</sup> SCPC (2024) and Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (2024) claimed that Tidö policies lead to increases of annual GHG emissions, corresponding to more than 10 % of Sweden's total annual emissions, and that the CAP will not suffice for Sweden to reach the target on climate neutrality by 2045, nor Sweden's responsibilities in relation to EU's 2030 climate target.

In critique of Tidö climate policy, three out of four parties in the Riksdag opposition (C, MP and V) tabled a motion of non-confidence, calling for the setting aside of climate minister Romina Pourmokhtari (L) for failing to deliver policies that reduce GHG emissions. The critique towards Pourmokhtari also refers to the fact that she herself promised to resign if Sweden does not meet Swedish and EU climate targets – which it will not. In addition, more than 1 350 critical L-politicians from local and regional levels demanded the resignation of Pourmokhtari because she and L gave way to SD's influence over the CAP, implying crossing several red lines of L's party program and ideology. However, when the Riksdag voted, the critics did not gather enough support to set Pourmokhtari aside.

Besides domestic criticism, Tidö climate policies were criticised also internationally, claiming that Sweden is losing its role as climate policy frontrunner and risk dragging the EU down with it.<sup>7</sup> Due to the Tidö climate policies, Sweden dropped from number one to number eleven between 2021 and 2024 in the Climate Change Performance Index (Burck et al., 2024). The European Commission has rejected Sweden's application for SEK 40 billion funding from the EU Recovery Fund since Sweden will meet neither national nor EU climate targets for 2030.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4.3. Use of Nasty Rhetoric in Swedish Climate Politics

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance article in *Dagens Nyheter* (Sweden's largest newspaper, independent liberal), <https://www.dn.se/sverige/ulf-kristersson-om-klimatet-karnkraft-viktigaste-atgarden/>; interview with the chair of the SCPC in *Svenska Dagbladet*, <https://www.svd.se/a/VPV2AI/klimatpolitiska-radet-klimatplanen-otillracklig>; statement on X/Twitter by Prof. Johan Rockström, director of Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, <https://twitter.com/jrockstrom/status/1737888256149057692>; statement on Facebook by Dr. Mikael Karlsson, Associate professor in Climate leadership, <https://www.facebook.com/mikael.karlsson.3158/posts/pfbid02xuBEHVir9pH3zT9kmysSeD7EAUodsGkwLNREQKhZbP7KPKd4b3CdBigsRmUVAZ33l>; statement by Swedish Association of Nature Conservation, <https://www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/artiklar/en-klimathandlingsplan-utan-handling/>; editorial in *Dagens Nyheter*, <https://www.dn.se/ledare/regeringen-maste-ta-klimatkrisen-pa-samma-allvar-som-krigshotet/>; statement by Swedish leading green think tank 2030-Sekretariatet, <https://www.2030sekretariatet.se/2030-sekretariatet-klimathandlingsplanen-en-gor-det-sjalv-julkapp/>

<sup>7</sup> Articles in French newspaper *Le Monde*, 27 January 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/01/27/sweden-is-moving-backward-on-climate-policy\\_6470373\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/01/27/sweden-is-moving-backward-on-climate-policy_6470373_4.html), and pan-European newspaper *Euractiv*, 30 March 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/swedish-right-wing-government-puts-country-on-wrong-climate-path/>

<sup>8</sup> Article in green liberal newspaper *Syre*, 22 July 2024, <https://tidningensyre.se/2024/22-juli-2024/sverige-enda-land-som-inte-sokt-pengar-fran-eus-aterhamnningssfond/>

In a related study, von Malmberg (2025) found that nasty rhetoric is widely used by party leaders and cabinet ministers, including the prime minister (PM) to target oppositional politicians, climate scientists, climate activists and climate journalists. It is also used by neoliberal, libertarian and far-right influencers and climate sceptics, applauding the weakening of Swedish climate policy. The political opposition in the Riksdag, and to a lesser extent scientists and activists as well as critical journalists, all advocating stronger climate policy based on climate science, also use it but in less aggressive forms. While Tidö parties and climate sceptics use all types of nasty rhetoric, from insults to incitements and physical violence, oppositional politicians and climate advocates only use insults and accusations.

That high-level politicians in the government and the Riksdag utter insults, accusations and intimidations towards climate scientists, journalists and particularly activists can be considered an important reason for the increase in threats (von Malmberg, 2025). Nasty rhetoric has become normalised and collectivised (cf. Peters, 2020) when the PM and other cabinet ministers and people with leading positions in the Riksdag use it, calling the climate justice movement “totalitarian”, “security threats”, “terrorists”, “saboteurs” and “a threat to Swedish climate governance and Swedish democracy” that should be “sent to prison” and “executed”. In addition, they accuse climate science of being “just an opinion”. Green politicians are “strawmen” that should be “killed”, and female climate journalists are a “left pack” and “moron hags” that “will be raped”. Insults, accusations, intimidations and incitements are made openly, mainly in social media from official accounts of ministers and other politicians. Intimidations targeting climate activists are also made in national radio, on the streets, and in political debates in the Riksdag.

Swedish politicians rarely humiliate or denigrate other politicians in person, but other political parties. Swedish politics is not as person fixated as, for example, American politics. It is rather far-right extremist persons that target politicians in person. Except for the hate on Greta Thunberg, the same holds true for nasty rhetoric of politicians targeting climate activists or scientists. It is primarily the organizations, not the persons, who are targeted (von Malmberg, 2025). In contrast, hate and threats sent by anonymous offenders are often targeting individual climate activists, scientists, journalists and other outgroups, orchestrated by SD and far-right extremist Alternative for Sweden (AfS),<sup>9</sup> who display names, photos, addresses and phone numbers of the ‘enemies’ in far-right extremist web forums, i.e. doxxing<sup>10</sup>.

Hate speech in Swedish climate politics has resulted in hate crime in terms of physical violence, but also to increased legal and economic repression of climate activists. In spring 2022, Extinction Rebellion (XR) reported that five masked people attacked a climate action, and that one activist had been assaulted, following infiltration and doxxing organized by AfS.<sup>11</sup>

Since 2020, 310 climate activists have been prosecuted in Swedish district courts for different crimes related to civil disobedience, some of them several times. Of these, 200 persons were convicted, mainly to fines or suspended sentence. In 2022, leading SD politician now chair of the industry committee in the Riksdag, and the former M spokesperson on legal policy issues, now minister of migration, accused climate activists performing traffic blockades at demonstrations of being “saboteurs”, and that they should be charged for “sabotage” instead of “disobedience to law enforcement”.<sup>12</sup> This change was later supported by the current minister of justice, saying that the actions of climate activists must be seen as sabotage so that they can be “sentenced to prison”.<sup>13</sup> In

<sup>9</sup> AfS was formed by far-right extremists when SD’s youth organisation was expelled from the mother party.

<sup>10</sup> Doxxing means to map and disseminate via the internet (i) private information, and (ii) information that can identify a specific person or organisation.

<sup>11</sup> News article in Syre, 13 June 2022. <https://tidningensyre.se/2022/13-juni-2022/hogerextrem-infiltrationskampanj-mot-klimataktivist/>

<sup>12</sup> Article in far-right populist online newspaper *Fria Tider*, 29 August 2022, <https://www.friatider.se/klimataktivist-stoppar-ambulanser>

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Swedish minister of justice, *Altinget*, 10 November 2023. <https://www.altinget.se/civilsamhalle/artikel/strommer-m-vill-se-haardare-domar-mot-klimataktivist>

2022, without change of legislation, prosecutors around Sweden suddenly began to charge climate activists performing roadblocks at demonstrations for sabotage. Between summers 2022 and 2023, 25 persons were convicted for sabotage, some of which were sentenced to prison, but most were later acquitted in the Court of Appeal.<sup>14</sup>

In 2024, a person engaged in *Mother Rebellion* was fired from her job at the Swedish Energy Agency due to accusations and intimidations of her predecessor, right-wing and far-right media and minister for civil defence that she was a threat to Swedish national security. In 2023, a scientist engaged in *Scientist Rebellion* was arrested for alleged sabotage of an airport. The action took place outside the airport and the scientist activist held a banner. The court case, which includes several lies from the airport manager, is still ongoing, but the activist recently got her application for Swedish citizenship rejected with the motivation that “[s]ince you are suspected of a crime, you have not shown that you meet the requirement of an honest way of life”.<sup>15</sup>

## 5. Emotional and Behavioural Effects on Victims

Nasty rhetoric is not a new phenomenon in Swedish politics, but it has shifted from targeting politicians to also targeting scientists, activists and journalists. In the 1970s and 80s, the hatred of then PM Olof Palme (S) was prominent. In 2015–2022, a main target of far-right nasty rhetoric was the former leader of the Centre Party and minister for business, Annie Lööf. She stood up for socio-liberal green values, a humane migration politics and criticised the turn to nasty rhetoric in Swedish politics. For this, she was called “Sharia-Annie” and was accused of being a “traitor to Sweden” that should be “brought to the neo-Nazi court and executed”.<sup>16</sup> In 2022, it was revealed that Lööf should have been killed by a far-right extremist. After years of steadfast resistance against the haters; “They shouldn’t fucking win” (to use her own words); fear and anxiety – “crying herself to sleep” – made her fed up with politics, and Lööf resigned as party leader and from other political assignments.<sup>17</sup>

### 5.1. Climate Scientists

In 2023, more than 50% of climate and environment scientists at Swedish universities reported in a survey that they sense decreasing trust in science the last five years.<sup>18</sup> Over a quarter state that they have been attacked by those around them because of their research or how they have spoken in the media. Since then, climate science has repeatedly been accused by leading right-wing and far-right politicians and other Swedish climate sceptics of being “just an opinion”, with climate scientists serving a “left-liberal conspiracy”. Over a third of the researchers spontaneously brought up that they believe that Swedish politicians ignore or question science. A professor in environmental science testifies that “there is an arrogance towards science, not least among politicians who want to attract voters”.<sup>19</sup> Several researchers express concern about reduced funding for environmental and climate science, as their expertise is perceived as superfluous. Another professor says:

*The development is becoming increasingly threatening. And when you also manage to move the debate in the Riksdag from “what to do about climate change” to “is there climate change” – then you yourself become conspiratorial. Is this some kind of plan? It’s scary.*

Nasty rhetoric attacks on Swedish climate scientists are made to delegitimise individual researchers, but also to cast doubts on universities, the scientific community and the role of science

<sup>14</sup> News article, *Dagens Arena*, 23 August 2023, <https://www.dagensarena.se/innehall/200-klimataktivister-domda-25-sabotage/>

<sup>15</sup> Article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 5 February 2025, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/protesterade-mot-privatflyg-far-inte-bli-svensk-medborgare/>

<sup>16</sup> Article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 26 August 2022, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/sa-sprids-hat-och-hot-mot-centerledaren-annie-loof/>

<sup>17</sup> Article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 16 December 2022, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/annie-loof-jag-grater-nar-lampan-ar-slackt/>

<sup>18</sup> News article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 26 February 2023, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/miljoforskarnas-oro-varfor-ska-vi-finnas-om-ingen-bryr-sig-om-oss/>

<sup>19</sup> News article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 27 February 2023, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/ministern-om-forskarnas-svar-djupt-oroande/>

in providing knowledge for citizens, businesses, public authorities and politicians to make informed decisions. An associate professor in environmental science testifies about death threats and incitement about being fired from university:

*As an environmental researcher, I have been exposed from various directions. After a wolf debate, I was informed that I live with two red dots on my chest. And in the climate debate over the past ten years, I have received threats that both one and the other measures will be taken to get me rid of my job, in a couple of cases in the last five years also uttered or hinted at by politicians.*

After being attacked, many researchers perceive a risk of being followed or chased and withdraw from research in areas that have become politically charged, and those who conduct research in such areas withdraw from communicating their research results to the public. They self-censor. A Swedish professor of climate policy testifies how hatred and threats affected him:

*I've received hate and threats for long. Being criticised in substance is part of being a researcher, that is what brings science forward. But being criticised in person, often related to conspiracy theories, is detrimental. Once, haters threatened to send a death squad to the university. The hatred and threats drain me of energy and to avoid it, I refrain from participating in the public discussion on climate policy.*

Scientists being threatened seek support from the universities' security departments. But experience shows that they get limited help. Most are helped to avoid getting more hateful and threatening e-mails, but not other measure to increase personal security, e.g. related to a risk of being followed or chased. A scientist threatened to death was advised to "run in zig zag if approached by armed people".

Some climate scientists were more offended and felt anger from the insults about climate science as "just an opinion". Few climate scientists were invited to the government's national climate meeting in June 2023, and those invited were not allowed to speak. In response, they insulted the government, calling the government's climate meeting a "joke", a "play for the galleries" and a "spectacle" in order to delegitimise it.<sup>20</sup>

## 5.2. Climate Activists

Climate activist organizations and individuals are the main targets of Tidö nasty climate politics. Referring to climate science, climate activists raise concern and shape opinion about the "climate emergency", calling upon politicians and business leaders to "tell the truth", and "act now" to "end fossil fuels" (von Malmberg, 2024b). Like in other countries globally, Swedish climate activists use civil disobedience or friendly protests to attack the governments' lack of action to reduce GHG emissions (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020). This has led to insults about climate activists being "irrelevant" and "hippies estranged from the world", accusations that they are "climate extremists", "totalitarian terrorists", "saboteurs" and "a treat to democracy", and intimidations and incitement that they should be "sent to prison" and "executed".

### 5.2.1. Harm from Primary Victimisation

Activists from a heterogeneous set of climate justice organizations witness that politicians and other nasty rhetoric perpetrators are lumping all climate activists together. A few have been battered or fired, many more have been prosecuted and sentenced to prison. A young female climate activist being intimidated by SD politicians and SD supporters at a large climate demonstration and afterwards online testifies how the hatred affected her:

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<sup>20</sup> News article about concerns of climate policy researchers, *Dagens Nyheter*, 14 June 2023, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/regeringens-klimatmote-vacker-fragor-i-forskarvarlden/>; Op-ed by eight climate policy researchers, *Aftonbladet*, 15 June 2023, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/3E78Ad/atta-forskare-klimatmotet-riskerar-bli-spel-for-gallerierna>; Op-ed by six climate policy researchers, *GöteborgsPosten*, 1 July 2023, <https://www.gp.se/debatt/m%C3%A5nga-avg%C3%B6rande-fr%C3%A5gor-saknas-i-regeringens-klimatpolitik-1.103017568>; Op-ed by 16 environmental organisations, *Expressen*, 14 June 2023, <https://www.expressen.se/debatt/regeringens-klimatmote-framstar-som-ett-skamt/>



*"They never said who they were but wanted to ask a few questions. I had no idea that they had evil intent. It was very naïve. [...] They had put on clown music and cut the interview so that I appeared stupid and ignorant. I felt extremely humiliated. The video had over 2 000 comments and the tone was very harsh and mocking. From fear that far-right extremists would start harassing me, I didn't dare to respond to the comments."*

All activists interviewed mentioned that they have balanced pros and cons of active climate activism, taking part in civil disobedience actions, and found that it is worth taking the risk of being imprisoned. Others have chosen more friendly forms of actions, e.g. singing sit-ins with Mothers Rebellion. All witness that they take offense to hate and threats, but they have the support of each other in the movements and have learned that the orchestrated hate speech and hate crime against them are not about them as people. They find nasty rhetoric part of a larger manoeuvre orchestrated to polarise and break down society and democracy, to safeguard economic growth. However, some activists step back from civil disobedience to friendly actions or withdraw and remain silent after being subjected to hate and threats, often people with families being worried, but many, particularly those in the core groups organizing civil disobedience actions, are strengthened in their conviction that they are right, and the perpetrators are wrong. To them, the fight for a just climate transition is so important that they largely set aside or stand above negative emotional reactions from hate and threats. Based on climate science and deliberative democracy, critical to the hegemonic norm of neoliberal economics and economic growth, they are fighting for the sake of the climate, human rights of current and future generations and democracy. They get angry and want to make things clear in a constructive way, make perpetrators understand that they are wrong and that they are the real threat to democracy. When the climate minister cancelled a meeting because an attendant was engaged in XR and the PM claimed that XR is "a threat to Swedish democracy and just pretend to care for the climate", spokespersons of Greenpeace and XR got angry and commented sharply in social media and newspapers:<sup>21</sup>

Greenpeace: "We need to talk about democracy, Ulf Kristersson."

XR: "It's really, really bad that PM accuses XR of being a security threat instead of taking the climate threat seriously."

Members of the Swedish climate justice organization *Take Back the Future* were both sad and angry about the PM's statement. In a press release, they clarified:

*"We are a completely peaceful movement. When the PM lied about his own policies during his open after-works, we felt a need to protest in the way we could. The fact that the PM is now portraying peaceful children and young people as a security threat is undemocratic."*

### 5.2.2. Harms from Secondary Victimisation

Climate activists are scared by the PM's accusations. Not of the content, but of the message it sends to followers in society that it is normal and legitimate to use nasty rhetoric. The lack of fear, and rather angry reaction of climate activists are well described by a female climate activist that got fired from a national agency because of her engagement in climate activism, which is a kind of secondary victimisation. She was sad and disgraced, but mainly because she was very loyal to her employer and thought she had maybe done something that could hurt the Energy Agency. In this case, exposure to collective online hate speech started after having been fired, when right-wing and far-right newspapers wrote about it taking the side of the person that harassed her and got her fired. Things changed when Sweden's largest newspaper changed narrative, from the alleged criminal act

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<sup>21</sup> News article in *Aftonbladet*, 6 October 2023. <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/O89GxO/pourmokhtari-stalld-in-mote-greenpeace-ilska>

to that of the victim.<sup>22</sup> But she says she is not angry on the people that started the hate campaign that got her fired, she is angry about the ongoing autocratisation in Sweden. The activist testifies in her own blog devoted to the case:<sup>23</sup>

When the campaign started, of course, it felt terrible, and I thought at first that it was me who had done something wrong, so then I didn't feel well. I really liked the Energy Agency and was absolutely horrified that I might have done something that damaged the agency's reputation, which I absolutely did not want. But then I saw how it was all staged and understood that it wasn't my fault. /.../ After all this, I also very quickly got an assignment, so I got over the bad feeling. This is of course a very serious story. The serious thing is that it shows that society is heading in an undemocratic direction, and that this is part of a tougher climate that affects a lot of people, and also our climate transition work.

The hate and threats targeting the climate activist that got fired from a national agency, i.e. economically violated, was preceded by leading Tidö members of the Riksdag claiming that non-political staff in the Government Offices and national agencies are activists, taking employment to drive their private agenda.<sup>24</sup> Climate change is the biggest threat to humanity, according to the World Health Organization. When officials at the Public Health Agency of Sweden (PHAS) appealed to raise the issue, they were called activists by their superiors, who also told that they had behaved inappropriately and violated the state's values – the rules that government officials must follow. "We were being silenced", says one employee.<sup>25</sup> Officials of PHAS raised the issue after an action by *Scientist Rebellion* at the entrance of PHAS, arguing for the agency to address climate change as a public health issue. The initiator wrote in an e-mail to colleagues and managers:

*"I have two children, 6 and 4 years old, and share the activists' concerns. I'm actually really scared! We are on our way to a 3-4 degree warming by the turn of the century right now. It looks really dark."*

Given the expanding state repression and thus secondary victimisation of climate activists, they seem to worry more about lawsuits than emotional and physical harm from climate sceptics and far-right extremists. They take actions of precaution such as encrypted communication to avoid physical violence, after previous infiltrations, and legal repression due to prosecutions for sabotage. Even though they have learned, desensitised, not to be touched emotionally by online hate and threats, at least not negatively, police interventions and lawsuits following climate actions, with face-to-face threats from officers of the judicial system of tougher suspicions of crime and potential imprisonment lead to some emotional reactions among climate activists. The first times feelings of worry about penalties, potentially imprisonment and its implications economically and professionally. Will they get a new job if fired? Later, they worry more about practical things such as how things will go at work and with the family while they are on trial and whether they will be sentenced to prison. They also witness about a sense of surrealism and schizophrenia leading to physical illness. A climate activist engaged in several climate justice organizations has participated numerous climate actions, also being prosecuted and sentenced more than once:<sup>26</sup>

*Sometimes the present feels extremely surreal. I alternate between correcting exams and discussing, with both the father of my youngest and my boss, upcoming (one week) absence due to climate lawsuit. At the same time as the planet alternately burns up, sometimes drowns. Difficult to navigate.*

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<sup>22</sup> A series of news articles in *Dagens Nyheter*; 11 April 2024, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/anna-ar-klimataktivist-blev-av-med-jobbet-pa-energimyndigheten>, 16 April 2024, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/klimataktivisten-anna-blev-av-med-jobbet-nu-ku-animals-ministern-som-kontaktade-hennes-chef/>, News article, 25 May 2024, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/klimataktivisten-blev-av-med-jobbet-fallet-animals-till-ik/>, 8 October 2024, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/fn-kritik-mot-sverige-for-fallet-anna-pa-energimyndigheten/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://annafranenergimyndigheten.se/anna-from-the-swedish-energy-agency/>

<sup>24</sup> Op-ed in *Aftonbladet*, 21 February 2023, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/GMwpl/fackforbund-statliga-tjansteman-ar-inte-aktivister>

<sup>25</sup> News article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 10 September 2023, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/tjansteman-pa-fhm-vi-tystas-om-klimathotet/>

<sup>26</sup> News article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 5 February 2025, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/protesterade-mot-privatflyg-far-inte-bli-svensk-medborgare/>

Those who are prosecuted have the help of dedicated lawyers, but some defend themselves in court. What they have in common is that they consider their actions to be done in self-defence given the ongoing climate emergency. Activists convicted of crime take their punishment, usually fines, sometimes imprisonment, but they are not deterred. They are rather radicalised and carry out new actions. One example is Greta Thunberg, who has been prosecuted and sentenced to fines several times.

Another response to experiences of hate speech and violence, but more so triggered by self-reflection on the effectiveness of current actions, is that several climate justice organizations have initiated a joint discussion about how to develop the climate justice movement. One activist told: "I feel insecure about our way of acting, do we dare to rethink or not? But if you look at climate research, what we do is insufficient". One way forward discussed is to combine civil disobedience and friendly actions with more responsibilising activities like joining with other organizations and companies to present concrete policy proposals (cf. von Malmberg, 2024a, 2024b). But not all activist organizations want to be responsibilised in a liberal democracy understanding. They see a need for revolution.

Reacting with anger, climate activists and their organizations are sometimes responding to hate speech with insults and accusations themselves – with a humoristic twist. Adhering to norms of deliberative democracy, sacralising the good argument, hate and threats have little or no place in the repertoire of climate activists. Previous research portrays climate activists as 'radically kind' that use humour in digital activism to transform democracy (Pickard et al., 2020; Sloam et al., 2022; Chiew et al., 2024). For instance, Greta Thunberg turned insults of then Brazilian president José Bolsonaro and then US president Donald Trump into humour, adding the Portuguese word "pirralha" (Eng. brat) and "A very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future" to her X/Twitter profile (Vowles & Hultman, 2021a; White, 2022).

This humoristic turn to 'nasty' rhetoric was evident in Greta Thunberg's insulting response to an intimidation by a leading SD politician outside the entrance of the Riksdag – a laughter, saying that the perpetrator is a loser.<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, Greenpeace and FFF organised a demonstration outside the government's national climate meeting in June 2023 when they were not invited. Inviting people to a demonstration outside the "climate meeting" with presence of "civil society organisations", they insulted the government in a subtle way, with quotation marks insinuating that the meeting was not a real climate meeting and that civil society organizations were not properly represented.<sup>28</sup>

### 5.3. Science Activists

Many scientists have asked themselves how they can spread awareness about climate science results when political decision-makers are constantly ignoring warnings published in scientific journals, magazines and newspapers. Some have turned to climate science activism within *Scientists Rebellion*. Such science activism has been perceived as political and strongly opposed by the Tidö parties and thus accused of double wrongdoing – being climate scientists and activists. Scientist activists have been accused of being a "security threat" by the climate minister, and "to undermine public trust in science" by then minister of education and research. But such activism is based on scientific knowledge and well in line with the 'third duty' of scientists and universities according to the Swedish law (1992:1434, 2 §) on higher education:

*The task of higher education institutions must include collaborating with the surrounding society for mutual exchange and working to ensure that the knowledge and expertise available at higher education benefits society.*

A Swedish climate science activist, director of a research institute with focus on climate and biodiversity, has received plenty of anonymous hate messages on Twitter/X, but also non-anonymous

<sup>27</sup> Video on YouTube showing a leading SD politician intimidating Greta Thunberg and other climate activists, but also how G.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlBy2uc6JuU&t=2s>

<sup>28</sup> Invitation to demonstration. <https://www.greenpeace.org/sweden/pressmeddelanden/klimat/pressinbjudan-demonstration-utanfor-regeringens-klimatmote-16-juni/>

insults and accusations in e-mails and letters. Most hate is shaken off, but accusations about her being disloyal and not credible hurts and leave a feeling of unease about possibilities to keep her job at university. This researcher continues doing research and climate actions, and have chosen to confront the worst perpetrators, convinced that she and climate science is right. For this, she has received a lot of positive feedback.

Another scientist activist, an EU citizen, arrested after a climate protest recently got her application for Swedish citizenship rejected. In custody, the police forced her to strip naked and spread her buttocks while she bent forward. "I found it hard to believe what I've been exposed to. It feels surreal", she testifies. Like for other climate activists, it is the secondary victimisation, being discriminated by the state because of their political views, that threatens her the most:<sup>29</sup>

*It's frightening, it can result in imprisonment for two years. Risking prison for holding a banner during a demonstration, I would never have thought that was possible in Sweden. /.../ I chose to express my opinion for something that I believe is important for improving society. Because of that, I am ultimately denied the right to vote. That does not go together with democracy. There is a strong right to protest in a democracy.*

#### 5.4. Climate Journalists

Independent media plays an important role to raise awareness in societies, which is why the first actions of autocratisers are often directed against established media (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021). In Sweden, Tidö parties, the far-right movement and other climate sceptics consider climate journalists in established media to belong to a "left-liberal conspiracy censoring the climate debate" and being "climate alarmist propaganda centres". Public service journalists have experienced an increase of insults and incitement since 2019 when financing of Swedish public service changed from a license fee to taxation.<sup>30</sup> One journalist testifies about emotional reactions to the hate and threats received:

*I remember laughing at the first threat that came. It was so banal, such blatant lies. There were five individuals/organizations that over a period of nine months wrote 'articles' with lies, several a day. Each article was followed by threats and harassment from their followers. The phone rang non-stop, e-mails were filled up, all social media accounts were sabotaged. It wasn't really the content that tired me, but the amount... After a couple of months, a death threat came that was so cold and uncomfortably worded that I was really scared, and after that it was hard to stop being afraid. As if something had shifted inside.*

A long-since female climate journalist testifies how the hate and threats affected her, emotionally and behaviourally:

*At the same time as I have carried out my assignment as a climate journalist, I have been in a storm of hatred, threats and insults. Lies about my person and alleged political affiliation have been glued to me. My feeling of powerlessness has been paralyzing at times. I have, to use an old-fashioned word, felt dishonoured. Therefore, I have now resigned as a journalist.*

Many journalists being severely threatened perceive heightened risks of being followed or chased. They seek support from the security departments of media houses, but also from the police. One journalist testifies:

*I have camera surveillance outside the door, security door and security glass. Have a note in my wallet with a direct number to a security company, contact to Swedish Security Service. Constant information to relatives what you are doing and encouragement to everyone to be attentive. Life has changed completely. I'm very rarely scared – but I'm damn pissed off! Angry because the whole society has slowly adapted to a new norm where this form of everyday terror has been accepted. And angry for the ineptitude that has spread all the way up to the highest decision-makers.*

A widespread culture of silence and self-censorship has taken hold. In a recent survey by the Swedish Union of Journalists, as many as 39 % state that they engage in self-censorship to avoid hate and threats, 48 % that they have adapted their reporting for the same reason.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 16 December 2022, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/annie-loof-jag-grater-nar-lampan-ar-slackt/>

<sup>30</sup> News article, *Dagens ETC*, 24 June 2021, <https://www.etc.se/klimat-miljo/vag-av-hat-och-hot-mot-klimatjournalister>

<sup>31</sup> Swedish Union of Journalists, <https://www.sjf.se/yrkesfragor/yttrandefrihet/hot-och-hat-mot-journalister>



## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

Nasty rhetoric is not empty words, it is emotional. Political sentiments in nasty rhetoric stress the evocation of feeling, aiming at persuading ingroup people to join the weird kind of sport of hating and threatening 'enemies of the nation', and at dehumanising and hurting outgroup people emotionally and eventually physically, economically or legally (von Malmborg, 2025). Being hit, nasty rhetoric does something to people. Results of this qualitative study identify some similarities but also differences in emotional and behavioural effects on the different groups of victims: (climate scientists, (ii) climate journalists, (iii) climate activists, and the hybrid group of (iv) scientist activists.

### 6.1. Fear and Anxiety Make Scientist and Journalist Victims Withdraw

Climate journalists and non-activist climate scientists, targeted as individuals for what they do professionally, report threats of being fired, physical violence and death threats, beyond insults and accusations. They react with fear of crime and being followed or chased, insecurity, anxiety and exhaustion, but also anger. To cope with mental stress, many of them withdraw from the public debate or change research area or job. They self-censor. But some get angry, bite the bullet and try to win the battle. They hit back with insults and accusations, showing with the eye of a child and based on science that the offenders are wicked and naked like the emperor. Scientists' and journalists' reactions with fear and insecurity are in line with research on Swedish hate crime based on other motives, e.g. misogyny and race (Hagerlid, 2021; Atak, 2022).

### 6.2. Double Victimization of Climate Activists

Compared to climate scientists and journalists, climate activists and scientist activists are targeted for their political opinions and actions in leisure time, outside their professional occupations. In addition, they are victimised twice. First by hate speech mainly as a group, less so as individuals, second by state repression through economic and legal violence being fired and prosecuted and sometimes sentenced for criminal acts. When targeted as individuals, it is through secondary victimisation from legal and economic repression, more seldom incitement about physical violence or death threats. One exception is Greta Thunberg, who has experienced plenty of hate and threats based on climate scepticism and misogyny.

#### 6.2.1. Desensitisation, Anger and Radicalisation

Victimised as a group, climate activists and scientist activists seem to spur each other to learn individually and collectively to ignore insults, accusations, intimidations and incitements. They undergo a process of desensitisation (cf. Soral et al., 2018), becoming less sensitive to hate speech and more prejudiced toward hate speech perpetrators, finding nasty rhetoric to be part of a larger strategy orchestrated by (far) right-wing politicians to polarise and break down society and democracy. They are strengthened in their conviction that they are right, and the perpetrators are wrong.

Climate activists, particularly the core group activists, are more afraid and anxious about the climate emergency and that politicians and business leaders are not acting appropriately fast and ambitious given the severe situation. Instead of being silenced by nasty rhetoric, they are radicalised and make new climate actions over and over again (cf. Bilewicz & Soral, 2020; Schäfer et al., 2022).

This is a groundbreaking finding, since previous research show that only members of the ingroup, the group emitting hateful and threatening messages, desensitise (Calvert, 1997; Soral et al., 2018). Desensitisation in the outgroup following ingroup hate speech has not been reported in the literature. Besides being easier to ignore hate speech if you are not directly targeted, an explanation to the desensitisation among climate activists, often left-wing, is related to partially different emotional opportunity structures and distinct political strategies at exploiting these structures of left- and right-wing people (Salmela & von Scheve, 2018). Left-wing people are often associated with acknowledged shame that holds emancipatory potential as it allows individuals to establish social bonds with others who feel the same. In comparison, right-wing people is characterised by repressed shame that transforms fear and insecurity into resentment and hatred against perceived 'enemies', where repressors seek social bonds from repression-mediated defensive anger and hatred. The outgroup desensitisation among climate activists also aligns with theory on political communication,

proposing that emotional effects provoked by hateful messages will not depend so much on the content of the message as on the ideological affiliation of the receiver (victim) with that of the sender (perpetrator) (Crawford & Brandt, 2020; Abuín-Vences et al., 2022).

### 6.2.2 Surrealism and Exhaustion from Secondary Victimization

Some activists react with fear of crime and harassment from secondary victimisation and choose to revert to more friendly actions. An uncertainty factor for climate activists changing behaviour is that politicians and other haters do not see any difference between the very heterogeneous group of climate justice organizations. All are lumped together. Backing down from civil disobedience to peaceful actions makes no difference to the perpetrators, and there is a risk that you will continue to be exposed to hatred and threats.

Climate activists continuing with civil disobedience, despite being prosecuted and sometimes sentenced, witness about a sense of surrealism and physical exhaustion since they find it difficult to combine job, family, court trials and climate actions while the Earth is burning and flooding at the same time. They also testify about hateful and threatening behaviour of individual police officers. This resembles experiences of legal estrangement among racist hate crime victims in Sweden (Atak, 2022).

### 6.3. Victim Discourses and Legislation

In common, nasty rhetoric violates the victims' fundamental right to dignity and equality. Like other forms of hate speech and hate crime, nasty rhetoric targeting climate scientists, climate journalists and climate activists also has message effects (cf. Ilse & Hagerlid, 2025). The motive behind the act is aimed at more than just the victim. Hate and threats are directed against people or groups of people to prevent them from participating in the public and democratic discourse. They should refrain from expressing opinions that do not agree with those of the perpetrator or perpetrators.

Voices have been raised in politics as well as society to end nasty rhetoric for its harm on people, society and democracy (e.g. Tsesis, 2009; Brudholm & Johansen, 2018; European Commission, 2021). Nasty rhetoric not only violates the victims' fundamental right to dignity and equality, but also the free formation of opinions and, by extension, our democracy. Some claim that such restrictions would imply restricting the fundamental human right of freedom of expression (e.g. Yong, 2011; Howard, 2019). But legislation has been adopted around the world that criminalises hate speech and hate crime, and implicitly nasty rhetoric. In most cases, such legislation focuses on racist, religious, gender or identity related hate speech and hate crime, but in some cases also hate speech and hate crime based on differences in ethics and political opinion (Bleich, 2011; Howard, 2017; Alkiviadou, 2018; Mchangama and Alkiviadou, 2021).

Crime victim discourse is gaining greater prominence in political and public debates on hate speech and hate crime since it can affect traditional legal principles such as rationales for punishment, equality before the law, and other legal safeguards (Tham et al., 2011; Hagerlid, 2021; Atak, 2022; Glad et al., 2024). This study shows that victims of hate speech and hate crime in climate politics, where outgroup enemies are identified by populist haters due to their conflicting political opinions or for providing and conveying unwanted information and knowledge, react emotionally and behaviourally in different ways.

Like victims of hate speech and crime in the Swedish LGBTQ community, another outgroup identified by ideological or ethical differences to the perpetrators, climate scientists' and journalists' feelings of being reduced to a negative stereotype resulted in fear of crime and perceived risk of being followed or chased (cf. Ilse & Hagerlid, 2025). But in contrast to LGBTQ victims, having a reduced ability to process negative emotions due to experiencing other traumatic life events parallel to the victimisation, climate victims seem to maintain this ability. Climate activists even seem to desensitise. Climate scientists and journalists feel lower fear of crime when self-censoring and withdrawing from the public debate. In comparison, concealment of sexual orientation reduces victimisation risk, but negatively impacts the overall health of the participants through feelings of lack of authenticity and self-censorship (Ilse & Hagerlid, 2025).

In all, the results show the importance of analysing crime victim discourses to avoid lumping victims together in public and policy debates on how to curb hate speech and hate crime, as well as to handle victims. The study was not able to detect different reactions related to victims’ gender, but previous research shows that climate scepticism is often combined with antifeminism and misogyny in hate speech (Vowles & Hultman, 2021a; White, 2022). Female climate journalists are more targeted than male climate journalists (von Malmborg, 2025).

Beyond analysing effects of nasty rhetoric on climate scientists, climate journalists and climate activists over time, in different geographies and jurisdictions, and related to gender, future research should analyse the combined effects on democracy that follow nasty rhetoric targeting these groups of victims. Future research should also study how nasty rhetoric in climate politics can be restricted by the juridical system in place or if new policies and legislation is needed.

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Annex A. Data sources

| Type of source           | Documents and audio-visual material analysed   |
|--------------------------|--|
| Newspapers and magazines | - <i>Aftonbladet</i> (independent social democrat)<br>Op-ed, 21 February 2023,<br><a href="https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/GMwpnl/fackforbund-statliga-tjansteman-ar-inte-aktivister">https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/GMwpnl/fackforbund-statliga-tjansteman-ar-inte-aktivister</a><br>Op-ed, 15 June 2023,<br><a href="https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/3E78Ad/atta-forskare-klimatmotet-riskerar-bli-spel-for-gallerierna;">https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/3E78Ad/atta-forskare-klimatmotet-riskerar-bli-spel-for-gallerierna;</a><br>Op-ed, 5 July 2023,<br><a href="https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/5BwJJK/professor-klimatforskare-maste-kunna-vara-aktivister">https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/5BwJJK/professor-klimatforskare-maste-kunna-vara-aktivister</a><br>News article, 6 October 2023,<br><a href="https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/O89GxO/pourmokhtari-stallde-in-mote-greenpeace-ilska">https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/O89GxO/pourmokhtari-stallde-in-mote-greenpeace-ilska</a><br>Editorial, 22 November 2022,<br><a href="https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/0QBb96/det-ar-sverigedemokraterna-som-ar-de-riktiga-extremisterna?utm_source=iosapp&amp;utm_medium=share">https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/0QBb96/det-ar-sverigedemokraterna-som-ar-de-riktiga-extremisterna?utm_source=iosapp&amp;utm_medium=share</a><br>Editorial, 16 December 2023,<br><a href="https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/l3qgky/vara-barn-kommer-att-se-pa-staten-som-ond">https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/l3qgky/vara-barn-kommer-att-se-pa-staten-som-ond;</a><br>Editorial, 9 February 2024,<br><a href="https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/JQjA46/idiotiskt-att-stotta-bonderna-men-inte-klimataktivisterna?utm_source=iosapp&amp;utm_medium=share">https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/JQjA46/idiotiskt-att-stotta-bonderna-men-inte-klimataktivisterna?utm_source=iosapp&amp;utm_medium=share</a><br>Editorial, 17 June 2024,<br><a href="https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/xm4LE8/sa-vinner-oljebolagen-over-greta-thunberg?utm_source=iosapp&amp;utm_medium=share">https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/xm4LE8/sa-vinner-oljebolagen-over-greta-thunberg?utm_source=iosapp&amp;utm_medium=share</a><br>Editorial, 25 July 2024, |

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|                     | <p><a href="https://annafranenergimyndigheten.se/anna-from-the-swedish-energy-agency/">https://annafranenergimyndigheten.se/anna-from-the-swedish-energy-agency/</a></p>   |
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| Podcasts            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Yttrandefrihetspodden</b> (Podcast on liberal democracy freedom of speech, Swedish PEN)<br/>18 December 2024, <a href="https://svenskapen.podbean.com/e/hur-mycket-hat-ska-man-behova-tala-i-offentligheten/">https://svenskapen.podbean.com/e/hur-mycket-hat-ska-man-behova-tala-i-offentligheten/</a></li> </ul>   |
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| National television | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Sveriges Television</b> (public service): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interview with minister of education, <i>SVT Agenda</i>, 30 April 2023;<br/><a href="https://www.svtplay.se/video/epoJkZ4/agenda/son-30-apr-21-15?id=epoJkZ4">https://www.svtplay.se/video/epoJkZ4/agenda/son-30-apr-21-15?id=epoJkZ4</a></li> <li>- Reportage on SD's strategies on climate policy, <i>Klimatdemokraterna</i>, 16 May 2023,<br/><a href="https://www.svtplay.se/video/8opY72V/klimatdemokraterna">https://www.svtplay.se/video/8opY72V/klimatdemokraterna</a></li> <li>- Interview with climate minister Romina Pourmokhtari, <i>30 Minuter</i>, 22 February 2024;<br/><a href="https://www.svtplay.se/video/jp5m1ra/30-minuter/romina-pourmokhtari-l">https://www.svtplay.se/video/jp5m1ra/30-minuter/romina-pourmokhtari-l</a></li> <li>- News on Swedish public service television SVT, 25 April 2024,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |

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