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Article

The 'Nasty Politics' of Swedish Climate Governance: A Threat to the Climate and Democracy

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Abstract: Sweden has long been hailed as a role model in climate policy. But the new right-wing government supported by a far-right populist party is undertaking a paradigm shift in Swedish climate policy and governance. This paper critically analyses this paradigm shift and its impacts on legitimacy, accountability and justice. These are democratic norms important in the analysis of a just transition to climate neutrality. Severe democratic deficits of the policy process and the policies proposed and adopted are identified, suggesting 'nasty politics' characterised by populist, divisive, and contentious rhetoric that entrenches polarization and us/them narratives. Climate scientists and the climate justice movement are discriminated in the policy process, the latter also being accused of terrorism and seen as a threat to democracy by the government. The deficits are partly explained by the neo-corporatist political system of Sweden and the dominance of the (neo)liberal discourse of ecological modernization in Swedish environmental policy, but primarily with the ongoing process of autocratization driven by anti-democratic far-right populist parties throughout Europe. The anti-democratic climate policy reforms in Sweden are foreboding an unwelcome development in the EU given the boost of far-right populist parties in the upcoming elections to the European Parliament in June 2024.

Keywords: accountability; autocratization; climate governance; climate policy; democracy; justice; legitimacy; policy entrepreneurs; policy process

1. Introduction

1.1. *An Age of Climate Emergency*

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023a), we are living in a climate emergency with rapidly increasing temperatures and more frequent and intense weather extremes leading to extensive damage and losses in nature and societies, beyond natural causes. With the Paris Agreement from 2015, United Nations adopted a temperature goal of holding the increase of the global average temperature to well below 2°C above preindustrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. In the European Union (EU), legislators adopted in 2021 a climate law (EU, 2021), stating among other things that EU GHG emissions shall be reduced by 55 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, and that the EU, by 2050, will be the world's first climate-neutral continent. To meet these targets, action to reduce GHG emissions must be taken rapidly, and in most cases, immediately across all sectors (IPCC, 2023b). GHGs are long-lived and any delay in reducing emission will see them accumulate in the atmosphere and make it harder to reach the targets (IPCC, 2023a).

1.2. *Sweden – A Role Model on Decline*

Sweden has long since been an international frontrunner and role model in climate policy (Matti et al., 2021), advocating high ambitions in global and EU climate policy as well as nationally. In 2017, the Swedish parliament (Riksdag) adopted a new climate policy framework, including:

1. a target that Sweden should have net-zero emissions of GHGs and be climate neutral by 2045 the latest.

- 2. a Climate Act,ⁱ stating that the government must present policies for reaching the target, present to the Riksdag annual climate reports in the budgetary bill and a Climate Action Plan (CAP) at the latest the calendar year after general elections to the Riksdag, and
- 3. the establishment of the *Swedish Climate Policy Council* (SCPC)ⁱⁱ, an independent, interdisciplinary expert body of distinguished researchers on climate change and climate policy tasked with evaluating how well the government’s overall policy is aligned with the climate target of net-zero GHG emissions by 2045.

In addition, the Riksdag has adopted interim targets towards climate neutrality by 2045, covering GHG emissions in the EU effort sharing agreement (i.e. excluding emissions covered by the EU emissions trading system (EU ETS) and emissions and uptake from the land-use sectors):

- Emissions in 2020 should be 40 per cent lower than emissions in 1990 (target achieved),
- Emissions in 2030 should be 63 per cent lower than emissions in 1990,
- Emissions from domestic transport, excluding domestic aviation, should be at least 70 per cent lower by 2030 compared to 2010, and
- Emissions in 2040 should be 75 percent lower than emissions in 1990.

Sweden’s GHG emissions in total decreased by approximately 37 per cent from 1990 to 2022 and a decoupling of emissions and economic growth began in 1992, when Sweden introduced carbon dioxide taxation (Figure 1). In 2022, Sweden’s GHG emissions amounted to 45.2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents (MtCO₂-eq), equivalent to 4.5 tCO₂-eq/capita (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SWEPA), 2023). This is significantly lower than the global average of annual GHG emissions per capita; about 6.1 tCO₂-eq/year.

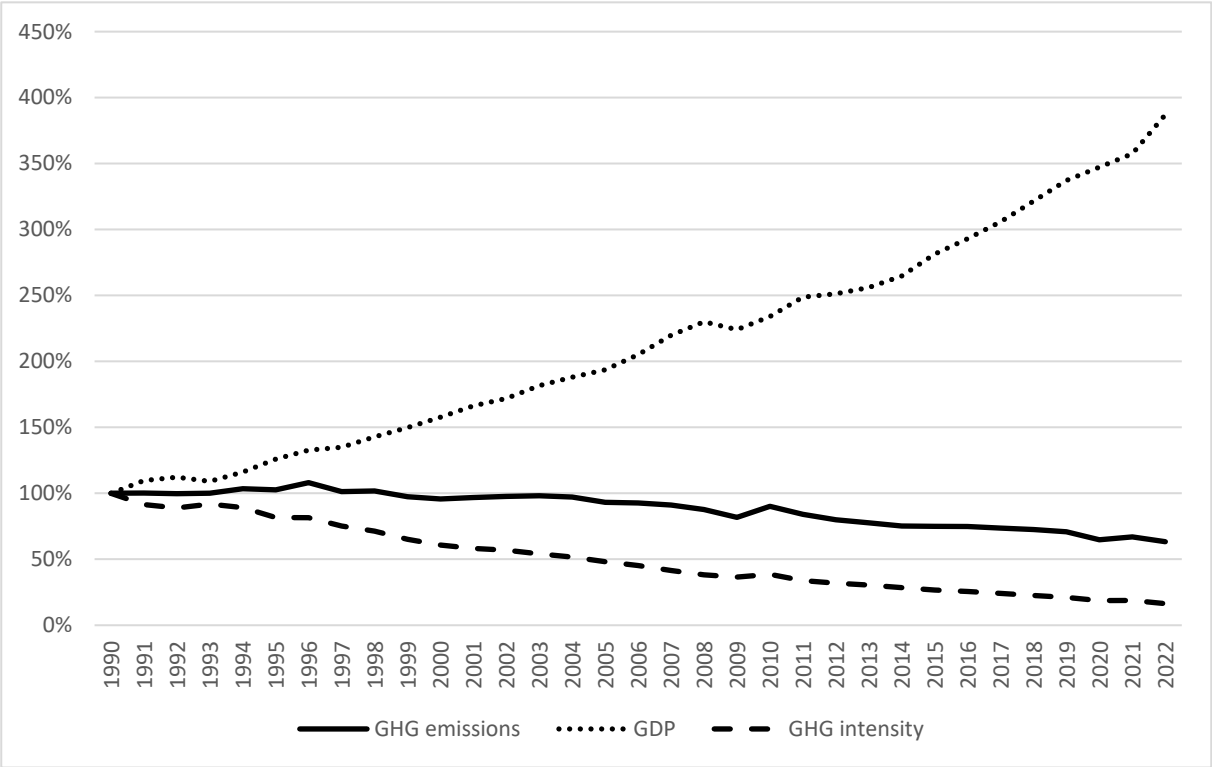


Figure 1. Indexed development of GHG emissions, GDP and GHG intensity (GHG/GDP) in Sweden 1990–2022 (Index 100 per cent = 1990). Data sources: SWEPA (2023), Statistics Sweden (2024).

But this trend has changed since late 2022. Political decisions have been taken that will increase annual GHG emissions by 10 per cent from 2024 (SWEPA, 2024), which has led to domestic as well as international criticism of Sweden’s current climate policy and role as a frontrunner.ⁱⁱⁱ Responsible for this shift is the current right-wing government who entered office after the last election to the

Riksdag in September 2022. The elections implied a shift of government, from eight years with a coalition of the Social Democrats (S) and the Green party (MP), to a coalition of the liberal-conservative Moderates (M), the Christian democrats (KD) and the Liberals (L), supported by the far-right nationalist populist Sweden Democrats (SD).

After some ado, the Swedish government and SD presented its CAP (Swedish government, 2023a) on 21 December 2023. According to M-KD-L-SD, their CAP is the first ever to propose measures that will enable reaching the target on climate neutrality by 2045. But when presented, the CAP was heavily criticized^{iv} by the opposition, the SCPC, government authorities, climate policy scientists, the environmental and social justice movement, business associations, editorial writers in leading national newspapers, and political debaters for its lack of short- and medium-term domestic action and focus on more inquiries despite a time of climate emergency, and a large focus on climate compensation in other countries. The M-KD-L-SD reference to strong EU climate policy with the *European Green Deal* and the *Fit for 55* package (European Commission, 2019, 2021) reducing the needs for domestic measures in Sweden was also criticized.^v

Despite the criticism (further described in section 4.1) a novel and interesting aspect of the CAP is that it is the first time ever a Swedish government refers to legitimacy as a guiding principle for climate policy. Previous governments have only highlighted the need for cost-effective policies and policy instruments, without mentioning legitimacy. At the presentation of the CAP, Martin Kinnunen, the SD climate and environmental policy spokesperson, said that the CAP is clear that “popular legitimacy” is a prerequisite for a successful transition (Swedish government, 2023a, p. 59, author’s translation):

Legitimacy among the citizens is a prerequisite for the transition. Transition needs to be based on the possibilities of finding effective means of control, while the conditions and standard of living for individuals, households and companies are not negatively affected and stagnate, and where the whole country and all social groups have equal opportunities in the transition.

Closely related, the CAP also states that new forms of co-operation must be developed to gain acceptance for the government’s climate policy (Swedish government, 2023a, p. 58, author’s translation):

Existing and new initiatives for collaboration and cooperation should be developed to create further commitment to climate change. In order to achieve commitment and acceptance for the climate policy, greater consideration needs to be given to how citizens and companies in different parts of the country are affected by the climate transition. The whole country needs to be included in the transition.

This turn is interesting since climate governance is not only about GHG reduction targets and policies and policy instruments to reach the targets, but also about policy processes and democracy. Climate policy and governance under M-KD-L-SD has been criticized for not reaching the targets, but they claim that it is “popularly legitimate”. But is it legitimate? Swedish media have reported increasingly on problems in the policy processes related to the CAP, repression of opponents and other topics related to climate governance from a wider democratic perspective with focus on legitimacy, accountability and justice (e.g. von Malmberg, 2024a, 2024b). These are norms claimed to be paramount in relation to a just transition towards climate neutrality. These allegations are serious and render critical analysis.

1.3. Aim of the Paper

The aim of this paper is to systematically and critically analyse and explain potential impacts on the democratic norms and principles of legitimacy, accountability and justice from the strategic agency of SD and the government, advocating the largest policy change in Swedish climate policy in decades – a true paradigm shift – to use their own words. The following research questions are addressed:

RQ1 How does the M-KD-L-SD climate policy impact democratic norms such as legitimacy, accountability and justice in democratic climate governance?

RQ2 How can potential democratic deficits of the M-KD-L-SD strategies be explained?

The paper is outlined as follows. Section 2 presents theories on the environment–democracy nexus guiding climate policy discussions today and reflects on important democratic norms and principles to govern and evaluate climate policy. Section 3 describes the method and data used. Section 4 presents the recent policy changes and the entrepreneurial strategies used by the Tidö parties, while section 5 analyses and discusses the results and explains the reasons. Finally, conclusions are drawn in section 6.

2. Climate Governance and Democracy

The current climate emergency has led to calls for *climate justice* (Shepard & Corbin-Mark, 2009; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; and a *just transition* to reach targets on climate neutrality (e.g. Capetola, 2008; Böhmelt et al., 2015; Evans & Phelan, 2016; McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Newell et al., 2021; Wang & Lo, 2021). With the focus on a just transition, and an increasing presence of non-governmental actors in global climate governance, scholars have raised the importance of analysing and evaluating climate policy not only from the perspective of cost-effectiveness advocated by economists (e.g. Hassler et al., 2016; Nordhaus, 2019), but also from perspectives democracy, with focus on *legitimacy*, *accountability* and *justice* as guiding principles (Newell, 2008; Biermann & Gupta, 2011; Bäckstrand et al., 2018; Jordan et al., 2015; Kuyper et al., 2018; Bouzarovski, 2022). Climate change and climate change mitigation includes social conflicts. The green transition must be fair and unite environmental and social issues in the transition towards climate neutrality (Muñoz Cabré & Vega Araújo, 2022). It must provide justice to all parties, regardless of who you are, where you work or where you live – while reducing emissions quickly enough (McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Newell et al., 2021; Bouzarovski, 2022; van Bommel & Höffken, 2023). Costs and benefits of the transition must be distributed fairly. Moreover, the transition must be socially inclusive (Capetola, 2008; Osička et al., 2023). Do all interested parties, not least those who risk being hit the hardest of climate change and climate policies, get the opportunity to participate and make their voice heard in the policy processes? It is important that people have insight and the opportunity to influence how the transition takes place.

2.1. Theories on the Environment–Democracy Nexus

The climate crisis poses a major challenge to governance and democracy. Failures in contemporary climate governance expose a systemic failure in liberal democracy (Goodman & Morton, 2014). The political theory of *ecological democracy*, building on the thoughts of deliberative democracy where citizens use public deliberation to make collectively binding decisions (e.g. Dryzek, 1990, 2000; Held, 2006), emerged in the 1990s when liberal democracy and cosmopolitanism appeared to be on the rise. It sought to critique and institutionally expand the coordinates of democracy – space, time, community and agency – to bring them into closer alignment with a cosmopolitan ecological and democratic imaginary. In the 2010s, a second wave of ecological democracy emerged, reflecting a significant shift in critical normative horizons, focus and method (Eckersley, 2019). It has connected ecology and democracy through local participatory democracy from a more critical communitarian perspective. Willis et al. (2022) conclude that deliberation-based reforms to democratic systems, including but not limited to deliberative mini-publics, are a necessary and potentially transformative ingredient in climate action.

Besides ecological democracy, *environmental democracy* has also developed as a political theory, drawing in large on the thoughts of liberal democracy (Held, 2006)¹. Environmental democracy revolves around reforming, rather than transforming, existing institutions of liberal democracy and capitalism. Environmental democracy thus resonates with ideas of green liberalism (Wissenburg, 1998) or liberal environmentalism (Bernstein, 2001) and is also more anthropocentric in its outlook (Arias-Maldonado, 2012).

The distinction between ecological and environmental democracy can help to categorize theories of the environment–democracy nexus (Pickering et al., 2020). Ecological democracy is more critical of existing liberal democratic institutions – particularly those associated with capitalist markets, private property rights and the prevailing multilateral system – and more ecocentric. Ecological democracy stresses the importance of ensuring that the interests of non-humans and future generations are represented in decision-making (Eckersley, 2004).

When compared with environmental democracy, ecological democracy tends to set more demanding normative standards, both in terms of environmental protection and democratic inclusion (the latter related to throughput legitimacy, further described in section 2.2.1). However, the two concepts represent two ideal types along a spectrum, and hybrid accounts are possible. Some accounts of ecological democracy give greater prominence to the state (e.g. Eckersley, 2004), while others emphasize the transformative potential of civil society and discourse (e.g. Dryzek, 2000; Dryzek et al., 2006).

Despite their differences, political theories of ecological and environmental democracy are united by a shared interest in whether democratic processes can be compatible with strong environmental outcomes (Eckersley, 2019). Both emphasize “the need for transformative change, particularly by reconfiguring the relationships between local, national and global decision-making, and rendering public deliberation more inclusive of citizens’ voices and more attuned to environmental values and realities” (Pickering et al., 2020, p. 10).

Neither ecological democracy theory nor environmental democracy theory has proposed their own, specific considerations on different democratic norms, such as legitimacy, accountability and justice, referred to in the democracy literature and political debates. However, Dryzek and Stevenson (2011) outline some elements of governance in ecological democracy, including (i) public space, (ii) empowered space, (iii) transmission, (iv) accountability, (v) meta-deliberation, and (vi) decisiveness.

Biermann and Gupta (2011) propose a research framework on accountability and legitimacy in earth system governance, to which climate governance belongs. Their framework draws from both liberal and deliberative democratic theory. Global environmental change, like climate change, together with the resulting challenge of developing effective systems of climate governance, poses new challenges for securing the accountability and legitimacy of governance systems – globally, supranationally, nationally, and locally (cf. Biermann & Gupta, 2011). These challenges include (i) spatial interdependence, (ii) functional interdependence, (iii) scientific uncertainty and normative contestation, (iv) temporal interdependence (future generations), and (v) extreme events. For instance, accountability is affected by mismatches between those who seek to hold others accountable and those who are held accountable, the former which could be stakeholders in the global South, and the latter actors in the global North, including policy entrepreneurs (Dryzek & Stevenson, 2011). Functional interdependencies refer the diverse sectors of global production and consumption, which make the assessment of the accountability and legitimacy of rule-making dependent on the boundaries to be drawn around the ‘stakeholders’ included (Biermann & Gupta, 2011).

2.2. Democratic Norms and Principles

¹ In liberal democracies, political decisions are made by elected politicians, based on free and fair multiparty elections. It includes principles such as guarantees of access to justice, transparent enforcement of the law, and upheld liberal principles of respect for personal liberties, the rule of law, and legal and legislative limitations on executive power (Held, 2006).

Legitimacy and accountability concerns are central to governance but are not confined to non-regulators or quasi-regulators (i.e. non-governmental actors performing governmental functions). However, they should be extended to policy actors influencing public policy, “who in much broader terms are seen as exercising significant amounts of power over those both inside and outside organizations, including for profit corporations” (Black, 2008, p. 141). Legitimacy and accountability are distinct communicative, dialectical relationships which are socially and discursively constructed, and which are contested. Accountability is a route through which pragmatic and moral/normative legitimacy claims are validated (Hood et al., 1999). In critical studies of policy and governance, one should focus on the legitimacy and accountability of those who frame problems and develop policy proposals, but also how their strategies and actions influences legitimacy and accountability of other policy actors and democratic institutions, and how their actions influence the legitimacy of a particular policy such as climate policy.

Neyer (2010) argues that from the perspective of deliberative democracy, formal criteria to analyse democracy do not suffice. Neyer argues that deliberate democracy is a process of self-governance of a people centred on free and unconstrained discourses among the individuals and groups of a society and emphasizes equality and an unrestricted public sphere. Nevertheless, Neyer argues, similar to Mollona and Faldetta (2022), that from a perspective of deliberate democracy one should focus on *justice* and the *right to justification* rather than democracy, as it helps to increase legitimacy and answers many questions inherent in the concept of accountability. The idea of justice as a right to justification is established on the assumption that we have a human right to demand and receive justification from all those individuals or organizations which restrict our freedom (Neyer, 2010). This includes not only decision-makers but also those who frame problems and propose related policies. As discussed below, political theory on deliberative democracy has evolved and now includes elaborated views also on legitimacy and accountability. Figure 2 illustrates the interlinkages between legitimacy, accountability and justice, and the sub-norms of transparency, openness and impartiality.

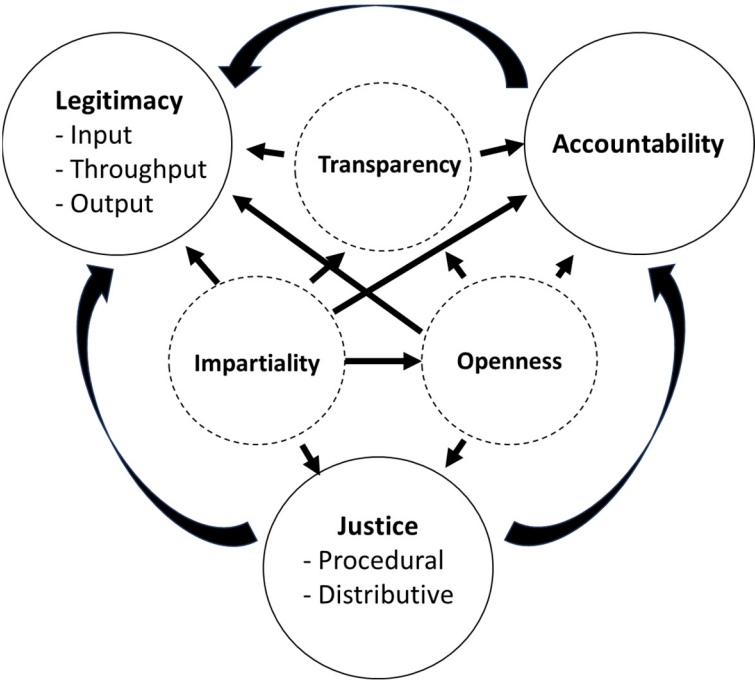


Figure 2. Interrelations of legitimacy, accountability, and justice as democratic norms.

2.2.1. Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a multifaceted concept, with different connotations depending on theoretical perspectives on democracy. Legitimacy has been defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed

system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574; Scott, 2001). Being socially constructed, legitimacy claims can be contested by those evaluating political regimes, policies and policy entrepreneurs. Thus, legitimacy lies as much in the values, interests, expectations, and cognitive frames of those who are perceiving or accepting the governance regime, a policy entrepreneur, or a policy, as they do in the regime, policy entrepreneur or policy itself (cf. Black, 2008). It can differ significantly across time and space, and between actors, systems, and contexts. Moreover, different people’s perceptions of whether a policy entrepreneur or policy is legitimate are not necessarily based on the same types of evaluations. A regime or a policy that is deemed legally valid must not be legitimate. Thus, “identifying the ‘legitimacy’ of governance regimes or organizations within them, trying to do so by identifying legal validity will often be irrelevant, or at least unproductive” (Black, 2008, p. 144-145). In addition, Black argues that not all organizations will be perceived as legitimate in performing political roles in policy processes. This implies that legitimacy is particularly relevant when considering the role of non-state policy entrepreneurs.

In liberal democracy, legitimacy focuses on social credibility and acceptability, including (i) to what extent policy regimes, policies and policy actors conform to established rules, (ii) the exercise of power is justified by reference to the beliefs of both majorities and minorities (both of which can be represented by policy entrepreneurs), and there is evidence of support or consent from the minority, (iii) *openness* and a fair, *impartial* and unbiased opportunity for impacted citizens and other stakeholders to participate in the policy process, and (iv) the ability of the political system and/or policy instrument proposed by a policy entrepreneur to solve collective problems for citizens in a just way (Lipset, 1959; Lijphart, 1977, 1999; Barker, 1980; Beetham, 1985, 1991; Scharpf, 1999; O’Donnell, 2007; Rothstein, 2009; Schmidt, 2006, 2013). In policy analysis, the model of Scharpf (1999) and Schmidt (2006, 2013), differentiating between input, throughput and output legitimacy is prevailing.

In deliberative democracy, “legitimacy means that there are good arguments for a political order’s claim to be recognized as right and just; a legitimate order deserves recognition” (Habermas, 1979, p. 178). The centrality of this view is that the political order consists of rules and procedures that revolve around the requirement that collective decisions be criticized and defended with reasons and good arguments. Later theorists of deliberative democracy expanded the view, that the outcomes of a political regime are legitimate to the extent they receive reflective assent through open participation in authentic deliberation by *all* those subject to the decision in question (Cohen, 1989; Knight & Johnson, 1994). In a similar manner, Benhabib (1996, p. 68) claims that “legitimacy in complex democratic societies must be thought to result from the free and unconstrained deliberation of *all* about matters of common concern” (highlight added). This focus on participation of all has been criticized by other scholars of deliberative democracy, since in real-world political deliberations, not all of those affected appear to participate (Shapiro, 1999; Dryzek, 2001). They argue that deliberative democracy cannot live up to its own standards of legitimacy, and thus, that legitimacy should not be a value and norm. The same holds true for private governance. Bäckstrand et al. (2018, pp. 346) claims that “multi-stakeholder participation was long hailed as the ‘gold standard’ of legitimate private rule-making”, ideas originating from deliberative democratic theory, with its focus on stakeholder participation and unconstrained dialogue (Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014). However, more empirically oriented scholars increasingly question the validity of this ‘inclusiveness paradigm’, pointing at the limited deliberative capacity of private multi-stakeholder governance (Schouten et al., 2012). Other theorists have elaborated the view of legitimacy in deliberative democracy, that a part of exercising legitimate democratic authority is a requirement for politicians, administrative agencies, and appointed experts to justify and explain their reasons and demonstrate that their demands can reasonably be expected to serve the common interests of free and equal citizens (Gutmann & Thompson, 1990; Cohen, 1996; King, 2003). As mentioned, Neyer (2010) argues that this focus on right to justification, rather than democracy, would be the basic principle to assess policy and political actors in deliberative democracy, as it helps to increase legitimacy and answers many questions inherent in the concept of accountability.

In summary, the main difference between the liberal and deliberate democracy perspectives on legitimacy lies in the view of who should be involved on impartial grounds in the ‘open’ policy

process and thus able to express their views and concerns; only those affected by a policy or everyone concerned, in what spatial and temporal scope, citizens, humans or even non-humans?

2.2.2. Accountability

Accountability covers a moral and institutional liability to publicly justify actions in such a way that decision-makers and policy entrepreneurs can be evaluated, judged and held 'politically' accountable in front of the public for their performance or behaviour related to something for which they are responsible (Filgueiras, 2020; Müller, 2023). Accountability relationships are a "critical element in the construction and contestation of legitimacy claims by both policymakers and legitimacy communities, as they are the means by which legitimacy communities seek to ensure that their legitimacy claims are met, and that their evaluations of the legitimacy of regulators are valid" (Black, 2008, p. 149).

Political accountability was not an important norm in early writings on deliberative democracy theory (Peters & Pierre, 2006). Due to limited oversight capacity of most legislatures in reality, Hunold (2002) proposed a deliberative model of bureaucratic accountability that would have significance beyond public administration for the study of democracy more generally. It focuses on accountability through public deliberation, where it is a challenge to link administrative institutions and their decisions to "interlocking and overlapping networks and associations of deliberation, contestation, and argumentation" (Benhabib, 1996, p. 74; Dryzek, 1990). Hunold's model builds on three concepts: publicity, equality and inclusiveness. Publicity demands that administrative agencies *transparently* release proposed rules for public discussion and criticism. Deliberative democracy requires that citizens participate based on equality with administrative officials and technical experts such as policy entrepreneurs. In practice, this means that "all participants of policy deliberations should have the same chance to define issues, dispute evidence, and shape the agenda" (Hunold, 2002, p. 158). For this to happen, there should be a means of compensating weaker participants for serious power disparities, e.g. by providing opportunities for education and preparation on policy issues (Fiorino, 1990; Mitchell, 2011). Finally, inclusiveness, were fairness and impartiality of representation and democratic accountability hinge on collective decision-making processes being open to all citizens. To Dryzek and Stevenson (2011), questions of inclusion and exclusion are prominent regarding accountability and legitimacy in deliberative democracy and means that the 'empowered space' of political decision-making is held accountable to the 'public space' of deliberation. Who decides who is to be included in the 'empowered space' of decision-making? Whose voices carry more weight in the 'public sphere' of deliberation?

Accountability in liberal democratic theory does also focus on publicity, equality and fairness, but in terms of transparency, openness and impartiality (Bitonti, 2017) as principal-agent accountability between the elected politicians and the public. In comparison to the deliberative model, the liberal model champions the probing of volitions among a smaller number of affected groups and actors. While accountability in liberal democracy is based on pluralist adversarial norms and more closed 'open' structures of interest representation, accountability in deliberative democracy champions collaboration and inclusiveness of more, sometimes all actors. This difference is important when it comes to climate governance.

Climate governance increasingly includes different type of actors; states, local government, bureaucracies, companies, NGOs and other IGs. Accountability is treated differently in different organizations, which calls for a distinction of internal and external accountability (Keohane, 2003). In internal accountability, the "principal and agent are institutionally linked to each other; and in external accountability, those whose lives are impacted, and hence who would desire to hold to account, are not directly (or institutionally) linked to the one to be held to account" (Biermann & Gupta, 2011, p. 1857). Policy entrepreneurs, being companies, business associations, think tanks or NGOs are self-selected, and there are, unless they are elected politicians or political parties, no demos available to hold them accountable. For these reasons, "principal-agent accountability [in relation to the public] – the main mechanism in liberal democracies – does not work in this context" (Bäckstrand et al., 2018, pp. 346). Thus, *transparency* is often suggested as an alternative, where transparency can

breed accountability in private governance through (i) market pressures, (ii) discourse and (iii) self-reflection. Civil regulation of transparency, fitting ecological democracy, would permit the public to hold private sector and civil society policy entrepreneurs to account for their policy framings and policy proposals (cf. Newell, 2008; Etzioni, 2010). A less coercive model, fitting policymaking in liberal environmental democracies, is based on self-regulation to resolve public policy issues and advancing corporate social responsibility and corporate political activities (cf. Bauer, 2014; Lock & Seele, 2016).

2.2.3. Justice

As for justice, the literature distinguishes procedural justice from distributive justice (Neyer, 2010; Mollona & Faldetta, 2022). The former is related to throughput legitimacy, while the latter is related to output legitimacy. Early scholars of deliberative democracy limited the theory to process considerations and were critical of incorporating substantive principles to assess procedural outcomes, such as individual liberty or equal opportunity, beyond what is necessary for a fair democratic process in its theory, thus focusing on procedural justice (e.g. Habermas, 1979, 1996; Knight, 1999; King, 2003). Deliberative democracy means fair procedures, not right outcomes. Democratic citizens, not democratic theorists, should determine the content of laws. In addition, the political sovereignty of citizens should not be exercised through theoretical reasoning but through actual democratic decision making. A deliberative democratic theory that contains substantive principles would constrain the democratic decision-making process and the process of deliberation itself.

This view has been contested by Gutmann and Thompson (1996), who argue that the value of reciprocity can be a principle of justice that guides thinking in the ongoing process in which citizens as well as theorists consider what justice requires in the case of specific laws. They claim (p. 4) that “reciprocity is to justice in political ethics what replication is to truth in science. A finding of truth in science requires replicability, which calls for public demonstration. A finding of justice in political ethics requires reciprocity, which calls for public deliberation.” Deliberation is a process of seeking not just any reasons but mutually justifiable reasons and reaching a mutually binding decision based on those reasons. Thus, the process presupposes some principles with substantive content. For instance, few would dispute that deliberative justifications should completely ignore the values expressed by substantive principles such as liberty and equal opportunity. Including both substantive and procedural principles in a democratic theory inevitably increases the potential for conflict. But democratic politics is full of conflict among principles, and a democratic theory that tries to insulate itself from that conflict by limiting the range of principles it includes is likely to be less relevant for recognizing and resolving the disagreements that democracies typically confront (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996).

In climate governance, claims are made for climate justice, both among scholars (Shepard & Corbin-Mark, 2009; Gardiner, 2011; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Newell et al., 2021) and social movements (Cassegård & Thörn, 2017; de Moor et al., 2020; Buzogány & Scherhauser, 2022; Borkhart, 2023). The concept emerged from the merging of the environmental movement and the human rights and social justice movement (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Cassegård & Thörn, 2017; Borkhart, 2023). Climate justice scholarship traditionally demonstrates how climate change is a moral and justice issue, not just a science, techno-economic, or finance issue (Shepard & Corbin-Mark, 2009; Gardiner, 2011; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Newell et al., 2021). Climate justice addresses how climate change impacts people differently, unevenly, and disproportionately, normatively aiming to reduce marginalization, exploitation, and oppression as well as enhance equity and justice of humans across regions and generations. In more recent years, climate justice scholars have included insights from a range of academic theories (such as feminist, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, post-colonial, and decolonial scholarship), to develop a more critical climate justice scholarship (Sultana, 2021). This development has made accountability and obligations, as well as ethics and human rights, more integral to climate justice. This also involves re-evaluation of global political economic systems that produce and reinforce socio-spatial injustices. Compared to climate justice scholars, the critical climate justice

perspective also focuses on procedural justice of vulnerable and marginalized groups. In all, critical climate justice addresses both procedural and distributive justice.

2.2.4. Potential Conflicts between Democratic Norms

These norms could theoretically and empirically be in conflict, particularly procedural norms and substantive norms (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). Consider for instance consensus rules, which would maximize the procedural justice as well as input and throughput legitimacy by giving all stakeholders a voice. However, this increase in input and throughput legitimacy can reduce the output legitimacy, distributive justice and effectiveness of the decision-making system. The collective accountability of decision-makers in deliberative democracy based on consensus hinges on the veto powers of a few decision-makers that “seek special benefits, pursue minority political agendas, or reap economic benefit from non-decisions and a persistence of the status quo” (Biermann & Gupta, 2011, p. 1863). Accountability and legitimacy of climate governance vis-à-vis the interests of a majority of humankind will be reduced. Conflicts between different democratic norms and principles could be dealt with if substantive norms to varying degrees are morally and politically provisional. A normative theory on policy entrepreneurs based on deliberative democratic theory can avoid usurping the moral or political authority of democratic citizens, while making substantive judgments about the policies they propose, since it claims provisional status for the principles it defends.

3. Method and Material

To analyse the impacts on democracy of SD and the Tidö government strategic agency, and explain the reasons for these, a case study approach was used (Yin, 1994). This methodology is suitable because the research problems are qualitative in nature. The strategies used are analysed in relation to the framework of strategies used by so-called policy entrepreneurs, who are central actors in policymaking as they frame problems and link them to policy solutions as a package, to persuade other policy actors and decision-makers in public policy (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2017; Brouwer & Huitema, 2018; Aviram et al., 2019; Petridou & Mintrom, 2019; Arnold, 2021). Both SD and the Tidö government used cultural-institutional entrepreneurship to influence norms and cognitive frameworks, worldviews, or institutional logics, as well as structural entrepreneurship, aimed at enhancing governance influence by altering the prevailing distribution of authority and information (cf. Boasson & Huitema, 2017).

The approach to analyse strategies and impacts of the Tidö government and SD as policy entrepreneurs may be criticized, given that most research on policy entrepreneurs focus on individuals or organizations that are not decision-makers. For instance, Boasson and Huitema (2017, p. 1351) argue that “privileged actors in powerful positions deploy[ing] the regular tools at their disposal and merely do their job” are not demonstrating entrepreneurship. But in this case, both SD and the Tidö government did “punch above their weight” (Green, 2017, p. 1473) to radically change Swedish climate policy. As set out in the Tidö Agreement, they aimed for a paradigm shift, and had to use plenty of resources and strategies to reach their aim. But they did not advocate innovative policy change from a positive perspective, proposing new policies that would drastically reduce GHG emissions. Nevertheless, their policy proposals and policies adopted are innovative in the sense that they turn previous climate policy upside-down. To further defend the idea of the Tidö parties acting as policy entrepreneurs, Schneider and Teske (1992) found that policy entrepreneurs often come from inside the political system, even from the government cabinet (Saetren, 2016). Similarly, Rabe (2004) found that policy entrepreneurs on US climate policy came from within the federal administration. In addition, partisan effects of Labour policy entrepreneurship have been identified for UK law and order policy (Staff, 2018) and UK education policy (Olsson Rost & Collinson, 2022). Thus, it is not far-fetched to view privileged actors in powerful positions such as elected politicians, political parties and governments as policy entrepreneurs. In all, acting as a policy entrepreneur depends on a “set of behaviours in the policy process, rather than a permanent characteristic of a particular individual or role” (Ackrill & Kay, 2011, p. 78).

As for data collection, semi-structured interviews were combined with qualitative text analysis (Table 1). Two interviews were held with policy officers in the Government Offices of Sweden, both deeply involved in the drafting of the government’s CAP. Interviewees were asked about their experiences of the policy process related to the CAP, particularly the relation between civil servants and politicians. Interviews were not recorded but notes were taken. As for texts, I have analysed (i) policy papers from the Swedish government, (ii) committee reports from the Riksdag, including a scrutiny report on the government, (iii) reports and protocols from interpellation debates in the Riksdag, (iv) reports from government authorities, (v) reports and statements of civil society organizations and business associations, (vi) articles, editorials and open editorials in newspapers and magazines, (vii) programmes in national radio and television, (viii) and posts on social media. As for newspapers, magazines and blogs, I have analysed editorials, op-eds and articles in left, green, social democrat, liberal and conservative press. No articles or editorials on the CAP or the Tidö government’s climate policy were found in far-right press such as *Fria Tider* and *Nyheter Idag*. In all, 59 editorials, op-eds, news articles, blogs, TV interviews, and radio programmes were identified, reporting on the process up to the CAP, the CAP itself and the aftermath of the CAP, as well as on the roles of different stakeholders in the policy process and the media reporting on climate policy itself.

Table 1. Data sources for analysing the impacts on democratic norms.

Types of sources	Interviews and documents
Interviews	IP1. Policy officer, Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Climate and Enterprise (December 2023) IP2. Policy officer, Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure (December 2023)
Policy documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The Tidö Agreement: An agreement for Sweden, 14 October 2022 (Tidö parties, 2022)- Government’s proposal for a Climate Action Plan (Swedish government, 2023a)- Government’s budgetary bill for 2024 (Swedish government, 2023b)- Committee report on the budgetary bill – Frame decision (Riksdagen, 2023a)- Committee report on the budgetary bill – Climate and environment (Riksdagen, 2023b)- Committee report on the budgetary bill – Energy (Riksdagen, 2023c)- Constitutional committee scrutiny report on the government (Riksdagen, 2023d)- Government’s bill on long-term energy policy (Swedish government, 2024a)- Legislative Council report on secrecy on electricity support (Swedish Legislative Council, 2022)
Government authority documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Input from the SWEPA to the government’s climate report 2024 (SWEPA, 2024)- Annual report 2024 of the SCPC (SCPC, 2024)- Annual report 2024 of the SFPC (SFPC, 2024)

Newspapers	- Aftonbladet (independent social democrat)
and magazines	- Aktuellt Hållbart (independent green)
	- Clean Energy Wire (independent green)
	- Dagens ETC (independent left)
	- Dagens Industri (independent, business)
	- Dagens Nyheter (independent liberal)
	- Euractive (independent, EU)
	- Expressen (independent liberal)
	- GöteborgsPosten (independent liberal)
	- Journalisten (journalist trade union magazine)
	- Le Monde (independent liberal humanist progressive)
	- Magasinet Konkret (independent liberal democratic)
	- Svenska Dagbladet (independent conservative)
	- Sydsvenskan (independent liberal)
	- Tidningen Syre (independent green liberal)
Blogs	- Klimatgranskaren (independent green deliberative)
	- Supermiljöbloggen (independent green deliberative)
National	- Sveriges Television (state owned)
television	- TV4 (private)
National radio	- Sveriges Radio (state owned)

In this written and audio-visual material, I identified perceptions of problems and positions on climate change, as well as on policies and policy proposals, entrepreneurial strategies and impacts on democratic norms and responses to these. Data was coded in relation to problem framing, policy proposal, beliefs, entrepreneurial approaches (structural or cultural-institutional (cf. Boasson & Huitema, 2017)), beliefs and motifs for policy change, entrepreneurial strategies (see Brouwer & Huitema (2018) for a categorization of different strategies), impacts on democratic norms (legitimacy, accountability, and justice as described in section 2.2 2), and if the impacts were intentional or unintentional.

4. Swedish Climate Governance with the Tidö Government

In the 2022 elections, M, KD and L collected 29.05 per cent of the votes together, holding 103 of 349 seats in the Riksdag.^{vi} SD, collecting 20.54 per cent of the votes and 73 seats, overtook for the first time M’s long since place as the second largest party in the Riksdag. SD holds no seats in the cabinet but has political staff in the Prime Minister’s Office and takes part in most negotiations on public policy, including climate policy. The opposition, consisting of the S, MP, the Centre party (C) and the Left party (V), collected in total 48.87 per cent of the votes, and 173 seats in the Riksdag.

In bargaining to form a government, M, KD, L and SD agreed on the *Tidö Agreement* (Tidö parties, 2022), suggesting a paradigm shift in six policy areas: public health, climate and energy, criminality, migration and integration, education, and economic growth and household economy, of which criminality, migration and climate change are the most important (Rothstein, 2023). It serves as an agreement on policy areas and policies that should be developed and implemented jointly by the government and SD for SD to support the government in the Riksdag. With reference to the Tidö

Agreement, the new government is called the *Tidö government*. As mentioned, SD has political staff in the Prime Minister's Office and takes part in negotiations in all policy areas in the Tidö Agreement, including climate policy.

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. They are critical to renewable energy, particularly wind power – destroying the Swedish landscape. They have also been concerned with high prices on petrol and diesel, leading to economic burdens for some citizens. Reducing fuel prices was a promise of SD to voters before the 2022 elections. M, KD, L and SD also wanted more nuclear power plants rather than wind farms to be built (Fischer et al., 2023). Entering office, the four parties wanted a radical change of Swedish climate policy and governance – a paradigm shift.

4.1. Recent Policy Changes and Proposals

As for climate and energy, the Tidö Agreement (p. 11, author's translation) stresses that the coalition aims to:

Develop and implement concrete political proposals that solve Sweden's most important social problems by restoring a functioning electricity system, with increased electricity production and low electricity prices, and to enable an effective climate transition. Conditions for plannable fossil-free power types must be improved to increase the production of clean electricity. Households must receive reasonable and predictable electricity prices. Companies must grow and employ more people.

Within climate policy, the conditions are being improved so that industry and transport can be adjusted and thereby contribute to Sweden's effective climate transition. This takes place through the streamlining of policy instruments and support, fewer administrative obstacles, and investments in new technology.

Where relevant, close collaboration with Swedish business, the public sector as well as civil society and research should be pursued.

The goal is to restore the electricity system so that people and companies receive stable and low electricity prices and to reduce emissions by increasing the efficiency of the transition.

Being a climate denier, SD wanted to abort the Swedish target of climate neutrality by 2045, but after bargaining with the government in finalizing the CAP, they now accept it. In return, they managed to delete short- and medium-term actions and dilute the ambitions in general. In the CAP, the Tidö parties stressed that the focus of their climate policy is to:

- ensure access to fossil-free electricity (including a strong expansion of the electrical system with expanded nuclear power), charging infrastructure and power grids to enable new connections of fossil-free facilities and charging of electric vehicles, and meet the expected increased demand for fossil-free electricity and power throughout the country,
- price GHG emissions, and
- provide incentives for negative emissions including biofuel carbon capture and storage.

When presenting the CAP, climate minister Pourmokhtari told that phasing out fossil cars is key to reach the target on climate neutrality. But prior to presenting the CAP, the government with support from SD, proposed in the financial bill for 2024 (Swedish government, 2023b), that renewable fuel quotas as well as energy and carbon dioxide taxes for petrol and diesel should be substantially reduced to lower fuel prices for households and companies, at a total cost of fossil fuel subsidies of SEK 13 billion (EUR 1.15 billion). The carbon dioxide tax, introduced in 1992, has helped Sweden reduce GHG emissions by 37 per cent and decouple GHG emissions from economic growth by 70 per cent since its introduction and was hailed as a success story by the last M Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt at the UN climate summit COP15 in Copenhagen 2009. Now, the M-led Tidö government scraps it. The proposal was approved by the Riksdag (Riksdagen, 2023a). The effects of these policy changes, which were made in violation to the Tidö parties' own aim to price GHG emissions and despite critique from the opposition, SWEPA, the Swedish Energy Agency, the Swedish Transport Administration, the environmental and climate movement, business associations, researchers and many others, are a drastic reduction of petrol and diesel prices (~20 per cent for diesel) and a drastic increase of GHG emissions (4.7 MtCO₂-eq/year, corresponding to 10 per cent of Sweden's total GHG

emissions). It also undermines efforts and reducing incentives for investments in renewable fuels and sustainable transport systems. Due to its focus on energy policy at the centre of climate policy, the Tidö parties also proposed budgetary changes on energy policy in the budgetary bill for 2024. Two new appropriations were established, one for energy planning with an annual budget of SEK 264 million, and one for energy security with an annual budget of SEK 54 million, increasing to SEK 144 million from 2025. In addition, the government proposed that it be authorized to issue credit guarantees for loans for investments in new nuclear power that amount to a maximum of SEK 400 billion. The proposals were approved by the Riksdag (Riksdagen, 2023b).

Greenpeace Sweden (2023) scrutinized all 46 decisions taken by the Tidö government on climate and energy policy during its first year in office. In all, 30 decisions were deemed bad, seven decisions deemed good and bad, and only nine decisions deemed good. Among the good decisions were higher tax deduction for installation of solar power, approval of two offshore wind farms, financial support for energy efficiency of single-family houses, and increased financial support for local climate projects. Among the bad decisions were the set-up of the national climate meeting in June 2023, credit guarantees and other measures to facilitate new nuclear power, reduced financial support for climate adaptation, tripling of climate compensation abroad, repealing climate criteria in public procurement, prolonged fossil fuel subsidies in agriculture, different measures to de-incentivize energy efficiency in industry, and repealing the financial support for electric vehicles. The last decision has had a large impact on sales of electric vehicles, down from a new sales share of 39 per cent in 2023 to 29 per cent in January 2024. As for energy efficiency, deemed by the International Energy Agency (2019, 2021) to be the “first fuel” in the clean energy transition, energy minister Ebba Busch told, in violation with the legally binding “energy efficiency first” principle in EU (von Malmborg, 2023a, 2023b), that it is not important compared to commissioning new nuclear power, a statement criticized by the business association *Teknikföretagen*,^{vii} whose members provide technology and services that improve energy efficiency.

SCPC (2024) was very critical to the CAP and previous decisions by the government, stating in line with IPCC that:^{viii}

The next decade is critical to avoid the most catastrophic consequences of climate change. The government’s CAP is insufficient to reach Sweden’s climate targets. Existing policies lead to greatly increased emissions in the near term. It is unclear how the plan will lead to a reduction in emissions so that the climate targets can be reached. The government needs to quickly return to the Riksdag with concrete proposals for strengthened policy instruments.

SWEPA (2024), the national expert agency for monitoring and evaluating climate change, was also critical to the CAP and the government’s climate policy, claiming that current and planned policy instruments 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. The Swedish Finance Policy Council (SFPC, 2024), an institution similar to the SCPC but with focus on finance and economic policy, was also critical towards the CAP and previous decision taken by the government and SD on climate policy:

Most fundamentally, the government lacks a coherent and comprehensible strategy to reach both the Swedish and the EU’s climate targets by 2030. Actions have been taken that in themselves increase emissions, while emission reductions are postponed to the future (p. 15).

A coherent and comprehensible strategy is needed so that individuals and companies can make the right investment decisions at the right time and thereby adjust in a cost-effective manner. Such a strategy is also a prerequisite for the transition to gain acceptance and thus become sustainable. We believe that the government’s CAP does not provide clear and concrete information about how the climate goals are to be reached; it rests on hopes that future actions will lead to the achievement of the objectives.

Regarding the CAP, it was welcomed by the *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise* and its neoliberal think tank *Timbro*, claiming that it “sends an important signal about the role of business in climate change mitigation and highlights the need for speed in implementation”.^{ix} In contrast, important players in the energy and industry sectors were critical about the lack of speed and policies and measures here and now. *Swedenergy*^x, the business association for energy utilities, was concerned

about the time aspect related to further investigations and the long lead times for strengthening and expanding the electricity grids. The business association *Innovation and Chemical Industries* (IKEM)^{xi} was also critical of the lack of short-term measures here and now. They asserted that the government, contrary to its focus on “business as the new environmental movement” (see section 5.2.1), chooses to invest in mitigation measures in other countries instead of measures in Sweden, the latter which can create competitiveness for Swedish companies. IKEM was as critical to the government’s related and recent energy policy bill (Swedish government, 2024a), for not proposing short- and mid-term planning targets for the expansion of fossil free electricity production. According to IKEM, this creates uncertainty for industry’s investments for the green transition. In response, the Tidö parties told it will initiate a broad inquiry on climate policy instruments, to be finalized by 2027. The *Federation of Swedish Farmers*, the *Swedish Confederation of Transport Enterprises* and *Scania*, a world leading producer of buses and trucks, were critical to the government’s one-eyed focus on nuclear power and called for policies to better stimulate renewable fuels and renewable power.^{xii}

In February 2024, transport minister Andreas Carlson (KD), said that “it’s time to do away with the flight shame” and for people to start to fly more², and the government allocated SEK 1 billion to strengthen the competitiveness of Swedish aviation.^{xiii} In mid-April 2024, the Tidö government further proposed to half the aviation taxation to stimulate airlines in an economic downturn, which would increase GHG emission with 87 600 tCO₂-eq annually.^{xiv} Contrary to recent scientific studies (Lai et al., 2022; Urban et al., 2024), Carlson is confident that aviation will be able to transition to sustainable fuels.^{xv} In addition, some of the Tidö parties like KD and SD have voiced concerns about ambitious EU-level climate policy, e.g. (i) wanting to repeal the ban on selling cars with internal combustion engines (which was decided in negotiations led by energy minister Busch), (ii) saying no to a phase out of fossil fuel subsidies by 2025, (ii) saying no to including climate justice in the EU directive on corporate sustainability due diligence (CSDDD)^{xvi}, and (iii) abstaining from voting on the Council’s adoption of the recast Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, with new criteria on climate performance of buildings, requirements to renovate to reduce primary energy use and far-reaching requirements for installation of solar panels. According to the editorial office of *Dagens Industri*, the leading business newspaper in Sweden, the timing for repealing the ban on fossil cars “is ironic since the European Commission on 6 February proposed a new climate target to reduce GHG emissions by 90 per cent by 2040, EU climate targets that are held as an example from the Tidö government”.^{xvii} Above all, the outcome is a political signal that KD and SD are going against the market-driven development in which car companies all over the world want to be leaders in electrification. What the Tidö parties think of the proposed 2040 target remains to be seen once negotiations in Brussels start later in 2024. Polls showing increasing support for right-wing populist climate deniers in the upcoming EU elections 6–9 June 2024 indicated a gloomy future for EU climate policy.^{xviii}

4.2. Entrepreneurial Strategies

SD acted in a way that can be described as an ‘activistic’ policy entrepreneur (cf. Arnold, 2021), deploying a broad set of strategies to reach several targets in influencing the Tidö government to change positions on climate policy and governance to support in the Riksdag, and to change the views of Swedish citizens (voters) on climate policy and governance. The Tidö government also acted as an activistic policy entrepreneur to change Swedish climate policy and governance. Their motifs were to radically change the entire policy area, which they thought was costly, ineffective and lacked legitimacy among citizens. The Tidö agreement mentions climate policy as an area in need of a paradigm shift. The type of entrepreneurship from both SD and the government to reframe and change Swedish climate policy was structural as well as cultural-institutional (cf. Boasson & Huitema, 2017). As for SD, they aimed at influencing the government’s perceptions and beliefs about climate change, policy instruments as well as the context and processes of climate policy and governance. They also aimed to please past voters and influence future voters at local and regional level, dependent on travelling by car and living close to wind farms. As for structural entrepreneurship,

SD influenced the government to limit public participation in policy discussions and limit the possibilities for critics to voice their concerns. Timing was important since their growth in each election since 2006, and particularly in 2022 making them the second largest party in the Riksdag, rendered SD a policy window of opportunity for a powerful position bargaining with the government, being able to veto most of the proposals put forward by the climate minister. Timing was important also for M, KD and L as they saw their chance to form a government with support from SD, despite the fact that the party leaders of both M and L told before the elections that they would never collaborate with SD. Political power was more important than ideology. The different entrepreneurial strategies (cf. Brouwer & Huitema, 2018; Aviram et al., 2019) used by SD and the government for the CAP and Swedish climate governance more generally are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Strategies deployed by Sweden Democrats and the Tidö government related to Swedish climate policy.

Actor	Attention- and support seeking strategies	Linking strategies	Relational management strategies	Arena strategies
<i>Sweden Democrats</i> 2006–2023	Problem framing, idea generation, strategic use of information (manipulation and strategic manoeuvring), rhetorical persuasion, protests, media attention	Coalition building with M, KD and L, linking climate policy to economic welfare of households	Networking by using social acuity at local and regional level	Timing, venue shopping, focus on local and regional communities, courts
<i>Swedish government</i> 2022–2023	Problem framing, idea generation, strategic use of information (manipulation and strategic manoeuvring), rhetorical persuasion, avoiding media attention	Focus on energy policy and EU policy instruments, coalition building with SD and industry, linking climate policy to business competitiveness	Networking with industry, avoiding critical voices from academia, social movements and media	Timing, venue shopping, choosing its own meetings, avoiding critical voices from academia, social movements and media

To prepare the CAP, the government signalled that it would have a dialogue with industry and the transport sector, as most GHG emissions come from these sectors. The government relied heavily on work done by the sectoral working groups of the *Fossil Free Sweden* initiative^{xxix}, launched by the then S-MP government in 2015, prior to the United Nations climate summit in Paris. Led by former secretary-general of the *Swedish Association for Nature Conservation* (SANC), the initiative has presented 22 roadmaps for fossil free competitiveness in different industries.^{xxx} The Tidö government also organised a national climate meeting^{xxxi} in mid-June 2023, and a series of ‘open after work meetings’ in different cities to collect views and suggestions for the CAP. But the process was marred by criticism regarding participation, especially from climate scientists and environmental and justice organizations such as *Greenpeace* and *Fridays for Future* (FFF). They were, in conflict with the Tidö Agreement, not invited to the national climate meeting, why *Greenpeace* organised a demonstration^{xxxi} outside the meeting, and climate scientists wrote op-eds in leading newspapers^{xxxi}. In October 2023, the climate minister Pourmokhtari cancelled a meeting where the cement industry would launch its roadmap for fossil free competitiveness due to an alleged security risk posed by the fact that one of the notified participants was a member of *Scientist Rebellion*, a subgroup of *Extinction Rebellion* (XR).^{xxiv}

The policy process on CAP was also marred by ambiguity and non-transparency, both regarding content and process. Initially, it was said that the CAP would be a government bill, but in the fall of 2023, it emerged that no bill would be submitted to the Riksdag. The CAP would become a government letter. The difference being that a bill contains formal proposals on targets, budgets or laws that the Riksdag has to consider and approve, while government letters only include the government’s considerations. Consequently, the CAP did not include any proposal for targets or policy instruments, but a multitude of suggestions for further inquiries and analysis. This also implies that the Riksdag has no opportunity to take a stance on the CAP.

Less than a week before the CAP was presented, climate and environment minister Romina Pourmokhtari (L) claimed in national television that the Climate Act states that the government *would* present the CAP no later than the year after a parliamentary election^{xxv}, while the law in fact states that the government *shall* present the CAP no later than the year after a parliamentary election. She backed down after heavy critique from the opposition and the environmental movement and the CAP was presented just before Christmas. In December 2022, minister Pourmokhtari was clear that the government would write the CAP itself – that it should not be negotiated with SD.^{xxvi} But since climate policy is part of the Tidö Agreement, SD had to take part in negotiations on the CAP, and it gained great influence and deleted many policy proposals during the final negotiations,^{xxvii} as well as added the text on ‘popular legitimacy’ among citizens. Interviews with policy officers at the ministries for Climate and Enterprise, and Rural Affairs and Infrastructure, confirmed that legitimacy was not mentioned in the draft version of the CAP that was negotiated among civil servants and checked with politicians from M, KD and L in different ministries of the Government Offices of Sweden, before being sent to the Prime Minister’s Office for political coordination among the Tidö parties, including SD. The mistake about when the CAP would be presented, the lack of concrete short term measures in the CAP, and the decision to increase GHG emissions from cars led two out of four parties in opposition, C and MP, supported by V, to table a motion of no confidence regarding accountability against minister Pourmokhtari in the Riksdag, calling for her resignation.^{xxviii} Despite sharing the same critique of the Tidö government’s CAP, the largest party in the Riksdag, S, abstained from joining the motion of no confidence since they did not want to use this tool to criticize the Tidö government. They were critical towards the Tidö parties who abused the non-confidentiality voting during the S-MP government term in 2018–2022 and didn’t want to use the same tool against its political enemies. Even critical liberal voices demanded her resignation because she and L gave way to SD’s influence over the CAP.^{xxix} When the Riksdag voted, the critics did not gather enough support for getting Pourmokhtari set aside.

When presenting the CAP, Prime Minister Kristersson and climate minister Pourmokhtari cross-safely claimed that the Tidö government is the first Swedish government to present a trustworthy CAP with policies that will lead to GHG emission reductions to reach the target on climate neutrality by 2045. Showing a graph with an emission trajectory with zero emission 2045, they told that Sweden has a plan to reach all the way down to net zero emissions by 2045.^{xxx} However, internal documents from the Government Offices of Sweden clearly shows that the government's claims are unjustified.^{xxxi} The same was stated by SCPC (2024) and SFPC (2024) in their analyses of the government's climate policy. Obviously, there is no plan, only guesswork and manipulation, with tens of millions of tonnes of GHGs to be removed with policy and technology not yet invented. When SWEPA (2024) presented data for the government's annual climate report, it included its own calculations of emission reductions of existing policies and policies proposed by the Tidö government. It shows a gap of almost 50 per cent of current emission levels to reach the target on climate neutrality by 2045, clearly indicating the government's manipulation of information (Figure 3).

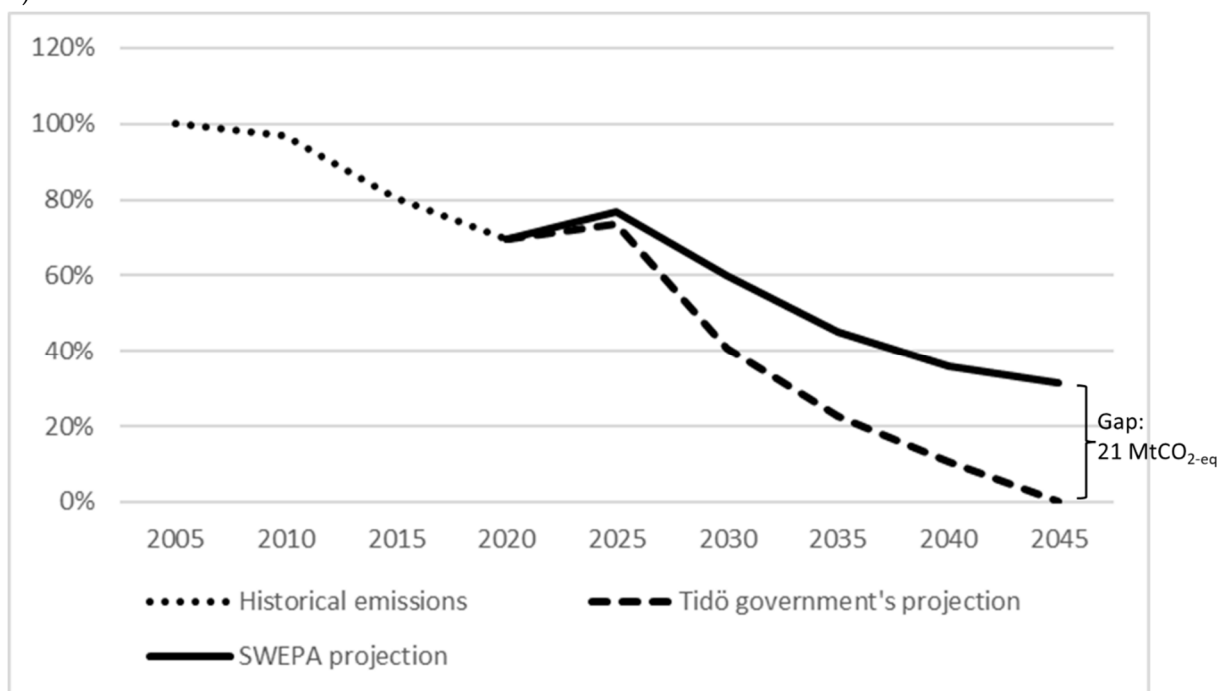


Figure 3. Emissions gap to reach with new policy instruments Based on data from Swedish government (2023a) and SWEPA (2024).

Regarding strategic manipulation of information to influence the opinion, Swedish media have recently revealed that SD, inspired by Donald Trump, have deliberately and systematically spread misinformation to manipulate voters and incite dissenters via a “troll factory” with anonymous accounts in social media since 2018.^{xxxii} They have consistently attacked their political enemies, S, C, V and MP, as well as individuals criticizing SD, but also politicians in the Tidö government – in an act to entrench the us/them and the people/elite narratives. SD accuses all other parties of creating the problems they see in Sweden. Orders are often given by SD party leader Jimmie Åkesson. In September 2019, they filmed a demonstration organized by *Fridays for Future* (FFF), and later smeared young people in social media.^{xxxiii} This action was led by then SD spokesperson on legal policy Tobias Andersson, now chair of the Riksdag's industry committee.

In parallel to developing the CAP, the Tidö parties, led by SD and M, put forward several proposals to the Riksdag, voiced suggestions and took action that influenced the policy process of the government's climate policy and Swedish climate governance:

- To have time to implement its policy reforms during the 2022–2026 mandate period, the Tidö government often applies shortened periods for official inquiries and referral times in public

consultations, from the normal three months down to as little as half a working day. Prime Minister Kristiansson has told that inquiries should be made in half the time since the paradigm shift is urgent and that “accuracy is no excuse for slowness. On the contrary, speed has its own value. Not only in sports and in business. We must show that change is entirely possible”.^{xxxiv} As an example, the proposal to repeal the climate-smart travel tax deduction was submitted for two weeks consultation in October 2022. A more blatant example is the consultation of documentation in December 2022 for a bill on changed confidentiality linked to the handling of electricity subsidies for households. In both cases, the opportunity for those concerned to analyse and provide substantiated answers to the government’s proposals was reduced. But after the widespread critique of the CAP, the government buried climate policy to reach short term targets in an public inquiry that will present its findings and proposals only in 2027, after the next elections to the Riksdag and with very little time for implementing policies that must reduce GHG emissions more drastically, and to a higher cost. The Tidö parties will delay climate action at least four years.

- Decisions, proposals and actions that limit citizen’s rights in various ways or undermine important principles in the rule of law. An example in the climate area is the changed criminal classification of traffic blockades carried out by climate activists at demonstrations, employed by prosecutors and courts since 2023, from ‘disobedience to law enforcement’ to ‘sabotage’.^{xxxv} This change was advocated by then legal policy spokespersons Tobias Andersson (SD) and Johan Forsell (M) already in 2022, before the new practice in the judicial system. It has later been supported by minister of justice Gunnar Strömmer (M)^{xxxvi}, saying that the actions of climate activists must be seen as sabotage so that they can be sentenced to prison.
- Proposals and actions that attack public service and independent media and can discourage critical scrutiny of power. For example, repealing of press support, i.a. to independent media that review climate and environmental policy. In addition, a review of guidelines for public service, with SD being critical towards public service. According to the review of public service, journalism in the future must be evaluated by external reviewers, among other things based on how they manage to reach the groups where trust is currently at its lowest, i.e. SD voters (Swedish government, 2024b). This means that public service may have to adapt the content to a certain type of political opinion. This goes against basic journalistic principles of impartiality, neutrality of consequences and truth-seeking (Bjereld, 2024). In early February 2024, the Swedish far-right movement protested outside the headquarters of Swedish public service television and radio, accusing them of not being versatile enough – not giving space and time to conspiracy theories.^{xxxvii} As a response, Swedish public service television SVT refused to report from the largest ever climate action in Sweden, organized by *Mother Rebellion*, a subgroup of XR, in April 2024.^{xxxviii} Contrary to the second largest television company in Sweden, privately owned TV4, and written media, they claimed that there was no news value, despite a quite spectacular action where 3 500 women each had knitted a 1.5 metre red scarf that were put together and wrapped around the Riksdag building to remind politicians of the global 1.5 degree target (Eckerman, 2024). SVT claimed that they only report from demonstrations and actions if they are violent.
- The government has been accused of not letting journalists with focus on environment, sustainability and climate take part in ‘open’ meetings with ministers, or not being able to pose questions to or interview the ministers, particularly climate minister Pourmokhtari^{xxxix} – an accusation she has recently confirmed.^{xl} In response to a feature on the government’s climate policy in Swedish public service radio on 11 February 2024^{xli}, Pourmokhtari’s press secretary posted on X/Twitter: “Incredibly negative feature about climate policy on Sveriges Radio today where the environmental debater Karlsson got a lot of space”. She manipulatively called Karlsson an ‘environmental debater’ even though he is no longer chair of SANC, but associate professor in environmental science, doing active research on climate leadership. To give a more ‘nuanced’ representation of the Tidö government’s climate policy, the press secretary referred to statistics from the European Commission showing that Sweden is number one in EU regarding renewable transport fuels in 2022. But this was also an act of manipulation, since the statistics shows the ranking before the entry into force of the Tidö government, who in 2023 deliberately repealed the policy instruments that made Sweden number one.^{xlii}

- Proposals and actions that risk reducing trust in society and increased mistrust between citizens, for example the Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson’s (M) statement in social media^{xliii} in October 2023 that XR is “totalitarian” and “poses a threat to Swedish democratic political processes”, something he was sharply criticized for by independent liberal media^{xliv}. Later, two members of the Riksdag representing M accused on social media XR and other climate activists of being terrorists.^{xlv} Both the Prime Minister and climate minister accuse XR of “pretending to care for the climate and just want to destroy the democratic discussion in an illegal way”.^{xlvi}
- In April 2024, a civil servant at the Swedish Energy Agency got fired because of sharing posts from climate activists on social media and for attending a peaceful action organized by *Mother Rebellion*. Minister of civil defence Carl-Oskar Bohlin (M) bragged on social media about his contacts with the agency’s director general to get confirmed that case was handled appropriately, raising questions in media and trade unions about ministerial ruling, which is forbidden in Sweden. As a result, MP and V have reported minister Bohlin to the Riksdag’s Constitution Committee for potential ministerial ruling^{xlvii} and a trade union has reported the Swedish Energy Agency to the Chancellor of Justice, serving as ombudsman in the supervision of authorities and civil servants.
- Proposal and decision to drastically reduce the financing of SWEPA, the national expert agency on environment and climate policy (Riksdagen, 2023c), which has notified 65 employees (10 per cent of the staff) of layoffs as of 2025, 13 of which are working with policy instruments, including on climate policy.
- In late 2023, the government assigned Svenska kraftnät, the operator of the national power grid, to propose new rules and guidance on requests for connection to the power grid. A draft version was presented in December 2023 and a final version in January 2024. Before the final version was presented, the state-owned power company operating the power grid in the actual region decided, with reference to the new rules, not to assign grid connection and power supply to an industrial company producing green steel despite them being first in line and having a mature project. In addition, a state-owned company producing iron pellets and sponge iron claimed it would not sell iron to the new company, only to the state-owned competitor in producing green steel, located in the same region. However, the power company decided to connect the two state-owned companies to the grid. The Swedish Energy Markets Inspectorate decided not to process the appeal made by the private company. Claims have been made by the minister responsible for state-owned companies that green steel production by the state-owned company must proceed, since it would be the only project that would render large GHG emission reductions to meet the Swedish climate target.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Impacts on Democratic Norms and Principles

As indicated in section 4.2, several actions taken by SD and the Tidö government can be criticized for breaching democratic norms and principles. Table 3 summarizes the empirical results regarding democratic deficits of SD and the Tidö government in the policy processes on the CAP and Swedish climate governance. As discussed in the following sections, no positive, only negative and rather severe impacts on the democratic norms of legitimacy, accountability and justice and their sub-categories were identified. The impacts are related to the actions and strategies used in the policy process, as well as policies proposed and decided. In addition, impacts are intentional, meaning that SD and the government deliberately and strategically acted to violate the norms of liberal and deliberative democracy.

Table 3. Democratic deficits of The Tidö government and the Sweden Democrats on Swedish climate policy and governance.

Legitimacy		Accountability	
Transparency	Input legitimacy		

	<p>Limited disclosure by the Swedish government and the Sweden Democrats on considerations for the Climate Action Plan.</p> <p>Reduced time for inquiries, with limited possibilities to analyse consequences, and for stakeholders to analyse and respond to public consultations. Violation to the Swedish constitution.</p> <p>No disclosure by the prosecutors, judiciaries, the government or the Sweden Democrats on suggestions for stricter charges and repression of climate activists.</p> <p>Active choice by the minister for climate and environment not to talk to environmental press. Abolishment of financial support to independent media and civil society organizations. Restricted possibilities to scrutinize the government's climate policy and facilitate education and preparation on policy issues.</p> <p>Manipulation of data concerning potential GHG emission reductions of policies in the CAP.</p>	
Openness and impartiality	<i>Throughput legitimacy</i>	<p>Government consultations with targeted stakeholders only. Discrimination of climate scientists, environmental media and environmental movements.</p> <p>Climate scientists and the environmental and climate justice movements actively excluded by the Swedish government from consultations on the Climate Action Plan.</p> <p>Prime Minister and minister for climate and environment smearing and delegitimizing the climate justice movement as being 'totalitarian' and a 'threat to Swedish democratic political processes'. Members of M in the Riksdag accusing climate activists of being 'terrorists'. The government and the Sweden Democrats called for and welcomed that climate activists temporarily blocking the traffic are charged for sabotage and sentenced to prison.</p> <p>Active choice by the minister for climate and environment not to talk to environmental journalists restricts possibilities to scrutinise the government's climate policy. Abolishment of financial support to civil society organizations restricts possibilities to facilitate education and preparation on policy issues.</p> <p>An employee at the Swedish Energy Agency was fired because of being a peaceful climate activist and sharing climate activist posts on social media.</p>
Justice	<i>Throughput legitimacy: procedural justice</i>	<p>Government consultations with targeted stakeholders only.</p> <p>Structural entrepreneurship, aimed at enhancing power of the Sweden Democrats and Swedish government</p> <p>Structural entrepreneurship, aimed at silencing media and critics of the</p>

by altering the distribution of formal authority and factual and scientific information.	Swedish government’s climate policy by altering the distribution of formal authority and factual and scientific information.
Structural entrepreneurship, aimed at silencing media and critics of the Swedish government’s climate policy by altering the distribution of formal authority and factual and scientific information.	Prime Minister and minister for climate and environment smearing and delegitimizing the climate justice movement as being ‘totalitarian’ and a ‘threat to Swedish democratic political processes’. The government and the Sweden Democrats welcomed that climate activists temporarily blocking the traffic are charged for sabotage and sentenced to prison.
<i>Output legitimacy: distributional justice</i> Redefinition of the concepts of legitimacy and climate justice to serve the purpose of the Tidö parties and make them look democratic. Swedish government and the Sweden Democrats favour citizens using private cars before public transport. Disregards energy poverty, humans in other countries, future generations, non-human beings. Lack of policies which would make industry invest in the green transition, despite the claim by the Prime Minister that industry would gain competitiveness from first mover advantage.	

5.1.1. Legitimacy and Accountability

In policy analysis, the model of Scharpf (1999) and Schmidt (2006, 2013), differentiating between input, throughput and output legitimacy is prevailing. It focuses on (i) to what extent policy regimes, policies and policy actors conform to established rules, (ii) the exercise of power is justified by reference to the beliefs of both majorities and minorities, and there is evidence of support or consent from the minority, (iii) openness and a fair, impartial and unbiased opportunity for citizens and other stakeholders to participate in the policy process, and (iv) the ability of the political system and/or

policy instrument proposed to solve collective problems for citizens in a just way. As for justice, it generally refers to procedural justice (cf. throughput legitimacy) and distributive justice (cf. output legitimacy) (Neyer, 2010; Mollona & Faldetta, 2022).

Accountability covers a moral and institutional liability to publicly justify actions in such a way that decision-makers and policy entrepreneurs can be evaluated, judged, and held 'politically' accountable in front of the public for their performance or behaviour related to something for which they are responsible (Filgueiras, 2016; Müller, 2023). This is closely related to the principle of justice as the 'right to justification' (Neyer, 2010). Among other things, this requires free media that can scrutinize those with power.

As policy entrepreneurs and experts are often part of the elite in their specific field, their role in the policy process can be criticized (Caramani, 2017; Müller, 2023). This is particularly so since an important strategy of policy entrepreneurs to reach their aims is to use factual and scientific information in a smart and strategic way (Boasson & Huitema, 2017), either by manipulating who gets what information if information is distributed asymmetrically and information is scarce (Moravcsik, 1999), or by strategic manoeuvring, such as providing as little information as possible to one's likely opponents (Mackenzie, 2010). If there is lack of transparency, the agency and power of policy entrepreneurs in the policy formulation process conceals the power that shapes how public problems and policies are framed and defined, which decreases accountability. How a condition is framed as a public problem influences how we think about the problem, which enables coupling to certain public policies, but not to others. How a problem is framed is highly important in climate governance (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2017). As Copeland and James (2014, p. 3) put it, framing is about "strategic construction of narratives that mobilize political action around a perceived policy problem in order to legitimize a particular solution". Framing also "involves the manipulation of dimensions to represent solutions to specific problems as gains or losses" (Zahariadis, 2003, p. 156). Framing is the most important strategy for a policy entrepreneur, both in structural and cultural-institutional entrepreneurship (Boasson & Huitema, 2017).

Brouwer and Huitema (2018) claim that one should differentiate public sector policy entrepreneurs from private sector policy entrepreneurs. The former are "accountable to their superior or executive, who must render political account to a democratically elected council" (Brouwer & Huitema, 2018, p. 1271). In this case of Swedish climate policy and governance, the policy entrepreneurs are elected politicians and their parties, including the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers. Since the ministers and spokespersons of SD are politically elected, there is a demos that can hold them accountable in the next election.

Three out of four parties in the opposition voted for the setting aside of climate minister Pourmokhtari in a motion of non-confidence following the government's budgetary bill for 2024 and the CAP. The vote was lost. So, there is a legal possibility that the Tidö government and SD will be held accountable for the climate policy criticized in the next general elections to the Riksdag in September 2026. Political appointees in the Government Offices of Sweden are accountable to their ministers and ultimately the Prime Minister, who are scrutinized by the Riksdag. The same holds true for ministers and the Prime Minister.

But non-political staff (civil servants) serve different governments and are held accountable to their non-political superiors. Only if they behave in misconduct can they be held accountable to the politicians, but as part of the Swedish constitution, it is part of their role to present justifiable critique to ideas of politicians. In this case, civil servants in the Government Offices told ministers that their claim about policy effects of the CAP are unjustified guesses. But a civil servant at the Swedish Energy Agency, having a central role in Swedish climate governance, got fired for her involvement with peaceful climate activists using their democratic rights of freedom of speech and freedom of demonstration.

Brouwer and Huitema (2018, p. 1271) also argue, based on one case on water management in the Netherlands, that the strategic behaviour of public sector policy entrepreneurs is generally "not about double-dealing or playing nasty tricks". They are generally ambitious for the organization or the public interest and not for themselves. For these reasons, Brouwer and Huitema take the view that

public sector policy entrepreneurs should not be seen as a threat to the accountability of public sector organizations, but first and foremost as an opportunity, particularly considering climate change. On the contrary, in this case, the Tidö government and SD did play 'nasty tricks'. Accountability is not only related to the subject of the policy issues, but the entire policy and governance process. Transparency, openness, fairness and impartiality are important democratic norms in liberal as well as deliberative democratic theory. The processes related to reductions of tax deductions for commuting with public transport as well as the development of the CAP were rather closed. The government organized a series of meetings to collect views on the CAP, but the CAP itself was not sent on public consultation. The proposal for reduced tax deductions on public transport was sent for consultation under two weeks. The same held true for the proposal to reduce carbon taxes on petrol and diesel. The most extreme case of shortening the time span for public consultation was the proposal on secrecy related to electricity support to households – half a working day. The latter example was criticized by both the Legislative Council and the Riksdag's constitutional committee (Riksdagen, 2023d). The Swedish Legislative Council (2022) considered that the Tidö government's consultation violates the consultation requirement in chapter 7 § 2 of the constitutional Form of Government law, which is particularly serious since the proposal in the bill was linked to the principle of publicity – which like the consultation requirement is a constitutionally protected principle. This violation of the Swedish constitution reduces transparency as well as input legitimacy.

Closely related, most of the future measures and policies that are outlined in the CAP shall be 'rapidly investigated', which endangers legal certainty as democratic participation, and the possibility of a proper referral procedure and impact assessment are reduced. This development, or paradigm shift, is found not only in climate policy and is criticized by the opposition. In a recent debate in the Riksdag on preventive stay bans, related to migration policy but also actions by climate activists such as roadblocks, the Social Democrat's spokesperson Mattias Vepsä mentioned (Riksdagen, 2024a, speech 6):

We have become accustomed to hearing from the government that a paradigm shift is underway, and legislation in our country is changing at a rate rarely seen. When it comes to the way you influence referral times, shorten investigation times or discuss fast tracks, it is clear that we are seeing a paradigm shift that we Social Democrats are concerned about. Legislative work must be followed with legal certainty, and opportunities must be provided for all referral bodies and people and organizations affected by the legislation to influence the legislation.

There was a lack of transparency on effects of policies in the CAP. The government intentionally manipulated data and graphs showing the path to zero emissions in 2045, but calculations made by SWEPA (2024) on emission reductions of the policies decided and proposed by the government showed a large emission reduction gap to be filled by technologies and measures not yet invented. It even turned out that the government calculated effects on emission reductions from a policy instrument they just had repealed. This was heavily criticized also by SCPC (2024) and SFPC (2024). This rendered an interpellation debate between MP-S and climate minister Pourmokhtari (L) on 19 March 2024, where it became evident that MP and S had no confidence in Pourmokhtari and the government, who they thought repeatedly acted manipulatively and deceptively (Riksdagen, 2024b).

Regarding transparency and participation in policy processes, following norms such as openness, fairness, impartiality and procedural justice, contributing to both accountability and legitimacy, climate policy processes in Sweden under the Tidö government leave much behind in terms of the participation of representatives of vulnerable citizens, young people as well as climate justice and democracy advocates. In the case of CAP, the Tidö government organized informal consultations and roundtables for targeted stakeholders, intentionally excluding climate scientists, the environmental movement and journalists covering climate change and climate politics. The government went as far as to portray XR as a threat to Swedish climate governance and Swedish democracy, smearing and delegitimizing the opponents to legitimize their own reluctance to take criticism, thus adopting the strategy and 'nasty politics' of SD characterised by populist, divisive, and contentious rhetoric that entrenches polarization and us/them narratives. It was mainly established organizations that participated in referrals, policy fora and meetings about problem framing and the

design of climate policy and policy instruments. In fact, this violates the Tidö Agreement and the CAP, which tell that "close collaboration with Swedish business, the public sector as well as civil society and research should be pursued", and "existing and new initiatives for collaboration and cooperation should be developed to create further commitment to climate change".

In more and more parts of the world, including Sweden, climate activists are using civil disobedience to protest the lack of governments' action to reduce GHG emissions. Practicing civil disobedience means to engage in a battle over legitimacy and is a performative act aimed at a target audience that seeks to delegitimize opponents (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020). Failure to understand these manifestations considering the right to demonstrate is a mistake, in a potentially dangerous and antiliberal democratic direction where constitutional rights are at stake. The right to demonstrate is a central building block in every democratic society. In Sweden, it is protected in the constitution and through several international conventions. Even civil disobedience is covered by the right to demonstrate if violence is not used. Human rights experts warned in September 2023 that climate activists who temporarily stopped traffic through demonstrations suddenly began to be prosecuted for sabotage.^{xlviii} A similar development has been seen in other European countries, e.g. Austria, France, Germany, Spain and the UK. UN special rapporteur on environmental organization rights under the Aarhus Convention, Michel Forst, claims in a recent report that "by categorizing environmental activism as a potential terrorist threat, by limiting freedom of expression and by criminalizing certain forms of protests and protesters, these legislative and policy changes contribute to the shrinking of the civic space and seriously threaten the vitality of democratic societies" (Forst, 2024, p. 11). In the past, the freedom of demonstration has always been seen as an overriding traffic concern, and demonstrators who refused to move at the request of the police have been charged with arbitrary proceedings or disobedience to law enforcement. It is a crime that carries a fine. The new tougher criminal classification of sabotage gives the police the right to preventive interception of people who organize a demonstration, even without concrete criminal suspicions. This legal change can be seen as a threat to human rights and freedom of demonstration. What is special about this change is that it did not happen through open debate. Instead, prosecutors and judges themselves have chosen, contrary to previous practice, to charge the climate activists with a more serious crime. This was in line with previous statements by SD and M and later on the government. Justice minister Gunnar Strömmer (M) has said that he wants the climate protesters to be punished more severely, sentenced to prison. Giving the police the right to preventive interception of people in visitation and security zones without concrete criminal suspicions, was recently proposed by the Tidö parties to curb gang criminality, another key policy area of the Tidö Agreement. The proposal was welcomed by the Swedish Police Authority and the Police Union, but highly criticized in the five-week referral from 14 December 2023 to 18 January 2024 by the Discrimination Ombudsman and the Chancellor of Justice for having unacceptable risks for discrimination and violating the protection against arbitrary intervention found in the constitutional Form of Government law and the European Convention^{xlix} It has also been criticized by commentators in media and academia, claiming that the new legislation, which also includes a law on prohibition to stay, may be used by the police to harass climate activists^l and "creates a surveillance society that easily exceeds the Orwellian dystopia of a society" (Kamali, 2024a).

Repealing financial support to civic education, civil society organizations and independent media, the oversight of public service, as well as the reluctance of the climate minister to talk to 'left-wing' journalists and journalists covering climate policy, make it hard for people to educate themselves and participate in the policy debate. These changes have made journalists even more critical towards the government and SD, claiming that media's resulting inability to scrutinize Sweden's second largest party on equal terms with other parties has led to a democratic problem.^{li} Finally, in the midst of an ongoing salary review at the Government Offices of Sweden, in the fall of 2023, directives came that employees who worked to implement the Tidö Agreement would be rewarded, indicating a politicization of civil servants who according to law should act independently from political parties, i.a. to assess impacts of policies proposed.

In all, this contradicts the claim by Brouwer and Huitema (2018) that the strategic behaviour of policy entrepreneurs from the public sector is not about double-dealing or playing nasty tricks.

5.1.2. Output Legitimacy and Distributive Justice

Issues of input and throughput legitimacy and procedural justice in this case were analysed in relation to accountability, showing limited legitimacy in both perspectives. The CAP refers to “legitimacy among the citizens is a prerequisite for the transition”. The conditions and standard of living for individuals, households and companies must not be negatively affected and stagnate. The “whole country and all social groups shall have equal opportunities in the transition”. This view of legitimacy is closest related to output legitimacy and distributive justice.

Prior to presenting the CAP, the government and SD proposed that renewable fuel quotas as well as energy and carbon dioxide taxes for petrol and diesel should be substantially reduced to lower the fuel prices. The reason for the proposal was the strained economic situation with high fuel prices and an inflation that puts pressure on households and businesses. This policy change came at a cost of SEK 13 billion in the form of fossil fuel subsidies and substantial increases of GHG emissions. In her answer to a written question from the Centre party’s energy policy spokesperson Rickard Nordin about the government’s increase in fossil subsidies, finance minister Elisabeth Svantesson (M) stated that “legitimacy among citizens is a prerequisite for the transition. For these reasons, the government has reduced the tax on fuel, reduced the renewable fuels quota and increased the deduction for travel to and from work” (Riksdagen, 2024c). At the same time, the Tidö parties have not seen the need for national measures to compensate for increased prices for public transport because the government generally provides grants to regions and municipalities (Riksdagen, 2023e). Public transport is not a responsibility for the government, transport minister Carlson claims. Aviation and fossilized motorists are favoured over electric cars and users of public transport, who are largely women, students, and young people. To that can be added several other decisions such as scrapping the climate bonus for cars, moving money from train maintenance to roads and throwing the climate-smart travel deduction in the trash. The abolition of the climate-smart travel deduction means that equality and distributive justice is reduced. Many people who would have received compensation for travel by train, bus or bicycle are now without it. The value of the new travel deduction also increases the higher the individual’s marginal tax.

Critics have claimed that the induced cost reductions for fossil fuels do not benefit the groups who are most vulnerable (SCPC, 2024; SFPC, 2024). Research shows that earmarking of revenues from taxes used for subsidies to vulnerable households would increase justice and maintain effectiveness, thus improve legitimacy (Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019; Ewald et al., 2022; Matti et al., 2022; Coleman et al., 2023). Output legitimacy and distributive justice are also limited by the Tidö parties’ focus on legitimacy among citizens. According to liberal environmental democratic theory (Bernstein, 2001), distributive justice also includes people in other countries, companies, and organizations, and according to deliberative ecological democratic theory (Eckersley, 2004, 2019), also justice for future generations, animals and nature. The Tidö parties’ focus on popular legitimacy and justice for citizens thus has limited anchoring in theories of the environment–democracy nexus (Pickering et al., 2020) and liberal as well as deliberative democracy theories on legitimacy and justice in general. The Tidö parties seem to focus on legitimacy for populists, not democrats. This confirms the findings of Lührmann et al. (2020) that populist rhetoric includes democratic concepts to help anti-pluralists conceal how dangerous their ideas are for democracy – they claim to stand for “true democracy” while their actions are likely to undermine it.

Legitimacy and justice of the government’s climate and energy policy was also criticized by industry. They assert that the Tidö government, contrary to the government’s focus on “business as the new environmental movement” (see section 5.2.1), acts in ways that creates uncertainty for industry’s investments for the green transition and thus reduces competitiveness of Swedish companies. There is a lack of short-, medium- and long-term perspectives in energy and climate

policy, and rules are changed non-transparently with retrospective application hampering competition in an open market. Contrary to the usually market liberal position of M, KD and L, state-owned companies are prioritized in gaining competitiveness from the clean energy transition.

Swedish green think tank *2030-Sekretariat* recently picked the winners and losers of the CAP.^{lii} The winners are (i) nuclear power, (ii) Bulgaria (or Romania) for potentially selling their overshoot of GHG emission reductions to Sweden, (iii) electric vehicle charging infrastructure, (iv) experts who will do all new inquiries, and (v) SD for reducing all ambitions. The losers are (i) public transport, (ii) behavioural changes, (iii) energy efficiency, (iv) biofuels, and (v) the Riksdag, since the CAP was a letter not a bill why the Riksdag has no say on the CAP.

Energy-related social injustice in terms of energy poverty in households is increasing in the EU as well as Sweden because of the energy transition (Bouzarovski, 2014; Thomson & Bouzarovski, 2019; von Platten et al., 2020, 2022), also including gender inequalities (Petrova & Simcock, 2021). However, energy poverty was not an issue in the CAP. Nor in policy discussions on policies for decarbonization of buildings in Sweden (von Malmborg et al., 2023) or the recent bill on long-term energy policy (Swedish government, 2024a). Nicholas et al. (2022) as well as Baard et al. (2023) found that political parties in the Riksdag pay lip-service to climate justice, energy justice and energy poverty, mentioning it at a general level, but with no in-depth analysis and policy proposals. This is despite that critical research on policies for energy efficiency of buildings has shown to increase energy poverty and social injustice in Sweden (von Platten et al., 2020, 2022). This is confirmed by Fischer et al. (2023), who found that justice was discursively treated in Swedish policy debates on the green transition in a way that essentially stifled change rather than improve transition governance. Explicit claims for climate justice were made by V, S and MP, but not by M, KD, L and SD. But political actors mainly attempted to trump each other's justice claims rather than to genuinely engage with them and were used only to back up or dilute existing policy instruments. Justice concerns that would not serve re-election, such as solidarity across social boundaries, were almost absent from the material. Overall, justice appeared to be reduced to expressions of IGs within society. Thus, the framing of justice arguments contributes to politicizing transition governance in ways that render some policy options impossible. The situation is similar in Swedish government agencies (Singleton et al., 2022), who mention energy and climate justice at a general level in different documents, without affecting concrete policy proposals.

The lack of focus on energy and climate justice, as defined and discussed by climate policy and governance scholars and the climate justice movement, in the policy process on the Tidö CAP has implications on both legitimacy and accountability of the Tidö government and SD in climate governance, which are affected by the resulting mismatches between those who seek to hold others accountable and those who are held accountable, the former which could be stakeholders in the global South, and the latter actors in the global North (Dryzek & Stevenson, 2011). Functional interdependencies make the assessment of the accountability and legitimacy of rule-making dependent on the boundaries to be drawn around the 'stakeholders' included.

The business newspaper *Dagens Industri* recently wrote in an editorial^{liii} that the climate minister must stand her ground when it comes to striving for "a climate policy that is perceived as realistic and legitimate by the population". The editor refers to the situation in Germany, Poland and Great Britain, but ignores that recent polls (June 2023 to February 2024) show that a majority of Swedes (70–80 per cent): (i) consider the climate issue to be very important^{liv}, (ii) the government has an important role in pursuing an ambitious climate policy^{lv}, (iii) have little confidence in the Tidö parties' climate policy and that greater trust is placed in the EU and Swedish companies^{lvi}, and (iv) that Sweden's climate policy should be based on science instead of populism^{lvii}. In addition, 75 per cent of the M, KD and L voters are critical to the government's climate policy^{lviii}. Obviously, there is a dissonance between the populist SD and the Swedish population.

Overall, it appears that a "popularly legitimate" climate policy is based on a very narrow definition of legitimacy, which is not associated with liberal and deliberative legitimacy and democracy, rather a policy associated with illiberal right-wing populism (cf. von Malmborg, 2024a). The SCPC (2024) also assessed that the Tidö government has a very narrow view of 'policy

acceptance'. "Popular legitimacy" should not be understood as legitimacy from the perspective of the majority, but as legitimacy from SD's right-wing populist perspective. Just like other populist far-right parties, SD refers to a homogeneous 'people' (the popular) as a counterpoint to the 'elite' that created the social problems SD sees today. According to themselves, SD is the true interpreter of the 'popular' will.

5.2. Explaining the Democratic Deficits

5.2.1. Neo-Corporatism and Ecological Modernization

The nature of policy actor relations in the neo-corporatist state of Sweden is generally deliberative, but it is a centralized and elitist top-down, exclusive type of deliberation where policymakers engage with a few policy actors of an encompassing character, often industry and trade unions, resulting in representation monopolies, non-transparency and other democratic deficits (Kronsell et al., 2019).

Closely related, Swedish governments and the economic elite have long since favoured the *ecological modernization* discourse (Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Tobin, 2015). It is a political theory of social change and practical discourse on liberalized environmental policy presented as a means for capitalism to deal with the environmental challenge – that reformist environmental policy and growth go hand in hand (Spaargaren & Mol, 1992; Jänicke, 2020). It focuses on market rationality, the role of technology, efficiency, businesses and consumers in environmental policymaking, leaving out issues like procedural justice and social inclusion discussed in deliberative ecological democracy and in global climate governance. This paradigm is unsympathetic to alternative approaches, knowledge, values, and experiences (Bailey et al., 2011). Despite high-level commitment to urgent transitional change, current policies still reflect an understanding of sustainability that is steeped in techno-economic narratives of innovation and market rationalities (Olsson et al., 2021).

In Sweden, the ecological modernization discourse was introduced in 1996 by Swedish prime minister Göran Persson (S) who launched the idea of the 'Green Welfare State' as a new social democratic policy programme (Lundqvist, 2004). It is the core tenet of the work of the 'Fossil Free Sweden' initiative, developing roadmaps for fossil free competitiveness. Ecological modernization is favoured also by the current right-wing government. At the Tidö government's climate meeting in June 2023, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson mentioned that:^{lix}

Business has also become an environmental movement. /.../ By being progressive and early on, Swedish companies build competitiveness for the future, while those who remain dependent on fossil fuels will be knocked out of the market. This is green market economics in practice: clear goals and demands from politics, long-term rules of the game and free competition in business.

Through regulation and financial instruments, following the ideals of (neo)liberal environmental democracy, the market is stimulated to innovation of green technology and increased competitiveness for business. This has led to a continued strong focus of the Swedish government on the interests of business when developing environmental and climate policy, while civil society, with environmental, climate and youth organizations, is often left out (cf. Baker, 2007; Thörn & Svenberg, 2016). The winners in this process are naturally the business world (Bailey et al., 2011). Losers are all the groups that do not target the market and the technical and market-based aspects of environmental and climate policy: solidarity groups and other groups that work to realize sustainable development and climate justice according to deliberative ecological democracy (Baker, 2007; Davidson, 2012; Thörn & Svenberg, 2016; Krüger, 2022).

Crespy and Munta (2023) as well as Dupont et al. (2023, p. 7), argue that "policies and tools associated with the just transition inside the EU do not lead to a just transition that adequately addresses environmental and social problems". Social conflicts are not dealt with appropriately. In the European Green Deal, the just transition is seen broadly as a transactional and financial transfer policy through the *Just Transition Mechanism* and the *Social Climate Fund* with targeted financial support to affected regions (Filipović et al., 2022).

Schlosberg (1999) describes how grassroots movements associated with demands for environmental justice actively promote emancipatory communicative and deliberative approaches to making and evaluating public environmental policy. Similarly, Weber (1998) describes how public and private participants in environmental policy disputes are sometimes willing to accept more deliberative, inclusive ways of settling policy disputes if they believe that cooperation will better serve their interests. But, in practice the environmental justice movement is less likely than established environmental NGOs to participate in institutionalized forms of collaborative governance (Hunold, 2002). According to Weber (1998, p. 235) only “those with the power to block or impede policy outcomes are invited to sit at the negotiating table”. This condition favours the inclusion of established environmental NGOs like SANC or Världsnaturfonden WWF over more politically radical and activist, and relatively powerless environmental and climate justice movements such as FFF and XR. A prominent example is the former secretary-general of SANC, Svante Axelsson, who was appointed national co-ordinator of the *Fossil Free Sweden* initiative by the S-MP government in 2015 and still holds the position. These early findings have been confirmed lately. Many new organizations and networks in the climate justice area, e.g. FFF and XR, raise the problem of climate change as an emergency and demand strong action from politicians and other decision-makers, but rarely offer technically-legally elaborate solutions to the problem (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020; de Moor et al., 2020; Buzogány & Scherhauser, 2022). Since they fall short of institutionalization (a process of professionalization and formalization, completed when a movement has become a part of society’s organizational structure) and neoliberal responsibilization (a development involving an increasing emphasis on market mechanisms) (cf. Thörn & Svenberg, 2016), they are not invited to fora for discussions about climate policy.

Contrary to the claim of Bitonti (2017), policy entrepreneurs in liberal environmental democracy with focus on ecological modernization obviously fail to include grassroots at the base. The pace of the institutional reforms proposed by ecological modernization and liberal environmental democracy is out of sync with the speed of today’s environmental changes, not least climate change. Mitigating climate change is not just about techno-economic industrial change, but also about social change and dealing with social conflicts.

5.2.2. Populism and Autocratization

As mentioned, SD has long since denied climate change and like other European far-right populist parties, SD is negatively polarizing and mobilizing a ‘cultural war’ on strong climate policies (Cunningham et al., 2024). SD’s top candidate in the upcoming EU elections in June 2024, Charlie Weimers, as well as SD’s environment and climate policy spokesperson, Martin Kinnunen, have told that SD wants to repeal the *European Green Deal* and *Fit for 55*.^{1x} In that sense, SD are culturally and cognitively motivated by conflicting ‘evil’ beliefs of previous governments for decades. These value-laden factors triggered a ‘devil’s shift’ (cf. Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999) that catalysed activist entrepreneurship with several goals (cf. Arnold, 2021).

The long term cultural-institutional entrepreneurship of SD to deny climate change as a political problem despite overwhelming evidence from climate scientists, has born little fruit in the Swedish population. This indicates that ambiguity about the problem is a key feature in the complex process of framing and mobilization. Thus, ambiguity can be seen as a multi-dimensional and dynamic phenomenon that changes its nature and function over the different stages of the agenda-setting process, which opened a window of opportunity for SD and the Tidö government to take on a more structural entrepreneurial role.

The strategies used by the Tidö government and SD in climate governance and their impacts on legitimacy, accountability and justice follow a pattern in Swedish politics identified by human rights and democracy advocates as well as political science scholars (Rothstein, 2023; Silander, 2024). This has been seen since 2006 when SD won 2.9 per cent in the elections to the Riksdag, which made them eligible for public funding, and 2010 when they entered the Riksdag. It has become much more evident since the general elections in 2022 when SD became a support for the right-wing government, following successful bargaining on who should be the new Prime Minister and who should be in the government cabinet. This opened a window of opportunity for SD to

dictate the government's climate policy, since the policy area was included in the Tidö agreement. For some years, SD had tried to distance itself from its neo-fascist past and erect a more respectable façade (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2016). However, they have continued to combine populism and anti-pluralism/authoritarianism with nativism – the longing for a homogenous nation state (cf. Meléndez & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021; Mudde, 2021), and propose populist and illiberal policies in many areas, not only migration, suggesting an ongoing process of autocratization of Sweden. SD has even hailed Victor Orbán's Hungary, the worst example of autocratization in the last years (Meléndez & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021; Mudde, 2021; Boese et al., 2022; Silander, 2024), as a role model regarding governance.

Regarding the role and agency of SD, it is important that they tend to "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 and deliberative perspectives on democracy. Populist parties have increased their votes in every election to national parliaments since the 1980s (Mudde, 2004, 2021). Autocratization is increasing in Europe, but Sweden is not yet mentioned among the states with flawed democracy (Boese et al., 2022; Silander, 2024), although the latest report of the V-Dem Institute (2024) identifies several signs of autocratization in Sweden. The autocratization is based on an ideology of 'far-right civilizationism', including transnational organization of far-right parties and a far-right social movement to challenge the centrist governance model of 'neoliberal cosmopolitanism' with a focus on individualism, humanitarianism, universalism and pluralism, which has been dominant in the West since the end of the Cold War (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019; Stewart, 2020; Pirro, 2023). Far-right populist parties are based on a unitary, non-pluralist, unmediated, and unaccountable vision of society's public interest, and stresses responsiveness and requires voters to delegate authority to leaders who equate the public interest with a putative will of the people (Caramani, 2017). The mainstreaming of SD follows structural as well as cultural-institutional entrepreneurship to change power relations and political and public discourses (cf. Brown et al., 2023). Being the largest of the Tidö parties, they have been able to influence the Swedish government to take a similar tack on substance as well as process in many policy areas, including climate policy. Without the support from SD, the M-KD-L government would have been in significant minority and not been able to form a government. And SD gets support from the government. While the parliamentary bourgeoisie in Germany has supported a broad popular opposition to the exclusionary right-wing nationalism represented by Alternative für Deutschland, that was recently ruled to show signs of 'anti-democratic aspirations' and of working against 'the human value of certain groups' by the Upper Administrative Court in Germany^{lxi}, the three bourgeois government parties in Sweden are instead doing everything to satisfy SD's growing appetite.^{lxii} Even the Swedish Social Democrats have a role in the normalisation of SD (Kamali, 2024b).

Laebens and Lührmann (2021) suggests that established parties and politicians are afraid to be voted out of power, and that fear sometimes constrains their autocratic ambitions while in government. Also related to political parties, negative partisanship with a deep and strong antipathy and rejection of the populist radical right can be a counterweight to autocratization (Meléndez & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021). However, these claims are countered by the current situation in Sweden. The party leaders of both M and L (current Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson (M) and current minister for employment and integration Johan Pehrson (L)) claimed before the elections that they would under no circumstances collaborate with SD. Yet here we are, with M and L in a government collaborating with SD eroding Swedish democracy, i.e. in the field of climate policy and governance. Many have asked how climate minister Pourmokhtari (L) and other ministers from the Liberal party can cope with the strong influence of the antiliberal and anti-democratic SD on the government's politics. L has been accused of selling their ideological soul to get seats in the cabinet. But recent polls^{lxiii} show a drastically decreasing support for L and KD, who are both well below the threshold to make it into the Riksdag. The main protesters against the Tidö government are C, V and MP, e.g. raising a motion of non-confidence in climate minister Pourmokhtari. The Social Democrats are also

critical to the process of autocratization led by SD and the Tidö government,^{lxiv} but they have been accused by *Civil Rights Defenders* to be part of the cause of increasing populism.^{lxv}

Civil Rights Defenders (2023) has reviewed the Tidö government's first year in power and identified several reasons for concern. The United Nations Association of Sweden (2023) has also expressed strong concern about the development. It is difficult to draw conclusions from individual policy proposals and decisions, but the overall picture creates a worrying pattern including: rapid inquiries, short time frames for referrals, reduced freedom of demonstration, reduced protection against arbitrary intervention, reduced freedom of association, politicisation of public service, repealed press support, partial selection of stakeholders in referrals and policy discussions, refusal to talk to 'left-wing' and environmental journalists, critics being singled out as scapegoats by political leaders and accused of being 'totalitarian' and a 'threat to democratic political processes in Sweden'. These actions, silencing and excluding critics from democratic debates, proposed and adopted with limited or no deliberation, increase the influence of structural entrepreneurship to intentionally change the distribution of formal power and factual and scientific information, and can lead to reduced trust in the rule of law and lower legitimacy for democracy. Civil Rights Defenders argues that this is a development that risks weakening Sweden's democracy and which may be the first step in the process of gradual autocratization overseen by democratically elected but antidemocratic leaders.^{lxvi} Even the editorial offices of Sweden's largest newspapers, independently liberal *Dagens Nyheter*, and independent social democrat *Aftonbladet* are worried of the development, arguing that 'Sweden is now taking step after step towards less and less freedom'.^{lxvii}

Rothstein (2023) contends the view that Sweden is under threat of autocratization. He agrees that the continuous electoral success of populist and illiberal SD together with their alliance with the three established right-wing parties in the government certainly marks a major change for Sweden. He refers to the non-existence of a 'Swexit' movement, that meritocracy will be the main principle for hiring civil servants, that judicial review is not in the 'DNA' of the Swedish legal profession, that Sweden has a vital civil society with many strong organizations that will do whatever they can to hinder any advance by authoritarianism. The same can be said for most of the mass media and the academy. According to the *V-Dem Institute*, providing the most developed data set on democratic rights and liberties in the world, the autocratization process can be hard to identify since it often takes place gradually in democratic states (Sato et al., 2022). It is the sum of the decisions and the style of governance of illiberal and anti-democratic actors that leads to defective democracies, that is, those with increasingly illiberal characteristics (Merkel & Lührmann, 2021). It is this whole that worries, or as stated by Merkel and Lührmann (p. 870), 'if the illiberal virus persists long enough, it transforms the liberal dimension, polarizes the political space, and may affect the institutional core of democracies as well'. And with the more established far-right in power, the far-right extremists are advancing their positions to further the silencing of opponents (Mudde, 2021). This was experienced in Stockholm, Sweden, in mid-April when five members of a neo-Nazi fight club violently attacked a political meeting organized by V and MP on how to deal with the far-right movement.^{lxviii} The aim being to make people and politicians afraid of criticizing SD and the government.

The far-right, when being part of the ruling elite as SD in Sweden, uses democratic institutions to erode democratic functions, e.g. censoring media, imposing restrictions on civil society, harassing activists, protesting, and promoting polarization through disrespect of counterarguments and pluralism (Lührmann et al., 2020; Mudde, 2021; V-Dem Institute, 2024). This includes acting as a structural and cultural-institutional policy entrepreneur, even though they commit to the substantive conception of the public interest and ideologically are strongly negative to policy entrepreneurship as it would influence their rightfulness to interpret the 'only true' vision and contrast the 'ultimate goal' (cf. Bitonti, 2017; Mudde, 2021). They themselves have the answer to what is in the public interest. But acting as a policy entrepreneur when SD itself is in power means that the end justifies the means, with an important difference compared to the majority of policy entrepreneurs – SD and the Tidö government act with structural entrepreneurship to change power relations. Strategic manipulation by distorting concepts like 'legitimacy' and 'climate justice' and distorting information in framing problems and possible solutions, and strategic manoeuvring by giving as little information as

possible to their opponents, as in the case of the Climate Action Plan, are among the most common strategies used by structural policy entrepreneurs. Scientifically based knowledge is dismissed as 'other opinions' that the Tidö government does not need to care about because they are 'right' and know the 'only truth'.

This case study suggests that Rothstein is wrong on all points, at least in relation to climate governance. The signs of autocratization suggested by the *V-Dem Institute* are present in Sweden today. As argued by Silander (2024) in a recent study of autocratization in Sweden, established democracies like Sweden are not immune to autocratization.

Furthermore, independent media play an important role to raise awareness, which is why the first actions of autocratizers are often directed against NGOs and the media. As presented, this was the case in Sweden. Financial support to the press has been abolished and funding of civil society organizations and civic education reduced. In addition, the governmental committee on the future of public service recently proposed in line with the Tidö parties' position that public service companies' use of external internet platforms shall be restricted, which is noteworthy because social media are important channels for reaching younger audiences with independent and accurate information.

Democracy scholars highlight the need for strong civil society organizations and civic education as an important effort to defend liberal democracy against ongoing autocratization (Finkel & Lim, 2021; Lührmann, 2021; Mudde, 2021; Silander, 2024; V-Dem Institute, 2024). It is therefore ominous that the Tidö government changes the Swedish system of support for civic education and civil society prior to the Civic Education Inquiry presents its report in June 2024 and thus without an impact assessment. The state financial support to study associations, which have an important role in civic education on climate change and democracy, is deliberately reduced gradually by 30 per cent. Protest, unrest, or an organized monitory civil society, making clandestine autocratization apparent to a wider public, may prevent or stop the autocratic ambitions of the government (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021). But the Tidö parties' attacks on civic education and civil society organizations, such as *Civil Rights Defenders* and XR, are an important organizing principle for a societal transformation that goes deeper than individual decisions and budget items. It is part of a pattern that opposes pluralism and fundamentally liberal and deliberative democracy. In SD's Sweden, climate policy is also cultural policy and they are well aware of how a liberal democracy can be dismantled in a very short time (Lagerkvist, 2024). SD has a pan-European network of far-right organizations to help them (Schlembach, 2011).

6. Conclusions

The climate emergency calls for rapid and deep reductions of GHG emissions not to exceed the UN temperature targets and reach the EU and Swedish targets on climate neutrality. Sweden has long since been a frontrunner in climate policy, but developments since the last elections in 2022 have led to increased emissions and widespread criticism that the current right-wing government lacks policies to reach the climate targets.

In addition to the criticism towards the government's lack of effective climate policies, this paper has analysed how and why current climate policy and governance in Sweden has negative impacts on democratic norms and principles such as legitimacy, accountability, and justice. The study identified severe democratic deficits of the Tidö government and SD related to these norms. Their strategic agency in climate governance can be questioned from perspectives of both liberal environmental democracy and deliberative ecological democracy theories. The study shows that their agency was partly cultural-institutional, aiming to change the perceptions of other policy actors, stakeholders and citizens and the entire discourse on climate policy. But agency was mainly structural, deliberately aiming to shift the power balance among policy actors and stakeholders in favour of the Tidö parties to reach their substantive policy changes, with a reference to 'popular legitimacy'.

Several measures were and are still taken to smear, silence or at least make it more difficult for critics to take part in the policy process. Despite many references to 'legitimacy among citizens' in the Tidö parties' CAP, a reference focusing on output legitimacy and distributive justice, their climate

policy is found to be legitimate for populists – not for liberal or deliberative democrats. Distributive justice is not reached, not even sought for. Owners of cars with combustion engines and wealthy people are the winners, less wealthy people and people commuting by bike, bus or train are the losers. It is symptomatic that a government supported by a populist and climate change denying party significantly reduces carbon pricing for fossil fuels as their first move on climate policy, resulting in an increase of Sweden's annual GHG emissions by 10 per cent. Policymaking and governance of the Tidö parties produces novel processes and phenomena, even in established policy domains such as climate policy, that raise questions of procedural justice, impartiality, influence, transparency, accountability and legitimacy (cf. von Malmborg et al., 2023). These deficits are partly explained with reference to dominant actor relationships in the neo-corporatist political system of Sweden and the dominance of the (neo)liberal discourse of ecological modernization in Swedish environmental policy, focusing on technology, industries and markets rather than justice and inclusive participation in democratic processes. But more important, the policy proposals made, and actions taken by the government and SD are directly illiberal, anti-deliberative and anti-democratic, and signs of an ongoing autocratization of Swedish climate policy and governance. Sweden is a liberal democracy, but the Tidö government with support from SD as policy entrepreneurs have taken several steps in an anti-democratic direction. This is evident in the case of climate policy and governance, but also in other policy areas. In all, this study indicates that the climate policy actions and their impacts on democracy is not a result of the ongoing autocratization of Sweden. Since climate policy is part of the Tidö Agreement, the change we see in Swedish climate policy is essentially a central part of the paradigm shift to an autocracy. The 'nasty politics' of the Tidö parties' climate policy need to be analyzed and confronted as much as the climate policy's lack of effectiveness (von Malmborg, 2024a). The anti-democratic reforms of climate policy in Sweden are forboding an unwelcomed development in the EU given the boost of far-right populist parties in the upcoming elections to the European Parliament in June 2024. If the European conservatives and Christian Democrats enter collaboration with the far-right populists, as they did in Sweden, to remain in "power", we are likely to see another democratic leader in global climate governance demount both climate policy and democracy.

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- ^{lxiv} Op-ed by S party leader Magdalena Andersson, *Dagens Nyheter*, 7 May 2023. <https://www.dn.se/debatt/sds-hogerregim-hotar-grunderna-i-var-demokrati/>
- ^{lxv} Op-ed in *Aftonbladet*, 14 May 2023. <https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/BWqdew/civil-rights-defenders-ni-ar-ocksa-skyldiga-till-populismen-s>
- ^{lxvi} Op-ed by Civil Rights Defenders in *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 December 2023. <https://www.dn.se/debatt/sverige-leds-just-nu-in-pa-vagen-mot-okad-autokrati/>

^{lxvii} Editorial, *Dagens Nyheter*, 25 January 2024. <https://www.dn.se/ledare/sverige-tar-nu-steg-efter-steg-mot-allt-mindre-frihet/>; Editorial *Aftonbladet*, 16 December 2023.

<https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/l3qgky/vara-barn-kommer-att-se-pa-staten-som-ond>

^{lxviii} News on Swedish public service television SVT, 25 April 2024.

<https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/stockholm/har-flyr-flera-maskerade-man-efter-attacken-i-gubbangen>