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Article

Weird Sporting with Double Edged Swords: Understanding 'Nasty Rhetoric' in Swedish Climate Politics

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Abstract

Growing powers of far-right populist parties in European countries has led to more divisive politics on climate change. This is the case also in Sweden, a country that has long been seen as a frontrunner in climate policy and a stronghold of liberal democracy. With a far-right populist nativist party currently holding tangible powers, Swedish climate politics have turned into an antidemocratic politics with rising greenhouse gas emissions in less than two years. Using contemporary Swedish climate politics as a case study, this paper qualitatively analyses the divisive nature of right-wing populist climate politics, with particular focus on the systematic use of hate speech and hate crime for political purposes – *nasty politics* with *nasty rhetoric*. Based on empirical data from 157 items from newspapers, magazines, radio, television and social media from June 2021 to June 2025, as well as a review of recent cross-disciplinary literature on hate speech and hate crime, this paper explores the use and nature of nasty rhetoric, raising questions for discussion among scholars, policymakers and civil society beyond Sweden. It is found that leading right-wing politicians, including the prime minister, cabinet ministers and leading parliamentarians, portray climate science as “a point of view”, green politicians as “strawmen” that should be “killed”, female climate journalists as “left pack” and “moron hags” that “will be raped”, and the climate justice movement as “saboteurs”, “totalitarian terrorists” and “a threat to Swedish democracy” that should be “sent to prison” and “executed”. The use of nasty rhetoric can be described as a *double-edged sword*, aiming to silence the opponents to the current paradigm shift in Swedish climate policy, while at the same time mobilising followers through conspiracy theories with fantasies and symbolic threats to expand the *weird sport* of nasty rhetoric. Reviewing the literature, people persuaded to follow and expand the use of nasty rhetoric seem to be influenced by ideology, but also social processes as well as dark personality traits. The pro-climate opposition is also using insults and accusations, not to silence the Tidö parties, but to reveal right-wing populist climate policy and politicians as a naked emperor.

Keywords: climate politics; democracy; far-right populism; hate crime; hate speech; nasty politics; psychology

1. Introduction

1.1. *Nasty Politics in the “Third Wave of” Autocratisation*

Far-right populist parties have increased their votes in every election to national parliaments in Europe since the 1980s and autocratisation is increasing (Mudde, 2004, 2021; V-Dem Institute, 2024, 2025). The pace with which US President Donald Trump operates since his inauguration in early 2025 has made even cautious political science analysts like professor Steven Levitsky say the US regime is

now some type of authoritarianism.¹ On a global level, there are fewer democracies than autocracies for the first time in over 20 years, liberal democracies have become the least common regime type in the world, and nearly three out of four persons in the world now live in autocracies, which is the highest since 1978 (V-Dem Institute, 2025). The most notable effect of this “third wave” of autocratisation”, with a fatality rate of 67 %, is the losses in freedom of expression (V-Dem Institute, 2025, p. 6). To reach their political aims, far-right populists often disseminate conspiracy theories and lies about the state of society, and use coarse, rude, and disrespectful language including hatred and threats in their political rhetoric to silence their opponents (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013; Moffitt, 2016; Lührmann et al., 2020; Mudde, 2021; Zeitzoff, 2023).

Use of hate speech and hate crime in strategic agency of far-right populists is well-known in policy domains such as migration and identity policy related to ethnicity, religion and gender (see e.g. Yilmaz, 2012; Lutz, 2019; Peters, 2020; Olivas Osuna, 2021; Weeks & Allen, 2023; Ardin, 2024; Askanius et al., 2024; Svatoňová & Doerr, 2024; Ilse & Hagerlid, 2025). For instance, members of the Jewish diaspora, the Muslim community and the LGBTQ+ communities in EU countries are victimised by online hate speech on an almost daily basis (Berecz & Devinat, 2017). To analyse such strategic and systematic use of hate speech and hate crime for political purposes, scholars of political science, particularly political psychology, refer to the concepts of *nasty politics* with *nasty rhetoric* (Zitzoff, 2023) It may seem unnecessary to invent new analytical concepts since hate speech and hate crime, as well as political rhetoric are well-known concepts, but analysing systematic hate speech and hate crime as a tactic in political strategic agency more comprehensibly as nasty rhetoric adds political and ideological perspectives to the understandings of hate speech and hate crime in rhetoric as provided in other disciplines, e.g. sociology, psychology, criminology and communication studies.

1.2. A “Culture War” on Climate Policy

Numerous reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on climate change events and their negative impacts on people, societies and economies all over the world (e.g. IPCC, 2023), have made the climate justice movement and some political leaders talk about a climate emergency and develop strategies and policies such as the Paris Agreement, the *European Green Deal* and the *Fit for 55* package to decarbonise our societies (de Moor et al., 2020; Howe, 2021; Kreienkamp et al., 2022).

As part of the current wave of autocratisation, climate policy is experiencing a rollback in western countries (von Malmberg, 2024a). Climate sceptic politicians – some denying the existence of climate change or that it is anthropogenically induced, others denying its consequences (Hobson & Niemeyer, 2012) – are downplaying climate policy, both nationally and internationally calling it a threat to economic growth (Marquardt et al., 2022; White, 2023). European far-right populist parties are mobilising a *culture war* on climate politics, aiming to polarise and make climate policy less ambitious and eventually scrap it (Buzogány & Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2022; Cunningham et al., 2024). This may have negative impacts on climate governance since climate change is considered a wicked problem that needs pluralistic rather than dualistic, divisive approaches to democracy to be governed (Goodman & Morton, 2014; Lindvall & Karlsson, 2023; von Malmberg, 2024a). While actions to tear down EU climate policy and its flagship, the *European Green Deal*, took off prior to EU elections in 2024 (Cunningham et al., 2024; Weise & Camut, 2025), the battle has been fought in Sweden for more than a decade, predominantly by far-right populists and libertarians, sometimes in collaboration (Hultman et al., 2019; Vowles & Hultman, 2021a, 2021b; Ekberg & Pressfeldt, 2022; von Malmberg, 2024a). The current right-wing Tidö government in Sweden, consisting of a liberal-conservative troika of the conservative *Moderates* (M), the *Christian Democrats* (KD) and the *Liberals* (L), but informally led by the far-right populist party *Sweden Democrats* (SD), is in the midst of executing an iconoclastic paradigm shift of Swedish climate politics, with negative impacts also on Swedish

¹ Article in *New York Times*, 6 March 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/06/us/politics/trump-democracy.html>

democracy in general (von Malmberg, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). This backlash is combined with the witnessing of uncivil rhetoric, where far-right populists, right-wing politicians and other climate sceptics employ hate speech and sometimes hate crime aiming to polarise and divide climate politics into two camps (von Malmberg, 2024a).

Analysing the strategic agency of the Tidö quartet to radically transform Swedish climate policy, von Malmberg (2024a, 2024b, 2024c) identified what appear as systematic use of insults, accusations, denigration and in rare cases violence to discredit oppositional politicians, which are usual targets of nasty rhetoric, but also to delegitimise and dehumanise new groups of outgroups enemies, i.e. climate activists, climate scientists and climate journalists.

In this paper, *climate scientists* refer to academic researchers from multiple disciplines studying the causes and effects of global warming, those developing technologies to mitigate and adapt to climate change, as well as those studying responses, actions, policies and measures (including political, economic, technological, discursive, social and behavioural) taken or that could or should be taken by politicians, business leaders, economists, public organisations, social organisations and people to mitigate and adapt to climate change. *Climate activists* are people who, organised in climate movements or unorganised, participate in the public debate advocating a need for urgent action to mitigate and adapt to the climate change emergency. Many of them refer to the anthropogenically induced climate change and the resulting climate emergency as ecocide.² Climate activists can use different strategies, tactics, forums and media to advocate urgent climate action, from writing and speaking to civil disobedience and illegal action. *Climate journalists* are journalists that report on climate change, climate science, climate action and climate politics in news media.

Not only anonymous internet trolls, but leading politicians from all Tidö parties use such hateful and threatening rhetoric. It is used as a tactic alongside other traditional measures of autocrats, such as more politicised governance of public service, decreased financial support to public service, public education and civil society organisations, manipulation of information and decreased transparency in policymaking (von Malmberg, 2024a, 2024b). Similar findings of means for autocratisation in Sweden, in a more general sense, have been reported elsewhere (Civil Rights Defenders, 2023; United Nations Association of Sweden, 2023; Ardin, 2024; Gustavsson, 2024; Silander, 2024). In early June 2025, the Tidö government took another step towards autocratisation when presenting a bill to the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) proposing a change to the Swedish constitution that power is transferred from the Riksdag to the government in times of crises, letting the government decide what is a crisis. A few parliamentarians and the largest newspapers were very critical, since the proposal includes no mechanisms from stopping the government to abuse the law, e.g. to use the military against antagonistic protesters as done by President Trump in California.³

1.3. Raising Questions and Provoking a Discussion on Nasty Rhetoric

Given the influence of far-right populism and rise of strategic and systematic use of hate speech and hate crime, contributing to democratic decline and divisiveness of climate politics this paper

² Ecocide refers to unlawful or wanton acts, committed with the knowledge that they are likely to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment. The climate justice movement in the EU is advocating endorsement of a law of ecocide by the EU allowing the prosecution of offenders responsible for environmental damage 'comparable to ecocide' (Proedrou & Pournara, 2025).

³ News article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 10 June 2015, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/regeringen-vill-ha-mer-makt-vid-kriser-avser-andra-grundlagen/>; Editorial in *Dagens Nyheter*, 14 June 2025, <https://www.dn.se/ledare/lilian-sjolund-gor-inte-riksdagen-maktlos-vi-klarar-kriser-utan-undantagstillstand/>; Editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 18 June 2025. <https://www.svd.se/a/kw91Ok/oppna-inte-for-maktmissbruk-i-kris>

dives deeper into the phenomena of nasty politics and nasty rhetoric in climate politics to draw attention to a field of inquiry and to provoke discussion on the use and nature of nasty rhetoric in a policy area which is more related to divergent political opinions than personal and cultural identity. This is not to say that climate policy is not related to cultural identity, but it is less so than gender issues, religion and ethnicity. Belief in the reality or otherwise of climate change has become a marker for cultural identities (McCright & Dunlap, 2011; Kahan et al., 2012), and it is not without reason the far-right is waging a culture war on climate policy. To the far-right, politics is largely about cultural identity (Short, 2016), which is why far-right populist parties in Europe frame politics on education “as a means of disseminating (conservative and nativist) culture and values, rather than as a means of redistributing opportunities” (Giudici et al., 2025, p. 1).

The paper uses recent developments in Swedish climate politics as a case. This case is illuminating for scholars, policymakers and civil society beyond Sweden. Sweden has long since been considered an international role model in climate politics, advocating high ambitions in global and EU climate governance as well as nationally (Matti et al., 2021; Widerberg et al., 2024). Sweden has also been considered a bastion of strong liberal democracy since the end of World War II (Boese et al., 2022; Silander, 2024). In the nexus of climate politics and democracy, Sweden has also seen the rise of strong social movements advocating ambitious climate policy, particularly with Greta Thunberg and *Fridays for Future* (de Moor et al., 2020). Analysing phenomena such as nasty politics and nasty rhetoric in a country that until recently experienced large societal consensus and policy leadership on climate politics provides important knowledge for understanding the agency and negative effects of radical right extremist politics, and raise food for thought on suitable interventions.

Research on hate speech in climate politics has mainly focused on its presence in social media, the combination of climate-denialism and anti-feminism, and hate campaigns towards specific targets, such as Greta Thunberg – the figurehead of the global climate justice movement – and climate journalists. Less is known about the use and nature of nasty rhetoric as political strategy and tactics in radically changing national climate policy and politics. Following the line of Toulmin (2012, p. 1) in his study of the use of arguments, the aim of this paper is to “raise problems, not to solve them; to draw attention to a field of inquiry, rather than to survey it fully; and to provoke discussion rather than to serve as a systematic treatise”, my intention is that such a discussion can contribute to better understanding of the general nature of nasty rhetoric:

- What role does nasty rhetoric play in politics, and how come it expands and continues?

So far, research explicitly mentioning nasty politics is rather US-based and has mainly focused on the targeting of politicians, although in many parts of the world (Zeitsoff, 2023), while the identification of nasty politics in Swedish climate politics indicate that also other groups, such as scientists, journalists and activists, are targeted. To address this main research questions, the following sub-questions are addressed:

- Who uses nasty rhetoric, in what forms and in which fora?
- Is there a difference in types of hate and threats and level of aggression depending on who is using it and for what reason?
- Why are people using nasty rhetoric in the first instance?
- Why are some people following suit to expand the use of nasty rhetoric?

These questions are addressed with a mixed method approach. The first three sub-questions draw on empirical data from the case study. The last sub-question and the main research question draws also on recent findings from research in political science, sociology, social psychology, psychology, psychiatry and neurobiology about factors explaining acts of perpetrators and followers in hate speech and hate crime. The analysis and discussion also draw on research on rhetoric and political communication, including environmental rhetoric. Thus, I refer to a lot of research not labelled as nasty politics research, but which is important to understand nasty politics and nasty rhetoric.

The paper is outlined as follows. Section 2 presents the theory of nasty politics and rhetoric, including previous research on hate speech and hate crime in general and in climate politics. Section 3 presents the method and material used to analyse nasty rhetoric in the case of Swedish climate politics, including the context of the case study. Sections 4 presents the results of the empirical case study, while section 5 analyses and reflects upon the case study results in relation to cross-disciplinary literature on factors explaining use of hate speech and hate crime, presenting a more generalised interpretation of the nature of nasty rhetoric. Section 6 draws conclusions and presents actions to take. Questions about the impacts of nasty rhetoric on victims and democracy are analysed elsewhere (von Malmberg, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c).

2. Nasty Politics and Rhetoric—Systematic Use of Hate Speech and Hate Crime

The concept of *nasty politics* was introduced by Zeitzoff (2023, p. 6) to describe the phenomenon when politicians use “a set of tactics [...] to insult, accuse, denigrate, threaten and in rare cases physically harm their domestic opponents”. Such opponents can include “political parties, partisans, ethnic groups, police and security services, immigrants, judges, businessmen, companies, journalists, members of the press, NGOs, government officials, military, business groups, or other domestic political opponents broadly construed” (Zeitzoff, 2023, p. 9). The core of nasty politics is the use of *nasty rhetoric*, characterised by divisive and contentious rhetoric with insults and threats containing elements of hatred and aggression that entrenches political divides with ‘us vs. them’ narratives, i.e. polarisation (Klein, 2020), designed to denigrate, deprecate, delegitimise, dehumanise and hurt their target(s) emotionally to make them silent (Kalmoe et al., 2018).

Nasty rhetoric can be used in “campaign rallies, speeches, via social media or face-to-face in debates or in actual violent confrontations” (Zeitzoff, 2023, p. 6). In that sense, nasty rhetoric is related to offline and online hate speech as well as hate crime (cf. Whillock & Slayden, 1995; Chetty & Alathur, 2018; Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021; Vergani et al., 2024). Hate crime can be defined as “a crime motivated by prejudice and discrimination that stirs up a group of like-minded people to target victims because of their membership of a social group, religion or race” (Peters, 2022, p. 2326). In comparison, there is a spectrum of definitions of hate speech, reflecting the jurisprudence in different polities (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017; Hietanen & Eddebo, 2022). Media scientist Sponholz (2018, p. 51) defines hate speech as “the deliberate and often intentional degradation of people through messages that call for, justify and/or trivialise violence based on a category (e.g. gender, phenotype, religion or sexual orientation)” (my translation).

Based on the work of Mouffe (2013), Chang (2019) and Olson (2020) show that hate speech, and implicitly nasty rhetoric where hate speech is used systematically to silence the targets, is not only about what is conveyed explicitly by use of language. Political sentiments are often emotional and affective, determined by viscerally experienced sentiments and a physically imagined sense of rightness or wrongness. As such, hate speech, be it stand-alone or systematically used in nasty politics, is not restricted to speech acts or the written language, but also encompasses, e.g., image-based communication with photos, pictures and videos (Bleiker, 2018). Some politicians, such as Donald Trump, also use gesture to ridicule and caricature his political opponents (Goldstein et al., 2020). Political persuaders, particularly populists, use language or images and sometimes the absence of language, e.g. rejection to take interviews with certain journalists, and exclusion or ejection of certain groups from public meetings, to affect emotions, perceptions of knowledge, belief, value, and action (see e.g. Mendoza-Denton, 2020; Shah, 2024). Thus, a statement, image or action that is not overtly hateful, aggressive or violent can also be an expression of nasty rhetoric. The notion of ‘nasty’ in nasty rhetoric is thus about the inherent message sent in the communicative act – a message of division, supremacy, retribution, dehumanisation and excommunication.

Zeitzoff (2023) has proposed a typology of nasty rhetoric (Table 1), to which I have added economic and legal violence (sanctions), e.g. state repression, increasingly used against climate justice activists in Europe (Berglund et al., 2024). The table also links different types of nasty rhetoric to hate speech and hate crime, presenting the respective level of aggression.

Table 1. Typology of nasty rhetoric and its relation to hate speech and hate crime.

Type of nasty rhetoric	Description	Relation to hate speech, hate crime	Level of aggression
Insults	Name-calling, including ridicule, hyperbole and caricature, that influences how people make judgement and interpret situations and could sometimes include dehumanising and enmity rhetoric.	Hate speech	Hate
Accusations	Blaming opponents of doing something illegal or shady, or promulgating conspiracy theories about opponents, e.g. through hyperbole, caricature, exclusion or ejection.	Hate speech	Hate
Intimidations	Veiled threats advocating economic or legal action against an opponent, e.g., that they should get fired, be investigated or sent to prison.	Hate speech	Threat (psychological violence)
Incitements	The most aggressive type of rhetoric includes people threatening or encouraging sometimes fatal violence against opponents. If the statement is followed, which happens, it implies physical harm to, or in the worst case, death of opponents.	Hate crime	Threat (psychological violence)
Sanctions (repression)	Denunciation, detention, fines, imprisonment	Hate crime	Economic or legal violence
Physical violence	Assault, beating, rape, murder.	Hate crime	Physical violence

Modified from Zeitzoff (2023).

As described by Zeitzoff (2023), nasty rhetoric works holistically where different types and expressions of nasty rhetoric do not happen in isolation, but tend to happen together and not necessarily sequentially, with more threatening and aggressive rhetoric happening alongside less aggressive rhetoric. In other words, more overt forms of hate can go hand in hand with implicit, subtle forms that link up to more overt forms, but also somewhat hide and disguise (cf. McIntosh, 2020). Since nasty politics and nasty rhetoric are umbrella concepts used in political science, scholarly understanding of the phenomena would inevitably draw on studies of hate speech and hate crime in other disciplines, e.g. to identify and explain motives, consequences and causalities.

Social psychology research on hate, described as a strong, intense, enduring, and destructive emotional experience intended to harm or eliminate its targets physically, socially, or symbolically (Fischer et al., 2018; Martínez et al., 2022a; Opotow & McClelland, 2007), finds a causal relationship between hate and aggression in terms of aggressive tendencies and hurting behaviour experienced towards specific individuals and entire out-groups (Martínez et al., 2022b). What starts with different expressions of hate (insults and accusations) soon escalates to different forms of threats (intimidations and incitements), one more aggressive than the other, and further to psychological, economic, legal or physical violence.

Deprecation, i.e. insults and accusations to make claims about action, may be a precursor to more targeted violent rhetoric and action, and act as a provocation and incitement to addressees and

bystanders as much as emotional sentiments that wound the targets of a speech, text, picture or video. As stated by Klemperer (2002, p. 15), “words can be like tiny doses of arsenic: they are swallowed unnoticed, appear to have no effect, and then after a little time the toxic reaction sets in after all”, which has also been described as the *banality of evil* (Arendt, 1971). As for violence, “speech can and does inspire crime” (Cohen-Almagor et al., 2018, p. 38; Schweppe & Perry, 2021). As stated by Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2021: “Online violence does not stay online. Online violence leads to real world violence”.⁴ Thus, hate speech and nasty rhetoric can also be seen as a type of ‘terrorism’ or trigger event of terrorism, i.e. any intentional act directed against life or related entities causing a common danger (Chetty & Alathur, 2018; Piazza, 2020a, 2020b). In the event of nasty rhetoric instigated by politicians in power, we can speak of ‘state terrorism’ (cf. Zeitzoff, 2023).

As for nasty politics and rhetoric as a precursor of political violence, Piazza (2020b) analysed terrorism and hate speech data for about 150 countries globally in the period 2000–2017. He found that hate speech by political figures boosts domestic terrorism, defined as “the deliberate, premeditated use of violence, or the threat of violence, by nonstate actors that is politically motivated and is intended to influence a wider audience beyond individuals affected directly by the attack” (Piazza, 2020b, note 1). Such domestic terrorism is mediated through increased political polarisation caused by political hate speech (cf. Klein, 2020). Donald Trump is a well-known user of nasty rhetoric targeting several groups in society, promoting hatred and violence (McIntosh, 2020; Valcore et al., 2023), for which he has been called “insulter in chief” (Vargiu et al., 2024). He is not the only world leader accused of publicly denigrating people beyond politicians for their racial, ethnic or religious identities, or for their political opinions (Piazza, 2020a, 2020b), but he actively incited violent riots at the storming of Capitolium on 6 January 2021 (Zeitzoff, 2023), and he violates numerous democratic norms such as legitimacy and accountability in delivery and content of his speeches (e.g., Jamieson & Taussig, 2017; Ross & Rivers, 2020).

2.1. Nasty Rhetoric and Far-Right Populism

Since nasty rhetoric is designed to invoke emotions, both among followers and targets, it aligns with notions of persuasion that stress pathos as an equally important part of rhetoric as logos and ethos respectively (Olson, 2020). Populist rhetoric operates in a world where it is not required for “every statement be logically defensible” (McBath & Fisher, 1969, p. 17). On the contrary, populist rhetoric can be rather incoherent (Slotta, 2020) and purposefully using vague concepts (Fridlund, 2025).

Emotions are central in nasty rhetoric, thus in the structural and affective changes that underlie populist mobilisation and the polarisation of everyday insecurities in general (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022). Emotional rhetoric is central in reproduction of structural power and power relations between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and key in a Foucauldian sense of *emotional governance* (Durnová, 2018), including techniques of surveillance, control, and manipulation for leaders to govern emotions through cultural and institutional processes. Emotional governance “affords individuals with a sense of what is regarded as appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and the circumstances in which certain emotions (e.g. fear, hatred, and contempt) become acceptable” (Crawford, 2014, p. 536). It pays attention to collective emotions as patterns of relationships and belonging (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022).

Entrenching an ‘us vs. them’ narrative, populists, be they left or right, refer to a homogeneous ‘people’ as an ingroup, as a counterpoint to the ‘elite’, the outgroup. This draws on poststructuralist theories of hegemonic discourses, that every concept, all meaning-making, is defined in a process of constitutive antagonism (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). To Laclau and Mouffe, antagonism refers to all possible meanings of a concept that are excluded when one meaning become hegemonic. Both the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ are constituted simultaneously and they are dependent on each other. But given that there are always several contingent meanings, their configurations are arbitrary and the result of given historical power configuration.

⁴ Interview in *Swedish Television*, 10 December 2021. Quote at 1:04:03. <https://bit.ly/36rVAYf>

Aiming towards a radical democracy theory, addressing the gaps of liberal and deliberative democracy theory, the works of Mouffe (e.g. 2000, 2005a) are important for socialist strategy to use populist discourse (Mouffe, 2013). However, it has also influenced the European far-right populists in developing their strategies of the culture war on the hegemonic 'left-liberal conspiracy'. As claimed by Mouffe (2005b) herself, the far-right use populism to shape a hegemonic discourse based on identity, not on class. Mouffe (1997, 2000) share analysis of the challenges to liberal and deliberative democracy with nazi philosopher Carl Schmitt (1976, 1985), about the tension between the liberal logic on 'difference' and the democratic logic on 'equivalence', implying that unitary equality and equity can never be fulfilled without a possibility of inequality and inequity. Equality and equity can only be fulfilled in democracies, for the people that belong to a specific polity, the demos. From this analysis, Schmitt argued for autocracy and that pluralism of ideas would shatter people and the state, and thus that democracy is only for a homogenic people, where the state has to differentiate between 'friends' and 'enemies', and potentially 'eliminate or eradicate heterogeneity'. On the contrary, Mouffe (2013) argues that a more radical democracy must be developed that can deal with pluralism in an agonistic, not an antagonistic, way.

Following the path of Schmitt, far-right populist rhetoric, narratives and discourse is based on emotional appeals to the homogenous good 'people' and the exclusion of the corrupt 'elite', who are routinely blamed and scapegoated for perceived grievances and social ills (Aalberg & de Vreese, 2016; Hunger & Paxton, 2022). Narratives of 'disaster' or 'anxiety' are important for the success of far-right populists (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022). These refer to a fantasy of a constant crisis, rather than an actual one of the nation, caused by long-term mismanagement by a corrupt 'elite' (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022; Ketola & Odmalm, 2023; Abraham, 2024). Far-right populist leaders portray themselves as the saviour of the nation and the 'people', while the 'elite' should be punished for their crimes against the 'people' (Mudde, 2004, 2017). While sometimes talking the language of the 'people', populists are not responsive to popular will. Their ideology is based on a unitary and non-pluralist vision of society's public interest, and they themselves are rightful interpreters of what is in the public interest – a putative will of the 'people' (Arato & Cohen, 2017; Caramani, 2017; Mudde, 2017), systematically presenting misinformation (Törnberg & Chueri, 2025). They act on their own will and invite their audience to identify with them (White, 2023).

2.2. Nasty Rhetoric and Hate Speech in Climate Politics

Analysing nasty rhetoric in the case of climate politics may lead us to think of political rhetoric and environmental rhetoric, where rhetoric is used instead of or in combination with rational reasoning to persuade opponents and the public (e.g. Myerson & Rydin, 1996; Higgins, 2008; Kuyper, 2009; Dryzek & Lo, 2015). Walsh (2016) argue for use of more rhetoric in climate-science debates, sine it would bring "more sensitivity to the political frame within which every debate takes place and how that frame shapes deliberation" (p. 1). However, nasty rhetoric is not about persuading opponents in a public or political debate or deliberation, it is about using hate speech and sometimes hate crime to silence opponents in the debate in line with the political theory of Carl Schmitt.

Research on hate speech in climate politics has mainly focused on its presence in social media, the combination of climate-denialism and anti-feminism, and hate campaigns towards specific targets, such as climate activists and and climate journalists.

In early 2019, congress woman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and senator Edward Markey presented the *Green New Deal* to the US House and Senate, with a goal to propose environmentally beneficial economic and infrastructural changes that could boost the US economy. In response, then President Donald Trump openly called Ocasio-Cortez a "nasty woman", and also said that many of the newly elected congress women should "go back to their countries" (Miller & Bloomfield, 2022). This shows the power dynamics circling not only female politicians but also climate policy. Combining climate denial and anti-feminism, Donald Trump and many other male politicians also directed and instigated hate and treats towards Greta Thunberg, the figurehead number one of the

climate justice movements (Andersson, 2021; Vowles & Hultman, 2021a; White, 2022; Arce-García et al., 2023).

Polarising rhetoric used to frame contesting views of singular political advocates and deniers of climate change have been studied extensively (e.g. Eubanks, 2015; Sharman & Howarth, 2017; Bsumek et al. 2019; Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022; Pandey, 2024), but research on more widespread nasty rhetoric in climate politics is sparse. Knight and Greenberg (2011) analysed adversarial framing for discrediting reputation of Canadian social movement/counter-movement relations. Both sides discredited their opponents based on combinations of practices, moral character, competence and qualifications, social associations, and real versus apparent motivations.

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

2.3. Motivation and Normalisation of Nasty Rhetoric, Hate Speech and Hate Crime

The increasing use of hate speech, hate crime and nasty rhetoric in politics has led to a surge of research on the causes and motives for such 'evil' acts. Findings converge that motives can be found on different levels and that any plausible explanation should be based on a systems approach (Dunbar, 2022a; Zeitzoff, 2023; Nai & Maier, 2024; Walther & Rice, 2025). On the macro-level, usually studied in political science and communication studies, institutional, ideological and political motives are addressed. Meso-level motives are analysed in sociology, anthropology and social psychology, addressing the role of social relations and culture. Micro-level motives and causes are analysed in psychology and psychiatry, and most recently neurobiology, addressing personality traits and their relations to (mal)functions of the brain.

From a political science perspective, nasty rhetoric is a tactic used systematically to strategically entrench polarisation and political divides between ingroups and outgroups. The aim of the ingroup perpetrators is to denigrate, deprecate, delegitimise, dehumanise and hurt their political enemies in the outgroup to make them silent (Zeitzoff, 2023). In short, research in political science and communication studies suggests that some politicians use nasty rhetoric with hate speech and hate crime (i) to grab media attention and attention of targeted groups, (ii) to be persuasive and strike an emotional chord and solidify ingroup members, and (iii) pave the way for democratic breakdown by silencing opponents or alleged enemies (see e.g. Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Schulz et al., 2020; Dimant, 2023; Zeitzoff, 2023). This suggests that there is something rational behind the use of nasty rhetoric.

Recent research in political psychology indicates that, compared to mainstream politicians, populist politicians score higher on dark triad personality traits, i.e. Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Visser et al., 2017; Nai & Maier, 2018, 2024; Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019), and that they are more inclined to systematically engage hate speech and hate crime. Machiavellian individuals are cynical, manipulative and lack morals. Typical narcissists are exhibitionists who are arrogant, exploitative and entitled, with oversized egos, while at the same time, their self-esteem is vulnerable, and they are highly sensitive to criticism. Finally, non-pathological psychopathy features low levels of empathy, conscientiousness and anxiety, along with high levels of impulsivity and thrill-seeking behaviour (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Furnham et al., 2013). This is in line with sociological research on character structure and social relations of neoliberal capitalism (Short, 2016) and cultural studies of neoliberal discourse (Alemán, 2024). They suggest that the dominant character structures, certain psychological functions – defences, affect and identification – and mechanisms to produce

subjectivities characterising neoliberal capitalism, may offer insight into contemporary far-right populism (cf. Hamburg, 1991; Kohut, 2011; Lacan, 2002; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2024).

While dark triad personality traits could explain the ignition of nasty rhetoric with hate speech and hate crime in a specific policy area or polity (cf. Visser et al., 2017; Nai & Maier, 2018, 2024; Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019), sociologists argue that the expansion and continuation of hate and threats rhetoric by followers cannot be fully explained by pathological personality traits. The production and propagation of hate messages on social media are not individual acts, not uncorrelated, not disorganised, but part of various social processes and systems (Walther, 2025). It is found that the motive for nasty rhetoric is not only to do emotional harm to the targets or to mobilise fellow offenders. Mobilised followers spread hate and threats in social media for reasons of social gratification, such as (Walther, 2025):

- acquiring social approval to fit in,
- getting attention and admiration to sustain social support, and
- entertaining each other and sharing in the fun of disparaging other people.

Cheng et al. (2017) found that you don't have to be evil to become a troll and post denigrating, deprecating or dehumanising messages on social media. They found two triggers that can turn anyone into an online troll: being in a really bad mood and seeing other people posting hostile messages. When legitimised by 'evil' political leaders, the darkness of denigration and deprecation seep into the mainstream and become habitually collectivised – normalised – and because the opportunity to participate in a collective that allows people to feel good about themselves by being superior to others can, for many, be almost too good to resist. Being exposed to hate speech not targeting yourself reduces people's ability to recognise the offensive character of such language (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020). Through a process of desensitisation, empathy is replaced by intergroup contempt as a dominant response to others. The greater the desensitisation of the individual towards hate speech, the greater the persuasive capacity of the message and the prejudice towards the group targeted by hatred. In short, the individual becomes desensitised, normalises hate speech, and transforms it into resentment, increasing prejudice and violence towards the subjects of hate (Soral et al., 2018).

Changes in the media landscape, with increasing use of social media, has enabled a constant and decentralised use of myths and imageries that essentialise and reify socio-cultural conflict (Doerr, 2017). Hence, far-right groups use social media to diminish the distance between political leaders and individuals, often by enabling a normalisation of behaviours and attitudes that would not be considered acceptable in the physical world, as online information is often non-censored and non-hierarchical (Bjola & Pamment, 2019; Helbing et al., 2019). Through social media, far-right populists can prey on an already precarious sociopolitical context by deepening efforts to misinform and disinform citizens, communities, organisations, and voters (Agius et al., 2021; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022).

Szanto (2018) also stresses the collectivisation in habitualisation of hatred. Drawing on classical phenomenology, recent social-scientific research and analytic philosophy of emotions, he argues that affective intentionality of hatred (Szanto, 2018):

- has an indeterminate affective focus leading to a collectivisation of the targets,
- is short of a determinate affective focus, where haters derive the extreme affective powers of the attitude not in reaction to any specific features or actions of the targets or from some phenomenological properties of the attitude but, rather, from the commitment to the attitude itself, and
- involves a certain negative social dialectic, robustly reinforcing itself and becomes entrenched as a shared habitus in a commitment to hate with others.

This aligns with analyses of hate speech effects using the ritual model of communication, illustrating a reinforcement of racist attitudes and disparate treatment of minorities that occurs with the repetitive use of hate speech (Calvert, 1997).

This behaviour has been described as a *weird manner of sport* (Walther & Rice, 2025) that requires no training or ability, with masses of cheering spectators who applaud the players with likes, hearts, upvotes, retweets, cross-platform links, and fans, many of whom join the players on the field as well. But what types of people engage in such weird sport for fun?

While sociologists attribute social processes as a basis for people to join the weird sport of nasty rhetoric, psychologists stress the need to understand and address the risk of epigenetic expression of outgroup hate and violence as a socially mediated phenomena related to culture and ideology, as well as a phenomenon caused by psychopathological and neurobiological factors in the perpetration of hate violence by individuals and groups (Dunbar, 2022a). The latter involves the sequencing of specific brain-behaviour processes that mobilise aggressive urges and direct these impulses against specific individuals, groups or institutions.

Pathological worry is one of the factors that can induce emotional problems, problems of an interpersonal nature, and social-relational problems (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Macatee et al. 2015; Ruscio et al., 2015; Di Maggio et al., 2017). Pace et al. (2018) found that pathological worry in adolescence is a positive predictor of hating, with cognitive distortions as a mediator, confirming previous research exploring potential pathways that could link pathological worry to the expression of aggression (Brosschot & Thayer, 2004; Zappulla et al., 2014; Lievaart et al., 2017). The hate shown by adolescents on- and offline could be considered a form of compensation for one's own anguish and frustration derived from pathological worry. Pace et al. (2018) suggest that the social-cognitive aspect is predominant, as well as directly connected to the phenomenon of haters, and particularly to distortions that lead adolescents to think of the worst in a variety of circumstances, attributing hostile intentions to others and interpreting situations in the worst possible way.

Psychopathological factors can also influence followers in nasty rhetoric (Nai et al., 2023). Different persuasive strategies work on different personalities, and persuasive appeals that are tailored to one's personality are more effective (Hirsh et al., 2012). Dark traits are particularly associated with populism (Galais & Rico, 2021; Pruysers, 2021; Hofstetter & Filsinger, 2024). A recent study by Isom and Hubbard (2024) suggests that dark triad traits may predispose whites to certain beliefs and perceptions. In particular, they suggest an association between these personality components and trust in conservative media, which is known to increase whites' feelings of habitus angst (Isom et al., 2021) and increase political divides (Klein, 2020). Such personality traits may also increase the likelihood of feeling various forms of angst, lending insight into differences between white people with these perceptions. Findings of Isom and Hubbard (2024) also suggest that the pre-dispositional influence dark triad traits may play in the intricate associations between habitus angst (such as white victim ideology), far-right extremist beliefs, media, orthodox norms (such as patriarchal gender normative beliefs), and negative outcomes, including online aggressive behaviours. The current results suggest dark triad traits play a substantial, though varied, role within these complex relationships. Neuropsychiatric research finds a possible relationship of human aggression to traumatic central nervous system injury and neurobiology (Dunbar, 2017, 2022b). Abnormalities in brain function, structure and biochemistry in the fear learning system of prefrontal cortex, hippocampus and amygdala can lead to difficulties in regulating social emotional action (Andrewes & Jenkins, 2019; Harnett et al., 2020).

3. Method and Materials

3.1. Qualitative Case Study

This paper analyses the nature of systematic and strategic use of hate speech and hate crime, i.e. nasty rhetoric, with a focus on climate politics.

The research is undertaken as a qualitative case study of Swedish climate politics. This case is chosen for several reasons. Increasing media coverage of the phenomenon in newspapers, magazines and radio programmes of toxic language in the public climate debate indicates that it is a growing concern in Sweden and Swedish public policy. More importantly, as a case study to provide insights

and knowledge of relevance for an international audience, Sweden is currently undergoing several changes in politics and governance noticed also by scholars internationally. Sweden has until recently been considered:

1. a stronghold of liberal democracy since World War II, able to develop and maintain a green and equitable welfare state, but is now showing signs of autocratisation and the end of Swedish exceptionalism regarding far-right populism (e.g. Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019; Rothstein, 2023; Silander, 2024; V-Dem Institute, 2024, 2025),
2. an international role model in climate policy and governance, but is currently implementing new policies increasing GHG emissions (Matti et al., 2021; Widerberg et al., 2024), and
3. the home of strong social movements advocating ambitious climate policy, particularly with Greta Thunberg and *Fridays for Future* (de Moor et al., 2020), which are now increasingly criticised and threatened (Berglund et al., 2024).

The paper explores the use of nasty rhetoric by politicians and their supporters from all quarters, climate advocates and climate sceptics, as found in written texts, photos and audio-visual material. While previous research indicated that nasty rhetoric is a practice of the right-wing and far-right populists, it may well be that the political opposition, the advocates of strong climate policy, also uses nasty rhetoric. The study focuses primarily on the use of nasty rhetoric from early 2022 and onwards, when it became a topic in Swedish media. To interpret the more general nature of nasty rhetoric, empirical results are reflected upon in light of recent insights from research on hate speech and hate crime in neurobiology, psychology, sociology and political science.

3.1.1. A Right-Wing Populist Turn in Swedish Politics

Over the past two decades, far-right nativist populist party SD has grown steadily and increased their votes in every election. In 2006, they gained 2.9 % of the votes, which was a doubling compared to the 2002 elections. In the 2010 election, SD of 5.7 % of the votes and won seats in the Swedish Riksdag, and in the 2014 election the party received 12.9 %, which made it clear that Sweden was no longer exceptional in the Nordics, not having had an electorally successful radical right-wing party (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019). However, SD had little direct influence on Swedish politics, since all other parties in the Riksdag rejected to collaborate or negotiate with SD.

The 2022 elections to the Riksdag marks a shift of Swedish democracy. Then, SD won 20.5 % of the votes and 73 out of 349 seats, becoming the second largest party in the Riksdag after the *Social Democrats* (S). This progress made SD gain formal powers in the Riksdag, holding the chairs in the committees of justice, labour market, foreign affairs and industry, and having direct influence over the government in most policy areas. Bargaining on who was to form a government for the 2022–2026 term resulted in the *Tidö Agreement* (Tidö parties, 2022) between SD, M, KD and L. SD supports the Tidö government, under the condition that SD takes part in decisions in six policy areas to undergo a rapid paradigm shift: climate and energy, criminality, economic growth and household economy, education, migration and integration, and public health; of which criminality, migration and climate change are deemed the most important (Rothstein, 2023). SD holds no seats in the cabinet but has political staff in the PM's Office within the Government Offices of Sweden. According to the Tidö Agreement, SD holds tangible powers but is not accountable for the government's decisions. In all, the Tidö quartet holds majority with 176 seats in the Riksdag, while the opposition, consisting of S, the *Centre Party* (C), the *Green Party* (MP), and the *Left Party* (V), holds 173 seats.

When formed in 1988, SD was extremist and violent rooted in neo-fascism, but with the election of current party leader Jimmie Åkesson in 2005, SD tried to show a more respectable façade to gain legitimacy (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019; Widfeldt, 2023; Enocksson, 2025). Other factors explaining the rise and growth of SD are (i) the decline of class politics in Sweden, (ii) a processes of post-politics with a convergence caused by a double move toward the centre by both S and M during the Alliance government, leaving voters confused about policy alternatives, and (iii) the growing

salience of socio-cultural politics, particularly the politicisation of the immigration issue, and (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019).

The refugee migration wave in 2014–2016, in which Sweden next to Serbia and Kosovo received most asylum seekers per capita in the EU, led Sweden to radically shift its migration policy (Sager & Öberg, 2017). An interim legislation with focus on deportability came out of a context discursively discussed as one of a ‘crisis’, a ‘systems collapse’ where Sweden had ‘reached its limits’, built on racist and nativist concerns that influenced all parties in the Riksdag but C, MP and V. In the beginning of the migration wave, some weeks before the elections in 2014, then PM Fredrik Reinfeldt (M) appealed to the Swedish people to “open their hearts” to migrants, showing a liberal attitude to migration. In the following elections, the ruling Alliance government lost power and a red–green government of S and MP was formed. After losing the election, M turned back to its more conservative origin, with a more restrictive position on migration as well as a revitalised focus on their traditional policy domains such as economics, law and order, security and defence (Enocksson, 2025). This did not help in the 2018 elections, which gave S and MP continued trust to govern. In the meantime, SD continued to combine populism, anti-pluralism and authoritarianism with nativism – the longing for a homogenous nation state – and propose populist and illiberal policies in many areas, primarily migration but also social, justice and environmental policy (Hellström, 2023). Yet, other parties refused to negotiate with SD, treating it as pariah. The future party leader of M, Ulf Kristersson, promised in a televised meeting with a well-known survivor of Auschwitz, who had long since warned about the creeping assimilation in Sweden to the far-right extremist rhetoric and politics, to never ever collaborate with SD.

After the elections in 2018 something happened. The former liberal–conservative Alliance between M, C, L and KD was broken, with C taking a more social-liberal position in most policy areas than M, KD and L who turned more conservative and neoliberal, becoming more restrictive on migration, more tough on law and order, more vocal on Sweden joining NATO, and more vocal in advocating nuclear power (Enocksson, 2025). C had always had a completely different positions on climate change, climate policy and energy policy, advocating renewable energy, whilst M, KD and L are obsessed with nuclear power as the one and only solution to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This became obvious during the implementation of the energy policy agreement met by S, M, MP, C and KD in 2016. V did not support it because it focused too much on nuclear power, while L and SD did not give support because of too little focus on nuclear power. In 2018, just before the elections, KD party leader Ebba Busch announced their support of new nuclear power, a position which was not agreed in the party according to KD’s energy policy spokesperson.⁵ This led to both M and KD leave the agreement in early 2019. In 2019, Busch also announced ending the quarantine for SD, that KD was willing to negotiate with SD. Shortly after, also Kristersson announced that he was willing to negotiate with SD, rhetorically claiming that “SD is a party like the others”.⁶ But according to recent studies of the Swedish far-right, SD is a party like others only to those who share the moral values of SD, assigning essentialist value to their key political concepts. SD tends 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; authors highlight). In other words, parties claiming that SD is just like other parties are loathing the norms of

⁵ Article in green magazine *Sveriges Natur*, 21 January 2020.

<https://www.sverigesnatur.org/aktuellt/striden-om-karnkraften/#:~:text=Den%2010%20december%202019%20l%C3%A4mnade%2028M%29%20och%2028KD%29,energi%C3%B6verenskommelsen%20togs%20den%2014%20augusti%202018%2C%20inf%C3%B6r%20valet>

⁶ Article in business newspaper *Dagens Industri*, 4 December 2019.

<https://www.di.se/nyheter/kristersson-efter-historiska-motet-sd-ar-ett-parti-som-andra/>

liberal and deliberative democracy as much as SD, who hail Victor Orbán's Hungary, the worst example of autocratisation in the world (Meléndez & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021; Mudde, 2021; Boese et al., 2022; Silander, 2024; V-Dem Institute, 2024, 2025), as a role model of democratic governance. In June 2025, Jimmie Åkesson rhetorically made an official excuse for SD's previous antisemitism in what can be seen as an attempt to show a respectable façade towards the new party leader of L, paving the way for their support of Åkesson as a potential prime minister after the elections in 2026. Party leaders of M, KD and L are cheering, while critics say that such an excuse is only legitimate if and when SD turns away entirely from all kinds of racism, pointing to the fact that other leading SD politicians claim that SD has the same ideology today as in 1988.⁷ As described in a recent white book commissioned by SD, printed in only 100 copies and not available online, SD politicians have changed their language, but not their ideological roots.⁸

There are good indications of the Tidö parties all taking a more autocratic stance before the elections in 2022. One important factor is the role of *Timbro*, a libertarian thinktank owned by the *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise*. *Timbro* is a member of the *Atlas Network*, an international network of libertarian thinktanks that has orchestrated libertarian autocratisation of many democracies around the world. Several studies show links between both ideology and political agency of far-right populists around and libertarian philosophy and neoliberal capitalist economics and the 'There is no Alternative' narratives used to support it (Bakker, 2003; Short, 2016; Goldwag, 2017; Séville, 2017). Looking at the Tidö government, the current Swedish PM and current minister of justice, both from M, used to work at *Timbro*. The former CEO of *Timbro*, Benjamin Dousa, responsible for nasty rhetoric campaigning towards climate activists and journalists, was recently appointed Swedish minister of development aid and trade. Eight other Tidö ministers, including the climate minister, were educated at the *Sture Academy*, *Timbro's* cutting-edge education in libertarian ideology, politics and opinion formation. But as claimed in a recent analysis of the history of the Swedish far-right, the turning of M, KD and L towards far-right populism is in many ways a turning back to their origins, where particularly M had many leading members sympathising with the German nazis (Enocksson, 2025).

Reviewing the Tidö government's first years in power, *Civil Rights Defenders* (2023), *United Nations Association of Sweden* (2023) and Gustavsson (2024) identifies several signs of autocratisation in Sweden and reasons for concern related to the strong influence of SD on the government. Such concerns have been raised also by democracy scholars (Rothstein, 2023; Ardin, 2024; Silander, 2024; V-Dem Institute, 2024; von Malmberg, 2024a). Due to the success of SD in the elections 2018 and 2022, and particularly its success in setting the agenda for the Tidö government, Sweden is currently one of the strongholds of far-right populists in the EU (Widfeldt, 2023). But the success of SD is dependent also on the agency of the other Tidö parties, particularly M, who legitimised SD as a political party despite (or thanks to) its far-right nativist populist stance since its close relationship to libertarian capitalism.

3.1.2. From Climate Policy Role Model to International Scapegoat

In 2017, the Swedish Riksdag adopted with support of all parties but SD a new climate policy framework, including:

1. A Climate Act with a legally binding target that Sweden should have net-zero GHG emissions by 2045, as well as interim targets;

⁷ Editorial in *Dagens Nyheter*, 28 June 2025, <https://www.dn.se/ledare/lilian-sjolund-sd-bad-judarna-om-ursakt-nar-sager-partiet-forlat-till-muslimerna/>

⁸⁸ Commentary in *Dagens Nuheter*, 1 July 2025, <https://www.dn.se/kultur/ola-larsmo-sverigedemokraterna-slapper-vitbok-men-overger-aldrig-sina-rotter/>

2. A requirement in the *Climate Act* for the government to present to the Riksdag a *Climate Action Plan* with policies and measures to reach the targets, at the latest the calendar year after national elections; and
3. Establishment of the *Swedish Climate Policy Council*, an independent and interdisciplinary body of climate scientists, to evaluate the alignment of the government's policies with the 2045 climate target.

Sweden's GHG emissions in total decreased by approximately 37 % from 1990 to 2022 and a decoupling of emissions and economic growth began in 1992, when Sweden as the second country in the world introduced carbon dioxide taxation. This long-term trend of emissions reductions made a U-turn when the Tidö government supported by SD entered office in 2022. With the Tidö Agreement, they advocated a radical change of Swedish climate policy and governance.

This was apparent with the state finance bill presented to the Riksdag only a few weeks after the Tidö government entered office⁹. They proposed to use one third of the budgetary reform space to reduce renewable energy quotas and carbon dioxide taxation for fossil fuels, estimated to increase emission by 10 %. This was also apparent in the first Riksdag debate between party leaders after the elections in 2022.¹⁰ Prime minister Kristersson in his introduction reduced climate policy to energy policy, putting great faith in new nuclear power. He also pointed at China – that it is more important that China reduces emissions than Sweden. In response, party leaders of S, C and MP stressed that Sweden's role as a pioneering country has been important in EU and global climate policy and should not be underestimated, and questioned that the Swedish government could lead EU negotiations on the *Fit for 55* package during its Presidency in the EU in spring 2023.

Financed by the oil and gas industry, *Atlas Network* and *Timbro* have orchestrated lobbying in Sweden and world-wide for decades¹¹, to initiate climate denying movements and cast doubt on climate science and climate policy, influence politicians, and attack climate activists (Ekberg & Pressfeldt, 2022; Walker, 2023). Timbro also approached SD to make them take on a sceptical position on climate change and climate policy. Initially championing environmentalism, being an important ingredient in 'blood and soil' narratives of social-nationalists, SD and other far-right populist parties began to deny climate change in the 2010s (Jylhä et al., 2020; Vihma et al., 2021), wanting to abort national as well as EU climate targets and climate policies.¹² SD is culturally and cognitively motivated by conflicting 'evil' beliefs of previous governments for decades, both S-led and M-led, why climate policy was purposefully included in the Tidö Agreement by SD (Rothstein, 2023; von Malmborg, 2024a, 2024b). Including climate policy in the agreement opened a window of opportunity for SD, the largest party in the Tidö quartet, to not only veto but dictate the government's climate policy. The situation is similar for all policy areas included in the Tidö Agreement, which effectively defines which policy areas that SD are to lead in order to support the government (Rothstein, 2023). Bargaining on finalising the Tidö climate action plan in 2023, SD now accepts the 2045 target but managed to reduce overall climate policy ambitions by deleting short- and medium-term targets and

⁹ <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/def2026cac0b4ef7acf4afeb988326ed/budgetpropositionen-for-2023-hela-dokumentet-prop.2022231-.pdf>

¹⁰ Party leader debate, 16 November 2022, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/partiledardebatt/eu-politisk-partiledardebatt_hac120221116pd/?pos=1774&autoplay=true

¹¹ The Atlas Network: Big Oil, Climate Disinformation and Constitutional Democracy. Research Seminar, University of Technology Sidney, 8 December 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlQOw6qpblY>

¹² Op-ed in *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 May 2024, <https://www.dn.se/kultur/kjell-vowles-sd-trollar-ocksa-om-klimatet-nu-vill-de-riva-upp-eus-klimatpakt/>

actions important for reaching long-term targets. The Tidö quartet focuses entirely on emission reductions by 2045, ignoring climate science saying that reducing every ton of GHG emitted from now to 2045 is what counts (Lahn, 2021).

Based on a combination of anti-establishment rhetoric, knowledge resistance and emotional communication of doubt, industrial/breadwinner masculinities and ethnonationalism, SD in close collaboration with the Tidö government, advocates more lax or even aborting climate policies (Hultman et al., 2019; Vowles & Hultman, 2021a; Ekberg & Pressfeldt, 2022)). They look back to a great national past during the oil-fuelled record years of the 1950s and 60s, when men had lifelong jobs in industry and sole access to society's positions of power. It is mainly white older men that support SD and are climate sceptics (Vowles & Hultman, 2021a).

In all, Tidö climate policy can be characterised as anti-climate action with increased GHG emissions. The climate action plan was initially welcomed by the *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise* and *Timbro*, but heavily criticised domestically by the political opposition, climate scientists, economists, government authorities, the environmental and social justice movement, business associations other than *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise*, citizens and editorial writers in leading national newspapers, for its lack of short- and medium-term domestic action, manipulation of information, and a large focus on new nuclear power and climate compensation in other countries (see also Ergon et al., 2025).¹³ The *Swedish Climate Policy Council* (2024) and *Swedish Environmental Protection Agency* (2024) claimed that Tidö policies lead to increases of annual GHG emissions, corresponding to more than 10 % of Sweden's total annual emissions, and that the climate action plan will not suffice for Sweden to reach the target on climate neutrality by 2045, nor Sweden's responsibilities in relation to EU's 2030 climate target.

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

¹³ See for instance article in *Dagens Nyheter* (Sweden's largest newspaper, independent liberal), <https://www.dn.se/sverige/ulf-kristersson-om-klimatet-karnkraft-viktigaste-atgarden/>; interview with the chair of the Swedish Climate Policy Council in *Svenska Dagbladet*, <https://www.svd.se/a/VPV2Al/klimatpolitiska-radet-klimatplanen-otillracklig>; statement on X/Twitter by Prof. Johan Rockström, director of *Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research*, <https://twitter.com/jrockstrom/status/1737888256149057692>; statement on Facebook by Dr. Mikael Karlsson, Associate professor in Climate leadership, <https://www.facebook.com/mikael.karlsson.3158/posts/pfbid02xuBEHVir9pH3zT9kmysSeD7EAUodsGkwLNREQKhZbP7KPKd4b3CdBjgsRmUVAZZ3l>; statement by *Swedish Association of Nature Conservation*, <https://www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/artiklar/en-klimathandlingsplan-utan-handling/>; editorial in *Dagens Nyheter*, <https://www.dn.se/ledare/regeringen-maste-ta-klimatkrisen-pa-samma-allvar-som-krigshotet/>; statement by Swedish leading green think tank *2030-Sekretariatet*, <https://www.2030sekretariatet.se/2030-sekretariatet-klimathandlingsplanen-en-gor-det-sjalv-julklapp/>

Besides domestic criticism, to which the *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise* and *Timbro* have joined in 2025 after changing position,¹⁴ Tidö climate policies were criticised also internationally, claiming that Sweden is losing its role as climate policy frontrunner and risk dragging the EU down with it.¹⁵ Due to the Tidö climate policies, Sweden dropped from number one to number eleven between 2021 and 2024 in the Climate Change Performance Index (Burck et al., 2024). The *European Commission* has rejected Sweden's application for SEK 40 billion funding from the EU Recovery Fund since Sweden will meet neither national nor EU climate targets for 2030.¹⁶ In March 2025, the international *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development* mentioned in its review of Sweden's environmental policies that "recent policy shifts, particularly in the transport sector, have put into question Sweden's ability to meet EU and domestic climate targets, with emissions projected to increase" (OECD, 2025). Summarising the extensive critique towards the Tidö climate policy, the lead editorial in Sweden's largest newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, stated in mid-June 2025 that "[i]t is clear that the government's policy is not an accident. It is a deliberate climate fiasco".¹⁷

3.2. Materials

Data on the use of insults, accusations etcetera in different fora was collected using qualitative text analysis of secondary written and audio-visual material from official policy documents, political debates, newspapers, magazines, blogs, television, radio etcetera (Appendix A).

Due to its wide reach and possibility of anonymity, social media provides important fora and channels for conveying hate speech and nasty rhetoric (Benkler et al., 2018; Olson, 2020; Agius et al., 2021; Tom Tong, 2025). Accusing Swedish established media of being left-liberal propaganda centres, SD and other nationalist right-wing groups have built their own ecosystem of digital media news sites, blogs, video channels and anonymous troll accounts in social media, which did not have to relate to the rules of press ethics (Vowles & Hultman, 2021b). It was recently revealed to the public by Swedish news media that SD's communications office, inspired by Donald Trump and directed by party leader Åkesson, runs a 'troll factory'. Using anonymous 'troll accounts' in social media, SD has deliberately and systematically spread misinformation and conspiracy theories to shape opinion, manipulate voters and incite outgroups by spreading insults, hate and threats.¹⁸ Åkesson has confirmed that SD use and will continue to use 'troll accounts', particularly on TikTok, to avoid getting public accounts reported and closed due to their frequent use of hate and threats. However, the anonymous use of nasty rhetoric of SD and others on social media platforms such as X/Twitter,

¹⁴ Interview with CEO of Confederation of Swedish Enterprise in *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 July 2025, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/svenskt-naringsliv-pausa-inte-den-grona-omstallningen/>

¹⁵ Articles in French newspaper *Le Monde*, 27 January 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/01/27/sweden-is-moving-backward-on-climate-policy_6470373_4.html, and pan-European newspaper *Euractiv*, 30 March 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/swedish-right-wing-government-puts-country-on-wrong-climate-path/>

¹⁶ Article in green liberal newspaper *Syre*, 22 July 2024, <https://tidningensyre.se/2024/22-juli-2024/sverige-enda-land-som-inte-sokt-pengar-fran-eus-aterhamtningsfond/>

¹⁷ Editorial, 18 June 2025, <https://www.dn.se/ledare/efter-fiaskot-har-ar-experterna-som-sagat-regeringens-klimatpolitik/>

¹⁸ See e.g. article in leftish newspaper *Dagens ETC*, 26 August 2022, <https://www.etc.se/inrikes/haer-aer-sd-s-hemliga-trollarme-faar-order-av-aakesson>, and undercover journalistic programme in national television *TV4*, 7 May 2024, <https://www.tv4play.se/program/cd339dace9a80bb132d9/kalla-fakta-undercover-i-trollfabriken>

Facebook or TikTok are not systematically analysed in this study. This choice was made deliberately because of the anonymity problem. The study does not particularly want to identify which kinds of insults, accusations etcetera are used or to what extent, but which persons and organisations actively taking part in the climate policy debate that send them, in which contexts and they are targeting.

To identify relevant political debates, I screened all debates in the Riksdag archive from January 2022 to August 2024. I found one party leader debate and twelve interpellation debates, where members of the Riksdag debate with the responsible minister. These are video recorded and transcribed and available at the Riksdag webpage. In all, 13 debates on climate policy and related issues were held from November 2022 to May 2024. In addition, two party leader debates and one debate of top candidates for the 2024 EU elections sent in Swedish public service television and radio were found.

News articles, essays, editorials and op-eds in newspapers, magazines and blogs were identified through Boolesk searches during April–August 2024 and May–June 2025 in *Retriever Mediearkivet*¹⁹, the largest media archive in the Nordic countries covering more than 1 000 newspapers, magazines etcetera. Searches were made using the terms presented in Table 2 in different combinations together with ‘climate’, such as climate AND hate, climate AND Sweden Democrats, and climate AND populism. Some terms, like antidemocratic, sabotage/saboteur and terrorism/terrorists, were included since such accusations on climate activists were widely discussed in national media in late 2023 and early 2024. I also screened programmes in television, radio and podcasts, searching webpages of state-owned and privately owned national television and radio using the search terms ‘climate politics’ and ‘climate activism’. The search terms chosen, addressing particularly hateful and threatening words, may have restricted identification of more normal kinds of rhetoric. However, the written data sources often put the use of nasty language in context, which makes it possible to also analyse sequencing of rhetoric and if nasty rhetoric was used alone or together with less nasty language.

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

Accuse/accusation	Delegitimate/ delegitimise	Hate	Nazi	Terrorist
Activism/-t	Democracy/ democratic	Journalism/-t	Populism/populist	Sweden Democrats
Aggression/ aggressive	Demon/demonise	Legitimacy/ legitimate	Repression/ repressive	The Cry [#]
Antidemocratic	Elite/elitism	Liar	Roadblock	Threat
Climate	Far-right	Liberal	Saboteur/sabotage	Violence/violent

[#] The Cry, in Swedish “Klägget”, is foul language for the “elite”, used by populists as well as advocates of deliberative democracy, see e.g. www.klagget.nu.

As for newspapers, magazines and blogs, editorials, op-eds and articles commenting Tidö nasty climate politics were found in left, green, social democrat, liberal, conservative and far-right media. In total, 142 editorials, op-eds, news articles, blogs, social media posts, TV programmes, and radio

¹⁹ <https://www.retrievergroup.com/sv/product-mediearkivet>

programmes were identified, showing, reporting or discussing the use of hateful rhetoric in Swedish climate politics between June 2021 and April 2025.

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

In these altogether 157 pieces of written, visual and audio-visual material, different expressions of insults, uncivil hate and threats and actual violence were identified and coded in relation to the typology of nasty rhetoric suggested by Zeitzoff (2023) and expanded in Table 1. Each expression was also coded with reference to sender, partisanship (or organisational belonging if not a politician) of the sender, position in the party/organisation of the sender, target, the context (if it was a firsthand expression or a response to a previous civil or uncivil rhetoric), and finally forum used for communication. Coded data is provided in Appendix B.

Regarding research ethics, names of individual persons uttering insults, accusations etcetera are mentioned if they themselves, as official, politically elected or appointed persons, have chosen to use hate speech or hate crime in public and are identified in publicly available news media or social media. Non-politically elected or appointed persons are anonymised. Since nasty rhetoric is not only used by anonymous trolls it matters who said what and who did what, especially if uttered by political leaders in the government or the Riksdag. Think of the research on nasty rhetoric of Donald Trump: What message would it convey if it didn’t mention his name? However, some scholars may have chosen to anonymise the senders. The approach to name politicians was discussed internally in the university, and it was concluded that no approval was needed from the Swedish research ethics board.

4. Exploring Nasty Rhetoric in Swedish Climate Politics

A leading Swedish newspaper recently described Swedish climate politics as “a musty rant with accusations of betrayal, sin and devil pacts”.²⁰ This section presents results regarding the use of insults, accusations, intimidations, incitements etcetera in Swedish climate politics. As will be shown with illustrative examples in section 4.1, hateful and threatening rhetoric is used by politicians from all Tidö parties, also by the prime minister, as well as their climate sceptic, libertarian or far-right extremist supporters, all advocating a radical degradation of Swedish climate policies. But uncivil rhetoric, including insults and accusations, is not only used by far-right and right-wing leaders and supporters. It is used also by oppositional politicians, climate scientists, climate journalists and activists in climate movement organisations, all opposing the Tidö climate policies. Illustrative examples are presented in section 4.2. A full account of insults, accusations, intimidations, incitement and different types violence committed by both camps is presented in Appendix B.

Before presenting examples of insults, accusations, intimidations, state repression etcetera in Swedish climate politics, it is worth stressing that every political speech and debate does not include hate or threats. The first party leader debate after elections in 2022²¹ started off with rather normal rhetoric. The prime minister and party leaders of KD and L initially claimed that climate policy is a priority policy area, but party leader for SD didn’t mention climate change in his initial speech. Prime

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

²¹ Party leader debate, 16 November 2022, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/partiledardebatt/eu-politisk-partiledardebatt_hac120221116pd/?pos=1774&autoplay=true

minister Kristersson in his introduction reduced climate policy to energy policy, putting great faith in new nuclear power. He also pointed at China – that it is more important that China reduces emissions than Sweden.²² And, he lied about who decided to close down four nuclear power plants a couple of years before the elections. In response, party leaders of S, C, V and MP claimed that the Tidö climate policy was unambitious, full of words but no action and thus being incoherent. They also stressed that Sweden's role as a pioneering country has been important in EU and global climate policy and should not be underestimated, and questioned if the Tidö government could lead EU negotiations on the *Fit for 55* package during its Presidency in the EU in spring 2023. But halfway through the debate, things changed when SD's party leader started to talk about climate change and insulted and accused the opposition.

4.1. Tidö Politicians and Supporting Climate Sceptics as Offenders

4.1.1. Insults

Insults are the mildest type of nasty rhetoric and can include harassment, ridicule and caricature, but also hyperbole. Insults of climate scientists, journalists, activists and oppositional politicians are made outspoken by the prime minister and cabinet ministers, party leaders from all Tidö parties, press secretaries and climate policy spokespersons in political debates, press conferences and social media. Insults are also made by Timbro and in editorials in far-right media.

A telling insult for the mode of Swedish climate politics was made by SD party leader Jimmie Åkesson in the first Riksdag party leader debate in November 2022, just weeks after the Tidö government entered office. He claimed that the previous S-MP government as well as C and V are “emotional” on climate policy, “not basing it on facts”, and that everything is about the “children and what children think”.²³ In a similar vein, prime minister Ulf Kristersson (M), rhetorically insulted the previous S-MP government and its climate policy when the Tidö parties presented their climate action plan in December 2023, claiming that the red–green “symbol politics is now replaced by things that have a real effect”.²⁴ These claims, not backed by evidence of any kind, were used in the beginning of the debate, setting the rhetorical tone of Tidö climate politics.

In preparing its climate action plan, the Tidö government organised a national climate meeting in mid-June 2023, and a series of ‘open afterwork meetings’ in different cities to collect views and suggestions for the climate action plan. But in breach of the Tidö agreement –saying that civil society should be included in consultations on climate policy – climate scientists and the environmental and climate justice movement, e.g. *Greenpeace*, *Fridays for Future* and *Extinction Rebellion*²⁵, were not invited. According to the government, their voices and opinions were “not relevant”. In a similar vein, prime minister Kristersson and SD's climate policy spokesperson, Martin Kinnunen, dismissed the scientifically based critique of the climate action plan presented by the Swedish Climate Policy Council as “just an opinion”, which the Tidö government did not need to care about.

²² Ibid., speech No. 1.

²³ Party leader debate, Swedish Riksdag, 16 November 2022, speech No. 63, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/partiledardebatt/eu-politisk-partiledardebatt_hac120221116pd/

²⁴ Analysis of the Tidö parties' press briefing on the climate action plan, *TV4*, 21 December 2023, <https://www.tv4.se/artikel/5MenofU2MHfkzfa4yGT6YF/analys-kompromissen-med-sd-baeddar-foer-hardare-strid>

²⁵ *Extinction Rebellion* includes many subnetworks such as *Scientist Rebellion*, *Mother Rebellion* and *Father Rebellion*. <https://rebellion.global/>

With the climate action plan, the ‘green’ right considered they have won big. The “extreme environmentalism” advocated by MP – the “political arm of the climate justice movement” – they campaigned against is unhooked.²⁶ Far-right media refers to climate activists as “leftish activists” and “muppets”²⁷ and libertarian think tank Timbro published an essay claiming “climate alarmists” are “religious doomsday prophets” that cause more harm to the world than GHG emissions.²⁸

In spring 2024, a less vocal form of insult was made towards climate activists when the chair of the Riksdag industry committee, Tobias Andersson (SD), deliberately walked across a banner of climate activists, including Greta Thunberg, demonstrating and blocking the entrance to the Riksdag (Figure 1). The situation was filmed and posted on an SD-related YouTube channel,²⁹ showing how Andersson redirects his steps in an act of showing power, that he owns her, when identifying Greta Thunberg.



Figure 1. Tobias Andersson (SD) insulting Greta Thunberg and other climate activists at the entrance to the Swedish Riksdag.

Climate journalists are often targeted with insults in social media and by e-mail. Insults are targeted at both male and female journalists, but female journalists seem to receive more hateful and

²⁶ Article in independent conservative newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, 21 December 2024, <https://www.svd.se/a/3EneLP/torehammar-svek-och-djavulspakter-i-klimatpolitiken> l

²⁷ See e.g. articles in far-right populist online newspaper *Fria Tider*, 29 August 2022, <https://www.friatider.se/klimataktivister-stoppar-ambulanser>; and far-right populist online newspaper *Nyheter Idag*, 1 April 2022, <https://nyheteridag.se/jan-emanuel-ingrep-mot-klimataktivister-miljomappar/>

²⁸ Essay in Timbro magazine *Smedjan*, 11 November 2021, <https://timbro.se/smedjan/klimatalarmismen-har-blivit-ett-storre-hot-an-klimatforandringarna/>

²⁹ Video showing Tobias Andersson (SD) insulting Greta Thunberg and other climate activists. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlBy2uc6JuU&t=2s>

aggressive insults (Björkenfeldt & Gustafsson, 2023), e.g. “left pack”, “crypto environmentalist”, “motherfucker” and “moron hag”.³⁰

4.1.2. Accusations

The second level of nasty rhetoric includes accusing opponents of doing something illegal or shady, or conspiracy theories that they are controlling the economy or politics (Radnitz, 2021). Accusations have mainly been directed towards public service media, scientists and climate activists, but also towards civil servants in national agencies.

In mid 2010s, Swedish climate denialists and the far-right movement accused established media of “censoring the climate debate” and being “climate alarmist propaganda centres”. Similarly, the radical right accused established media of belonging to the “left-liberal conspiracy”.³¹

As part of the campaign for the national elections in 2022, SD’s climate policy spokesperson Kinnunen and social policy spokesperson Clara Aranda accused the environmental movement, climate activists, MP and C of being “infantile” and using a rhetoric that “scares children and young people to climate anxiety”.³²

In October 2023, climate minister Pourmokhtari (L) 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 retired engineer and member of *Scientist Rebellion*, a subgroup of *Extinction Rebellion*.³³

At the same time Kristersson’s (M) accused in his official Instagram account *Extinction Rebellion* of being “totalitarian” and “a threat to Swedish democratic political processes”.³⁴ Shortly after, two members of the Riksdag representing M accused *Extinction Rebellion* and other climate activists on social media of being “terrorists”, but without explaining in what way.³⁵ Both the prime minister and climate minister Pourmokhtari continued to accuse *Extinction Rebellion* and its subgroup *Mother Rebellion* of “pretending to care for the climate and just want to destroy the democratic discussion in an illegal way”.³⁶

A special group of scientists accused of acting wrong are those who turned to climate activism in *Scientist Rebellion* when right-wing and far-right politicians constantly ignore climate science warnings published in scientific journals, magazines and newspapers. They were accused of being a “security threat” by the climate minister and of “undermining public trust in science” by then minister of education and research Mats Persson (L).

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

³¹ Op-ed in *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 May 2024, <https://www.dn.se/kultur/kjell-vowles-sd-trollar-ocksa-om-klimatet-nu-vill-de-riva-upp-eus-klimatpakt/>

³² Op-ed in *Aftonbladet*, 19 May 2022, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/9KJB49/sd-sluta-skram-vara-barn-med-er-klimatangest>

³³ Article in *Aftonbladet*, 6 October 2023, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/O89GxO/pourmokhtari-stallde-in-mote-greenpeace-ilska>

³⁴ Post on the prime minister’s Instagram account (@kristerssonulf), 4 October 2023. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cx_RMVuMawb/

³⁵ <https://riktpunkt.nu/2023/10/moderat-riksdagsledamot-terroristanklagar-klimataktivister/>; <https://twitter.com/FredrikKarrholm/status/1705600537448587714>

³⁶ Article in green-liberal newspaper *Syre*, 7 October 2023. <https://tidningensyre.se/2023/7-oktober-2023/ministrar-kritiserar-klimataktivister-de-stor-demokratin/>

In April 2025, climate activists in Restore Wetlands made a series of actions at Swedish airports, trespassing security objects and flying drones at airports to highlight the need to end extraction of peat.³⁷ SD's spokesperson for legal policy, Pontus A. Garpvall, responded quickly to the airport actions by proposing just a few days after, that climate activists should be prosecuted for terrorism under current laws, which if they are found guilty would render prison in four to eight years.³⁸ In what way climate activists would be terrorists was not explained.

Leading Tidö members of the Riksdag have accused civil servants in the Government Offices and national agencies of being activists, taking employment to drive their private agenda.³⁹ It has later been found that leaders in SD have a black list of people they want to fire from the Government Offices for having wrong opinions.⁴⁰ This is similar to, but far behind the Trump administration's Project 2025 to reshape the federal government of the United States and consolidate executive power in favour of far-right extremist policies.⁴¹

When officials at the Public Health Agency of Sweden appealed to raise climate change as an issue of public health, they were called activists by their superiors, who also told that they had behaved inappropriately and violated the state's values—the rules that government officials must follow.

4.1.3. Intimidations

The third level of nasty rhetoric advocates economic and/or legal sanctions against an opponent, e.g., that they should be fired, be investigated or sent to prison. Intimidations are mainly directed to climate activists, suggesting stronger state repression, but also towards climate scientists and journalists.

The Tidö parties pushed back against the critics of their climate action plan. In most cases it stopped at insults and accusations. SD's climate policy spokesperson thought that the report from Swedish Climate Policy Council contained "little of value for climate policy" and questioned the existence of Swedish Climate Policy Council and threatened to revise their mandate.⁴²

³⁷ Press releases of Restore Wetlands. <https://aterstallvatmarker.se/pressmeddelanden/>

³⁸ News article in *Aftonbladet*, 25 April 2025. https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/zAjVkv/sd-forslaget-klimataktivister-ska-domas-for-terrorbrott?utm_source=iosapp&utm_medium=share. News article in *Tidningen Syre*, 25 April 2025. <https://tidningensyre.se/2025/25-april-2025/sd-vill-doma-klimataktivister-for-terrorbrott/>

³⁹ Op-ed in *Arbetsvärlden*, 24 November 2022, <https://www.arbetsvarlden.se/debatt/en-del-av-de-nya-makthavarna-vill-se-utrensningar-i-statlig-forvaltning/>. Op-ed in *Aftonbladet*, 21 February 2023, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/GMwpln/fackforbund-statliga-tjansteman-ar-inte-aktivister>. Op-ed in *Altinget* 24 October 2024. <https://www.altinget.se/artikel/otillaaten-paaverkan-mot-statligt-anstallda-hotar-rattssakerheten>. Op-ed in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 January 2025. https://www.svd.se/a/dRzj6z/regeringen-skapar-misstro-mot-myndigheter-skriver-britta-lejon?utm_source=iosapp

⁴⁰ Article in *Dagens ETC*, 25 March 2025, <https://www.etc.se/story/svarta-listan-saa-rensar-sd-ut-sossiga-tjaenstemaen-fraan-regeringskansliet>. Op-ed in *Altinget*, 28 March 2025. <https://www.altinget.se/artikel/stoppa-aasiktsregistreringen-i-regeringskansliet>

⁴¹ Article in *The New Republic*, 22 July 2024. <https://newrepublic.com/article/183971/jd-vance-weird-terrifying-techno-authoritarian-ideas>

⁴² Article in independent liberal newspaper *GöteborgsPosten*, 2024, <https://www.gp.se/politik/sd-kritiska-mot-klimatpolitiska-radet-ska-ses-over.e9469d5f-ec8b-4cb7-864b-68d51010c490>

In 2022, Tobias Andersson (SD) and Johan Forsell (M), then spokesperson on legal policy issues now minister of migration, accused climate activists performing traffic blockades at demonstrations of being “saboteurs”, and that they should be charged for “sabotage” instead of “disobedience to law enforcement”.⁴³ This change was later supported by current minister of justice Gunnar Strömmer (M), saying that the actions of climate activists must be seen as sabotage so that they can be “sentenced to prison”.⁴⁴ Responding to climate actions at airports in April 2025, SD’s spokesperson for legal policy, Garpvall, did not only claim that climate activists should be prosecuted for terrorism under current legislation, but that the anti-terrorist legislation should be revised to clearly include acts of climate activism as terrorism.⁴⁵

Climate scientists and public service journalists are often intimidated with threats of getting fired since they are often paid by taxpayers’ money. Journalists scrutinising the actions of the far-right movement related to climate activists are also seriously harassed, starting with insults but rapidly expanding to accusations or intimidations. An SD-related media person attacked a male journalist in an interview, where part of the interview was posted on social media and set in motion a hate drive:⁴⁶

“You are a showman, an idiot, a dishonest person, a political activist. There is no reason for me to be serious with you. The only way I can treat you is to fool around. I will post this conversation just so you know.”

Accusing civil servants of being activists with personal agendas, SD has collected a list of names of non-political staff in the Government Offices of Sweden that they want to get rid of.⁴⁷

4.1.4. Incitements

Incitement is the most threatening kind of nasty rhetoric, likely to provoke actual physical violence. It includes threats encouraging or facilitating physical violence against opponents, which if the statement is followed through would imply physical harm to opponents.

In spring 2022, some months before national elections in Sweden, far-right extremists media site *Exakt24*, linked to far-right extremist party Alternative for Sweden (AfS)⁴⁸ and to SD, started an online name and shame campaign against climate activists, or climate extremists as they called them. Mastermind behind the campaign, a well-known extremist journalist with ties to AfS and the Swedish white power movement, posted photos, names, addresses and phone numbers of climate activists on far-right extremist websites as an incitement for further harassment and physical

⁴³ Article in far-right populist online newspaper *Fria Tider*, 29 August 2022, <https://www.friatider.se/klimataktivister-stoppar-ambulanser>

⁴⁴ Interview with Swedish minister of justice Gunnar Strömmer, *Altinget*, 10 November 2023. <https://www.altinget.se/civilsamhalle/artikel/strommer-m-vill-se-haardare-domar-mot-klimataktivister>

⁴⁵ News article in *Aftonbladet*, 25 April 2025. https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/zAjVkv/sd-forslaget-klimataktivister-ska-domas-for-terrorbrott?utm_source=iosapp&utm_medium=share. News article in *Tidningen Syre*, 25 April 2025. <https://tidningensyre.se/2025/25-april-2025/sd-vill-doma-klimataktivister-for-terrorbrott/>

⁴⁶ Article in green liberal newspaper *Syre*, 27 June 2023, <https://tidningensyre.se/2023/27-juni-2023/hatkampanj-mot-syres-reporter/>

⁴⁷ News article in *Dagens ETC*, 25 March 2025, <https://www.etc.se/story/svarta-listan-saa-rensar-sd-ut-sossiga-tjaenstemaen-fraan-regeringskansliet>

⁴⁸ AfS was formed by far-right extremists when SD’s youth organisation was expelled from the mother party.

violence. Activists in *Extinction Rebellion* were particularly targeted. In chat rooms filled with followers with Nazi symbols and Nazi rhetoric about race traitors, some of them members of the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR), followers are encouraged to infiltrate and seek accommodation with activists in *Extinction Rebellion*.⁴⁹

In a video on Instagram, a former member of the Riksdag for S, who started a new far-right populist party ahead of the 2024 EU elections, appears next to what is supposed to represent a dead person wrapped in a black garbage bag, with a sign tied around the body: "I regret that I voted for the Green Party last election".⁵⁰

An SD-related journalist working for YouTube-channel Riks, formerly part of SD's communications office, but also engaged with far-right extremist Exakt24, posted openly on his X/Twitter account that "I am a little sceptical that the state should execute people. But when it comes to [activists in] @vatmarker [Återställ Våtmarker (Eng. Restore Wetlands)], I am willing to make an exception to my principles".⁵¹

4.1.5. Economic and Legal Sanctions

Between September 2020 and September 2024, 310 climate activists were prosecuted in Swedish district courts for different crimes related to civil disobedience, some of them several times. Of these, 200 persons were convicted, mainly to fines or suspended sentence.

As presented, leading SD and M politicians accused climate activists performing roadblocks at demonstrations of being "saboteurs", and intimidated that they should be charged for "sabotage" instead of "disobedience to law enforcement".⁵² This change was later supported by the current minister of justice, saying that the actions of climate activists must be seen as sabotage so that they can be "sentenced to prison".⁵³ In 2022, without change of legislation, prosecutors around Sweden suddenly began to charge climate activists performing roadblocks at demonstrations for sabotage. Between summers 2022 and 2023, 25 persons were convicted for sabotage, some of which were sentenced to prison, but most were later acquitted in the Court of Appeal.⁵⁴ Several climate activists felt that this change in the judicial system was politically motivated.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Article in green-liberal newspaper *Syre*, 13 June 2022, <https://tidningensyre.se/2022/13-juni-2022/hogerextrem-infiltrationskampanj-mot-klimataktivister/>

⁵⁰ See articles in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 20 June 2022, <https://www.svd.se/a/8Qy7zd/jan-emanuels-video-kritiseras-vem-blir-klimathatets-nasta-offer>; and *Expressen*, 15 June 2022, <https://www.expressen.se/tv/nyheter/jan-emanuels-likvideo-anvands-som-hot-mot-miljopartister/>

⁵¹ Article in green liberal newspaper *Syre*, 27 June 2023, <https://tidningensyre.se/2023/27-juni-2023/sd-kopplad-profil-avrattna-aterstall-vatmarker-aktivister/>

⁵² Article in far-right populist online newspaper *Fria Tider*, 29 August 2022, <https://www.friatider.se/klimataktivister-stoppar-ambulanser>

⁵³ Interview with Swedish minister of justice, *Altinget*, 10 November 2023. <https://www.altinget.se/civilsamhalle/artikel/strommer-m-vill-se-haardare-domar-mot-klimataktivister>

⁵⁴ News article, *Dagens Arena*, 23 August 2023, <https://www.dagensarena.se/innehall/200-klimataktivister-domda-25-sabotage/>

Following the climate actions at airports in April 2025, SD proposed that Swedish antiterrorism legislation may need to be changed so that climate activists surely can be charged for terrorism.⁵⁶ This was shortly followed by editorials in Tidö supportive right-wing newspapers, also suggesting that the Swedish Institute for Human Rights, a national authority under the government, should be abolished, and that Sweden should exit the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.⁵⁷ Obviously, human rights are not for climate activists and members of other environmental movements.

In 2024, a person engaged in MR, a subgroup of XR that not engage in civil disobedience but only friendly actions such as singing,⁵⁸ was fired from her job at the Swedish Energy Agency due to accusations and intimidations of her predecessor, right-wing and far-right media and minister for civil defence that she was a threat to Swedish national security. In 2023, an immigrant scientist engaged in SR was arrested for alleged sabotage of an airport. The action took place outside the airport and the scientist activist held a banner. The court case, which includes several lies from the airport manager, is still ongoing (June 2025), but the activist, being a citizen in another EU member state, recently got her application for Swedish citizenship rejected with the motivation that “[s]ince you are suspected of a crime, you have not shown that you meet the requirement of an honest way of life”.⁵⁹

As an impact of nasty rhetoric’s message effect, warning others to do what the ‘enemies’ have done, some state agencies under the government have changed their recruitment routines to include additional question on what applicants do in their leisure time. In other agencies, staff perceived as activist have been replaced in their job. As witness by the activist that got fired, agencies are tightening the seat belt for other climate engaged people and people sympathetic with civil disobedience who seek security-classified positions.⁶⁰

If you show climate commitment, there will be tougher tests and controls, which does not make it easier for the agency to find qualified aspirants. And, if you show an understanding that people are protesting something through peaceful civil disobedience, you will not pass a security clearance.

4.1.6. Physical Violence

Shortly after the 2022 online name and shame campaign targeting climate activists, *Extinction Rebellion* reported that five masked people attacked a climate action, and that one activist had been

⁵⁶ News article in *Aftonbladet*, 25 April 2025. https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/zAjVkv/sd-forslaget-klimataktivister-ska-domas-for-terrorbrott?utm_source=iosapp&utm_medium=share. News article in *Tidningen Syre*, 25 April 2025. <https://tidningensyre.se/2025/25-april-2025/sd-vill-doma-klimataktivister-for-terrorbrott/>

⁵⁷ Editorial in *Göteborgs-Posten*, 28 April 2025. <https://www.gp.se/ledare/lagarna-maste-motsvara-var-tids-terrorism>; Editorial in *Norrbottnens-Kuriren*, 28 April 2025. <https://www.kuriren.nu/ledare/artikel/aktivister-ska-inte-fa-frikort-att-bega-brott>

⁵⁸ Article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 18 January 2024. <https://www.dn.se/sverige/kan-rebellmammorna-radda-varlden/>. Article in *Liberal Debatt*, 18 November 2024, <https://www.liberaldebatt.se/2024/11/rebellmammorna/>

⁵⁹ Article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 5 February 2025, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/protesterade-mot-privatflyg-far-inte-bli-svensk-medborgare/>

⁶⁰ <https://annafranenergimyndigheten.se/anna-from-the-swedish-energy-agency/>

assaulted.⁶¹ About an hour after the attack, the far-right extremist that organised the campaign appeared at the spot with video camera and studio light but did not get any interviews. “They weren’t so talkative last night when I came by with a studio light and everything...”, he wrote in his Telegram channel. In a later post, he questioned that the attack on *Extinction Rebellion* really took place but added that he distances himself from the event “if it is true”.⁶²

Another act of physical violence was experienced in late April 2024, when five masked members of a neo-Nazi fight club attacked a political meeting in Gubbängen, a suburb south of Stockholm, organised by V and MP on how to deal with the nasty politics of the far-right movement and its implications for democracy.⁶³

4.2. The Political Opposition and Climate Advocates as Offenders

Rhetoric of the political opposition, S, C, V and MP) started off quite normal in the first party leader debate in the Riksdag after the elections in 2022. Responding to the Tidö parties’ first state budgetary bill, with proposals that would increase Sweden’s GHG emissions, S party leader said that:⁶⁴

Sweden’s role as a pioneering country has been important and should not be underestimated. It is because Sweden is at the forefront of development that thousands of new jobs are now being created in the green industrial transition here in Sweden. That gives us credibility. But with what credibility will the new government now be able to lead the negotiations to reduce emissions in the EU when a national policy is being pursued that will increase Swedish emissions? ‘If we don’t do it, we won’t do it,’ was the finance minister’s answer to the question of what happens if we don’t reach our climate targets.

Similar critique was given by party leaders of C, V and MP, where Annie Lööf (C) also mentioned Sweden’s role in the EU and globally:⁶⁵

Sweden has taken the lead at home and shown how our country can and should be a role model for others. But if we are to achieve success, more must follow. It is therefore worrying to see how the Swedish government is now swaying in a number of areas. When you go to the global climate summit with the message to other countries that it is urgent, but back off yourself in climate policy and increase our emissions by millions and millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide, you are not a green example in the world.

One of the spokespersons of MP continued:⁶⁶

There is a lot of talk about the effectiveness of the government’s climate policy, but what the government is effectively succeeding in is raising emissions, exacerbating the nature crisis and delaying the Swedish transition. It is incredibly unfortunate that we are now hearing from both the Minister for the Environment and other government representatives, such as the Minister of Finance, that it is uncertain whether the Swedish climate goals will be achieved.

⁶¹ News article in *Syre*, 13 June 2022, <https://tidningensyre.se/2022/13-juni-2022/hogerextrem-infiltrationskampanj-mot-klimataktivister/>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ 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>

⁶⁴ Ibid., speech No. 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., speech No. 5.

⁶⁶ Ibid., speech No. 7.

But the data reveals that the targets of the Tidö parties' and other climate sceptics' nasty rhetoric, i.e. the political opposition (S, C, V and MP), climate scientists and activists as well as journalists, are also using uncivil rhetoric, in response to how they perceive of Tidö climate policy and the right-wing use of nasty rhetoric. A significant difference is that climate advocates only use insults and accusations of a rather mild kind, and with another purpose than silencing their opponents.

4.2.1. Insults

Insults of oppositional politicians, climate activists, scientists and journalists are mainly targeting the government as a collective, SD and individual ministers, in particular the prime minister and the climate minister.

In the first Riksdag party leader debate after the Tidö government entered office, then party leader of MP Per Bolund called the PM a "provoking naked liar", for his claim that the S-MP government decided to decommission four nuclear power plants, when in fact it was the owners that took the decision since the plants were old, not safe and unprofitable, based on policies that also M and KD approved.⁶⁷

It is quite provocative to have a prime minister who stands and peddles untruths in the Riksdag to try to hide how naked he and the government are on environmental issues. Ulf Kristersson knows as well as anyone else that the nuclear reactors he is talking about were shut down by the owners because they were old, unprofitable and unsafe. The energy policy that prevailed was also supported by the Moderates. It is also very slippery when it comes to the climate targets on the part of the government. It is very unclear to find out what really applies. The minister of finance is at least honest about the fact that no climate targets will be achieved with the government's policy.

Calling them "irrelevant", the government purposefully insulted and discriminated climate justice organisations and climate scientists from participating in the national climate meeting in June 2023. As a response *Greenpeace* and *Fridays for Future* organised a demonstration outside the meeting. Together with 14 other environmental organisations, they also wrote an op-ed insulting the government. Climate scientists also wrote op-eds in leading newspapers before and after the meeting. While the former were rather subtle in insulting the government, inviting people to an action outside the "climate meeting" which included "civil society organisations", with quotation marks insinuating that the meeting was illegitimate,⁶⁸ the latter were more explicit, calling the government's climate meeting a "joke", a "play for the galleries" and a "spectacle".⁶⁹

The opposition was critical to the climate action plan. The S climate policy spokesperson, Anna-Caren Säterberg, called the Tidö parties' climate action plan "a napkin sketch and a broken

⁶⁷ Ibid., speech No. 22.

⁶⁸ Invitation to demonstration.

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

⁶⁹ News article about concerns of climate policy researchers, *Dagens Nyheter*, 14 June 2023, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/regeringens-klimatmote-vacker-fragor-i-forskarvarlden/>; Op-ed by eight climate policy researchers, *Aftonbladet*, 15 June 2023, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/3E78Ad/attaforskare-klimatmotet-riskerar-bli-spel-for-gallerierna>; Op-ed by six climate policy researchers, *GöteborgsPosten*, 1 July 2023, <https://www.gp.se/debatt/m%C3%A5nga-avg%C3%B6randefr%C3%A5gor-saknas-i-regeringens-klimatpolitik-1.103017568>; Op-ed by 16 environmental organisations, *Expressen*, 14 June 2023, <https://www.expressen.se/debatt/regeringens-klimatmote-framstar-som-ett-skamt/>

promise".⁷⁰ Member of the Riksdag, Jytte Guteland (S), a former Member of the European Parliament, claimed that climate minister Pourmokhtari is "standing in front of an empty shop window."⁷¹

With the almost exclusive focus of the Tidö parties on nuclear power to mitigate climate change, critical journalists have asked energy minister Ebba Busch (KD) about the reasons for the government to suddenly shift and suggest state funding of new nuclear power plants. The answer given, 'that it is a natural law', did not please the journalists, why a politics journalist of *Dagens Nyheter*, claimed that the lure of nuclear power is "an erogenous zone to the government".⁷² Also critical to the exclusive focus on new nuclear power, Tony Haddou (V) claimed that minister Busch is in some kind of "nuclear Tourette's state of mind".⁷³

4.2.2. Accusations

While all climate advocates insulted the government and individual Tidö politicians, mainly oppositional politicians and some groups of scientists used accusations. Most harsh in accusing the Tidö parties and individual ministers was Märta Stenevi, former party leader of MP. Debating the Tidö climate policy in the Riksdag, she accused the climate minister of being:⁷⁴

a minister in an extremely weak puppet government that could only take office after a comprehensive agreement was made with the right-wing extremists in SD, /.../ We are debating with a liberal climate minister who runs SD's climate policy.

Guteland (S) questioned the attitude of the climate minister, constantly referring to herself as a liberal minister in a right-wing government in which SD has no ministers, that:⁷⁵

In politics the motto 'I can do it myself' works very poorly. In politics, it's about creating trust and making sure that you get joint decisions and can make them together with others – not least in Sweden's Riksdag, this is completely decisive. Therefore, this superhero attitude is not satisfactory. /.../ The climate minister stands very alone in an uncomfortable situation because the support that exists for this government rests on a climate sceptic party.

In its critique of the climate action plan and previous climate policy decisions of the Tidö parties, the Swedish Finance Policy Council (2024, p. 15) was rather outspoken for being a national authority, accusing the Tidö parties of (author's highlight in italics):

Lacking a coherent and comprehensible strategy to reach both the Swedish and the EU's climate targets by 2030. /.../ We conclude that the government's climate action plan does not provide clear and concrete information about how the climate targets are to be reached; *it rests on hopes* that future actions will lead to the achievement of the targets.

⁷⁰ Analysis of the Tidö parties' press briefing on the climate action plan, TV4, 21 December 2023, <https://www.tv4.se/artikel/5MenofU2MHfkzfa4yGT6YF/analys-kompromissen-med-sd-baeddard-foer-hardare-strid>

⁷¹ Riksdag debate on the climate action plan, 19 March 2024, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/interpellationsdebatt/klimathandlingsplanens-redovisade-utslappskurva_hb10538/

⁷² Podd 'Älskade politik' (Beloved politics'), *Dagens Nyheter*, 14 August 2024, <https://www.dn.se/podd/alskade-politik/en-erogen-zon-for-regeringspartierna-karnkraftens-lockelse/>

⁷³ Riksdag debate on climate policy, 6 December 2022, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/interpellationsdebatt/atgarder-for-att-na-klimatmalen_ha1039/

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Riksdag debate, 14 March 2023, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/interpellationsdebatt/forhandlingen-om-sveriges-klimathandlingsplan_ha10224/

The Swedish Climate Policy Council (2024, p. 8) was even more outspoken in their critique and accusations (author's highlight in italics):

The Tidö parties provides a *misleading* picture of the action plan's expected contribution to achieving the goal. The claim that the action plan leads 'all the way to net zero' is *factually flawed*.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Nasty rhetoric is not a new phenomenon in Swedish politics. In the 1970s and 80s, the hate targeting then prime minister Olof Palme (S) was prominent. In the early 1970s, one could hear and read rumours that Palme was a "drug addict", a "Russian spy", a "manic liar" and a "communist". In the 1980s, hatred of Palme increased sharply, demonising him as a "double nature"; a "deformed and dangerous person with demonic traits".⁷⁶ It is not yet clear who murdered Palme in February 1986 and why, but there were many far-fetched conspiracy theories and hateful attacks against Palme at this time. Between 2015 and 2022, a main target of far-right hate and threats was the former leader of the Centre Party and minister for business, Annie Lööf.⁷⁷ She stood up for socio-liberal and green values, a humane migration politics and criticised the turn to toxic language in Swedish politics. For this, she was called "Sharia-Annie" and was accused of being a "traitor to Sweden" that should be "brought to the neo-Nazi court and executed". In 2022, it was revealed that a far-right extremist was plotting to kill her. After years of steadfast resistance against the haters, anxiety and fear made her fed up with politics, and Lööf resigned as party leader and from other political assignments.⁷⁸

A survey of online hate speech in Sweden identified four vulnerable groups in two main categories, i.e. citizens and workers. In the first group, people are vulnerable to racist and sexist hate speech, or hate speech towards young persons. In the second category, politically elected and appointed persons and journalists are particularly targeted (Svensson et al., 2021). In climate politics, politicians and journalists are identified as targets of nasty rhetoric, besides climate scientists and climate activists. Racist and particularly sexist hate speech, as well as hate speech towards young persons, is used in combination with climate related hate speech, meaning that women and young people in the different groups of victims can be targeted more often or more aggressively.

Statistics from the *Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention* (2023) shows that about one third of politically elected representatives at local, regional and national level were targeted by hate and threats during the election year 2022, mainly via social media. Almost 70 % of these were exposed more than once. Women and young people and representatives of MP are targeted more often than others. In most cases the perpetrators were anonymous, but if identifiable, they were usually angry middle-aged men often related to the far-right (extremist) movement. As discussed below, it also happens that politicians are sometimes targeted by other politicians.

A recent survey on online harassment against journalists in Sweden, covering more than 3,000 journalists, found that 70 % of journalists in Sweden had been targeted with insults, 40 % with defamation and 23 % with harassment and illegal threats (Svensson & Björkenfeldt, 2021).⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Article in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 30 August 2021, <https://www.svd.se/a/oWk7LK/palmehatet-exploderade-pa-1980-talet>

⁷⁷ Article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 26 August 2022, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/sa-sprids-hat-och-hot-mot-centerledaren-annie-loof/>

⁷⁸ Article in *Dagens Nyheter*, 16 December 2022, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/annie-loof-jag-grater-nar-lampan-ar-slackt/>

⁷⁹ Online article by *Swedish Journalist Union*, 30 April 2021, <https://www.sjf.se/aktuellt/202104/ny-undersokning-om-hot-och-hat>

Journalists with foreign background are more vulnerable to all kinds of hate speech and hate crime, and harassment, including sexual harassment, is more commonly targeting women.

Scientists were not mentioned in the survey of online hate in Sweden, nor were climate activists or activists in general. However, these groups are targets of hate speech and hate crime in climate politics. A more recent survey of the occurrence of hate, threats, and harassment against researchers and teachers in general at Swedish universities found that two out of five respondents (N=2,995) have been targeted with harassment and threats (Brax, 2024). In most cases, the offenders are students, but researchers and teachers active in public debates and social media, and those who work in subject areas that can be perceived as politically charged, are mainly offended by people outside university. They are also offended slightly more than others.

Nasty rhetoric has been used to target radical activists in Sweden in policy areas with much antagonism, other than climate policy. One such area is agriculture and animal welfare. In comparison to climate politics, hate speech and hate crime in this area do not include politicians. The conflict is mainly between animal welfare activists and the meat industry, food retailers and farmers (Schwartz, 2020), with farmers being the main victims (Ceccato et al., 2022). Violent protests have been used also by the radical left-libertarian movement, sometimes referred to as the autonomous left, for instance in the Gothenburg riots in 2001 (Wahlström, 2011; Jacobsson & Sörbom, 2015). Measures have been taken by Swedish governments since 2011 to intensify the counteracting both left and right “violence-affirming extremism” (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020, p. 384). Such measures include both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ repression. While hard repression involves force to control or crush oppositional action, soft repression includes nonviolent means such as silencing activists or marginalising oppositional ideas, e.g. through ridicule, stigma, or silencing (Ferree, 2004). In combination, hard and soft repression by the state is similar to nasty politics and nasty rhetoric.

5.1. Comparing the Use and Users of Hate Speech in Climate Politics

5.1.1. Offenders and Targets in Swedish Climate Politics

As presented above, the targets of hate speech in Sweden have expanded since the hate and threats towards Palme and Löf, beyond oppositional politicians to also include scientists, activists and journalists. This is not new with climate politics. It can rather be seen as a continuation and expansion of far-right hate speech and hate crime in Sweden targeting groups for ethnical, religious and gender reasons to new domains (see e.g. Tham et al., 2011; Hagerlid, 2021; Atak, 2022; Ilse & Hagerlid). The results also reveal that members of all parties in the Riksdag but C use insults and accusations in their political rhetoric. Former party leader of C, Annie Löf, stood firm in criticising the use of nasty rhetoric in Swedish politics. Emma Wiesner (C), top candidate in the 2024 EU elections, was the only politician in the final debate in Swedish television that did not use nasty rhetoric.

Politicians rarely humiliate or denigrate other politicians in person, but other political parties. Swedish politics is not as person fixated as, for example, American politics. It is rather far-right extremist persons that target politicians in person. Except for the hate on Greta Thunberg, the same holds true for nasty rhetoric of politicians targeting climate activists or scientists. It is primarily the organisations, not the persons, who are targeted. Some exceptions in politicians’ rhetoric are the accusations of (i) former MP party leader Bolund calling prime minister Kristersson a “provoking naked liar”, (ii) former MP party leader Stenevi calling the climate minister a “week minister in a puppet government”, and (iii) S spokesperson Guteland criticising the climate minister for her “superhero attitude”. Hate and threats sent by anonymous offenders are often targeting individual climate activists, scientists, journalists and other outgroups, orchestrated by SD and AfS, who display names, photos, addresses and phone numbers of the ‘enemies’ in far-right extremist web forums.

5.1.2. Nasty Rhetoric as a Tactic of Anti-Climate Advocates

Analysing the use of hateful rhetoric of the anti-climate and pro-climate groups, the empirical data provides clear evidence that the Tidö parties and their followers use hate speech and hate crime systematically silence their political opponents. This is nasty rhetoric in essence. All types of nasty rhetoric, from insults to incitements and violence, are widely used by Tidö party leaders and government ministers, including the prime minister. It is also used by neoliberal, libertarian and far-right influencers and climate sceptics, applauding the weakening of Swedish climate policy. The main aim is to delegitimise, dehumanise and threaten their enemies to silence. Nasty rhetoric explicitly targeting climate scientists, climate journalists and climate activists also has a message effect, indirectly targeting people and society in general to prevent them from participating in a public and democratic debate on climate policy (cf. Ilse & Hagerlid, 2025). They should refrain from expressing opinions that do not agree with those of the perpetrator or perpetrators.

Inspired by several years of advocacy of the *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise* and *Timbro*, the highest representatives of Tidö parties regard strong climate policy and advocates of strong climate policy, requiring a green and just economic and industrial transition, as threats. However, it seems that the *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise* and *Timbro* have recently changed opinion. Climate activists formulate system criticism based on climate science calling for a just transition (Evans & Phelan, 2016; Wang & Lo, 2021; Fischer et al., 2024). Tidö parties' response is to demonise and delegitimise non-violent climate activists as "a threat to democracy", "totalitarian forces" or simply "saboteurs" and "terrorists" to be "sent to prison" and "executed". Such accusations, intimidations and incitements are not a matter of isolated occasions, and it cannot be considered innocent mistakes. The words come from the highest-ranking politicians, including the prime minister, whose rhetoric agitates that climate activists really are a threat to democracy. Pro-climate advocates are not equal human beings and should not have the same rights as Swedish citizens in general. A recent survey of 156 civil society organisations in Sweden, working for democracy from all sorts of angles, shows that right-wing politicians all over the country openly use negative connotations to discredit and delegitimise civil society (Ardin, 2024). Advocating liberal or deliberative democracy is seen as extremism and antidemocratic in the right-wing populist discourse. Insults, accusations, intimidations and incitements are made openly, mainly in social media from official accounts of ministers and other politicians. Intimidations targeting climate activists are also made in national radio, on the streets, and in political debates in the Riksdag.

That Greta Thunberg has gone from pet peeve to pariah among Tidö parties, *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise* and *Timbro* and other climate sceptics from 2018 to 2020 is no coincidence. The change follows a sharpening of the climate justice activists' message – economic degrowth (Heikkurinen, 2021). It is about the realisation that the whole economic system of today is flawed (Bailey et al., 2011; Davidson, 2012). An insight transformed into a critique of the neoliberal, capitalist economic system and its focus on free markets and economic growth (Euler, 2019; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2020). In addition, a critique of the hegemonic liberal democratic system with its increasing focus on restricted and competitive participation where it pays off to invest large in lobbying, as opposed to a more deliberative and inclusive ecological democracy (Pickering et al., 2020; von Malmborg, 2024a). Degrowth and a resulting perceived intrusion upon their dominant status in society is what right-wing and far-right politicians painting a threatening picture of climate activists are afraid of.

Instead of responding to the perceived threats with good arguments, as would be suspected in environmental or sustainability rhetoric (cf. Dryzek & Lo, 2015; Wolrath Söderberg, 2020), the anti-climate advocates use nasty rhetoric, attacking their opponents for who they are and what they do, not what they say. Climate policy of the previous S-MP government is dismissed as "emotional" and "symbolic", not as potentially ineffective or expensive. Climate scientists are not criticised on scientific grounds, but for providing knowledge that contradicts the will of the Tidö parties, and thus accused of being "irrelevant" and "just an opinion". Journalists are attacked because they write and report about climate change and climate policy based on scientific inquiry, not giving equal space to

climate sceptics. In addition, hatred expands when individuals and groups connect policy issues, or are part of more than one target group. Activists in *Scientist Rebellion* are double-hated, as scientists and activists (cf. von Malmberg, 2025b). And the hate towards Thunberg has escalated since she linked climate activism with activism for human rights, and her pro-Palestine stance in the Israel–Gaza war, coupling rhetoric of anti-capitalism to rhetoric of colonialism and white supremacy. She is openly called a ‘leftish nazi’ or ‘girl-Hitler’.⁸⁰ Intersectionality makes some people more vulnerable to hate speech, and hate speech harsher (Alfaro, 2022).

A similar fear of system critique was perceived in Olof Palme’s attacks on neoliberal economics and libertarian political philosophy as threats to the welfare state in the 1970s and 80s, and former C-party leader Annie Lööf’s socio-liberal views on migration policy. This made Swedish right-wing and far-right politicians in M and KD and later on SD and AfS and their supporters paint pictures that Palme and Lööf stood for something evil. For this, they should be punished – silenced. Importantly, *Timbro* had a significant role also in the hate and threats targeting Olof Palme. In 1984, they published the book “Who is Olof Palme?” (Östergren, 1984), the most elaborate and offensive attack on Palme as a person and politician.

Nasty rhetoric is an outspoken tactic of SD to entrench the ‘us vs. them’ and the ‘people vs. elite’ narratives. But it has turned out that SD also uses nasty rhetoric through its anonymous troll accounts on social media targeting ministers of M, KD and L for being part of The Cry. The insults and accusations towards cabinet ministers were condemned by the political opposition and criticised by prime minister Kristersson (M), who required an excuse and that posts on social media smearing the government were deleted, but he did not criticise the widespread use of nasty rhetoric in general – he uses it himself. An editorial in the largest newspaper in Sweden called upon the prime minister to stop threatening opponents and start dealing with public policy issues in substance.⁸¹

This is symptomatic since the systematic and strategic use of hate speech and hate crime by the Swedish far-right is normalised by the extensive use of the prime minister and other leading politicians. With increasing protests in Sweden and internationally against the Israeli war on Palestine, particularly SD, M and KD politicians accuses pro-Palestine demonstrators of activism, sometimes violent, and thus being a threat to democracy.⁸² But, researching journalists critically analysing the Swedish far-right argue that violence is often provoked by SD politicians with teams of photographers linked to Riks, who immediately publishes films and comments about violent anti-democratic activists in social media.⁸³ Posts that are then shared by the prime minister. Given the similarities with films of climate activists at demonstrations, there is a pattern in how SD’s troll factory is used as video provocateur to create an image of activists as anti-democratic. With the focus on climate justice, linking climate policy to human rights policy, most climate activists are also involved in the pro-Palestine movement.

⁸⁰ Editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 26 November 2023, https://www.svd.se/a/abR9jO/madeleine-albright-hade-haft-en-sarskild-plats-i-helvetet-at-stina-wollter-och-greta-thunberg?fbclid=IwAR21Rypq7bOKRL_TxeJP2NCn8LjN1K57bn5YRLa_Vl_1-34Mb2rU4SVLo; Commentary in *Arbetet*, 27 November 2023, <https://arbetet.se/2023/11/27/sa-blev-greta-thunberg-tjej-hitler/>

⁸¹ Editorial in *Dagens Nyheter*, 23 June 2025, <https://www.dn.se/ledare/max-hjelm-ulf-kristersson-spelar-skramspel-i-stallet-for-att-losa-samhallsproblemen/>

⁸² Editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 15 June 2025, [https://www.svd.se/a/vgBw8l/palestinarorelsens-utlopare-hotar-demokratin](https://www.svd.se/a/vgBw8l/palestinarorelsens-utlopare-hotar-demokratin;);

⁸³ Op-ed in *Aftonbladet*, 23 June 2025, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/a/mPb2B4/jessica-stegrud-roger-sahlstrom-och-hetsen-mot-palestina-demonstranter>

5.1.3. Pro-Climate Advocates Are Uncivil but Not Nasty

The political opposition in the Riksdag, and to a lesser extent scientists and activists as well as critical journalists also use insults and accusations, but no intimidations, incitements or violence. Insults and accusations from climate advocates target the government as a collective, or the prime minister and climate minister directly, to delegitimise them in affective response to what they consider to be inferior climate policy in substance and process. They also insult and accuse the prime minister and the climate minister for lack of leadership. Being climate minister, Pourmokhtari is bound to take the hit, although everyone understands that she is only a “liberal minister in SD’s puppet government”.

The red–green political opposition as well as climate scientists and climate activists use uncivil rhetoric, sometimes with a humoristic twist, to delegitimise opponents to rally supporters, not to silence their opponents. In that sense, it cannot be considered nasty rhetoric. They value pluralism and freedom of speech and use uncivil language to enhance ‘normal’ rhetoric. Like Kamala Harris and Tim Walz were calling Donald Trump and J.D. Vance “weird” in the 2024 US Presidential campaign, former party leaders of MP, Per Bolund and Märta Stenevi show with their accusations and the eye of a child that the prime minister and climate minister are “naked emperors” – that the Tidö quartet lacks credible political reforms, no visions of building a climate neutral society. Tidö’s response to the climate emergency is described as “Tourette-like tirades” about new nuclear power at upfront costs of about USD 30–60 billion and USD 1 000 in annual nuclear taxation per Swedish household. The uncivil rhetoric of Bolund and Stenevi, an everyday call to laugh at the Emperor’s new clothes, can arouse broad popular engagement. This is indicated by the results of the 2024 EU elections, where Swedish left-wing and green parties more than doubled their votes compared to the national elections in 2022, collecting almost 25 % of the votes in total. SD dropped from 20.5 % in the national elections to 13 % in the EU elections, for the first time ever getting reduced support in a nationwide election.

As for humour in climate rhetoric, studies indicate that climate activists are ‘radically kind’ and use humour in digital activism to transform democracy (Pickard et al., 2020; Sloam et al., 2022; Chiew et al., 2024). For instance, Greta Thunberg turned insults of then Brazilian president José Bolsonaro and then US president Donald Trump into humour, adding the Portuguese word “pirralha” (Eng. brat) and “A very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future” to her X/Twitter profile (Vowles & Hultman, 2021a; White, 2022). The humoristic turn in climate rhetoric was also evident in Greta Thunberg’s insulting response to Andersson’s (SD) intimidation outside the entrance of the Riksdag – a laughter, saying that he is a loser – and the subtle insults of *Greenpeace* and *Fridays for Future* related to the government’s illegitimate “climate meeting” with “civil society organisations”.

5.1.4. A Reflection on Nasty Rhetoric and Environmental Rhetoric

The empirical data indicates that red–green politicians, climate scientists and activists, and sometimes journalists, use insults and accusations to enhance the good argument based on facts and figures from science and statistics. They aim to delegitimise the politics of the Tidö parties, but not to silence Tidö politicians. This is very much in line with traditional environmental rhetoric (cf. Dryzek & Lo, 2015; Wolrath Söderberg, 2020), and quite the opposite to the Tidö parties’ nasty rhetoric aiming to silence opponents.

The prime minister and the climate minister accused climate activists of being a threat to Swedish democracy, but without factual grounds, only emotions. When S party leader Andersson accused SD of being a threat to democracy, and MP leader Stenevi accused Pourmokhtari of being a minister in SD’s “puppet government”, these accusations have concrete bearing on results and conclusions from democracy research (e.g. Silander, 2024; V-Dem Institute, 2024; von Malmborg, 2024b, 2024c). They were not slurs, but well-substantiated accusations. It is ironically symptomatic that SD party leader Åkesson, basing his entire politics and rhetoric on emotional governance, accuses the former S–MP government’s climate policy to be based on emotions, not on facts, while Tidö climate policy is based on false hope and putative will of the people. When asked by oppositional

politicians, scientists and media to present facts about how Tidö climate policies will make Sweden meet its climate targets, the prime minister and climate minister said that these would be presented in the climate action plan. When asked by oppositional politicians, scientists and media to explain why the climate action plan does not get the calculations right, that there are no policies that will make Sweden meet its climate targets, they were insulted and intimidated. The Tidö parties had no answers but fantasies about new nuclear power plants to be built in unrealistically short time at extremely high costs, which they tried to hide from the public.⁸⁴

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

5.2. Understanding the Nature of Nasty Rhetoric

Reflecting upon the empirical results in a wider context, this section also reviews the literature on far-right populism, hate speech and hate crime to analyse the nature of nasty rhetoric from a more general perspective, addressing the main research question: What role does it play, and how come it expands and continues? Looking into the meso- and micro-level causes and motives of hate speech and hate crime, I give an account of the ebb and flow of nasty rhetoric.

5.2.1. A Double-Edged Sword in a Weird Kind of Sport

The empirical data provides evidence that right-wing politicians use nasty rhetoric to polarise climate politics and to silence their 'enemies' in the culture war on climate change, as one tactic in an overall attempt to demount Swedish democracy (cf. von Malmborg, 2024a). They use it to denigrate, deprecate, delegitimise, dehumanise and emotionally hurt some targets directly, but also to send a message to other members of the outgroup, like civil servants in national authorities, that they should not raise their voices and oppose the Tidö government (cf. Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Schulz et al., 2020; Dimant, 2023; Zeitzoff, 2023; Ilse & Hagerlid, 2025). The extensive use of nasty rhetoric by prime minister Kristersson and other leading Tidö politicians, dehumanising the enemies, also desensitises and legitimises more people to use it, thus, to continue and expand its use and normalise it. The greater the desensitisation of the individual towards hate speech, the greater the persuasive capacity of the message and the prejudice towards the group targeted by hatred. In short, the individual becomes desensitised, normalises hate speech, and transforms it into resentment, increasing prejudice and violence towards the subjects of hate (Soral et al., 2018). SD's use of anonymous troll accounts helped to diminish the distance between political leaders and individuals, enabling a normalisation of behaviours and attitudes that would be considered unacceptable in the physical world or online a few years ago (Bjola & Pamment, 2019; Helbing et al., 2019).

From this, nasty rhetoric can be seen as a *double-edged sword*, used by political leaders and front-row warriors to cut emotional wounds in the outgroup 'enemies', while at the same time sabring open the bottle of potential ingroup supporters and followers to intensify and expand the hate and

⁸⁴⁸⁴ Series of articles in *Dagens Nyheter*, 12-13 August 2024, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/tomas-ramberg-mangmiljardfragan-ar-om-vi-alls-behover-ny-karnkraft/>; <https://www.dn.se/ledare/regeringens-karnkraftsplan-ar-en-enda-enorm-gladjekalkyl/>; <https://www.dn.se/ekonomi/expert-efter-karnkraftsbeskedet-tydligt-hur-dyrt-det-blir/>

threats towards the outgroup (cf. Chen, 2017; Munger, 2017; Walther, 2025). The study does not address the psychological traits of Tidö politicians, but recent studies indicate that populist politicians score high on dark triad personality traits, i.e. Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Visser et al., 2017; Nai & Maier, 2018, 2024; Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019), and that they are more inclined to systematically engage hate speech and hate crime. This is in line with sociological research suggesting similar character structures, psychological functions, social relations and mechanisms to produce subjectivities of neoliberal capitalism and contemporary far-right populism (Hamburg, 1991; Kohut, 2011; Lacan, 2002; Short, 2016; Alemán, 2024; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2024). But how do populist leaders persuade their followers, and what makes some people follow suit in this *weird kind of sport*? A sport that requires no training or ability, with masses of cheering spectators who applaud the players with likes, hearts, upvotes, retweets, cross-platform links, and fans, many of whom join the players on the field as well.

5.2.2. Why and How Right-Wing Populist Leaders Persuade Their Followers

When used by leading politicians, including the prime minister, nasty rhetoric is normalised and legitimised. Demonising and delegitimising rhetoric on climate activists as criminals (saboteurs and anti-democratic terrorists that should be executed), climate journalists as a left-liberal conspiracy and moron hags that should be raped, and climate scientists as opinion leaders to be killed, all symbolically blamed and scapegoated for perceived grievances and social ills, i.e. a threat to the 'people' and their worldview, gives rise to emotions of hate and threat offenders such as vindictiveness, disgust and hate, and calls for retribution and execution (Wahlström et al., 2021; Martínez et al., 2022a; Pretus et al., 2022). Similar findings have been reported in studies of hate crime in the US, where defensive hate crime offenders react to a perceived intrusion upon their dominant status in society, e.g. fear of lost status or economic distress (McDevitt et al., 2002).

According to social psychology research, symbolic threats, i.e. threats to worldviews, values and identity (Stephan & Stephan, 2017), predicts hatred which in turn predicts aggressive tendencies and hurting behaviour (Martínez et al., 2022b). In comparison, realistic threats, i.e. threats to safety, goals or resources, give rise to anger and dislike (Stephan & Stephan, 2017), which predicts tendencies of wanting to change the 'enemy', not hurt it (cf. Martínez et al., 2022b). Thus, hate is a destructive force, while anger is a constructive force (Martínez et al., 2022a). The stronger emotional reactions to symbolic threats, facilitating hate and aggression, may be explained by the strong emotionality with which people endorse values, moral convictions and worldviews (Skitka et al., 2005; Pretus et al., 2022). Furthermore, compared to realistic threats, symbolic threats may be experienced as stable in time based on negative and non-malleable dispositional attributions towards the in-group targets (e.g. Hutcherson & Gross, 2011), eliciting proportional enduring hate feelings with the prospective function of keeping individuals prepared to keep hating for longer periods (cf. Roseman & Steele, 2018).

This can explain the focus of the Swedish far-right and right-wing populist politicians and policy professionals to portray climate scientists, climate activists, the political opposition and climate journalists as a 'symbolic' and cultural threat to Sweden, and what they perceive as Swedish. The nasty rhetoric and the conspiracy theories provoke hatred among followers, not simply anger. In addition, they dehumanise and demonise the outgroup. Political leaders' legitimisation of more aggressive hate and violent actions by appealing to higher loyalties is complemented by a "denial of injury by framing violence as 'educational' and denial of the victim through dehumanisation or by framing violence as 'just retribution'" (Wahlström et al., 2021, p. 3307). Nasty politics with denigrating and deprecating rhetoric is a powerful tactic of particularly populist politicians, often with dark triad psychopathological personality traits (Visser et al., 2017; Nai & Maier, 2018, 2024; Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019), to persuade followers to expanding and aggravating nasty rhetoric and violent actions to silence the opponents (Anastasio et al., 2021; Valcore et al., 2023; Zeitzoff, 2023). Deprecation, i.e. insults and accusations to make claims about action, may be a precursor to more targeted violent rhetoric and action, and act as a provocation and incitement to addressees and

bystanders as much as emotional sentiments that psychologically wound the targets of a speech, text, picture or video. As for violence, “speech can and does inspire crime” (Cohen-Almagor et al., 2018, p. 38; Schweppe & Perry, 2021). As mentioned by Valcore et al. (2023, p. 251), “deprecation is a perlocutionary message and permission to hate not because of some characteristic of the hated other, but for what has presumably been done by the hated other to the safe, clean, Arcadian, white world the speaker cherishes”.

5.2.3. Why Followers Follow

It is outside the scope of this study to analyse the motives of followers empirically. A review of recent research in sociology, social psychology, psychology, psychiatry and neurobiology, taken together, suggests that perpetration of hate speech and hate crime by individuals and groups towards outgroups can only be explained by addressing it as a socially mediated phenomena related to culture and ideology, collectively habitualising nasty rhetoric, as well as a phenomenon caused by psychological and neurobiological factors. The latter involves the sequencing of specific brain-behaviour processes that mobilise aggressive urges and direct these impulses against specific individuals, groups or institutions (Dunbar, 2022a, 2022b).

Nasty rhetoric utilises emotion rhetoric to invoke emotional harm. Psychologists stress that pathological worry is one of the factors that can induce emotional problems, problems of an interpersonal nature, and social-relational problems to predict hating and expression of aggression, relevant to explain hate speech and hate crime (see e.g. Di Maggio et al., 2017; Lievaart et al., 2017; Pace et al., 2018). Psychopathological factors can also influence followers in nasty rhetoric (Nai et al., 2023). Different persuasive strategies work on different personalities (Hirsh et al., 2012). Dark traits are particularly associated with populism (Galais & Rico, 2021; Pruysers, 2021; Hofstetter & Filsinger, 2024). A recent study by Isom and Hubbard (2024) suggest associations between dark triad traits and trust in conservative media, habitus angst (such as white victim ideology), far-right extremist beliefs, media, orthodox norms (such as patriarchal gender normative beliefs), and negative outcomes, including online aggressive behaviours. These all increase political divides (Klein, 2020). In opposition to widespread intuitions about the character of populists, Galais & Rico (2021) found that in a Spanish context, narcissism is positively associated with support for populism. On the contrary, studies by Vargiu et al. (2024) with focus on American and Swiss contexts, and by Hofstetter and Filsinger (2024), with focus on France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, and the United Kingdom, found support for psychopathy rather than Machiavellianism and narcissism predicting populist attitudes and individuals being more inclined to be persuaded by incivility in political messages. These studies give no convergent results on relationships between personality traits in different cultures and governance systems, why it is impossible to extrapolate to the Swedish context, but overall, these findings highlight the political relevance of cultural and individual differences rooted in personality traits (Blais et al., 2021).

While personality traits, related to neuroanatomy and neurotransmission of biochemical agents in the expression of hate speech and hate crime affects emotional dysregulation of individuals, ascription to a bias ideology has an impact on social cognition and social bonding of perpetrators of hate speech and hate crime. Ideologically, Dellagiacoma et al. (2024) has found that people adhering to right-wing authoritarianism are more likely to produce online hate than people with a more social liberal orientation. Dunbar (2022a) describes four archetypes of followers in hate and violence:

1. *Willing followers*, with minimal ideology and low arousal who join haters for self-affirmation,
2. *Calculated believers*, marked by strong ideological motives and low-affect dysregulation,
3. *Labile bigots*, who are affect-dysregulated perpetrators of violence with low ideological motives, and
4. *Violent extremists*, including high-ideological offenders with high affect dysregulation and impulsive neurobiological status.

A reanalysis of data on 555 reported hate crime cases in the US found that 49 % were conducted by willing followers, 34 % by calculated offenders, 8 % by labile bigots and 9 % by hate extremists (Dunbar, 2022a). The first two categories included more people that had prior hate activity. All groups used verbal hate, while particularly violent extremists used violent infraction.

Attempting to explain the 'willingness' of willing followers, research on hate speech and hate crime in sociology and social psychology suggests that production and propagation of hate messages on social media are most often not individual acts, not uncorrelated, not disorganised, but part of various social processes and systems (Walther, 2025). Obvious examples in the case of Swedish climate politics are the online and offline attacks on members of *Extinction Rebellion* orchestrated by SD and particularly AfS. When legitimised by 'evil' political leaders, the darkness of denigration and deprecation seep into the mainstream and become *habitually collectivised*, i.e. normalised, and the opportunity to participate in a collective that allows people to feel good about themselves by being superior to others can be almost too good to resist (Cheng et al. (2017). Being exposed to hate speech not targeting yourself, such as members of the anti-climate ingroup, reduces people's ability to recognise the offensive character of such language (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020). In short, the individual becomes desensitised, normalises hate speech, and transforms it into resentment, increasing prejudice and violence towards the subjects of hate (Soral et al., 2018; Szanto, 2018).

6. Concluding Remarks

The aim of this paper is to raise problems, draw attention to, and to provoke discussion about the use and nature of nasty rhetoric, i.e. systematic and strategic use of hate speech and hate crime for political purposes, where targets are not only oppositional politicians, but professionals doing their job and engaged citizens concerned about climate change and what they see as political inaction related to an ongoing ecocide.

Perceiving ambitious climate policy as a threat to the current capitalist economic system and the economic growth paradigm, with repressed shame and fear of symbolic economic distress and losing societal status and identity, libertarian and neoliberal thinktanks, liberal-conservative and far-right populist politicians in Sweden use nasty rhetoric as a *double-edged sword*. They use insults, accusations, intimidations, incitements and sometimes violence of different kinds to demonise, dehumanise, emotionally hurt and silence political opponents in their outgroup – the 'enemies' of the nation. They also use such nasty rhetoric to instigate hate in the ingroup and mobilise more offenders in a *weird sport* related to a culture war on climate politics. Climate science is described as "just an opinion", green politicians as "strawmen" that should be "killed", female climate journalists as "left pack" and "moron hags" that "will be raped", and climate activists as "saboteurs", "totalitarian terrorists" and "a threat to democracy" that should be "sent to prison" and "executed". International studies on followers in hate crime indicate that half of them join haters repeatedly for self-affirmation, while the other half are marked by high ideological motives and/or psychopathological and neurobiological factors leading to difficulties in regulating social emotional action. This indicates that any attempt to give a full understanding of nasty rhetoric must synthesise research in different disciplines using a systems approach.

State repression of climate activists have increased and changed in nature, from sentencing activists to fines for disobedience of law enforcement to sentencing them to prison for sabotage. Intimidations and incitement have been made of changing anti-terrorist legislation to include actions of climate activists. A similar development of increased state repression of climate activists is seen in other European countries, e.g. Austria, France, Germany, Spain and the UK. The UN rapporteur on environmental organisations' rights under the Aarhus Convention expresses well the impact of nasty rhetoric and nasty politics targeting climate activists (Forst, 2024, p. 11):

By categorising environmental activism as a potential terrorist threat, by limiting freedom of expression and by criminalising 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.

A Swedish climate journalist, heavily targeted but still standing the grounds against nasty rhetoric, recently claimed that:⁸⁵

The reason why activists are so heavily targeted and why anti-climate advocates like to throw the activist stamp on a journalist who investigates large exploitation companies and the system is because climate policy is potentially subversive. The UN says that we must have rapid change in every sector. Of course, it is dangerous for everyone who wants business-as-usual and for many who are in positions of power. There is a huge interest in criminalising activism.

The political opposition, climate scientists, climate journalists and climate activists also use uncivil language, but of a less aggressive form – only insults and accusations – targeting the government and individual ministers. This is done in a more traditional kind of rhetorical argumentation, where they aim at delegitimise and reveal Tidö climate politics and politicians as a flaw and a naked emperor. Referring to real threats with acknowledged shame, they instigate anger and emancipation in their ingroup and a will to change, not silence, Tidö supporters.

Nasty rhetoric is part of the far-right populists' culture war, not only on climate politics but on what they claim is a hegemonic left-liberal conspiracy. While silencing critics and mobilising followers, nasty rhetoric also manipulates ideologically the meaning of concepts used in society and politics in the contemporary world. With less than three years use of nasty rhetoric in Swedish climate politics, legitimacy has little to do with public acceptance, but shall now be understood as 'according to the will of the Tidö parties'. Climate justice is now understood as 'justice for those who use fossil fuels'. Democracy means 'autocracy'. Gradually increasing accusations of climate activists as being saboteurs, totalitarian, terrorists and a threat to Swedish democracy, the Tidö parties use hyperboles to change the meaning of the concept of 'activist', describing it as illegal behaviour. Even if people in general do not consider climate activists as terrorists, the meaning of activists has changed from an 'engaged citizen' raising her voice in protest against abuses to a 'person performing criminal acts'. Activism has become an 'illegal' action. Being vague on definitions of central concepts is also a way for populists to gain support (Fridlund, 2025). Nasty rhetoric used by politicians feeds political intolerance, defined as the support or willingness to denounce basic democratic values and the equal rights of people belonging to a defined outgroup in a particular society (Oates & Gibson, 2006).

A similar development with concrete consequences for those who try to protest against abuses in the contemporary world is the ideological manipulation of the concept of 'antisemitism', where voices of solidarity in Palestine have consistently been accused of antisemitic activism (Ardin & Irwing, 2025). The reference is relevant since many climate activists are also active in the Palestine movement. According to Ardin and Irwing, the criticism of the activists has often been speculative and has been about symbols that have been constructed as unequivocal evidence of antisemitism, without other explanations being explored. For example, an early denunciation of Israel's actions as "genocide" have sparked global accusations against Greta Thunberg. At the same time, expressions of antisemitism tend to be trivialised if they come from others than just the Palestine movement.⁸⁶ This reinforces the image that the concepts of 'climate activism' and 'antisemitism' are in many cases not used honestly, but are used as ideological tools to achieve political results. In these ways, the climate justice movement and the Palestine movement are singled out as extremists and made a scapegoat for Europe's guilt of capitalism and colonialism (cf. Ardin & Irwing, 2025).

In September 2024, 74 scientists, journalists and writers in Sweden made an appeal in Sweden's largest newspaper that measures ought to be taken by the political leadership and other leading

⁸⁵ Interview in *Sveriges Naur*, 9 April 2025, <https://www.sverigesnatur.org/intervju/lisa-rostlund-om-klimatet-och-journalistiken/>

⁸⁶ Consider Elon Musk's hailing on stage,

people in public policy discussions to end nasty rhetoric due its detrimental effects on democracy.⁸⁷ The appeal includes 25 emotional testimonies embodying the emotions and vulnerabilities of the victims of nasty rhetoric. Many of those were threatened to silence but chose to raise their voices again in company of others, to stand the grounds for liberal democracy. They spoke also in sympathy with those who continue to stay silent, who don't dare to speak of fear to be hated and threatened again. Significant for the political climate in Sweden and the self-positioning of libertarians, neoliberals and far-right populists as morally superior (Vahter & Jakobson, 2023), this call was immediately attacked by right-wing influencers, including a well-known libertarian YouTuber. Manipulating his 50K followers on Facebook, he claimed that the signatories are "inflated prima donnas" performing a "Princess and the Pea coterie" being sad and calling for political action to restrict freedom of speech because "some insults made them loose their privilege of interpretation".⁸⁸ In his post, he ignored the testimonies of incitement, threats of assault and death. The call for an end to nasty rhetoric was not about privilege of interpretation, but about the dignity as human beings and more importantly about safeguarding basic norms and institutions in a liberal, pluralistic democracy. Nasty rhetoric is a serious threat to liberal democracy.

Based on the case of Swedish climate politics, this paper highlights that nasty rhetoric is not like 'normal' political rhetoric, where antagonists use arguments in a deliberative conversation to come to an agreement and develop policy, or if less ambitious, win a debate. Despite its name, users of nasty rhetoric are not interested or willing to argue, to engage in a deliberative dialogue with their antagonists using traditional rhetoric. It is a core trait of populists to consider themselves to have the answer to all questions and solutions to all problems in public policy, often described in simple terms (Arato & Cohen, 2017; Caramani, 2017). Like religious fundamentalists, their ideology is based on a unitary and non-pluralist vision of society's public interest, and they themselves are rightful interpreters of the Only Truth (von Malmberg, 2025d). Except for the purpose of persuading current and potential supporters, mobilising the ingroup, far-right populists are not interested in deliberation or winning a debate. They do not want a debate, their opponents are enemies to the nation and heretics, and should thus be silenced, excommunicated.

Perhaps nasty *rhetoric* is not a good name for the phenomenon? It seems misleading with regard to traditional research on political rhetoric. Nasty rhetoric differs from traditional rhetoric, not only because of the systematic use of hate speech and hate crime for political reasons, but because of its nasty aim to silence the opponents. But rather than changing the name, perhaps it is research on (sustainability and sustainable) rhetoric that should engage with the current changes in language, discourse and ways of communication in politics and society. As discussed by Mouffe (2013), the means of communication and rhetoric as we know them are hegemonic in liberal democracies, but the "third wave of autocratisation" comes with a culture war to end the hegemony of liberal democratic discourse, and to replace it with autocracy including autocratic discourse and autocratic rhetoric (cf. Ardin, 2024; V-Dem Institute, 2025). Some would even call it fascist discourse and fascist rhetoric (Ardin & Irwing, 2025). Nasty rhetoric influences the norms and language used in society and politics. Words like democracy, legitimacy, justice, but also activist, antisemitism and Nazi do not mean the same thing today as they did a few years ago. Nasty rhetoric is truly a weird kind of sport performed by right-wing populists, the impacts of which on different victims and liberal democracy ought to be studied more.

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⁸⁷ Op-ed in *Dagens Nyheter*, 22 September 2024. <https://www.dn.se/kultur/upprop-detta-maste-fa-ett-slut-for-demokratins-framtid/>

⁸⁸ Post on Facebook by Henrik Jönsson, libertarian influencer, 22 September 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/T1ZT2edcMtdnewi/>

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Data availability statement: All data used comes from secondary sources, which are referenced either in Appendix A, footnotes or the reference list. Coded data is presented in Appendix B.

Appendix A. Data Sources

Type of source	Documents and audio-visual material analysed
Policy documents	- <i>The Tidö Agreement: An agreement for Sweden</i>, 14 October 2022; https://www.liberalerna.se/wp-content/uploads/tidoavtalet-overenskommelse-for-sverige-slutlig.pdf - <i>Tidö state finance bill for 2023, Prp. 2022/2023:1</i>, https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/def2026cac0b4ef7acf4afeb988326ed/budgetpropositionen-for-2023-hela-dokumentet-prop.2022231-.pdf - <i>Tidö government’s Climate Action Plan, 2023</i>; https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/990c26a040184c46acc66f89af34437f/232405900webb.pdf - <i>Tidö government’s energy and climate action plan to the EU, 2024</i>; https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/0b8182fb427d434cae89090457dab6f/sveriges-uppdaterade-nationella-energi--och-klimatplan-for-2021-2030.pdf - <i>Constitutional committee</i> scrutiny report on the government, 2023; https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/A7ADEA2E-FDB8-4136-9484-809FE4C4BD2B - Information from the <i>Riksdag</i> on the motion on non-confidence against climate minister Pourmokhtari, 17 January 2024; https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/aktuellt/aktuelltnotiser/2024/jan/9/omrostning-omisstroendeforklaring-mot-romina_cmsb96e46b0-deff-43b2-a12f-6a9c7e9c1480sv/; https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/aktuellt/aktuelltnotiser/2024/jan/17/ingen-misstroendeforklaring-mot-klimat-och_cms402569eb-17b1-4da9-8b7a-1074371827aeshv/ - Government bill 2024/25:155, <i>Stronger Constitutional Preparedness</i>; https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/f2279c1bacfe45ce8708eed4c3cbb1fb/star-kt-konstitutionell-beredskap-prop.-.pdf
Political debates in the Riksdag	- Party leader debate, 16 November 2022; https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/partiledardebatt/eu-politisk-partiledardebatt_hac120221116pd/ - Interpellation debate on Sweden’s climate target for the transport sector, 11 November 2022; https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/interpellationsdebatt/sveriges-klimatmal-for-transportsektorn_ha104/

- Interpellation debate on policies for climate change mitigations, 6 December 2022;
https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/interpellationsdebatt/atgarder-for-att-na-klimatmalen_ha1039/

- Interpellation debate on the government’s climate action plan, 26 January 2023;
https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/interpellationsdebatt/klimathandlingsplanen_ha10112/

- Interpellation debate on negotiations on the climate action plan, 14 March 2023;
https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/interpellationsdebatt/forhandlingen-om-sveriges-klimathandlingsplan_ha10224/

- Interpellation debate on green transition, 11 April 2023;
https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/video/interpellationsdebatt/den-grona-omstallningen-_ha10280/

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Social media	- Statement on Instagram by Greenpeace (@greenpeacesverige), 5 October 2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CyBsLf1h8BE/?igshid=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng%3D%3D&img_index=3 - Statement on X/Twitter by Prof. Johan Rockström, director of <i>Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research</i>, 21 December 2023, https://twitter.com/jrockstrom/status/1737888256149057692; - Statement on Instagram by Sweden’s prime minister (@kristerssonulf), 4 October 2023. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cx_RMVuMawb/ - Statement on X/Twitter by Jan Ericson (M) (@Ericson_ubbhult), 5 October 2023, https://riktpunkt.nu/2023/10/moderat-riksdagsledamot-terroristanklagar-klimataktivister/; - Statement on X/Twitter by Fredrik Kärholm (M), (@FredrikKarrholm), 23 September 2023, https://twitter.com/FredrikKarrholm/status/1705600537448587714 - Video on YouTube-channel of Riks, previously communication office of SD, 14 March 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlBy2uc6JuU&t=2s - Statement on X/Twitter by minister of civil defence Carl-Oskar Bohlin (M), (@CarlOskar), 4 April 2024, https://x.com/CarlOskar/status/1775974564738089126 - Post on Facebook by Henrik Jönsson, libertarian influencer, 22 September 2024, https://www.facebook.com/share/p/T1ZT2edcMtdnewi/
National television	- <i>Sveriges Television</i> (public service): - Interview with minister of education Mats Persson (L), <i>SVT Agenda</i>, 30 April 2023; https://www.svtplay.se/video/epoJkZ4/agenda/son-30-apr-21-15?id=epoJkZ4 - Reportage on SD’s strategies on climate policy, <i>Klimatdemokraterna</i>, 16 May 2023, https://www.svtplay.se/video/8opY72V/klimatdemokraterna - Interview with climate minister Romina Pourmokhtari, <i>30 Minuter</i>, 22 February 2024; https://www.svtplay.se/video/jp5m1ra/30-minuter/romina-pourmokhtari-l - Party leader debate prior to EU elections, 5 May 2024; https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/svts-partiledardebatt-i-agenda-2024 - 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>

- EU elections 2024: Final debate, SVT, 7 June 2024,
<https://www.svtplay.se/video/Kv1Yn2b/eu-val-2024-slutdebatten/avsnitt-1>

TV4 (private):

- Analysis of the Tidö parties’ press briefing on the CAP, 21 December 2023,
<https://www.tv4.se/artikel/5MenofU2MHfkzfa4yGT6YF/analys-kompromissen-med-sd-baeddard-foer-hardare-strid->

- “SD runs a troll factory”, Kalla Fakta, 7 May 2024;
<https://www.tv4.se/artikel/2VCWExxK0L1Xmai2Y60Z2/kalla-fakta-avsloear-sd-driver-en-trollfabrik>

- “Undercover i trollfabriken”, Kalla Fakta, 14 May 2024;
<https://www.tv4.se/artikel/57wbqqgEiXcPt2qvqozl2L/jimmie-akesson-svarar-pa-kalla-faktas-avsloejande;>

<https://www.tv4.se/artikel/6FuOqCQdMy2ryScvcl9V47/kristersson-m-sd-maste-be-om-ursaekt>

National radio - *Sveriges Radio* (public service):

- The climate activists that became saboteurs, *P1 Konflikt*, 19 January 2024;
<https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/klimataktivisterna-som-blev-sabotorer>

- How Europe wants to stop climate activists, *P1 Konflikt*, 9 February 2024;
<https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/sa-vill-europa-stoppa-klimataktivisterna>

- Party leader debate on climate policy prior to elections to Swedish Riksdag, 27 August 2022; <https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/riksdagspartierna-debatterar-miljo-och-klimat>

- Feature on climate policy, Swedish public service radio, *P1 Godmorgon världen*, 62:00 minutes. <https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/finland-gar-till-val-sveriges-tappade-klimatforsprang-och-regering-moter-banker-och-polis-i-bedragerimote>

Appendix B. Data on Hateful and Threatening Rhetoric in Swedish Climate Politics

Table B1. Insults made by (far) right-wing politicians and supporters.

Sender	Channel	Target	Rhetoric	Context
Party leader Jimmie Åkesson (SD)	Party leader debate in Swedish Riksdag	S, MP	“Your climate climate policy is emotional, not based on facts; It’s all about the children.”	Commenting previous governments’ climate policy
Climate minister Romina Pourmokhtari (L)	Invitation to national climate meeting	Extinction rebellion, Fridays for Future, Greenpeace	The climate movement is “irrelevant”	The Tidö government promised to have a dialogue with business, public authorities, academia and civil society in

					preparing the CAP, but the climate movement and climate scientists were deliberately discriminated and not invited.
PM Ulf Kristersson (M)	Press conference on CAP	S, MP		"Symbol politics is now replaced by things that have a real effect"	Commenting previous governments' climate policy
Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	Press conference on CAP	Journalists		"Quiz questions"	Response to journalists asking about short- and medium-term actions
Prime minister Kristersson (M), climate policy spokesperson Martin Kinnunen (SD)	Press conference on CAP	Climate scientists		Climate science is "just an opinion"	Response to critique of Swedish Climate Policy Council and climate scientists on the CAP
Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	Climate policy debate in Swedish Riksdag	S, C, MP, V		"You are strawmen, claiming that we abolish climate laws and targets"	Commenting allegations of the opposition about a leaked document from the Tidö parties' climate strategy investigator, published the day after the debate [#]
Press secretary of climate minister	Personal account	X/Twitter	Climate scientist, public service radio	Incredibly negative feature about climate policy on Swedish Radio today where 'environmental debater' N.N. got a lot of space	Commenting a in Swedish public service radio feature on the Tidö climate policy where a climate scientist presented his opinion
Nyheter Idag, Fria Tider (far-right online media)	News articles		Climate activists	"Leftish activists"; "muppets"	Commenting climate activist roadblocks

Timbro	Timbro online magazine <i>Smedjan</i>	Climate activists	“Climate alarmists”; “religious doomsday prophets”	Commenting climate activist roadblocks
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^aIn his report to the government, presented 18 October 2023, Prof. Hassler suggested that Swedish climate targets should be reviewed and revised, which the opposition interpreted as abolishment. <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/0b09ab52d60b4f8f8212acc1b71fbbb8/sveriges-klimatstrategi---46-forslag-for-klimatomstallning-i-ljuset-av-fit-for-55.pdf>.

Table B2. Accusations made by (far) right-wing politicians and supporters.

Sender	Channel	Target	Rhetoric	Context
Stockholm initiative (climate denying scientists)	Op-ed in newspaper	Established media	“Censoring the climate debate; climate alarmist propaganda centres.”	Traditional media reporting on climate change
SD	Far-right media	Established media	“Left-liberal conspiracy”	Media reporting on climate change
Mattias Karlsson (SD), member of the Riksdag, lead ideologist of SD	Interview in Swedish Newspaper <i>Expressen</i>	UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres	“He lacks grounding in science when he says that humanity is headed for climate hell.”	Climate speech by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres
Tobias Andersson (SD), member of the Riksdag, then legal policy spokes-person	Infiltration, humiliating videos on far-right social media	Climate activists	“Hippies estranged from the world”	Infiltration and confrontation at climate demonstration organised by Fridays for Future
Far-right journalist tied to AfS, SD and the Swedish white power movement	Far-right extremist media site Exakt24	Climate activists, particularly in Extinction Rebellion	“Climate extremists”	Campaign for the national elections in 2022
Martin Kinnunen (SD, climate policy spokesperson), Clara Aranda (SD, social policy spokesperson)	Interview in newspaper	Climate movement, MP and C	“Infantile rhetoric that scares children and young people to climate anxiety.”	Campaign for the national elections in 2022
Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	Press release	Climate activists, Extinction Rebellion, Scientist Rebellion	Extinction Rebellion is a “security risk”.	Pourmokhtari cancelled participation in the launch of an industry

			roadmap for fossil free competitiveness since one of the notified participants was a retired engineer and member of Scientist Rebellion		
Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	Communication with journalists	Climate journalists	Long-term refusal to be interviewed by journalists, restricting and delegitimising journalists from doing their job to scrutinise the Tidö parties' climate policies.	Response to critique of the Tidö parties' climate policy	
Prime minister Ulf Kristersson (M)	Instagram	Climate activists, Extinction Rebellion	Extinction Rebellion is "totalitarian" and "poses a threat to Swedish democratic political processes".	Members of Mother Rebellion sang at an open after work meeting organised by the government	
Prime minister Ulf Kristersson (M)	Facebook	Climate activists, Extinction Rebellion, Mother Rebellion	They "pretend to care about the climate but destroy the opportunities for a constructive conversation about climate policy. It's really, really bad."	Follow-up on actions of civil disobedience	
Fredrik Kärrholm (M) and Jan Ericson (M), members of the Riksdag	X/Twitter	Climate activists, Extinction Rebellion	"Terrorists"	Comment to accusations of prime minister Kristersson regarding Extinction Rebellion	
Pontus A Garpvall (SD), legal policy spokesperson	Interview <i>Aftonbladet</i>	in Climate activists	"Terrorists"	Comment related to climate actions at airports	
<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i> (independent	Editorial	MP	Represents "extreme environ-mentalism". Is "the political arm	Commenting the Tidö government's CAP	

conservative newspaper)			of the climate justice movement”.
Former gas supply coordinator at Swedish Energy Agency	Interview in <i>Fokus</i>	New gas supply coordinator at Swedish Energy Agency, privately active in Mother Rebellion	“She is a huge risk to national security and also to other countries” Indignation over being fired from Swedish Energy Agency due to misconduct

Table B3. Intimidations made by (far) right-wing politicians and supporters.

Sender	Channel	Target	Rhetoric	Context
Tobias Andersson (SD), chair of the Riksdag’s industry committee, Johan Forsell (M), minister of migration	Debates in the Riksdag, interviews in newspapers	Climate activists performing roadblocks at demonstrations	Climate activists are “saboteurs” to be “charged with sabotage, not disobedience to law enforcement”.	Response to climate activist roadblocks
Justice minister Gunnar Strömmer (M)	Interviews in newspapers, debates in the Riksdag	Climate activists performing roadblocks at demonstrations	“Climate activists should be sentenced to long periods in prison.”	Response to climate activist roadblocks
Garpvall (SD), legal policy spokesperson	Interview in <i>Aftonbladet</i>	Climate activists	“Climate actions should be charged in courts as acts of terrorism”	Comment related to climate actions at airports
Martin Kinnunen (SD), climate policy spokesperson	Press conference on Swedish Climate Policy Council’s annual report	Climate scientists, Swedish Climate Policy Council	“I will make sure your mandate is revised.”	Response to critique of Swedish Climate Policy Counciland climate scientists on the Tidö parties’s climate policy
Former gas supply coordinator at Swedish Energy Agency	Text messages	New gas supply coordinator at Swedish Energy Agency, privately in Mother Rebellion	“Do as I say, or you will be fired. I know people in the government.”	Indignation over being fired from Swedish Energy Agency due to misconduct

Civil defence minister Carl-Oskar Bohlin (M)	X/Twitter	Climate activist engaged in Mother Rebellion	“Important that measures are taken to ensure that something like this never happens again”	Response to news articles on climate activist working at Swedish Energy Agency, after calling the Director General of the Agency
Minister of education and research Mats Persson (L)	Interview in public service television	Climate scientists	“Scientists’ climate activism undermines public trust in science.”	Comment on climate actions of Scientist Rebellion
Anonymous far-right climate deniers	E-mail	Climate journalists	“Damn you, I pay your salary and will make sure you’re fired.”	Critique towards public service reports on climate change
Björn Söder (SD), member of the Riksdag	Interview in <i>Dagens</i> <i>ETC</i>	Civil servants, including climate activists	“Civil servants illoyal to SD shall be fired”	Response to 261 civil servants in the Government Offices of Sweden

Table B4. Incitements made by (far) right-wing politicians and supporters.

Sender		Channel	Target		Rhetoric	Context
SD-linked media profile engaged with far-right extremist Exakt24		X/Twitter	Climate activists, Återställ våtmarker (Eng. Restore wetlands)		“I am a little sceptical that the state should execute people. But when it comes to @vatmarker, I am willing to make an exception to my principles.”	Commenting climate activist roadblocks, attacks on paintings at museums and attacks on tv shows
Far-right populist influencer, former member of the Riksdag for (S)		Instagram reel	MP		Video showing what represents a dead person wrapped in a black garbage bag, with a sign tied around the body: “I regret that I voted for the Green Party last election”.#	Campaign for the national elections in 2022

Far-right journalist tied to AfS, SD and the Swedish white power movement	Far-right extremist media site Exakt24	Climate activists, particularly in Extinction Rebellion	Campaign with Nazi symbols and Nazi rhetoric to encourage far-right extremists, including members of the neo-Nazi NMR, to infiltrate and seek accommodation with activists in Extinction Rebellion.	Facilitation of hunting down members of Extinction Rebellion
Far-right journalist tied to AfS, SD and the Swedish white power movement	Telegram and far-right extremist media site Exakt24	Climate scientists, climate activists, climate journalists	Posting of photos, names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses.	Facilitation of hunting down enemies
Anonymous far-right extremists	Exakt24, Telegram	Climate journalist	“His mother is from Norway, have not examined her. But the daddy is an imported vote cattle from Chile. The Social Democrats picked up thousands of communists in the 70s to secure the election win.”	Including family members in threat campaigns
Anonymous right-wing climate deniers	E-mail	Female climate journalists	“You will be raped!”	Critique towards established media reports on climate change

[#] <https://www.expressen.se/tv/nyheter/jan-emanuels-likvideo-anvands-som-hot-mot-miljopartister/>.

Table B5. Insults made by left-liberal and green politicians, climate scientists, journalists and the climate justice movement.

Sender	Channel	Target	Rhetoric	Context
Anna-Caren S��therberg climate policy spokesperson	Riksdag debate on (S), climate policy, with focus on the CAP	Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	The CAP is a “napkin sketch and a broken promise”.	Critique of the Tid�� parties’ CAP
Jytte Guteland member of the Riksdag, former	(S) Riksdag debate on climate policy, with focus on the CAP	Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	“The climate minister is rhetorically skilled and eager to get into	Critique of the Tid�� parties’ CAP

member of the European Parliament			debates but right now it is very obvious to the Swedish people, journalists and politicians in this chamber that the climate minister is standing in front of an empty shop window."		
Greenpeace, Fridays for Future	Op-ed in newspaper, invitation to demonstration [#]	Tidö government	Demonstration outside the national "climate meeting" with "civil society organisations". [‡]	Response to not being invited to the government's national climate meeting	
Climate scientists	Op-eds in newspapers	Tidö government	The government's climate meeting was a "joke", a "play for the galleries" and a "spectacle".	Response to not being invited to the government's national climate meeting	
Tomas Ramberg, politics journalist at <i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	Commentary in newspaper	Industry and energy minister Ebba Busch (KD, the government	The lure of nuclear power is an erogenous zone to the government. ^t	Critique of minister Busch's claim that the reason for the government to provide state finance to new nuclear power is 'a law of physics'	

[#] <https://www.greenpeace.org/sweden/pressmeddelanden/klimat/pressinbjudan-demonstration-utanfor-regeringens-klimatmote-16-juni/> [‡] Quotation marks insinuate that the meeting was not a real climate meeting and that civil society organisations were not properly represented.

Table B6. Accusations made by left-liberal and green politicians, climate scientists, journalists and the climate justice movement.

Sender	Channel	Target	Rhetoric	Context
Per Bolund (MP), former party leader	Party leader debate in the Riksdag	Prime minister Ulf Kristersson (M)	"Provoking naked liar"	Response to accusation of the prime minister that the S-MP government decided to decommission four nuclear power plants

Andrea Andersson Tay (V), member of the Riksdag	Climate policy debate in the Riksdag	Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	“You let climate policy cover the bubbling frustration over society’s injustices.”	Critique of Tidö parties’ climate policy
Tony Haddou (V), member of the Riksdag	Climate policy debate in the Riksdag	(M) and (KD)	“M and KD deny the need for strong climate policy: The finance minister (M) shrugs; ‘It’s no big deal if Sweden misses the climate targets. If we don’t do it, we don’t do it’. KD have been mostly happy to move money from rail to road and are in some kind of ‘nuclear Tourette’s state of mind’.”	Critique of Tidö parties’ climate policy
Märta Stenevi (MP), former party leader	Climate policy debate in the Riksdag	Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	“You are a minister in an extremely weak ‘puppet government’ that could only take office after a comprehensive agreement was made with the right-wing extremists in SD, /.../ We are debating with a liberal climate minister who runs SD’s climate policy.”	Critique of Tidö parties’ climate policy and climate minister Pourmokhtari
Märta Stenevi (MP), former party leader	Climate policy debate in the Riksdag	Prime minister Ulf Kristersson (M)	“This ‘puppet government’ does not understand the urgency of containing global warming. It is clueless at best and cynical at worst – you increase emissions	Critique of the prime minister’s ambition to “calmly sit down with researchers, industry and various bodies to ‘chisel out the policy that will take us to the finish line’”

			today and hope that someone else will solve the situation in the future.”	
Daniel Vencu Velasquez Castro (S), member of the Riksdag	Riksdag debate on the government’s policy for a green transition	Industry and energy minister Ebba Busch (KD)	What does it mean for the green transition when the government is controlled by SD, who do not want any change?”	Critique of the weak puppet government
Anna-Caren S��therberg (S), member of the Riksdag, climate policy spokesperson	Riksdag debate on climate policy	(L) and climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	“You are ambiguous. You said: ‘No, SD are not involved.’ Then your party leader, minister for education Johan Pehrson (L) said that ‘SD must be involved in designing the CAP to the highest degree’. Is there a crack in the Liberals?	Critique of the process for preparing the CAP
Elin S��derberg (MP), member of the Riksdag, climate policy spokesperson	Riksdag debate on climate policy	Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	The government seems to “abdicate on the CAP and present it as a government letter rather than a government bill, which sidesteps the Riksdag”.	Critique of the process for preparing the CAP
Jytte Guteland (S), member of the Riksdag, former member of the European Parliament	Riksdag debate on climate policy	Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	“The government communicates with the opposition through media rather than personal meetings. I represent the largest party in the Riksdag – it is not far-fetched to think that we could be one of these parties. Yet	Critique of the process for preparing the climate action plan, referring to the prime minister’s claim that the government should seek broad support for the climate action

				we have seen no such plan from many contacts. Then one parties begins to think about whether this rhetoric is a way to divert thoughts from the lack of concreteness in climate policy."
Jytte Guteland (S) member of the Riksdag, former member of the European Parliament	Riksdag debate on climate policy	Climate minister Pourmokhtari (L)	"In politics the motto 'I can do it myself' works very poorly. In politics, it's about creating trust and making sure that you get joint decisions and can make them together with others – not least in Sweden's Riksdag, this is completely decisive. Therefore, this superhero attitude of yours is not satisfactory. The climate minister stands very alone in an uncomfortable situation."	Critique of the climate minister constantly referring to herself as 'a liberal minister in a right-wing government in which SD has no ministers'
Economics scholars in Swedish Finance Policy Council	Annual report to the government 2024 (Swedish Finance Policy Council, 2024, p. 15)	Tidö parties	"The climate action plan does not provide clear and concrete information about how the climate targets are to be reached; it rests on hopes that future actions will lead to the achievement of the targets."	Critique of the Tidö parties' climate policies

Climate scientists in Swedish Climate Policy Council	Annual report to the government 2024 (Swedish Climate Policy Council, 2024, p. 8)	Tidö parties	“The Tidö parties provide a misleading picture of the action plan’s expected contribution to achieving the goal. The claim that the action plan leads ‘all the way to net zero’ is factually flawed.”	Critique of the Tidö parties’ climate policies
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