

Sustaining Ambition: The Role of Swedish Party Politics in Meeting EU Green Deal Emission Reduction Targets (2016–2045)

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Abstract: This study investigates how Swedish party politics between 2016 and 2025 have shaped the country's climate policy ambitions within the framework of the 2017 Climate Act and the EU Green Deal. Drawing on wedge-issue competition theory, the analysis applies a theory-driven qualitative content analysis to parliamentary debates to explore how climate policy has evolved beyond its traditional focus of widespread agreement toward structured political contestation. The findings show that while Swedish parties continue to agree on the necessity of climate action, they increasingly diverge over governance strategies, policy instruments, and the distribution of costs and benefits. Coalition politics and strategic party repositioning have shifted climate policy toward contested implementation rather than declining ambition. Overall, the study concludes that Sweden's long-term climate goals to meet up with both the European Union Green Deal signed in the year 2019 to be realized by 2050 and equally the Swedish climate act of 2017 remain intact. But their realization depends on managing wedge-issue dynamics within an increasingly complex coalition-based political system.

Keywords: Swedish Politics, Climate Ambition, Wedge-Issue Competition, Coalition Politics, Climate Policy, EU Green Deal.

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ Background

Globally, Sweden is widely regarded as one of the leading countries in the fight against climate change, consistently positioning itself at the forefront of ambitious climate policy, international cooperation, and domestic emission reduction efforts. In 2022, Sweden's greenhouse gas (GHG) emission intensifies per capita and per unit of GDP were amongst the lowest across EU member states. Sweden has successfully decoupled Green House Gas emissions from strong economic growth and growing population. Between 2010 and 2022, GHG emissions, excluded land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF), fell by 29% (OECD, 2025). From 2026 till present, Sweden has been involved in a series of coalition arrangements that have shaped or sometimes constrained its climate ambitions. Through its political shifts in government coalitions, minority governments and reliance on parliamentary supports from parties with differing views on climate action have introduced political trade-offs that have affected policy consistency, and implementation.

The atmosphere is warming and climate is changing each passing day with 1 million of the 8 million species on the planet at risk of being lost. As such, while humankind cannot do away with natural hazards, we can eliminate those that we cause, minimize those that we exacerbate, and reduce

our vulnerability to most. Doing this requires healthy and resilient communities and ecosystems. Indeed, the planet earth is going through a climate crisis, characterized by a profound and accelerating long-term shifts in global weather patterns are influenced primarily by anthropogenic activities, although natural factors also contribute to their variability. This phenomenon is predominantly caused by significant increase in atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane and nitrous oxide resulting from the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas), deforestation and industrial processes which trap heat in the earth's atmosphere, which has caused severe global warming. The consequences of this are far-reaching and manifest in various forms including rising global average temperatures, climate change is associated with an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, including heat waves, droughts, floods, and severe storms, as well as accelerated glacier melting. The European Union Green Deal is a strong response to these challenges because it operationalizes the IPCC Synthesis Report's scientific warnings by translating the 1.5°C target into binding EU climate, energy and emission policies. The AR6 SYR confirms that, the nationally determined contributions (NDCs), committed by 2030 show temperature will increase by 1.5°C in the first half of the 2030's and it is becoming increasingly difficult to limit global warming to 2.0°C by the end of the 21st century (Calvin., et al 2023).

The European Green Deal is a flagship initiative of the European Commission, presented by Commission president “Ursula von der Leyen” on 11 December 2019. It comprises a range of initiatives, strategies, and legislative measures that together are intended to facilitate a just, sustainable, and inclusive transformation of European society and the economy (Calvin et al., 2023). While the EU has previously positioned itself as a leader in climate action through successive policy frameworks like the 20-20-20 energy and climate package known also as CEP2020 targets for 2020 and the “2030 climate and emergency framework”, it became evident that these measures, while foundational, were insufficient to meet the challenges ahead. Furthermore, it is the imperative to honor the commitments made under the Paris Agreement in 2015, which legally bound signatories to limit global warming to well below 2°C and ideally 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, demanded a radical recalibration of the Union’s climate strategy, pushing for more comprehensive and transformative agenda that transcended incremental adjustments. The vision articulated was one of systemic transformation, promoting a circular economy, halting biodiversity loss, eliminating pollution and fostering innovation, thereby seeking to reduce the environmental impacts associated with resource depletion and environmental degradation, which has positioned the European Union as a prominent driver in shaping the global green transition.

Sweden is widely regarded as a pioneer in environmental governance. This has been justified by supporting views such as: Sweden is arguably the first country to ascertain a comprehensive approach on environmental issues in particular to pollution control, secondly, it has gained global recognition in global environmental governance because its government has championed climate mitigation both domestically and globally and lastly, it has also created an institutional framework with strong and enduring backing for environmental integration (Environmental Leader n.d.). However, the nation’s climate efforts are anchored in a legally binding climate act adopted in 2017. In June 2017, the Swedish Parliament adopted a climate policy framework with a view to achieving climate policy stability and setting a predictable pathway for businesses and society as a whole. It comprises three main parts: national Climate Goals, a Climate Act and a Climate Policy Council, and sets two targets for 2045; to achieve climate neutrality and reduce GHG emissions by 85% compared with 1990.

Previous study shows that, Swedish far-right political parties like the (Swedish Democrats), have expressed reservations about the fact that climate change is due to human impact and, overtime they have taken a more climate-change skeptical approach (Gemenis et al., 2012, & Hultman et al., 2020). This is as opposed to the left-libertarian parties like the Green party who are on progressive side of the political spectrum. As opposed to the far-right, their core political value insists on the prevention of global warming via aggressive emission reductions, transitioning into 100% renewable energy, and integrating climate action into all areas of policy to achieve long-term ecological sustainability.

According to the Global Stocktake (GST), which was concluded in 2023, it serves as a tool to measure collective progress in climate action and enhance ambition for meeting the Paris Agreement. It underscores that, in order to realize the necessary transformative change, three factors are needed which are: popular support, robust institutions and political commitment. The GST fulfil the role of a periodic review process on a five-year basis in implementing the Paris Agreement and a tool used for assessing the collective progress made by parties and non-party actors (Zhu, Mengye et al, 2023).

➤ Objective

This research investigates the extent to which the positions, ideologies and parliamentary behavior of Swedish political parties influence development and strengthening of the 2017 Swedish Climate Act in context of the EU Green Deal’s objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Specifically, the study analyzes how party ideological divisions, government-opposition dynamics, and coalition politics shape formulation, adoption, and implementation of national climate policies aimed at achieving Sweden’s 2045 net-zero target in alignment with the EU’s 2050 emission reduction goal. In this context, political parties are examined as key actors whose positions, strategic interests, and legislative actions directly influence governance outcomes.

➤ Aim Research Questions

This research investigates the complex dimension of Sweden’s internal political and ideological differences with regard to climate change especially in meeting the objectives of the EU Green Deal 2050 target through internal policy formulation, adoption and implementation. As such, it, explores two sets of questions:

- How have Swedish political parties views on climate, energy and emission targets changed since 2016?
- How are the changing party priorities and coalition politics influencing Sweden’s commitment to the national and EU climate rules and objective?

In this research, I explored the impact of Swedish political parties in enhancing the 2017 Swedish climate act towards meeting up with the EU Green Deal objective of becoming carbon neutral by 2050. I presented information provided from a randomly selected Swedish parliamentary debates from 2016-2025, and government policy frameworks like the Swedish Climate Act and political parties as legislative actors. Their views regarding Swedish party politics and their ideological divisions in the shaping of the formulation, adoption and implementation of national climate policies aligned with the EU Green Deal emission reduction targets (2016–2045).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section critically reviews the extant literature on climate ambition related to part politics, coalition governance, and the EU climate policy influence. It goes further to identify a key research gap which concerns how

party competition reshapes climate ambition during the implementation phase under coalition rule.

➤ *Climate Ambition and Party Politics in Advanced Democracies:*

Several bodies of literature have examined the relationship in party politics and climate ambition within advanced democracies. Early research largely framed climate policy as a party identified political issue (Tobin, 2017). His findings suggest that, climate change remains a party-identified political issue. It should be noted that political parties act as an interface between the people and the government. Through this they are very indispensable in the success or failure of every state policy including climate ambition. More recent studies equally reveal that, party ideology continues to shape climate ambition even in situations. In the context of climate politics and policy, Domestic politics and climate and national governments always have a key role to play in establishing climate politics (Carter, Little and Torney, 2019).

Comparative research further indicates that climate ambition is increasingly affected by electoral completion. Parties may strategically reframe climate policy to appeal to key voter segments particularly when climate action entails visible short-term costs. Over the last two decades, the populist radical-right parties (PRRPs) have been the most successful newcomers in Europe. Literature shows that, energy and climate policy efforts sometimes but not always weaken when PRRPs participate in government or support minority governments. This was examined when analysing the impact of PRRPs on energy and climate policy in six West European countries including Sweden (Ćetković and Hagemann, 2020).

➤ *Coalition Government and Climate Policy Implementation:*

An important strand of the literature highlights the significance of coalition governance in shaping climate policy outcomes. Collaborative governance processes seek to engage diverse actors in the design and implementation of consensus-oriented policy and management actions. Whether it is achieved, however, largely depends the degree to which actors with differing beliefs coordinate their actions to achieve common policy goals which is a behavior known as cross-coalition coordination (Koebele, 2020).

Some scholars have argued that, coalition governments tend out to dilute ambitious environmental policies, as climate measures become subject to negotiate across multiple veto players. Movements may have a profound effect on the political system as well and new politics issues. In recent times, literature has revealed that green environmental dimension has been incorporated into the traditional left-right dimension with significant consequences. Firstly, this reveals that, left positions are increasingly associated with environmental concerns, secondly, the integration of the green position into left-right dimensions indicates that the conflict of the green policy dimension has thus been transferred into the left-right dimension. Finally, this shift

suggests that, green politics has lost momentum in the new millennium (John, 2017).

Nonetheless, much of this literature focuses on policy outputs or a legislative outcome offering limited insights into discursive and strategic dynamics through which parties negotiate climate ambition within coalitions.

➤ *EU Climate Governance and Domestic Politicisation:*

Literature holds that, the European Union has emerged as a key actor in shaping domestic climate policy through binding targets, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and equally regulatory frameworks. Through the EU Green Deal, the European Union has established a regional climate governance framework through which they monitor and evaluate member states and their commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050. The EU is often considered as the frontrunner and even a leader in the adoption of climate policies internally and the promotion of such policies externally (Delreux and Ohler, 2019).

Scholars have noted that, EU climate governance can both reinforce and politicise domestic climate policy. On the one hand, EU targets provide governments with external legitimacy, enabling national actors to justify ambitious measures as compliance with European Union obligations. The Union seeks to advance climate policy and governance beyond incremental development, maintaining certain established patterns while simultaneously departing from other conventional governance trends (Dupont et al., 2024).

Despite this growing body of work, existing studies often treat EU influence as an external variable affecting policy outcomes, rather than as embedded within domestic party competition during policy implementation.

➤ *Research Gap*

Taken together, the existing literature offers valuable perspectives on party ideology, coalition governance, and EU climate influence. However, a critical gap remains. While prior research explains what parties believe about climate change and what policies are adopted, it insufficiently explains how party competition reshapes climate ambition during the implementation phase, particularly under coalition rule. This article seeks to address these gaps by applying wedge-issue competition theory to the Swedish case. By analyzing parliamentary debates between 2016 and 2025, it shifts attention from policy rejection to contestation over implementation, demonstrating how climate ambition can be politically negotiated, reframed, and sustained within an increasingly fragmented party system.

In the following study, the Sweden's political parties and their approach to climate is the focus. Earlier research shows that, parties frame climate differently which is as a result of their ideological reflection and orientation. Looking at the Paris Agreement which is a vital aspect of the Sustainable Development goal number 13 (United Nations, 2021), was not ratified by all the political parties in Sweden. Out of the eight political parties, only seven ratified the Paris Agreement and the Swedish Democrats denied to ratify the

agreement even though they made it clear that they stand for an effective climate policy however, they chose to make reservations approving the Paris Agreement which according to them, there are several problems with the content and implementation of the Agreement (Betänkande, 2016/17: MJU6). The question, therefore, is whether the problem lies with the Paris Agreement itself, or whether there is another explanation for the Swedish Democrats' skepticism about global climate cooperation. As said earlier, Sweden has long been hailed as a role model in climate policy. But in recent times, the new right-wing government supported by a far-right populist party is undertaking a paradigm shift in Swedish climate policy and governance. This thesis critically analyses the paradigm shift from 2016 till present in Sweden and its impact on political parties and their commitment towards the attainment to emission reduction and achieving the Swedish climate act of 2045. To Fredrik Malmborg, there has been severe democratic deficits of the policy process and policies proposed and adopted which has been identified suggesting what he calls “nasty politics”, characterized by populist, divisive, and contentious rhetoric (Malmborg, 2024). Viewed through the lens of wedge-issue competition theory, it illustrates how political ideological divergence and strategic reluctance toward radical measures have reshaped Sweden's climate governance.

Institutional Complexity and Paradox theory: According to the Institutional Complexity and Paradox theory, organizational success increasingly depends on leaders' abilities to address competing demands simultaneously. Scholars have been able to apply both the institutional theory and paradox theory to better understand the nature and responses to these competing demands (Chhillar & Lellapalli, 2015). In this essay, we seek to highlight the ideological differences of the different Swedish political parties which has affected their commitments to the emission reduction course hence shifts. To stand out, parties have adopted strategies which are similar to policy-committing: for example, the Green Party and Social Democrats emphasize long term commitments to the Paris Agreement and the EU green deal, which has signaled some credibility and responsibility to voters while on the other hand, the Swedish Democrats take a nationalist, skeptical stance which effectively differs themselves within the coalitions (Vestergard, 2025).

The Paradox of Positional Convergence Theory: This theory was articulated by Mathias Bukh Vestergaard which articulates how parties deal with the problem of having very similar policy positions to competitors. Political parties often take similar stances to appeal to the same large voter segments. Yet, when parties converge, they paradoxically risk losing votes if the electorate cannot distinguish one party from the other. By producing commitments, a party increases the costs of deviating from its original position after the election campaign. Parties can now exploit-committing strategy to stand out from parties with similar positions. A major implication of this theory is that, intense party competition is very crucial for the translation of policy positions into real politics (Vestergaard, 2024). From the year 2016, as most Swedish parties converged around support

for ambitious climate goals, which includes alignment with the Paris Agreement, and also the EU Green Deal, the risk of positional convergence has increased. However, the Green party for instance has been shaped by positional convergence around climate goals and strategic differentiation among parties through policy commitments such as binding climate laws, net-zero targets, and explicit alignments with the Paris Agreement, EU Green Deal and Swedish Climate Act while the moderate party has converged its commitment towards acceptance of ambitious climate but differentiated itself through conditional commitments. This reflects a lower cost-commitment strategy aimed at balancing voter appeal and governing practicality. The social democrats on their path have acted as stabilizers of climate ambition through being committed to international frameworks and Paris agreement and the climate act. They equally balance this commitment with strong but pragmatic which has earned them their role as leading governing party in minority conditions.

Amongst the different theories observed and previous literature on this subject, the wedge issue competition theory best captures the dynamics of Swedish climate politics since 2016. While positional convergence explains why parties increasingly share similar climate goals, and policy commitment theory accounts for how parties signal credibility, these frameworks do not fully explain how climate policy becomes strategically contested within and between governing coalitions. The Wedges issue competition theory has gone a long way to address the gap by focusing on how parties exploit issues that generate internal disagreements amongst opposition and coalition partners.

III. METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK

➤ Method of Data Mobilization

The primary data for this research consists of parliamentary debates transcripts which was obtained from the official Swedish Riksdag. Apparently, this information was assessed through the official website of the Swedish parliament (Riksdagens officiella webbplatser) and accompanied by some key documentary sources such as *The Swedish Climate Act (2017)* which is an ambitious climate policy to be achieved by 2045. The rationale for selecting Parliamentary debates as first-hand material was simply because they actually provide non-mediated, institutionalized, expressions of party positions which reflects political priorities and conflicts at specific moments. Contrary to other primary sources such as interviews and questionnaires though are reliable but to a certain extent vulnerable to retrospective bias.

It is equally important to note that, these debates were drawn from basically three distinctive legislative periods which are: 2016-2017, 2019-2020, and 2024-2025. Apparently, this temporal selection creates room for the study to be able to trace discursive change across different coalition configurations and stages of the EU climate policy development which incorporates the introduction and consolidation of the EU Green Deal. The reason for choosing 2016-2017 is because, during these years, climate policy in Sweden was largely consensual under this coalition. In as

much as tension emerged over implementation priorities. Then after the 2018 elections, and the January Agreement coalition, complexity greatly increased throughout 2019-2020 whereby minority governments required cross-party negotiations which to a certain extent, increased contestation over policy instruments even as broad climate goals were retained. Lastly, 2024-2025 happens to be a dispensation in Sweden where climate policy debates reflect increased conflict over ambition after the emergence of the right-wing parties who are supposedly climate changed skeptics.

Again, a random selection strategy was employed within predefined criteria namely, climate- and energy-related debates which aims to reduce the researcher's bias in the speech selection process. Randomization is a solution to selection bias and a partial solution to publication biases (Duflo, Glennerster and Kremer, 2007). However, this approach is not without its limitations, as it may exclude particularly influential or high-profile interventions. The debates were analyzed in the original Swedish but given that my work is written in English, I had to translate it without distorting the originality of the conceptual meaning.

➤ Data Analyses

This study conducts a content analysis to test the hypothesis “Swedish party ideology shapes the country’s alignment with EU Green Deal emission-reduction targets” within the time frame from 2016-2025. Here, the objective is to test party’s dedication using Swedish party objectives to align with their commitment on attaining the 2017 Swedish climate act on emission reduction engagement by 2045. This provides the study with the tools that will permit us to understand the way Swedish party politics has shaped the country's alignment with the EU Green Deal emission-reduction targets by 2050. Hence, we used Swedish political and parliamentary debates to derive information on indicators obtained to assess party politics shifts and commitments towards the country’s alignments with the EU Green Deal’s emission reduction targets by 2050. This combination will eventually help the study to provide quantitative analysis providing clarity on the Swedish political party’s commitment towards emission target and how it aligns with the EU Green Deal.

To analyze the content of these debates, I have made use of indicators that identifies Swedish political party shifts on climate change and emission reduction targets in terms of “speech act”. These contents represent different political parties and their ideological shifts from 2016 till 2025 based on alignment with climate change and carbon emission reduction. To operationalize the wedge theory which is a tool through which the indicators below were obtained, this study employs a quantitative content analysis of parliamentary debate transcripts.

➤ Operationalization and Analytical Indicators

Drawing on the wedge issue theory (Meguid, 2008), and framing literature. The four analytical indicators are used: climate framing, coalition conflicts, position shifts, and EU politicization. Each indicator captures observable discursive patterns through which climate policy becomes politicized or

strategically reframed. Coding is conducted at the level of speech segments, following a structured codework that defines inclusion criteria and provides empirical examples for each category. The following indicators were used:

- Climate Framing: Passages framing climate policy as a threat, cost or opportunity.
- Coalition Conflicts: Statements revealing intra-party or intra-coalition disagreements over climate ambitions.
- Position Shifts: Evidence of strategic moderation, compromise or policy adjustments over time.
- EU Politicisation: References to EU climate rules used to criticize opponents or mobilize voters.

To conduct the content analysis, the above-mentioned indicators were interpreted and measured firstly, then compared and analyzed. In doing so, I have chosen three speeches of representatives of three political parties within the Swedish political landscape in their debates from 2016-2017, 2019-2020, 2024-2025 during their debate sessions and analyzed them as recording units.

➤ Quantitative Method and Material Coding

Three different speeches from three randomly selected Swedish political parties were selected from different periods. These three speeches from different political parties were chosen to enable a focused comparison on how climate policy is framed and contested across different ideological positions. While the restricted number actually limits the scope and rather constraints generalization, the advantage is that, it creates room for in-depth and systematic quantitative coding and discursive patterns. By and large the focus is more on analytical depth rather than broad descriptive coverage. It is consistent with theory-testing content analysis, through which our four indicators were derived for data analysis. Credence is given to this approach because, it captures the most important ideological and institutional perspectives on climate policy in Sweden making these three parties the most ideal choices for assessing a climate ambition like the Swedish climate act to be realized by 2045. The selected parties represent distinct political views and approaches to climate mitigation. These three different political parties are selected to represent the different ideological positions within the Swedish party system. They include: The Green Party, The Social Democrats and The Moderates. Despite the existence of several other political parties, the choice of these three is because; they are the central political actors in Swedish climate governance. Firstly, the Green Party happen to be the primary advocate for strong environmental and climate policy reforms; while the Social Democrats have been at the forefront of historically shaping coalition governments and balancing climate ambition with economic and social consideration; lastly, the Moderates stands tall as a major center-right party, that influences policy through cost-efficiency and pragmatic approaches to implementation. The *raison d'être* behind this choice of selection is to enable comparison across government, opposition, coalition roles while capturing most influential parties who are at the helm of driving or moderating the most ambitious climate policy in Sweden. This allows the study to capture variation in climate policy discourse between governing, opposition, and

ideological divergent actors. This selection is analytically relevant to the research question because it allows for a structured comparison of party positions, framing strategies and expressions of conflict within parliamentary debates which are central to understanding how internal political dynamics shape the implementation of Sweden's climate targets. The limited number of speeches enables in-depth quantitative analysis of the discursive patterns such as framing, coalition tensions, and politicization. Rather than broad but superficial coverage of all parliamentary interventions.

To be able to capture the level of party commitment to climate ambition, I counted the number of times each indicator is represented, by the speaker- or rather which indicator the speaker is emphasizing on. From the selected speeches analysed, and representing each party's view, I recorded the frequency with which those indicators appeared in each speech, and converted them into percentages and cumulative percentages, which ultimately revealed a progression of the respective parties' commitment to climate

mitigation and carbon reduction in Sweden. I equally made an assessment on factors to assess the shift of party ideologies in this domain ranging from 2016 till 2025.

Each speech is analyzed and coded into numbers by counting the frequency of times the speaker refers to a particular indicator. The result is then documented in the index section, where data has been illustrated in the form of graphs and tables in the analysis section. The result is then transformed into percentage base; providing comparable data at the end. The data is then illustrated in the form of graphs and tables in the analysis section, showing each political party's standpoint on climate mitigation and carbon-emission reduction. In the conclusion, I illustrated through the data the extent of party ideological shift from 2016 to 2025 on climate mitigation and emission reduction, and the reasons for these shifts. Given that in principle I am restricted based on word count for this thesis, Appendices, table of content, cover page, footnotes, and the bibliography are excluded from the total word count, in accordance with Lund University's guidelines for academic assessment.

➤ All 3 Speeches - 2016/17

Table 1 Green Party (GP) - 2016/17 Total Indicator Mentions = 16

Indicator	Count	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Climate Framing	7	43.8%	43.8%
Coalition Conflicts	5	31.3%	75.1%
Position Shifts	1	6.3%	81.4%
EU Politicisation	3	18.6%	100%

• Interpretive Note:

The Green Party strongly frames climate change as an existential threat and moral emergency, while also actively confronting opposition parties for blocking climate transition. EU and international leadership are used positively rather than defensively.

Table 2 Social Democrats (S) - 2016/17 Total Indicator Mentions = 18

Indicator	Count	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Climate Framing	6	33.3%	33.3%
Coalition Conflicts	6	33.3%	66.6%
Position Shifts	2	11.1%	77.7%
EU Politicisation	4	22.3%	100%

• Interpretive Note:

Social Democratic discourse balances economic opportunity framing with direct political conflict, particularly against Moderates and Sweden Democrats. EU and Paris Agreement commitments are used to justify investment-driven climate policy.

Table 3 Moderate Party (M) - 2016/17 Total Indicator Mentions = 15

Indicator	Count	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Climate Framing	4	26.7%	26.7%
Coalition Conflicts	3	20.0%	46.7%
Position Shifts	6	40.0%	86.7%
EU Politicisation	2	13.3%	100%

• Interpretive Note :

The Moderate Party places strongest emphasis on policy adjustment, cost-efficiency, and moderation, frequently reframing climate ambition as a risk of inefficiency or fiscal waste. Climate leadership is defined in economic, not moral, terms.

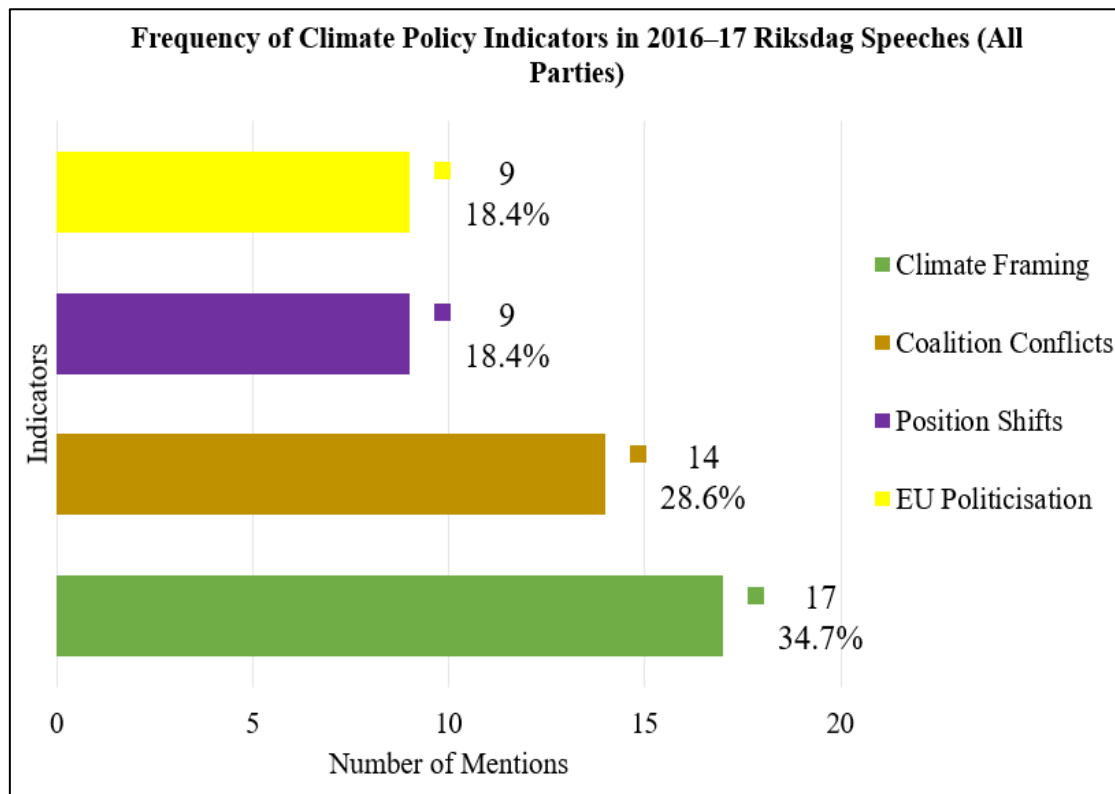


Fig 1 Frequency of Climate Policy Indicators in 2016–17 Riksdag Speeches

➤ General Trends

Across all three parties analysed, Climate Framing is the most dominant indicator, accounting for 17 out of 49 references (34.7%). This suggests that climate change is primarily articulated as a serious threat and transformative challenge, rather than as a marginal or technical policy issue.

This framing is particularly evident in emotionally charged language and metaphors. For example, Green Party Minister Isabella Lövin describes climate change as “*a planetary crisis*” and compares it to an emergency requiring an “*SOS Alarm 112*” response, signaling urgency and existential risk. Similarly, Social Democrat Matilda Ernkrans stresses immediacy by stating “*20 years – that’s now*” when referring to Arctic ice-free winters.

Coalition Conflicts represent the second most frequent indicator, with 14 references (28.6%), indicating that climate policy is not only a shared concern but also a site of political confrontation. Parties frequently use climate arguments to criticize opposing budgetary priorities, policy instruments, or levels of ambition.

Position Shifts and EU Politicisation each account for 9 references (18.4%), but they serve distinct roles. Position shifts reflect strategic recalibration rather than rejection of climate goals, while EU references are primarily used to legitimize national action or discredit alternative policy paths.

➤ Party-Specific Insights

• Green Party (GP)

The Green Party accounts for 16 coded references, with Climate Framing dominating (7 references, 43.8%), followed by Coalition Conflicts (5 references, 31.3%). This pattern reflects a discourse centered on moral urgency and political leadership.

Textual evidence strongly supports this framing. Lövin repeatedly emphasizes existential risk, describing the Arctic as “*a cooling unit for the planet*” and warning that its destabilization could “*throw the planet out of its stable state.*” The use of scientific data (temperature anomalies, methane emissions, Gulf Stream disruption) reinforces the seriousness of the threat while demonstrating close engagement with climate science.

• Coalition Conflict is Explicit and Direct. Lövin Openly Challenges Opposition Parties by Asking:

“Why do the Moderates, the Christian Democrats, the Liberals and the Center Party want to hold back the power of the transition?”

This rhetorical question directly exposes intra-parliamentary tension and positions the Green Party as the defender of ambitious climate action.

EU and international references (3 mentions, 18.6%) function positively, portraying Sweden as a global role model, particularly through references to the UN Security Council's climate initiatives, international climate

agreements, and partnerships with actors including California.

- *Social Democrats (S)*

The Social Democratic speech contains 18 coded references, evenly split between Climate Framing (6 references, 33.3%) and Coalition Conflicts (6 references, 33.3%), with notable EU Politicisation (4 references, 22.3%).

Climate framing is closely tied to economic opportunity and welfare. Ernkrans' detailed discussion of the electric road project in Sandviken demonstrates how climate policy is embedded in innovation, employment, and industrial competitiveness. By citing exact funding figures- "*77 million kronor from the state*" and "*48 million from the business community*" - the speech signals careful policy engagement and reinforces the credibility of climate investments.

Coalition conflict is strongly personalized and politically explicit. The Moderates are accused of pursuing "*enormous tax cuts*" financed by "*dramatic cuts in the budget for environmental and climate investments.*" This framing positions the Social Democrats as defenders of the "Swedish climate model" and casts opposition parties as undermining both jobs and emission reductions.

EU and Paris Agreement references are used to justify national ambition, as when Ernkrans highlights Sweden's role in realizing "*the high ambitions of the Paris Agreement.*" These references serve as normative anchors rather than external constraints.

- *Moderate Party (M)*

The Moderate Party speech contains 15 coded references, with Position Shifts emerging as the dominant indicator (6 references, 40.0%). This marks a clear contrast with the governing parties.

Jonas Jacobsson Gjörtler repeatedly criticizes government measures such as Klimatklivet, arguing that if projects "*would have been implemented anyway,*" the "*climate benefit per krona spent is zero-zero!*" This explicit numerical emphasis demonstrates close scrutiny of policy outcomes rather than moral urgency.

Coalition conflict (3 references, 20.0%) is present but framed in technocratic terms, focusing on fiscal responsibility rather than ideological opposition. EU and global

considerations (2 references, 13.3%) are used pragmatically, particularly to argue that emission reductions are equally valuable regardless of where they occur, reinforcing a global cost-efficiency logic.

➤ *Key Observations*

Several key conclusions can be drawn from the combined statistical and textual analysis:

Climate framing dominates across parties (34.7%), confirming that climate change is firmly established as a central political issue.

Conflict is focused on policy instruments, not goals, as evidenced by high coalition conflict frequencies alongside shared acknowledgment of climate urgency.

Position shifts are concentrated within Moderate discourse, reflecting strategic moderation rather than denial or disengagement.

EU politicisation plays a legitimizing role, supporting arguments rather than driving conflict.

Empirical detail and concrete examples (funding figures, policy instruments, scientific data) indicate high levels of policy engagement across speeches.

➤ *Professional Insight*

The 2016–17 Riksdag climate debates illustrate a case of institutionalized climate politicisation, where climate change is universally recognized yet actively contested in terms of governance strategy. Quantitatively, the dominance of climate framing and coalition conflict confirms both consensus and contention. Qualitatively, close reading reveals how parties strategically deploy science, economics, morality, and international commitments to strengthen their positions.

The Green Party frames climate policy as an existential and ethical imperative, the Social Democrats integrate climate action into a welfare-oriented growth narrative, and the Moderates reposition climate leadership around efficiency and fiscal discipline. These findings show that Swedish climate politics in this period were not polarized over *whether* to act on climate change, but over *how* to act a hallmark of a mature climate policy system.

Table 4 Green Party (GP, 2018/19) Total Indicator Mentions = 14

Indicator	Count	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Climate Framing	5	35.7%	35.7%
Coalition Conflicts	5	35.7%	71.4%
Position Shifts	1	7.1%	78.5%
EU Politicisation	3	21.5%	100%

- Evidence Hints

- ✓ “The world's most ambitious climate policy is now saved” - Climate framing
- ✓ “2.7 billion in cuts from the far right” - Coalition conflict
- ✓ CCPI global ranking - EU / international politicization
- ✓ January Agreement compromise - Position shift

Table 5 Social Democrats / SD Speech (2018/19) Total Indicator Mentions = 16

Indicator	Count	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Climate Framing	6	37.5%	37.5%
Coalition Conflicts	5	31.3%	68.8%
Position Shifts	4	25.0%	93.8%
EU Politicisation	1	6.2%	100%

(Note: This speech is oppositional populist framing, clearly distinct from 2016 S discourse)

- Evidence Hints

- ✓ “Fear and intimidation... dystopian theories” → Climate framing (negative)
- ✓ Rural vs urban inequality framing → Coalition conflict
- ✓ Criticism of green taxes, EV subsidies → Position shifts
- ✓ Macron fuel tax reference → Indirect EU politicisation

Table 6 Moderate Party (M, 2018/19) Total Indicator Mentions = 13

Indicator	Count	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Climate Framing	4	30.8%	30.8%
Coalition Conflicts	1	7.7%	38.5%
Position Shifts	5	38.5%	77.0%
EU Politicisation	3	23.0%	100%

- Evidence Hints

- ✓ “Emissions increased by almost 2 percent” - Climate framing (problem-oriented)
- ✓ Electrification strategy - Position shift
- ✓ “Sweden accounts for about 1 per thousand of global emissions” - EU/global framing

Table 7 General Comparison Table (Counts Only – 2018/19)

Indicator	Green Party	SD / S	Moderates
Climate Framing	5	6	4
Coalition Conflicts	5	5	1
Position Shifts	1	4	5
EU Politicisation	3	1	3
Total Mentions	14	16	13

Table 8 All Parties Combined (2018/19) Combined Total Mentions = 43

Indicator	Total Count	Percent (%)
Climate Framing	15	34.9%
Coalition Conflicts	11	25.6%
Position Shifts	10	23.3%
EU Politicisation	7	16.2%
Total	43	100%

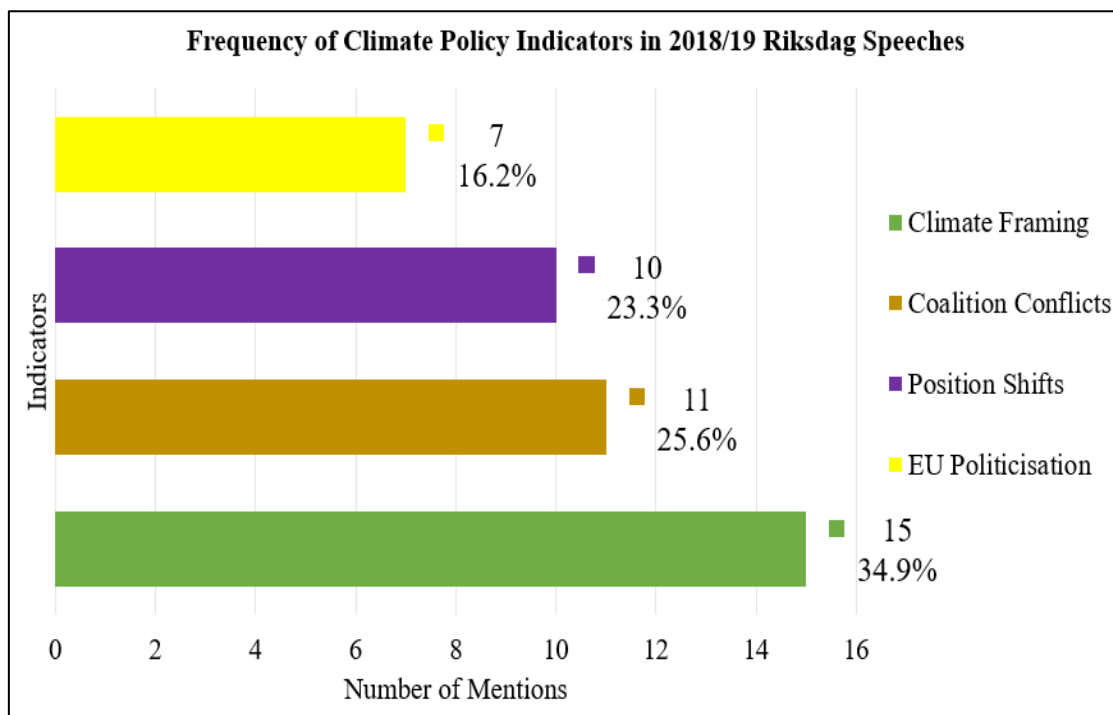


Fig 2 Frequency of Climate Policy Indicators in 2018/19 Riksdag Speeches

➤ General Analysis of Climate Policy Indicators in 2018/19 Riksdag Speeches

• Overall Trends

Across the 2018-19 speeches, Climate Framing remains dominant (34.9%), confirming continuity with the 2016-17 debates. However, the tone has shifted: climate is no longer framed primarily as moral urgency, but increasingly as a distributional, economic, and political conflict. References to fear, inequality, and cost are more frequent, particularly in oppositional discourse.

Coalition conflicts (25.6%) remain high, reflecting tensions generated by the January Agreement, which reshaped parliamentary alliances. Climate policy functions as a proxy battlefield for broader disputes over taxation, welfare, and rural–urban divides.

Position shifts (23.3%) increase compared to 2016–17, signaling growing concern with policy effectiveness, efficiency, and public acceptance rather than ambition alone.

• Party-Specific Insights

✓ Green Party (GP)

The Green Party combines climate ambition framing with defensive coalition politics. By citing CCPI rankings and concrete emission-reduction projects (Hellkvist Grus, Gotland biogas), the party demonstrates policy delivery, not just rhetoric. Coalition conflict is explicit, particularly against far-right budget alternatives threatening climate investments.

✓ SD / Opposition Discourse

This speech reframes climate policy as elite-driven, socially unjust, and emotionally manipulative. Climate is not denied, but the *means* are delegitimized through strong position shifts and populist conflict framing (“*Tesla subsidies for CEOs*”). This marks a sharp discursive evolution from earlier consensus-based debates.

✓ Moderate Party (M)

The Moderates show high internal consistency across years. Position shifts dominate again (38.5%), with emphasis on electrification, industrial transition, and global cost-efficiency. The party reframes leadership as technological realism, not spending volume.

• Key Observations

- ✓ Climate discourse becomes more conflictual and redistributive by 2018-19.
- ✓ Position shifts increase, indicating policy fatigue and demand for efficiency.
- ✓ Coalition realignments intensify politicization.
- ✓ EU and global framing remain supportive but secondary.
- ✓ Climate policy is increasingly linked to social justice and legitimacy, not just emissions.

• Professional Insight

The 2018-19 debates mark a transition from consensus-driven ambition to contested implementation politics. While all parties still acknowledge climate change, the central conflict now concerns who pays, who benefits, and which instruments work. Climate policy in Sweden thus enters a phase of normalized politicisation, where legitimacy, fairness, and effectiveness dominate parliamentary debate.

➤ All 3 Speeches - 2024/25

Table 9 Green Party Expanded Indicator Table (GP) - 2024/25 (*Speech: Daniel Helldén, 2024/25 Special Climate Debate*) Total Indicator References = 17

Indicator	Count	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Climate Framing	7	41.2	41.2
Coalition Conflicts	5	29.4	70.6
EU Politicisation	4	23.5	94.1
Position Shifts	1	5.9	100.0

Table 10 Social Democratic Party Expanded Indicator Table (S) - 2024/25 (*Speech: Jytte Guteland, 2024–2025 Special Climate Debate*) Total Indicator References = 18

Indicator	Count	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Climate Framing	6	33.3	33.3
Coalition Conflicts	6	33.3	66.6
EU Politicisation	4	22.2	88.8
Position Shifts	2	11.1	100.0

Table 11 Moderate Party Expanded Indicator Table (M) - 2024/25(*Speech: Helena Storckenfeldt, 2024–2025 Special Climate Debate*) Total Indicator References = 15

Indicator	Count	Percent (%)	Cumulative %
Position Shifts	6	40.0	40.0
Climate Framing	5	33.3	73.3
Coalition Conflicts	3	20.0	93.3
EU Politicisation	1	6.7	100.0

Table 12 General Comparison Table (Counts Only – 2024/25) General Comparison Table with Totals (Counts Only) (*All Parties Side-by-Side*)

Indicator	Green Party (GP)	Social Democrats (S)	Moderates (M)
Climate Framing	7	6	5
Coalition Conflicts	5	6	3
Position Shifts	1	2	6
EU Politicisation	4	4	1
Total Mentions	17	18	15

Table 13 All Parties Combined (2024/25) Total Indicator Distribution (All Parties Combined) Combined Total References = 50

Indicator	Total Count	Percent (%)
Climate Framing	18	36.0
Coalition Conflicts	14	28.0
Position Shifts	9	18.0
EU Politicisation	9	18.0
Total	50	100.0

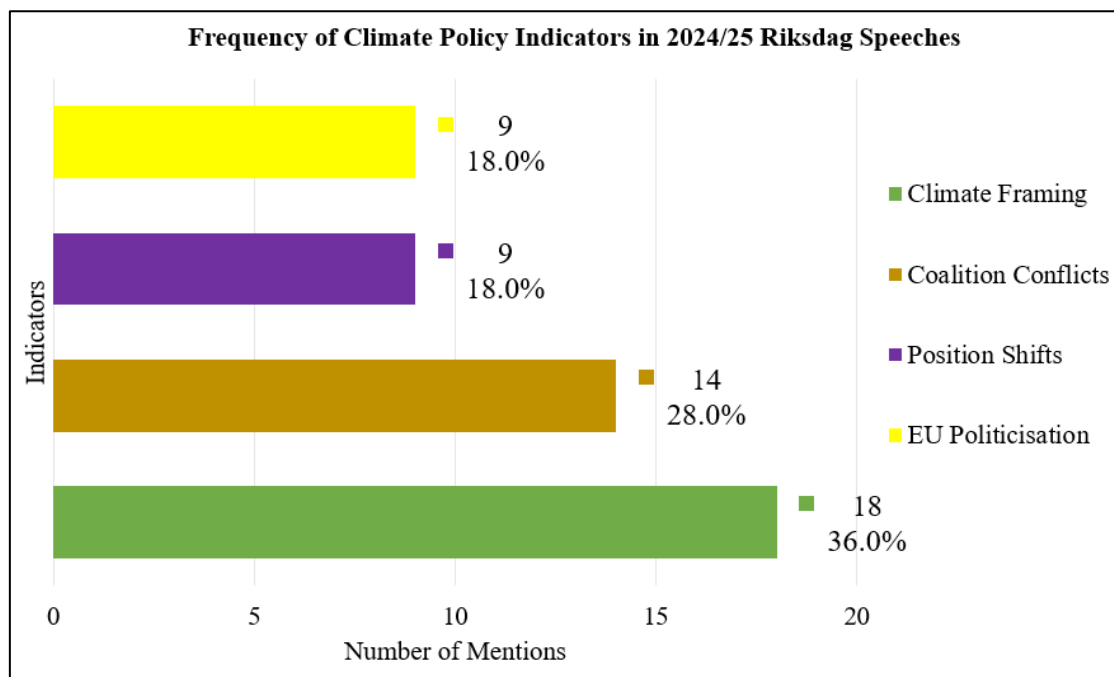


Fig 3 Frequency of Climate Policy Indicators in 2024/25 Riksdag Speeches

➤ *Professional Insight: Climate Policy Indicators in Riksdag Climate Debates (2024–2025)*

(Based on Coded Indicators, $N = 50$)

• **Overall Trends**

The quantitative analysis reveals that *Climate Framing* is the most dominant indicator across the three parties, accounting for 36% (18/50) of all coded references. Climate change is consistently presented as a high-stakes political issue, framed through recurring themes of urgency, crisis, responsibility, or opportunity. This dominance is evident in repeated references to failure, urgency, threat, and leadership, such as Daniel Helldén's assertion that "*Sweden is expected to miss all national and European climate targets*" and Helena Storckenfeldt's framing of climate change as "*the great challenge of our time.*"

Coalition Conflicts follow closely at 28% (14/50), indicating that climate policy functions not only as a policy domain but also as a central arena for political contestation. Parties consistently use climate performance to assign blame, delegitimize opponents, and mobilize public support. This is particularly visible in attacks on the Tidö government and the Sweden Democrats for allegedly weakening climate ambition.

Position Shifts and *EU Politicisation* are equally represented at 18% each (9/50). Their presence reflects a transition from ideological debate toward strategic recalibration, where disagreements concern policy instruments, effectiveness, and compliance with European commitments, rather than whether climate change is real. Overall, the trend indicates a mature but highly politicised climate discourse, in which the urgency of climate action is broadly accepted, but the means of implementation remain contested.

• **Party-Specific Insights**

✓ **Green Party (GP)**
(17 references; 34% of total sample)

The Green Party's discourse is overwhelmingly shaped by *Climate Framing* (41.2%), emphasizing crisis, urgency, and moral responsibility. Climate change is portrayed as an immediate policy failure caused by political backsliding, particularly by the current government. Statements such as "*traffic emissions increased by a brutal 18 percent*" and "*the entire transition [has been driven] into the ditch*" clearly reflect a threat-based framing.

Coalition Conflicts (29.4%) are also prominent, with direct accusations against the Tidö government for tax cuts on fossil fuels and withdrawal of climate support mechanisms. *EU Politicisation* appears strategically through references to European climate targets, reinforcing the argument that Sweden is no longer meeting its international obligations.

The near absence of *Position Shifts* (5.9%) indicates ideological consistency rather than strategic moderation. The Green Party presents itself as the guardian of climate ambition, resisting compromise and framing deviation as betrayal.

✓ **Social Democratic Party (S)**
(18 references; 36% of total sample)

The Social Democrats show a balanced distribution between *Climate Framing* (33.3%) and *Coalition Conflicts* (33.3%), reflecting their dual role as former governing party and current opposition. Climate failure is framed both as a policy collapse and as a moral breach of public trust.

Guteland's repeated grading metaphor - "*Transport target – F, ESR target – F*"-functions as a rhetorical device that combines evaluation, blame, and urgency. EU Politicisation (22.2%) is particularly strong, with explicit references to EU climate law, emissions trading, and potential EU fines, used to discredit the government's strategy of externalizing responsibility.

Position Shifts (11.1%) appear through acknowledgement that some 2024 measures were "*a step in the right direction*", suggesting conditional support rather than outright rejection. This indicates strategic moderation aimed at maintaining credibility while reinforcing climate ambition.

✓ *Moderate Party (M)*
(15 references; 30% of total sample)

The Moderate Party shows the highest rate of Position Shifts (40%) among all parties. Rather than rejecting climate action, the Moderates reframe leadership as efficiency, legitimacy, and technological neutrality. Storckenfeldt's critique that previous policies focused on 'what sounded good rather than what worked' exemplifies a managerial reframing of climate governance.

Climate Framing (33.3%) is present but moderated, portraying climate change as a challenge that must be addressed without sacrificing economic growth. Coalition Conflicts (20%) are less confrontational and focus on policy effectiveness rather than moral failure.

EU Politicisation is minimal (6.7%), reflecting a preference for global climate benefits and domestic structural reform over direct engagement with EU enforcement mechanisms.

• *Key Observations*

Several critical observations emerge from the combined qualitative and quantitative analysis:

- ✓ No party denies the seriousness of climate change, confirming the institutionalization of climate concern in Swedish politics.
- ✓ The locus of political conflict has moved from problem recognition to policy design, particularly around taxation, electrification, and public acceptance.
- ✓ Opposition parties use failure framing and EU obligations to delegitimize the government, while the governing bloc emphasizes legitimacy and long-term stability.
- ✓ Position shifts function as a key strategic tool for the Moderates, allowing them to appear climate-responsible without endorsing high-cost measures.
- ✓ EU climate policy acts as a normative benchmark, invoked primarily by left-leaning parties to reinforce accountability and urgency.

• *Professional Insight*

The analysis demonstrates that Swedish climate policy discourse between 2016 and 2025 has evolved into a form of structured politicization, where climate change is no longer

contested as a phenomenon but is deeply embedded in electoral competition, coalition politics, and governance strategy.

The Green Party and Social Democrats deploy high-intensity climate framing and coalition conflict to mobilize urgency and moral responsibility, positioning climate ambition as central to political legitimacy. The Moderates, by comparison, pursue a strategic repositioning advocating climate action through technological development, economic competitiveness, and long-term public support.

EU climate commitments play a supporting yet powerful role, serving as both an accountability mechanism and a rhetorical instrument for criticism. Overall, the findings indicate a shift from consensus-driven environmentalism toward contested climate governance, where climate policy has become a central axis of political identity, responsibility, and power in Sweden.

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSES

From the years 2016 till 2025, the climate change phenomena and carbon-reduction targets by political parties within the Swedish framework have been discussed in various aspects and themes. This section analyzes the parliamentary debates using four key indicators to assess party commitments to carbon emission reduction. This section is divided into themes that the debates have been mostly revolved around. Here, I connect indicators of climate mitigation to these themes, comparing the use of these indicators by the different political parties.

➤ *Themes*

• *Party Positions on Climate and Emissions in Sweden (2016-2017)*

This theme recurred throughout the 2016–2017 period. Drawing on three speeches from the Green Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Moderate Party, this analysis compares each party's position and shifts across the four variables outlined above, presented in the tables and graphs that follow.

V. CONCLUSION

Between 2016 and 2025, Swedish climate politics underwent significant transformation, driven by shifting party dynamics and repositioning. Looking at the early debates, their speeches reflected an urgency of climate action, while subsequent electoral cycles and mutating coalition governments began to introduce very strategic shifts in the ways parties are able to justify climate ambition. Looking at the three different parties selected, the green party consistently advanced high-intensity, moral and existential framing while the Social Democrat on their path, saw climate action within a welfare-state and growth-oriented narrative. The Moderates on their path took quite a middle stand by repositioning their approach in accepting climate leadership but on the other hand, highlighting cost-efficiency, technological solutions, and fiscal responsibility. We cannot

say that these shifts reflect a withdrawal from climate action, however, it called for a more assertive and diversification of climate rationales shaped by electoral competition and coalition bargaining.

Coalition politics has been able to shape the Swedish political climate in the sense that, it plays a decisive role in both enabling and constraining of climate ambitions. Through this, minority governments and cross-party dependencies have required compromise, which often produces policy moderation and contestation. Political parties across the spectrum agree on the necessity of climate action, converging on their acknowledgment of the underlying problem. However, concerned on areas related to cost-burden, which sector receives support, and how quickly transition measures should proceed. The effect here is that, it has led to a form of institutionalized disagreement which has normalized climate conflict within a democratic governance system like Sweden and to certain extent will reduce most party's commitment towards a long-term climate target. These shifts can be explained by electoral competition and wedge-issue dynamics. Parties typically adjust their positions over time to align with voter interests. Challenger parties, such as the Green Party, foreground climate change to consolidate support among their core base, while mainstream parties like the Moderates recalibrate their stance to avoid losing voters to these challengers. This pattern of strategic repositioning reflects issue-wedge theory. Again, due to coalition politics and internal disagreements, there has been a shift. We should note that Sweden operates in multiparty setting. As a result, parties are compelled to shift their positions to address voter priorities such as jobs and immigration fairness. Finally, EU-level pressures and politicization drive parties to align national objectives with regional ones, as seen in the case of the EU Green Deal. From the perspective of the Wedge Issue Competition theory, the findings reveals that climate change in Sweden has become an issue of political competition rather than full political agreement. Parties do not reject climate goals. However, they differ on how climate action should be explained and implemented. Across the different indicators, distinct patterns emerge. In climate framing, the Green Party emphasizes moral urgency, the Social Democrats link climate action to welfare and economic growth, and the Moderates prioritize cost-efficiency and technology. Over time, parties have shown clear position shifts, driven mainly by elections and coalition pressures. Coalition conflict is particularly pronounced, as minority governments must compromise on climate-related measures, especially regarding costs and timing. EU politicization has further shaped these debates, with parties invoking the EU Green Deal either to support their arguments or to criticize opponents. Together, these findings suggest that Sweden's climate ambition has not weakened but is instead sustained through political negotiation and strategic reframing a pattern consistent with wedge-issue competition theory. In all, Sweden's climate ambition has not actually diminished but has been politically negotiated rather than consensus-driven. In as much as coalition politics and strategic repositioning can slow down the implementation of climate policy, this has not fundamentally derailed Sweden's trajectory towards a net-zero ambition in 2045 in achieving the Swedish climate act

and the EU green deal of 2050. The solution will be, that provided that cross-party support for climate the climate framework endures and distributive conflicts are managed, through credible transition policies, Sweden remains well positioned to meet both its national and international climate obligations with the EU through a very contested and adversarial pathway.

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