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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

# CLIMATE CHANGE AS COMMON SENSE

A framing analysis of party response to climate change in Sweden

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**Abstract:** This paper looks at how the different parties of parliament in Sweden frame the issue of climate change. Based on evidence suggesting that the issue is either politicized or depoliticized, this study investigates the difference in response to what is a common objective – to politically tackle climate change. Drawing upon the theoretical distinctions between a depoliticized and politicized approach found in the literature, I construct a “moderate” and a “radical” typology. These are then applied in a framing analysis looking at debating articles produced by the different parties. The results indicate a predominantly moderate framing of the issue, with the notable exception of the Left Party. I conclude by discussing the implications for the overall (de)politicization of the issue and suggest that they point to a hegemonic configuration of a depoliticized “common sense” conception of climate change.

**Keywords:** *climate change, climate politics, politicization, depoliticization, post-politics, hegemony, Swedish politics, common sense*

**Word count:** 11998

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## 1. Introduction

“We stand before an existential crisis. The greatest crisis ever faced by humanity, and yet it has been ignored for decades by those who have known about it. You know who you are, you who are most guilty of this – and it is not us.” (Greta Thunberg, in a speech outside the Swedish Parliament, 15 March 2019).

The crisis of climate change is forcing us to re-evaluate our basic political understanding of the world around us. In this context, Sweden has often been considered a “forerunner state” in terms of environmental- and climate politics (see for example Hysing 2014). The high ambitions of the Swedish government are manifested in their explicit aim to make Sweden “the world’s first fossil free welfare state” (Skr. 2017/18:238: 19, my translation). Given its (relatively) green track record and high ambitions, Sweden arguably makes for a particularly interesting case of study concerning the political response to the issue of climate change.

A central component of these ambitions is the Swedish “Climate Policy Framework” (CPF) adopted by a broad majority in parliament in 2016<sup>1</sup>. Claimed to be “the most important climate reform in Swedish history” (Regeringen 2017), the framework imposes on government the task of reducing emissions to reach net zero by the year 2045 (ibid).

The broad consensus surrounding the CPF, and its objective to drastically reduce emissions, indicates that the issue of climate change has been politicized insofar as it has been recognized as a central matter of political concern. Since the imperative provided by the framework ultimately places political responsibility on the parties of parliament to put us on a trajectory towards a sustainable future, it is of crucial interest to review their actual response. Given the broad consensus surrounding the objective, this study seeks to investigate how the different parties frame the issue of climate change. Because as we shall see, there are conflicting evidence suggesting that the issue is either politicization or depoliticized<sup>2</sup> – that the means by which to achieve this objective are contested, or not (Swyngedouw 2010; Pepermans & Maeseles 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> By all parties except for the Sweden Democrats.

<sup>2</sup> See section 2.

## 1.2. Theoretical approach

To investigate this, two overarching and polarly opposite perspectives have been identified in the literature. Using Bertell Ollman’s (2015) terminology, I have labelled these the “moderate” and “radical” approaches to climate change<sup>3</sup>. Although sharing a common objective, these perspectives differ fundamentally regarding the problem representation and solutions to climate change, in turn generating different implications for its (de)politicization.

In short, the moderate perspective rests on a foundationalist problem representation, which treats the issue in discrete terms and as possible to address according to its distinct cause and effect. By framing the issue in objective terms, any opposition is deemed irrational or immoral – depoliticizing the issue (Pepermans and Maeselees 2016; Ollman 2015).

The radical perspective adopts a post-foundationalist problem representation, which perceives the issue in structural terms and as systemically intertwined with other issues. Since from a radical perspective, the issue is inherently dependent on a struggle for representation, it seeks to politicize it by revealing different interests concealed by the moderate approach. (Pepermans & Maeselees 2016; Ollman 2015; Machin 2013).

*Table I:* Simple overview of the different approaches to climate change.

	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Radical</b>
<b>Problem representation</b>	Foundationalist	Post-foundationalist
<b>Solutions</b>	Depoliticization	Politicization

## 1.3. Specified purpose and research questions

In acknowledging the widespread recognition for the need of a political response to climate change, the purpose of this study is to examine how the different parties of parliament frame the issue given their combined ambitions but different ideological and strategical positions in parliament. By constructing a “moderate” and “radical” theoretical framework, this study aims to relate the framing produced by the parties to these typologies, and assess the implications of this regarding the (de)politicization of the issue.

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<sup>3</sup> See section 3.

More precisely, I intend to answer the following questions:

1. How do the political parties frame the problem representation of climate change in relation to the moderate and radical typology?
2. How do the political parties frame the solutions to climate change in relation to the moderate and radical typology?
3. How does the framing differ between the different parties?
4. What are the implications of the results regarding the (de)politicization of the issue?

#### 1.4. Previous research

Earlier studies have through the lens of (de)politicization looked at the communicative framing of climate change in a public media discourse (see for example Pepermans & Maeseles 2014). Furthermore (de)politicization has been empirically investigated in a US context, as well as in the UK, Canada and Australia (see McCright & Riely 2011; Pepermasn & Maeseles 2016: 479). In a Swedish context, depoliticization has been observed in relation to sustainable regional development (Hilding-Rydevik, Håkansson & Isaksson 2011). No previous study has looked at the issue in relation to Swedish party politics. By synthesising the communicative framework of Yves Pepermans & Pieter Maeseles, with the political typologies of Ollman<sup>4</sup>, this study aims to contribute to an important understanding of both the political and communicative aspects of the issue.

#### 1.5. Outline of paper

Before proceeding, I will give a brief account of the outline of the paper. First, the issue is discussed in relation to the evidence and arguments for its (de)politicization. Following this, I will give a detailed account of the moderate and radical typologies, before outlining the method used in the analysis and discussing some methodological considerations. Lastly, the empirical results are presented and summarized, before final conclusions are drawn, and further implications discussed.

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<sup>4</sup> See Kurtz (2017) for a similar typological discussion.

## 2. Climate change: A case of (de)politicization?

As previously mentioned, there are conflicting evidences suggesting that the issue of climate change is either politicized or depoliticized. In this section, I will present the different arguments which will serve as the point of departure for this study.

### 2.1. The argument for depoliticization

On the one hand, we have the argument put forward by a number of scholars that the issue of climate change has been especially subsumable to a process of depoliticization. Such a presumed development has been welcomed by moderate scholars such as Ulrich Beck (in Mouffe 2005) and Anthony Giddens (2008) who argue for the necessary reconciliation of ideological conflict in favour of rational consensus.

Echoing the establishment of the Swedish CPF, Giddens for example, argue that, “Climate change is not a left-right issue. [...] A cross party framework of some kind has to be forged to develop a politics of the long term” (2008: 7). Policy matters such as the environment and energy supply – central to the issue of climate change – have furthermore been argued not to fit within the traditional right-left dimension around which Swedish politics historically has been organized (Esaiasson & Wängnerud 2015: 190).

Scholars such as Erik Swyngedouw (2010, 2015, 2014) and Chantal Mouffe (2005) have situated such an apparent depoliticization within the larger context of an uncontested neo-liberal capitalist hegemony – or what they refer to as a state of “post-politics”. Such a post-political condition is one where, according to Swyngedouw, “Debate and contentious argument are restricted to questions of techno-managerial management whereby the neoliberal frame of market-led and growth-centred development cannot be legitimately questioned” (Swyngedouw 2015: 638).

The politics of climate change has, again, been argued to be central to the consolidation of such a post-political condition. In his critique, Swyngedouw argues that “the environmental question in general, and the climate change argument and how it is publicly staged in particular, has been and continues to be one of the markers through which postpoliticization is wrought” (Swyngedouw 2010: 216; see also Goeminne 2012; Swyngedouw 2010, 2015; Mouffe 2005).



## 2.2. The argument for politicization

Others have argued that the issue of climate change is instead subject to substantial political contestation (see for example Urry 2011; McCright & Riely 2011; McCarthy 2012).

Expressing such a sentiment, Isabella Lövin, one of the leaders of the Green Party, argues in an article from just before the 2018 elections that, “Climate change is the greatest challenge for our generation, and the greatest issue of conflict in Swedish politics” (Lövin 2018, my translation); suggesting that climate change indeed is a politicized issue *par excellence*.

Such a claim is furthered by the increased concern for the issue among the voters, where 35% of the voters ranked the ‘environment and climate’ as one of the most important political issues in August 2018 (Novus 2018). Such a development should provide an imperative for parties to distinguish themselves on the issue and to undermine political adversaries in the politicized struggle for support among the voters.

To conclude then: given the different theoretical and empirical evidence suggesting both a depoliticization or a politicization of climate change – it is of interest to empirically examine the actual framing and its implications.

## 3. Theory and typologies

“The problem is that those who produce the emissions do not pay for that privilege, and those who are harmed are not compensated.” (William D. Nordhaus 2013).

“[T]here are no ‘solutions’ within our current systems. No one ‘knows’ exactly what to do. That’s the whole point. We can’t just lower or heighten some taxes or invest in some ‘green’ funds and go on like before.” (Greta Thunberg 2019).

In this section I will give a detailed account of the moderate and radical perspective regarding problem representation and solutions. By doing so, I am constructing the typologies which will later be used in the analysis<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> For an operationalized overview of the different typologies, see *table II.* under section 4.4.

### 3.1. The moderate problem representation

The moderate perspective rests on a foundationalist outlook on the issue of climate change. As such, it “understands climate change first and foremost as a physical phenomenon that can be observed, discerned, quantified, and managed with some degree of scientific objectivity” (Pepermans & Maeselees 2016: 480). The moderate ontology acknowledges the problem, but ultimately treats it in discrete terms according to its inherent (physical) disposition, and as fundamentally disconnected from other issues (Ollman 2015).

This strict focus on the scientific understanding and framing of climate change is derived from the context of “Earth System science” – institutions which, according to Eva Lövbrand et al., “have fostered an epistemology that is focused on understanding and predicting environmental changes through integrated assessments and modelling studies” (2015: 214). Within such a framework, the issue of climate change is treated as a strictly empirical one; as a problem for science – rather than politics, and for knowledge rather than power (Pepermans & Maeselees 2016). Such a moderate problem representation could ultimately be said to rest on the dualist perception of ‘Nature’ as something external to society and social relations; as something quantitatively assessable and “value-able” (Pepermans & Maeselees 2016: 480; Kurtz 2017).

Scholars such as Adam Moolna (2012) and Erik Swyngedouw (2010) have pointed to how the moderate apprehension of the issue in strictly physical terms tend to generate a framing focused on the GHG-emissions (most notably CO<sub>2</sub>) as the root “cause” of the problem; as “the ‘thing’ around which our environmental dreams, aspirations, contestations as well as policies crystallize” (Swyngedouw 2010: 219-20). The GHG-emissions, which as a *matter of fact* are causing climate change on a physical level, are here elevated to the political *matter of concern* (Swyngedouw 2010: 217).

The notion of Nature as an external force, generates a framing where climate change is casted as a catastrophic entity facing an aggregated account of “humanity” (Machin 2013: 110; Malm & Hornborg 2014 in Lövbrand et al. 2015: 213-14). Such “presentation of climate change as a global humanitarian cause”, argues Swyngedouw, “produces a thoroughly depoliticized imaginary” (Swyngedouw 2010: 218). Although, acknowledging the

differentiated impact between communities, this is ultimately used to enforce a framing of an all-encompassing threat or an “ecology of fear” (Swyngedouw 2010: 221, 217; Žižek 2008).

### 3.2. The moderate solution

The foundationalist problem representation, or “the dominant framing of climate change as entirely a matter of science and technology”, according to Brian Wynne, “presents policy as a matter of scientific discovery, as if the right way to tackle climate change could be ‘read off’ scientific data” (in Machin 2013: 94). This objective and quantitative approach generates a framing of apparently undisputable solutions directed at the inherent physical properties of the issue at hand (the GHG-emissions). Therefore, the telos of the moderate approach is ultimately to foster consensus around these unequivocal, objective solutions. By using scientific, rational, economic or moral imperatives, dissidents are excluded as “irrational” or morally “wrong” (Pepermans & Maeselees 2014: 223, 2016: 480; Machin 2013: 30).

In focusing on the emissions, the moderate solutions tend to be framed in negative terms of “reduced emissions”, in an appeal to “maintain the status quo – but without the CO<sub>2</sub>”. This is mainly done through a “techno-economic approach”, which Amanda Machin argues is the “dominant approach to climate” (2013: 20). This approach focuses on technological solutions pared with the market’s ability to “both rationally and efficiently, [...] solve human problems” (Machin 2013: 16). Such an approach has also been referred to as “ecological modernisation” and advocated by Asafu-Adjaye et al. (2015) amongst others. This approach assumes no conflict between existing institutions and practices, why the solutions are framed in terms of ‘good businesses’.

From this perspective, the role played by politics (if any at all) is to facilitate sustainable development through rational economic incentives such as taxes or subsidies (Machin 2013: 21). By treating the emissions as ‘negative externalities’, the solutions are sought in pricing the emission correctly. This approach assumes that subjects act according to rational self-interested incentives (Machin 2013: 21-24; Moolna 2012).

The “green republican” and “green deliberative” approach seek to introduce a more normative dimension in the moderate framing, expanding the notion of the individual to a community-oriented citizen and by bringing the notion of sustainability into that of the state in general (Machin 2013: 47-8). The green deliberative approach expands on this by emphasising the

democratic input procedure as one where, “by being brought into contact with each other in a rational discussion, apparently conflictual perspectives can be aligned and brought to an enlightened choice” (Machin 2013: 76). Although representing a more politicized approach, the aim of such deliberative process is still to reach an enlightened consensus (Machin 2013). Even though the moderate framing entails an overall depoliticization of the issue, “dialogic” dissent can still occur regarding the specifics of what we have seen are different ways of framing the moderate solution (Mouffe 2005).

### 3.3. The radical problem representation

As opposed to the moderate foundationalist ontology, the radical perspective perceives the issue in post-foundationalist terms (Pepermans & Maesele 2016). The post-foundationalist outlook stresses the socially constructed nature of the representation and points to what is perceived as the structural root cause of the problem (Machin 2013; Moolna 2012; Pepermans & Maeseles 2016). From a radical perspective, the issue of climate change is ultimately only perceivable through representations, which in turn, according to Pepermans & Maeseles, “are always the provisional and contingent result of power struggles” (2016: 481). Thus, the issue of climate change is fundamentally perceived as one of politico-ideological conflict between “competing sets of epistemic assumptions” (Pepermans & Maeseles 2014; 224).

This apparent inseparability of normative political judgement and empirical analysis is grounded in the radical apprehension of political issues as systematically interconnected with the broader societal structures (Ollman 2015). Instead of focusing on the strictly physical and scientifically objective aspects of climate change, the radicals seek to draw attention to the social and economic relations driving the emissions, and the structural and systemic injustices which sustains them and disproportionately affects different communities (Machin 2013: 111; Moolna 2012; Swyngedouw 2010).

Such a problem representation could ultimately be said to rest on a fundamentally different apprehension of the concept of Nature as inseparable from that of society. Although different apprehension of the nature-society relation exists in the radical literature (See for example Smith 2008; Žižek 2008; Moore 2015), they all reject the dualist notion of Nature as an objective, pre- or extra-societal state. Nature, and ultimately climate change, is from the radical perspective an integrated part of our social relations, and thus necessarily political.

### 3.4. The radical Solution

The radicals argue that the moderate perspective fails to account for the fundamentally political nature of the issue, and that it “depoliticises the issue and undermines the possibility of climate change politics” (2013: 89). This is problematic because first, it stifles the envisioning of an alternative socio-ecological future beyond the confines of the neoliberal market economy, and second because it restricts political engagement to either approval or denial, alienating people from “owning” the issue (Pepermans & Maeseles 2016: 480; Goeminne 2012).

Thus, the radical framing aims to reveal the competing set of social, economic and political interests at the heart of the issue through a process of politicization, rather than focusing on its scientific and moral aspects (Pepermans & Maeseles 2014). Therefore, the radicals frame the issue using “discursive strategies that aim at revealing competing sets of epistemic assumptions, policy choices, values, and interests underlying opposing responses to uncertainty, and relate these to underlying alternative visions of society” (ibid 2014: 224). Such a “repoliticization” of the issue is according to Pepermans & Maeseles often understood as “an egalitarian, emancipatory struggle against (free market) capitalism and for ‘the commons’ and ‘climate justice’” (2016: 481).

Since there from a radical perspective, “is no *one* direct and correct perspective that can see the issue for what it really is” (Machin 2013: 106), these solutions must naturally spring from a normative claim over the socially constructive nature of the issue as such. This can only be done by framing the solution in *positive* or *absolutist* terms, and through the envisioning of a different socio-ecological future (Swyngedouw 2010: 228).

Mouffe argues that such an alternative vision of society must challenge the moderate hegemony of politics through a “profound transformation of the existing power relations” and by seeking the establishment of a new hegemony (2005: 31, 52). The radical, or what Mouffe calls “agonistic”, political contestation is therefore ultimately concerned with the *form* of politics itself and the hegemonic structures which constitutes it (Pepermans & Maeseles 2014; Mouffe 2005; Swyngedouw 2010; Kurtz 2017). Indeed, radicals like Mouffe and Swyngedouw argue that politics without this agonistic confrontation is not really politics in

the true sense of the word, since the ontological constituent of the political is found in the agonism itself (Mouffe 2005).

The radical framing has been criticized for being inherently vague and often not providing concrete enough recommendations for tackling the problems it claims to have identified (Ollman 2015; Pepermans & Maeselees 2016). According to Ollman, because it sees ‘agonism’ as inherently being able to produce the necessary policy out-put, the radical perspective fails to recognize that such a process of politicization is not inherently guaranteed to generate a substantial policy output (even though agonists like Mouffe might argue differently) (Ollman 2015; Kurtz 2017).

## 4. Method and material

In this section I will account for the material used in this study and discuss the method used in the analysis along with certain methodological considerations.

### 4.1. Selection

The material used in this study was chosen based on a strategical selection. It first and foremost consists of debating articles, “debates”, and replies written by representants from the eight parties of parliament. In total 13 articles were selected. Due to underrepresentation of certain parties in the available material, the selection was supplemented with information from these parties’ websites<sup>6</sup>.

Debates and replies were chosen because they are arguably a central component to the public political discourse, and a typical way for parties to communicate their politics to the voters. Furthermore, I argue that they constitute a critical case for testing for politicization, since it is naturally a forum centred around dissent. Because moderates are argued to favour “communication strategies and public forums which diffuse ideological polarization and increase consensus” (Pepermans & Maeselees 2016: 478), a depoliticized framing in this naturally confrontational material would entail strong evidence for such an overall tendency.

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<sup>6</sup> See section 4.2

#### 4.1.1. Time

My intention was to retrieve as recently published and relevant material as possible, why the selection was limited to material produced in the year 2018. 2018 being an election year, furthermore gives us reason to assume a relatively high frequency of politicized content in the competition for support among the voters at the time before the election (from which most of the articles were retrieved), further making it a critical case. Widely reported events such as the forest fires ravaging parts of the country, arguably also contributed to the heightened interest in the issue, as shown by the relatively high number of articles on climate change for that year<sup>7</sup>.

#### 4.1.2 Authors and papers

The selection of articles was further conditioned on the author and the paper. The selected articles had to be written by national party representatives, so that they to the greatest extent possible could be said to represent the national party line. European Union representatives were further included to broaden the pool of selection. Since this study only concerns itself with domestic climate change politics, articles whose focus was centred around European climate policy were excluded.

Furthermore, the selection was limited to articles written for major, widely circulated national papers<sup>8</sup>. This is because I want the texts to be representative of national climate politics, directed at the national voter. The material was collected using the media archive service ‘Retriever’<sup>9</sup>.

#### 4.2. Validity

Due to the limited scope of this study the claim to investigate the politics of climate change is limited to the notion of “party politics”. In mainly focusing on the on the communicative aspects of climate change politics, its claims regarding substantial climate policy output are restricted. That said however, I argue that the articles to a certain degree should be regarded as political texts, why they are believed to be indicative of actual climate politics pursued in

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<sup>7</sup> Evident in the process of retrieving the material.

<sup>8</sup> These included Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Aftonbladet and Dagens Industri.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.retriever.se/> Search terms used were: “climate\*”, “debate” and the names of respectively party.

parliament. At the very least, it is unlikely to believe that the parties would assume a more “agonistic” position in parliament (see the critical case argument made above).

Due to an uneven amount of material produced by the different parties, some were underrepresented in the selection. This is a problem for the validity of the result since the claims made regarding these parties might be misrepresented. The original objective was to collect at least two articles from each party. Where this was not possible due to underrepresentation, the material was supplemented with relevant information from these parties’ websites. The Christian Democrats were for example only represented with one short article in the form of a reply. The Sweden Democrats, the Liberals and the Social Democrats were also clearly underrepresented in the selection. The additional material was incorporated in the analysis to account for central frames absent in the articles.

Such an apparent lack of material produced by certain parties is arguably indicative of an overall depoliticized moderate framing, or at least of a lack of significantly divergent perspectives. The Social Democrats are for example are thought to depend on the much more frequent representation of the Green Party, with which they share seats in government.

The absence of relevant articles produced by leading Social Democrats in the major national papers forced the selection process to include a wider set of papers. The article from the Social Democrats was ultimately taken from “Aktuell Hållbarhet” – a significantly smaller paper focusing on issues concerning sustainability. This article was chosen nevertheless since it was written by a national party representant for a national audience, and since its contents were deemed to be exhaustive and reflecting that of the other papers.

#### 4.3. Framing

In acknowledging that “societal phenomena do not have a given meaning but can be interpreted – framed – in different ways”, and that, “how the phenomena is framed has significance for how actors handle the issue” (Esaiasson et.al 2017: 218, my translation), the material was analysed using a qualitative “framing analysis” (discussed in *ibid*: 218-19). Since such an analysis is especially concerned with the actors behind the representation – the “producers” and the “consumers” of the text (*ibid*: 218) – it is well suited for this study, interested in the relation between the producers in their appeal to the voters.



#### 4.4. Typologies

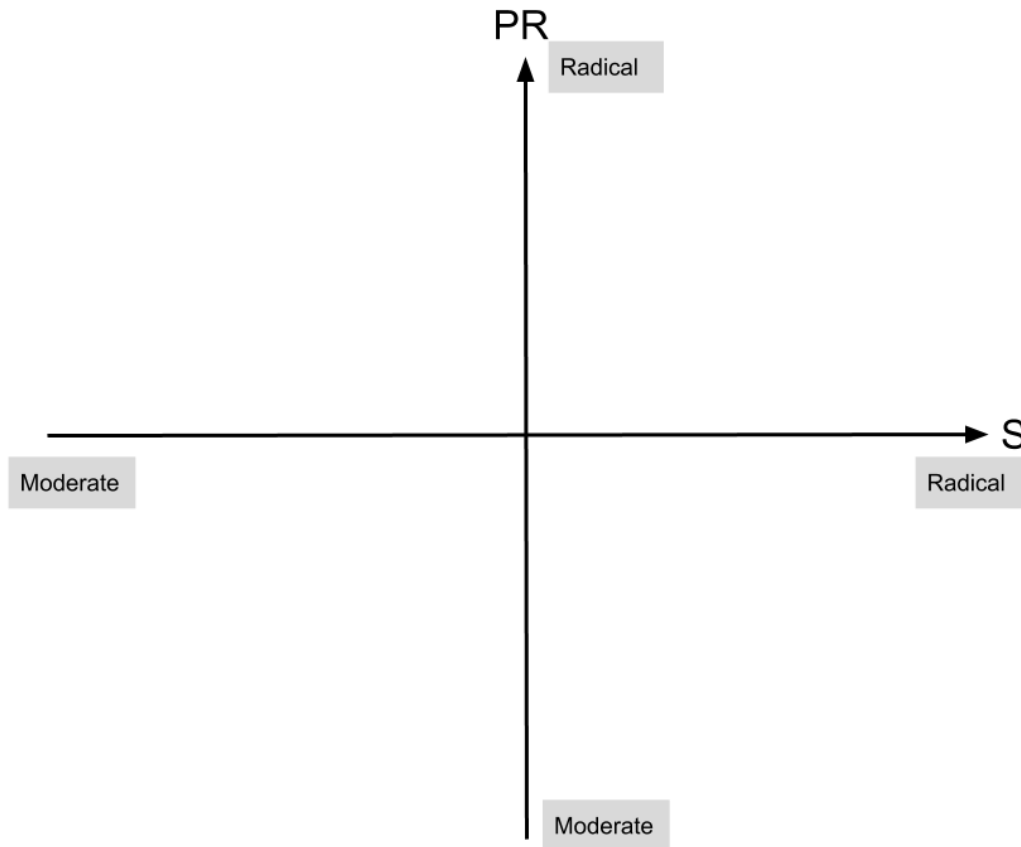
In conducting the analysis, a deductive method was used based on the moderate and radical typologies outlined in the previous chapter. These are summarized and presented in operationalized terms in *table II*. The typologies are treated as ideal types, or as “broad abstractions that may not consistently serve to classify empirical cases” (Collier, Laporte & Seawright 2008: 8). Hence, I do not expect any one party too meet all the criteria of any particular typology. This also, is not the purpose. By constructing these, polarly opposite ideal-types, my aim is to assess how the parties relate to these in terms of “closer to” and “further from” – indicating a “difference in degree” rather than a “difference in kind” (Esaiasson et al. 2015: 142, 140, my translation). Therefore, the ideal-type is the ideal typology for comparison (Collier, Laporte & Seawright 2008) and the most suitable for this study concerned with identifying differences in terms of (de)politicization.

The relation between the moderate and radical ideal-types can furthermore be illustrated and treated as two polarly opposite positions along a dimension in a two-dimensional matrix (see *figure I*). Finally, my intention is that these typologies will be collectively exhaustive. However, I acknowledge the risk of this not being the case since typologies are “always a particular work of construction and can never be definitive” (Machin 2013: 6).

Table II.

	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Radical</b>
<b>Problem representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Objective issue</li> <li>- Moral issue</li> <li>- Scientific issue</li> <li>- Individual issue</li> <li>- Economic issue</li> </ul> <p>Discrete issue to be handled separately.</p> <p>GHG-emissions as the matter of concern.</p> <p>Objective outlook generating dichotomies such as “good” versus “bad”, “rational” versus “irrational” or “emotional”</p> <p>Homogenous threat facing an aggregated account of humanity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dependent on representation</li> <li>- Issue of conflicting interests</li> <li>- Justice issue</li> <li>- Social issue</li> <li>- Structural issue.</li> </ul> <p>Systemically intertwined with other issues.</p> <p>Societal structures behind emissions as the matter of concern.</p> <p>Constructive outlook generating a normative framing in terms of competing sets of political interests.</p> <p>Heterogenous threat facing a differentiates account of humanity.</p>
<b>Solution</b>	<p>Aims to diffuse ideological polarization and foster consensus.</p> <p>Solutions mainly framed in negative terms (typically, “lower emissions”).</p> <p>Maintain the status quo – without the CO<sub>2</sub>.</p> <p>Mitigation is “good business”.</p> <p>Existing institutions part of the solution (e.g., the free market).</p> <p>Downplaying the role of politics. Favours politics that facilitates market solutions.</p> <p>Solutions in ‘relative’ terms (e.g., market mechanisms and commodification).</p> <p>Moral, scientific and economic imperatives: Technological solutions. Market mechanisms. Normative notion of the green state. Rational deliberation.</p>	<p>Aims to highlight different political interests.</p> <p>Solutions framed in positive terms (as alternative socio-ecological future).</p> <p>Challenges the status quo, through structural transformation.</p> <p>Trade-offs between different (economic) interests necessary.</p> <p>Existing institutions part of the problem.</p> <p>Highlights the role of politics.</p> <p>Solutions in ‘absolute’ terms (e.g., “leave the oil in the ground”).</p> <p>Normative, political imperatives from conflict of interest. Highlights the issue of climate justice, and the social and economic dimension of the issue. Egalitarian framing.</p>

Figure I.



#### 4.5. Conducting the analysis

In conducting the analysis, the articles were printed and read through thoroughly. Based on the operationalization of the typologies summarized in *table II*, the articles were re-read and different sections coded in accordance to the different typological distinctions. Sections discussing problem representations was coded with a “PR”; solutions with an “S”, and so on. “In this way relevant parts of the text are highlighted, and the possible answers are easier to overlook” (Esaiasson et al. 2017: 229, my translation). The analysis was systematically conducted to ensure a good validity (ibid 2017: 219) and the hermeneutic principle of charity was implemented throughout. Relevant quotes were then extracted and translated into English.

Finally, a qualitative estimate of the parties' relation to the different ideal-types are presented in the matrix, thus providing a graphical depiction of the overall result. The positioning of the parties in the matrix are motivated in relation to their overall tendency towards a certain type of framing. Important to note is that this is not based on any quantitative criterion but acts as a graphic depiction of a rough qualitative estimate of the aggregated result, and as an illustrative summary of the general debate.

## 5. Results

In this section the results of the analysis are presented. I will first give an account of how the framing of each party relate to the moderate and radical typologies, before summarizing the debate and relating the parties to each other.

### 5.1. The Left Party (V)

Among all the parties, the Left Party clearly has the most radical outlook on the issue. The problem representation highlights the representative character of the issue and the socio-political interests embedded in it:

“Emissions and class correspond on a number of areas. The richest 10% are responsible for 45% of the world's emissions. The more money you have the more you consume and travel” (Holm 2018b).

Here, conflicting interests are clearly identified and expressed in terms of class. However, while pointing to the centrality of structural aspects, the emissions are ultimately tracked to the individual as a “consumer”, in line with a more moderate problem representation. The individual responsibility however, is clearly differentiated according to said structures. As noted here in regard to air travel:

“There is an almost completely neglected dimension to the important debate about the environmental consequences of air travel. Namely, who is it who is flying? [...] It is the world's rich and a growing middle class. The clear majority does not” (ibid).

The class focus in the problem representation indicates a radical, post-foundationalist appreciation of the issue, where climate change is treated as systemically intertwined with other socio-economic issues. Further expressing such a notion, the Left Party argues that, “An economic politics for more justice is also good climate policy” (ibid), pointing to the solution as necessarily concerned with the radical frame of economic justice.

In regard to aviation, the Left Party argues that:

“Aviation must bear its full societal and climate cost. Taxation is a good first step, but more has to be done. It is irresponsible and completely unsustainable to think that the number of flights can increase when, on the contrary, it must decrease. This applies even if it sometime in the future will be possible to run the aircrafts on bio-fuel; they will still contribute to large emissions” (Holm 2018b).

In this quote, the moderate call for economic incentives is put forward, but its limitation acknowledged, why the solution is ultimately framed in absolute terms (“it must decrease”). The radical, absolutist approach is also manifested in the party’s critique of the proposed increase in the capacity of Arlanda airport: “In this perspective it is also unreasonable to believe in an expansion of Arlanda, and Bromma airport should be closed” (ibid). This framing clearly identifies a conflicting set of interests – that sustainable development and continual development in accordance to “business as usual”, might not be compatible. The critique of the moderate solutions is also expressed in terms of a scepticism in the belief that technological development will solve the problem (“This applies even if it sometime in the future is possible to run the aircrafts on bio-fuel”).

The more radically systemic concern of the Left Party is also evident in their take on consumption:

“Why has the S/MP government been so nonplussed before the issue concerning our unsustainable consumption? I think that consumption criticism challenges a fundamental aspect of today’s society, namely the idea of perpetual growth driven by an ever-rising private consumption” (Holm 2018a).

In challenging “a fundamental aspect of today’s society” the idea of perpetual growth and private consumption, central to neoliberal capitalism, is targeted in what resembles a radical systemic critique. Apart from criticizing institutions central to the status quo, the Left Party also provides a positive vision of an alternative socio-ecological future:

“But our society can grow in different areas instead. Public sector consumption – investments in the school system, healthcare and elderly care – puts less pressure on the environment than the private sector and would be well off to grow substantially. Higher taxes and fees on especially high-income consumption would therefore have a positive environmental effect. We would have fewer city jeeps and weekend trips to London, but more money left for a better school and healthcare. A general shortage of working hours, where the increase in production goes to more free time instead of corporative profits or increase in salary would as well have a soothing effect on the unsustainable consumption” (Holm 2018a).

Here, a vision of a better, more egalitarian society is connected to the notion of an ecologically sustainable one, in line with the radical perspective. When it comes to the concrete means by which this is to be achieved however, the framing deviates further from the radical perspective.

Although partly acknowledging the societal structures driving the emissions, such as class and the idea of perpetual growth, the Left Party again struggles to lift the focus above the individual. Consequently, many of the concrete solutions are ultimately moderate in their aim to change individual behaviour. Even though the structures generating a differentiated behaviour are recognized, the structures themselves are not as subsumable to critique as the actions of the individuals acting within them. Consequently, many of the Left Party's propositions are aimed at targeting the individual with economic incentives such as taxes ("Higher taxes and fees on especially high-income consumption would therefore have a positive environmental effect"). Even the socio-political aim of introducing a shorter working day is ultimately framed in zero-sum terms as a trade-off between salary and consumption. Thus, the Left's radical ambition, "To formulate alternatives to today's unsustainable use-then-throw-away society" (ibid), on a policy level appears to remain a predominantly moderate one.

## 5.2. The Green Party (MP)

More than any other party, the Green Party stresses the dire effects and implications of climate change in its problem representation. For example:

"Food security for billions of people are on the line. Hundreds of million people can be displaced, homes and entire societies submerged by rising seas, floods and storms. The world's poorest are hit the hardest, but the entire world is affected" (Lövin & Fridolin 2018a).

Although recognizing a differentiation in the effect based on structural injustices in line with a radical framing ("The world's poorest are hit the hardest"), the overall absence of any clear account of such structural interconnectedness, along with a moderate tendency towards a reinforced universal framing ("the entire world is affected"), is arguably more resonant with a moderate 'ecology of fear'. This naturally generates a moral framing, where the imperative to act is framed in dichotomic terms of "right" and "wrong":

“We also know that we have a choice: we can be the ones who took the issue seriously and did what is demanded. Or we are those who with open eyes burned the earth’s resources and the prerequisites for a good life” (ibid).

In terms of solutions, the Green Party argues for the normative notion that sustainability must permeate all sectors of society: “In our climate plan there are suggestions to consequentially develop all sectors of society” (ibid). This framing, indicative of a green republican approach, is also manifested in the following excerpt:

“Shall we continue to show the way and become the world’s first fossil free welfare state? Or shall we hope that others take the forerunner responsibility? My promise to the Swedish public is that I will do everything for politics to take its responsibility and make it easier for the climate heroes in Sweden who every day struggles to reduce their emissions” (Lövin 2018).

Here, the green republican notions of a green state (“fossil free welfare state”) and a more community-oriented citizen acting beyond narrow self-interest are expressed (“the climate heroes in Sweden who every day struggles to reduce their emissions”). The Green Party also points to the deliberative process as a means through which rational decisions is reached when they write that, “It is only through an active political discussion about the smartest reforms that we will be able to reach and exceed the climate objectives” (Lövin & Fridolin 2018a).

The main task for politics is however framed in terms of making it easier and cheaper for the individual to facilitate the transition to a fossil free economy: “The climate smart choices should be simpler and cheaper than the environmentally bad ones” (Lövin & Fridolin 2018a). This is mainly done through economic incentives: “We support those who buy an electric bike, those who want to put solar panels on their roof or those who wants to change to a more fuel-efficient car” (Lövin 2018). In targeting the individual and treating them as a consumer motivated by economic rationality and/or green morality, these frames are explicitly moderate.

Investment and innovation are furthermore framed in economically rational moderate terms as both profitable for the environment and the economy: “Investments in both electrification and production of renewables will benefit both the environment and the economy” (Lövin & Fridolin 2018a). Other techno-economic frames include: “The Green Party suggests that Sweden produces a new ‘Stern report’, a report with calculations of how much climate change will cost Sweden” (Lövin & Fridolin 2018b), and the appeal to a “Renewed focus on a green

tax transition” (ibid). These frames are all grounded in the moderate notion of economic rationality as the central imperative for a sustainable development, where no conflict is identified. In arguing however for the absolutist demand that “Fossil fuels must have an end date” (Lövin & Fridolin 2018a), it is indicated that the Green Party puts heavy emphasis on the role played by politics in climate mitigation, and that market incentives might not be enough to solve the issue.

### 5.3. The Social Democrats (S)

“One of the greatest challenges”, writes the Social Democrats, “is the climate and to create a society which is not dependent on fossil fuels but built on renewables” (Westlund 2018). This framing, while it points to the centrality of the issue, centres around its physical nature. The issue is furthermore presented in discrete terms, indicating the possibility for a necessary trade-off between different environmental interest: “It is central to manage the climate challenge, but there are also other crucial environmental issues” (ibid).

However, a social justice perspective is also introduced in the framing, where the work for an ecologically sustainable future is connected to the ideological struggle for equality and solidarity:

“We will continue to work towards the vision that Sweden shall become the world’s first fossil free welfare state, and we do it with our social democratic ideology at the foundation [so] that the work towards a better environment is also a work for equality and solidarity” (ibid).

This framing is clearly radical in that it apprehends the issue of climate change as systemically intertwined with social injustices (“the work towards a better environment is also a work for equality and solidarity”). However, a lack of any substantial structural critique and acknowledgement of conflicting interests, obfuscates the radical problem representation and leaves the solutions short of any radical implications.

The Social Democrats uses a similarly normative framing as the Green Party in referring to the aim to make Sweden “the world’s first fossil free welfare state”. A more politicized approach to the issue and its structural implications is also manifested in the following quote: “We need to work for a more circular economy with increased reuse and recycling [...] and make our consumption more sustainable” (ibid). This could be interpreted as a broader systemic and radical critique of social and economic relations. However, since the main



implications are directed towards the individual acts of “reuse” and “recycling”, the framing is ultimately deemed predominantly moderate.

The transition towards a sustainable society is furthermore framed in terms of a moderate win-win scenario, absent of any conflicting interests: “We are convinced that we as a country have everything to gain from being in the front line on environmental issues. It is like that we will secure job and welfare also in the future” (ibid). This moderate “good-for-business” sentiment is also clearly expressed in the following quote from their website:

“By taking the lead and investing in climate friendly technology, Sweden will strengthen the competitiveness of our companies. Swedish companies should be ready to sell the innovations requested by the world. This creates jobs and export revenue” (Socialdemokraterna 2018).

This framing is clearly in line with the techno-economic approach stressing the economic benefits of technological development and climate mitigation. To facilitate such a development the Social Democrats points to market incentives designed to “increase investment in climate mitigation” and to introduce “subsidies for innovation in industry which decreases the emissions” (ibid). The main sentiment is summed up in the following appeal to economic rationality and benefits of the techno-economic approach: “We will make it profitable for the companies to act environmentally friendly. It should be easier for people to take climate responsibility in their everyday life” (ibid).

The role for politics is thus ultimately reduced to providing market incentives, creating a thoroughly depoliticized framing echoing an eco-modernist project, where apparently nothing stands in the way: “We want to tackle the issue of solving the climate crisis through a modernization of Sweden and to transit to a fossil free Sweden. We possess the technology, the knowledge and the will” (ibid). The perceived absence of any conflicting interests is lastly manifested in an explicit call for moderate consensus-based solutions: “The transformation to a sustainable society is a step forward, not backwards. Our position is that it must be done through a broad coalition not to change direction after each election” (Westlund 2018).

#### 5.4. The Centre Party (C)

The Centre Party frames the issue in moderate, mere physical terms, and no conflict between the economic institutions fostering economic growth and the issue of climate change is identified, why the author assumes an “optimistic” outlook:

“I am an optimist. We in Sweden have historically shown that it is possible to reduce emissions while maintaining a strong economic growth. Our example serves as a role model for many other countries” (Löf 2018).

As indicated here, the Centre Party puts heavy emphasis on the role played by the market in solving the issue. The techno-economic apprehension of mitigation as good business (in terms of “green growth”) is also evident here: “Economic development and climate responsibility go hand in hand. It is through enterprise, innovation and a green growth that we handle the climate transition” (ibid).

Such “rational” approach is juxtaposed with “symbolic” and “ineffective” measures, supposedly put forward by the Green Party. “It had been desirable if the Green Party’s long list of climate policy had contained effective, forward looking and technology friendly proposals to lower emissions” (Nordin & Federley 2018). Here, the moderate focus on technology and emissions, void of any social concern, is clearly manifested. The central role played by the market in such development is also highlighted: “The next environment and climate minister must have an insight regarding the power possessed by Swedish companies to contributing to a cleaner world” (Löf 2018).

The concrete solutions in form of policy proposals, are accordingly framed in terms of green development through market mechanisms. Such examples include a “green car bonus”, “green reduction” on services and a green “tax transition” (Löf 2018; Nordin & Federley 2018). Echoing the moderate perception of the subject as economically rational, the Centre Party writes that, “Our principle is clear - it should pay off to be environmentally friendly and readjust” (Löf 2018). Since no conflict of interest is identified any opposition is clearly deemed irrational: “For us it is important to stop the emissions – not the development. It is through enterprise, innovation and green growth that we manage the climate transition” (ibid). Hereby, economic growth is not only framed as compatible with a decrease in emissions, but indeed as a requisite for it. This is a prime example of the non-conflictual nature of the moderate framing, and the call for the maintaining of the status quo without the CO<sub>2</sub> – a common framing with many parties.

## 5.5. The Liberals (L)

The Liberals also frame the issue in exclusively moderate terms, centred around techno-economic solutions:

“The Liberals stand for a climate policy for the long term. [...] Knowledge and technological development contribute to new climate smart solutions. Market economy and free trade pushes on” (Persson & Tysklind 2018).

The framing in terms of “knowledge”, and the focus on GHG-emissions, is significant of a foundationalist problem representation from which the unequivocal appeal to decrease emissions through “technological development” spring. The explicit emphasis on “market economy and free trade” as the institutions through which such development and “climate smart solutions” are facilitated, clearly indicates a moderate framing absent of any conflict.

The techno-economic imperative of choice is for the Liberals centred around the taxation of the polluters. In this way, the emissions are treated in terms of a negative economic externality – as a failure to aptly price the emissions:

“We assume the principle that the polluter should pay, and we rather see that the cost increases for those who pollute instead of subsidising that which shall be introduced. As opposed to The Green Party and the Government, who call for a red increase in taxation, we want a green tax transition” (Persson & Tysklind 2018).

The centrality of economic incentives is further expressed in regard to the objective to achieve a “a fossil free vehicle fleet”, which for the Liberals, “goes through a number of reforms which build on the principle of polluter pays”. The means to achieve the objective of zero emissions is here – as opposed to the radical framing in absolute terms – framed in relative terms and as a necessary outcome of pricing the emissions right. Applied to the individual as a rational economic consumer, this gives that, “It has to be easy to consume climate smart, recycle and travel by bike, bus or train instead of car” (Liberalerna n.d.).

Ultimately for the Liberals, the issue is treated in terms of reducing GHG-emissions through existing institutions and market mechanisms. No socio-political implications are identified in the framing.

## 5.6. The Conservative Party (M)

The Conservative Party frames climate change as a discrete issue and as an external threat facing an aggregated notion of “humanity”:

“Climate change is one of many threats against humanity, where famine, poverty, political instability and international contradictions also are a part of our reality. We must handle the multitude of challenges. Despair’s stultification can only lead to failure, in climate politics and in politics in general” (Hökmark 2018).

This moderate problem representation assumes a foundationalist outlook on the issue as possible to handle separately in accordance to its inherent properties. By framing the issue in terms of a trade-off between different types of threats, it is isolated from any radical systemic interconnectedness.

In line with this foundationalist problem representation, the solutions are framed in strictly moderate terms, dominated by a techno-economic approach. Technological development and economic growth are clearly framed as holding the key to a sustainable development, and no conflict is identified between them: “The development of technology – not the rewinding of economic growth – is the key to success” (ibid). In other words, climate mitigation through technological development is good for business:

“With new technology we can combine reduced emissions with economic growth. This applies to electric cars, more modern aircrafts, solar panels and other new fuels, more modern and smarter traffic systems by means of new generations of mobile networks, fossil free steel production, energy-efficient housing and more open energy markets” (ibid).

Here, the issue is again treated in mere physical terms of emissions, and its solution framed in terms of new technology fuelled by economic growth. Thus, the facilitation of free market mechanisms and competition is framed in terms of good climate policy:

“The technological development presupposes a global economic development for modern technology to be accessible for all. The economic development presupposes in turn a technological development. If we stop flying in Sweden this does not affect the global emissions but risks delaying the development of better aircrafts” (ibid).

And, “A strong competitiveness is a presumption for powerful climate action” (Malmer Stenergard & Warborn 2018).

The strong belief in the markets ability to self-regulate and foster green technological development is manifested in the Conservatives outlook on air travel, and the negative role

ideally played by politics. Again, no conflict is identified with maintaining the status quo and decreasing the emissions. Such a rationalist “win-win” framing clearly deems any opposition irrational, here in terms of “symbolic sacrifices”:

“We do not contribute to the ‘global development’ through symbolic politics belief in sacrifices, but by taking the lead in technological and economic development. Maturity is demanded to realize that great challenges are best handled by viewing complexity, balance and priorities” (Hökmark 2018).

The radical demand for “the transformation of our entire society” (ibid), is also explicitly dismissed. Why transform society if there are no contradictions inherent in it?

In more concrete terms the Conservatives argue that we “focus on the major sources of emission” (Malmer Stenergard & Warborn 2018), and that, “The companies must lead the transformation, but [that] politics have a great responsibility” (ibid). This responsible, as discussed above, is mainly framed in terms of facilitating the technological transmission through economic incentives. This is done through industry discounts which arguably “would create greater precision than subsidies” (ibid), and by attributing “Greater resources to research and development” (ibid).

The heavy emphasis on the unimpeded markets ability to foster development of green technology and lead the way towards a sustainable future, is clearly manifested when it is pointed out that in the US, “Even with a president who denies the climate threat, the technological development still leads to decreased emissions” (Hökmark 2018). This indicates a thoroughly depoliticized moderate framing where role of politics is downplayed in favour of the rationality of the market.

### 5.7. The Christian Democrats (KD)

On their website the Christian Democrats writes that, “The current systems of production and consumption on our planet are not sustainable in the long term” (Kristdemokraterna n.d.).

This arguably resembles a radical problem representation implicant of a more systemic critique. However, in what follows it becomes clear that the Christian Democrats frame the issue in strictly moderate terms, and that no conflict is identified between the “current system” and climate mitigation: “Growth and economy are not enemies to the environment, but prerequisites for a good society” (Gunther 2018). Mitigation is instead framed in

depoliticized terms and as a win-win situation, dependent on institutions central to the status quo.

The depoliticized outlook on the issue is supported by an overall lack of material, where the only concrete solutions put forward on their website, further aims at providing economic incentives for economically rational subjects on the market:

“We want to lower taxes on work and raise taxes on environmentally damaging activity. We also want to introduce new taxes on plastic bags and non-recyclable textiles” (Kristdemokraterna n.d.).

Given the perceived moderate lack of conflict between “growth and development”, the Christian Democrats rally against the Green Party for being enemies of such a rational economist approach, why they are framed in dichotomic terms as enemies to rationality and morally “bad”:

“On issue after issue, in branch after branch, the Green Party is soon against everything which can contribute to growth and development; and with a duality in morals that is hard to beat”. And further, “The social market economy tells us what is to be guiding in politics all the time – to have a social, economic and an environmental perspective. What the Green Party has lost is the two former perspectives” (Gunther 2018).

The initial identification of the issue with the “The current systems of production and consumption”, is evidently not followed up by anything which would suggest any systemic interconnectedness or conflict. Instead the “environmental perspective” is treated in discrete terms and the initial radical sentiment quickly turned on its head and cemented in a strictly moderate frame. The framing lacks any social implications.

#### 5.8. The Sweden Democrats (SD)

The Sweden Democrats also have a clear moderate appreciation of the issue, centred around the physical aspect of GHG-emissions: “The Sweden Democrats have an efficient policy for lowering Sweden’s oil dependence and emissions of greenhouse gases” (Kinnunen 2018).

Accordingly, and in line with a strict techno-economic approach, the Sweden Democrats put especially great emphasis on technology, creating a thoroughly depoliticized framing:

“The Sweden Democrats is a technology and development friendly party, and we realize that ordinary people, now and in the future, will strive for mobility and a better economy. Thus, we think that environmental politics first and foremost should be driven by a development of technology, not larger tax burdens” (ibid).

This, combined with the overall lack of material, indicates a thoroughly depoliticized and moderate, negative framing. The depoliticized framing focused on technology is evident in the only substantial proposal for a solution found in the material:

“The most important measures are to maintain and develop nuclear energy, invest more in research and development and contribute more to international actions. Regarding the transport sector we want to develop electric and hydrogen drive” (Sverigedemokraterna 2019).

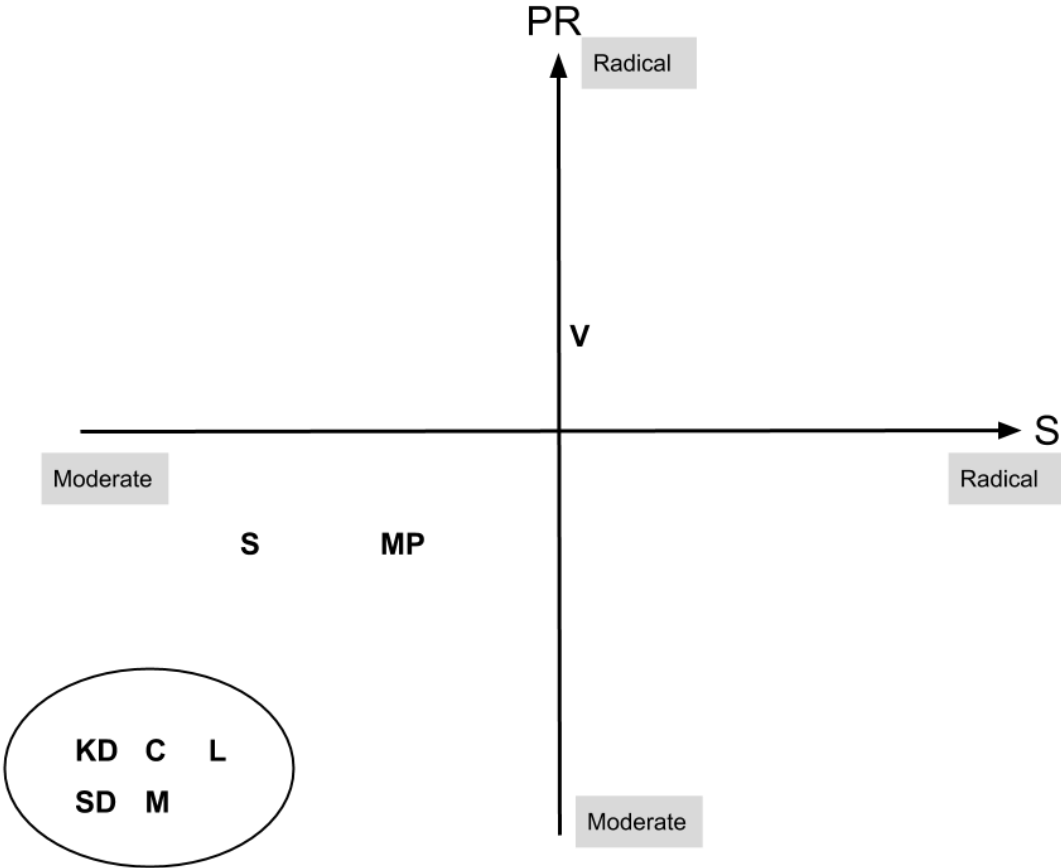
No conflict of interests are identified, why the adversarial framing is put in dichotomic terms of techno-economic rationality versus irrational “symbolic” spending:

“The problem is [...], that Swedish climate policy is expensive without contributing to a decrease in global emissions” and “Swedish climate policy must be given a global perspective where cost efficient reforms, which makes a real difference, are prioritized in front of symbolic spending” (Kinnunen 2018).

Once again, the issue is framed in moderate terms of discrete emissions, and its solution in an appeal to economic rationality, where the role played by politics is downplayed. The framing lacks any social implications.

5.9. Summary of the debate

Figure II.



In *figure II.*, the results are summarized and presented in relation to the moderate and radical ideal-types. Once again, it is important to note that this is a graphic depiction based on a rough, qualitative approximation and not on any quantitative criterion. From these results it is clear that the moderate perspective dominates both the problem representation and the solutions with all parties, except for the Left Party, but that there is a degree of significant differentiation within the moderate framework.

The Left Party is the only party which consequentially makes use of radical frames, most significantly in terms of problem representation. Although arguably failing to produce a wholly consequent radical framing, this clearly separates the Left Party from the others. Worth noting is that the positioning of the Left Party in the predominantly radical field in



terms of solutions is conditioned on the higher frequency of the more radical “discursive” framing than the more moderate policy-oriented, why the political implications might differ (see discussion).

The Green Party and the Social Democrats both incorporates social justice frames but ultimately leaves out any structural implications why they are deemed overall “moderate”. Since the extent of politicization is an important criterion for distinguishing between the moderate and radical typologies, the Green Party places further from the moderate ideal-type than the Social Democrats – who frames the solutions in more predominantly depoliticized techno-economic terms.

The remaining parties, which I will refer to as “the right opposition”, all make use of exclusively moderate frames in terms of both problem representation and solution. Because not enough substantial difference was identified in relation to the analytical framework, they are treated as qualitatively inseparable for the purpose of the analysis. With that said however, there is possibly a case to be made for distinguishing the Centre Party and the Liberals from the others in this group, since they arguably put greater emphasis on the active role played by politics in climate change mitigation. Future studies adopting a different analytic framework, more sensitive to differentiations within the moderate framework, would have to evaluate if there is enough evidence to clearly distinguish them from the rest of the right opposition.

To conclude then, based on these distinctions, three main groups or positions in relation to the typologies can be distinguished in the results. These are the Left Party, the two parties of government, and the right opposition. In the final section, I will discuss the implications for the (de)politicization of the issue in regard to these results.

## 6. Discussion and concluding remarks

“Common sense is a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find there anything that one like.” (Antonio Gramsci 2007).

Given the results, and the predominantly but differentiated moderate response to the issue of climate change, what could be said about its (de)politicization?

## 6.2. Different types of politicization

As pointed out in the introduction to this paper, an issue could be said to be “politicized” if it generates a political response. Moreover, it can be said to be so to a different degree, depending on the centrality of the role proposedly played by politics in addressing the issue (e.g., different degrees of market intervention). Although a *quantitative* difference in politicization exist within the moderate framework – regarding the preferred *types* of reforms (compare for example the Green Party with the Sweden Democrats) – there is a *qualitative* leap in the kind of politicization when moving into the radical typology. This is because the radical approach fundamentally challenges the moderate problem representation, generating not only a different *type* of moderate reform, but a different *form* of political response (e.g., by introducing a social justice dimension) (Swyngedouw 2010; Kurtz 2017).

These different frames, when situated in a context of adversarial confrontation – such as that provided for this study – in turn generates different implications for the *overall* (de)politicization of the issue. Here, the issue itself could be said to be politicized if substantial difference and conflict is identified between the parties – or depoliticized if the issue is subject to an overall consensus. Once again, there is a qualitative difference between the adversarial confrontation taking place within a moderate framework – what Mouffe calls “dialogic” confrontation – and that coming from a radical, or “agonistic”, position (2005: 51-54)<sup>10</sup>. Given these distinctions – how is the issue of climate change politicized or depoliticized in the political discourse, and what implications does this leave us with?

## 6.3. Agonistic confrontation

Let us begin by looking at the only case of agonistic confrontation implied by the results; namely that generated by the (predominantly) “radical” position of Left Party. In recognizing a conflict between climate change politics and institutions and practices central to the status quo, the issue is here subject to agonistic politicization. This is for example illustrated in the Left Party’s critique of the idea of “perpetual growth” – seen by the adversaries as compatible, and even necessary, for sustainable development (e.g., in terms of “green growth”). By also providing a radical vision of an alternative socio-ecological future, the Left

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<sup>10</sup> See section 3.2 and 3.4.

Party could be argued to challenge the current hegemonic discourse focused on the non-conflicted practice of techno-economic mitigation. Thus, there is significant evidence suggesting that climate change is subject to what the radicals would argue constitute a “proper” agonistic form of politicization on a discursive level (Mouffe 2005: 31; Swyngedouw 2010; Moolna 2012). This however, only to a limited extent.

Since the framing concerned with concrete policy proposals is predominantly moderate, the road towards such a future largely remains shrouded in obscurity. This arguably generates a different implication for the type of politicization on the political level (in terms of substantial climate policy) – compared to that on the level of more abstract discourse discussed above. Since the concrete policy-oriented solutions are mainly framed in moderate terms, they instead imply a dialogic form of politicization. Such implications provide support for the claim made by Ollman regarding the shortcomings of the radical approach, when it comes to produce a coherent political praxis (2015). From this perspective, the implications for actual climate politics are arguably moderate, “to the extent that while criticizing actually-existing political practices and institutions, the solutions [...] are essentially compatible with or re-enforcing of the status quo” (Kurtz 2017: 12). Given the discursive nature of this study, further investigation into the political praxis and a more policy-oriented material would have to be made, before any definitive conclusions are drawn regarding the (de)politicized state of substantial climate politics.

#### 6.4. Dialogic confrontation

The more frequent form of “politicization” indicated by the results, is the dialogic confrontation between different moderate approaches. Even though Mouffe and other radicals would be hesitant to call such confrontation “politicized” at all (Mouffe 2005), I will relate to this as a form of “dialogic politicization” or confrontation.

Dialogic confrontation is most apparent in the relation between the government (most notably the Green Party) and the right opposition. Here, the main lines of conflict are drawn between the specific types of techno-economic solutions. The apparent “politicization” is amplified by the discursive use of the moderate dichotomies “rational” versus “irrational”, and “right” versus “wrong”. However, when dissected more closely one shall find that the framing and solutions put forward by these adversaries are all grounded in the same moderate problem

representation, why the rational and moral imperatives used in the argument for any particular frame appears arbitrarily derived from an appeal to what Kurtz in reference to Antonio Gramsci (1971) aptly calls a “common sense” conception of the issue (2017: 10). Such apparently incontestable frames, appealing to rational or moral “common sense”, are devoid of any socio-political implications and conflict, why they are arguably inherently depoliticizing. Kurtz indeed argue that such a “common sense” conception of the issue is central to the moderate techno-economic and moral understanding of the issue and that these “perspectives are ubiquitous and hegemonic among those who share a broadly ‘liberal’ or ‘progressive’ outlook on climate change” (Kurtz 2017:10). A claim supported by the results of this study. This is evident in the common framing centred around the notion that politics should provide an economic or moral incentives to facilitate sustainable development (clearly expressed in the common sentiment that “it should be easy and pay off to act sustainable”). Here, the same type of “common sense” appeal is used to inform a differentiated policy, however ultimately resting on similar moderate principles.

Thus, much of the apparent “politicization” could therefore be argued to consist of different appeals to such ‘common sense’ arguments, which ultimately are not grounded in any “real” political conflict between normative interests, why “Debate and contentious argument are restricted to questions of techno-managerial management whereby the neoliberal frame of market-led and growth-centred development cannot be legitimately questioned” (Swyngedouw 2015: 638).

However, given that the somewhat differentiated framing appears to vary between parties of different ideological background, further studies using a framework more sensitive to politico-ideological differentiations within the moderate category, would have to be conducted before any final conclusions are drawn regarding a potential “post-political” state of Swedish climate politics. The implications of this study however, suggests that the issue, at least from a radical perspective, is depoliticized, with the notable exception of the discursive framing of the Left Party. Finally, let us proceed to look at the implications of such an apparent depoliticization.

### 6.5. The hegemony of “common sense”

As discussed above, the apparent “politicization” of the issue arguably takes place mainly within the hegemonic structure of a largely uncontested moderate discourse (given the much limited political implications of the radical framing of the Left Party), where confrontation is mostly limited to appeals to apparently incontestable ‘common sense’ arguments. The overall lack of agonistic politicization – especially on a policy-oriented level – is therefore evident of a hegemonic configuration within which the socio-political dimension of the issue is largely unacknowledged. By appealing to different ‘common sense’ arguments climate change can within such a configuration at once be successfully casted as the “greatest issue of conflict in Swedish politics” (see Lövin 2018) – and at the same time be limited to a moderate set of reforms, consolidating the hegemony. If the issue of climate change is indeed systemically intertwined with socio-political life, and dependent on representation and normative political judgement – as suggested by the radicals and the author of this paper – such a moderate, yet apparently politicized, political discourse arguably risks foreclosing a proper debate surrounding the structural problems at the heart of the issue (Swyngedouw 2010, 2014; Kurtz 2017; Moolna 2012; Pepermans & Maeseles 2014, 2016).

If it is indeed true that, “We cannot assume that the social and political structures and institutions which have given rise to this crisis are adequate to the task of resolving it” (Kurtz 2017: 15), the current state of Swedish climate politics, as indicated by the results of this study, might not be capable of properly handling the issue. To highlight the conflict of interest at the heart of the ‘common sense’ approach to climate change and to formulate a viable political alternative must therefore be central to any political project claiming to take the matter of climate change seriously.

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