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# Political Headwind:

How wind power development  
influences political trust

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### Abstract

Most policy projects aimed at environmental protection are conflictual in their nature and have supporters and opponents. If a policy is implemented without taking into consideration the opinions of policy opponents, there is a risk of disappointment with political actors, lowered political trust and even dissatisfaction with democracy among them. In our paper, we explore *how* environmental policy projects, namely, installment of wind turbines, disrupt political trust among policy opponents. We conducted semi-structured interviews with policy opponents who live in proximity of completed and planned wind turbines on Haramsøya and Bjerkreim in Norway. We found that the reason why opponents might lose political trust is, first and foremost, lack of procedural fairness, as they become unhappy with the secretive, abusive, and unfair process; disappointment with institutional performance in policy implementation process; people's attempts at participation in development processes failing or being ignored by authorities and decision makers; and increased polarization in the society through increased hostility and distrust towards opposing groups. All factors play a role in a decreased political trust among opponents of wind turbines at the planning stage and after the completion of the project, although polarization is less pronounced before the project is implemented. Our results shed light on the potential sources of political discontent among citizens living in proximity to wind turbines and need to be taken into account by policymakers in the planning stage of wind power development.

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# 1. Introduction

As the world is witnessing severe democratic backsliding, listening to the sentiments of those dissatisfied with the political system in democracies is becoming critical, not least to be aware of the potential hearth of unrest. Dissatisfaction with the political system can stem from many sources, including favorite candidates losing elections, inability of the governments to make decisions, unfulfilled promises, unpopular policies, among others. In this article, we turned to an increasingly controversial and polarizing issue that has a potential for disrupting trust in the political process, consequently leading to unnecessary headwind for democracy - environmental policy projects that have strong opponents, namely wind power development.

The issue is relevant and highly controversial. For example, in 2021, the Supreme Court of Norway ruled that the wind farms on Fosen violated Sámi rights under international convention; however, the decision was made to keep them in operation despite the ruling (Knutsen, et al., 2023). Then, in 2023, hundreds of Sámi activists - alongside climate activist Greta Thunberg - blocked several Norwegian ministries, protesting the decision to keep the wind turbines operational (Kassam & Niranjana, 2023; Klesty & Fouche, 2023; “Greta Thunberg protests”, 2023; Ørnhaug, Mudenia & Kurseth, 2023). These events gained a substantial amount of negative media attention in Norway, as well as internationally, and put Norwegian decision-making into question. This protest underscored the broader implications and discourse surrounding wind turbine development in Norway; however, it is not the only one.

The local community on Haramsøya in Norway has the last couple of years fought a battle to prevent the construction of sixteen, later changed to eight, wind turbines on Haramsfjellet; however, to no avail, as, at the time of writing, the construction of the eight turbines was finished. Similarly, the local community in Bjerkreim in Norway has seen some opponents fight a long battle to hinder development of wind power on Faurefjell in Bjerkreim; however, contrary to Haramsøya, this battle ended with a victory for the local community. Both communities voiced their dissatisfaction with democratic processes in social media, and the former, Haramsøya, have seen much media attention since 2019. These wind power developments have been perceived as harmful by the local communities, reducing property value, and harming recreational areas. However, they may also be harmful for decision-makers and politicians, as the critique that follows these cases might spread past those who are affected by these wind power projects.

Literature has long examined the extent to which siting of environmental policy projects, henceforth EPPs, effects local communities, and the consequences this has on political trust (e.g., Lesbirel, 1998; Linzenich & Ziefle, 2018; Waldo, 2012; Wolsink, 2007). Studies generally find that people consider green energy sources a positive remedy for global climate change; however, these projects often lead to a dilemma of conflicting values (e.g., Hurley & Walker, 2004; Stokes, 2020; Warren, Lumsden, & Birnie, 2005). These dilemmas have shown to negatively impact political trust, in regard to how procedures surrounding wind power siting were conducted (Clausen & Rudolph, 2019; Firestone, Hirt, Bidwell, Gardner, & Dwyer, 2020; Wolsink, 2007), potentially even leading to electoral backlash (Stokes, 2016). Literature also found that it is important to pay attention to those who oppose such policies as they are the source of discontent

and may disrupt political trust on the grounds of environmental policy implementation (Cheon & Urpelainen, 2013; Jagers et al., 2020; Werners et al., 2010).

In this paper, we aim to investigate *how* environmental policy projects affect political trust among policy opponents. We turn to the case of wind power development as a case of EPP and a critical case of Norway, where wind power development projects are widespread and ongoing and the general level of political trust is high. We take a qualitative approach and utilize semi-structured interviews with policy opponents who either live or own a home close to a completed wind power project, or policy opponents who live or own a home close to a planned wind power project.

We take a point of departure in theories on sources of political trust when gathering and analyzing our interview data. We find that most important factors that influence political trust of those who oppose environmental policies are: procedural fairness, where perceived unfairness of a process negatively impacts political trust; institutional performance, where citizens who assess institutional results and performance poorly have their trust reduced; results of citizens' political participation; and polarization, where citizens grow skeptical and distrusting towards those with opposite beliefs.

Results from the interviews showed that each of the factors influences political trust; however, procedural fairness stood out as the most important one due to the fact that the other factors stem from a process initially being deemed as unfair. If decision-makers fail to inform those who are affected by an environment policy, as well as fail to follow up during the entire process, they are left with opponents from the very beginning of a policy implementation, which could snowball into poor assessment of institutional performance, which leads to disappointment with participation opportunities, and ultimately polarization.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we present previous literature, clarifying the research gap we address. Then we present our theoretical framework, introducing the importance of procedural fairness, institutional performance, citizen participation, and polarization for citizens' political trust. We then introduce our research design, including our data and methods. Thereafter, we briefly describe how EPPs, more specifically wind power, is developed in Norway, as well as provide a brief recap of the wind power development cases on Haramsøya and Bjerkreim. Then comes a presentation of the results and discussion, followed by the conclusion that outlines possibilities for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

Literature has long examined the extent to which siting of EPPs, such as solar-, hydro- and wind power, effects local communities, and the consequences this has on public support, political engagement, and political trust (e.g., Lesbirel, 1998; Linzenich & Ziefle, 2018; Waldo, 2012; Wolsink, 2007; Stokes 2017). Results from the field generally find that people consider green energy sources a positive remedy for global climate change; however, building renewable energy plants, like other large-scale land usage projects, often leads to a dilemma involving conflicting

values (e.g., Hurley & Walker, 2004; Stokes, 2017; Warren, Lumsden, & Birnie, 2005). These dilemmas have shown to negatively impact political trust, as people react to how procedures surrounding renewable energy plant siting have been conducted (Clausen & Rudolph, 2019; Firestone, Hirt, Bidwell, Gardner, & Dwyer, 2020; Wolsink, 2007), potentially leading to electoral backlash (Stokes, 2016). Focusing on those who oppose such policies is particularly important as, being a source of discontent, they may disrupt political trust in society as a whole (Cheon & Urpelainen, 2013; Jagers et al., 2020; Werners et al., 2010; Stokes, 2016).

Development of green energy sources is an important step in combating climate change; however, these often take up much space and require tact in order to persuade those living within proximity to accept the development. Opposition from those who live close to renewable energy plants is often referred to as NIMBYism, an acronym for “Not In My Back Yard,” which is what locals would say to new infrastructure within proximity. This phenomenon has become almost synonymous with opposition to any EPP siting, and has been widely observed by various scholars over the last three decades in different cases of infrastructure facility siting (such as, nuclear, conventional, and hazardous waste facilities; nuclear and conventional power plants, railroads, roads, offshore oil platforms, oil drilling, etc.), and social facility siting (such as, housing, nursing homes, mental health institutions, etc.) (Bosley & Bosley, 1988; Cotton & Devine-Wright, 2011; Lesbirel, 1998; Petrova, 2013; Schively, 2007). The assumption is that opposition is largely reserved for local project siting, as those not affected will support the same projects elsewhere.

Synthesizing the previous literature on NIMBYism, Schively (2007) highlights the main sources of people’s concern which may develop into opposition: perceptions of the project’s impacts, its siting process, and perceptions of other participants. The main worries about the impacts include potential effect on the environment, health, the values of the property or even public safety (Easterling & Kunreuther, 1995; Kasperson, Golding & Tuler 1992; Takahashi & Dear, 1997). Opposition groups mobilize to challenge information on the risk, questioning the data, methodology and technical implementation (Kearney & Smith 1994). Perceptions of the siting process involve the issues of associated costs and fairness of the siting, including whether people are consulted on the siting in the first place and whether experts are involved in the evaluation of the siting. Perceptions of other participants include trust in the implementing authority, trust in experts and information that they provide about the project’s risks, trust between supporters and opponents in the society, which, when low, can hamper finding a compromise (Hunter & Layden, 1995; O’Hare, Bacow & Sanderson, 1983; Smith & Marquez, 2000) .

Similar to the last point, Wolsink (1999; 2007), argues that institutional factors arguably provide a better explanation for local opposition towards EEPs than NIMBYism. He argues that the attitudes towards EPPs are influenced by various decision-making processes. Therefore, to understand how opposition towards EPPs develops, Wolsink (1999; 2007), emphasizing fallacies in simply attributing various project failures to NIMBYism, documents the importance of institutional factors related to implementation and public support of EPPs, namely: (1) knowledge resources, (2) relational resources, and (3) the capacity for mobilization, all contributing to institutional capital. The purpose of this institutional capital is to promote a collaborative style to

the siting process of renewable energy infrastructure (Wolsink, 2007). The lack of it leads to inefficiencies of top-down bureaucracy and lack of transparency, increased amount of technocratic and elite decision-making, which might ignore local attitudes. Finally, although participatory processes are crucial to the expansion of wind power, the siting process in some countries does not encourage collaboration (Wolsink, 2007). Instead, it is completed beforehand, followed by consultation with the locals after the planning has already begun. Rather than improving public opinion, this will likely trigger opposition instead. Therefore, it is not necessarily the technology that people oppose, but rather the process.

Regardless of the sources of opposition to the environmental policy projects and renewable energy projects in particular, their influence on society and politics can be very strong. These opponents, as seen in both Stokes (2016) and Wolsink (2007) are able to affect politicians and incumbents negatively by either reducing their electoral support, or by halting policy implementation.

Stokes (2017), in her study of people's attitudes to renewable portfolio standard (RPS) policies, a set of laws requiring a portion of electricity generation to come from renewable sources in the US, finds several pitfalls that affected public support and trust in the process. More specifically, she finds that (1) even the slightest increase in costs for the average taxpayer decreases public support for such a bill, and a larger cost could potentially flip most states from support to opposition for RPS, suggesting that the public is sensitive to costs; (2) the promise of new jobs increases support substantially; (3) better air quality as a result from RPS policies increases support; (4) emphasizing a link between renewable sources and climate change changes nothing; (5) elite support for a bill has a strong positive influence on the support for the bill. Of these, the cost treatment had the largest effect, it alone could undermine the positive effects of all other treatments if placed at US\$10/month in utility bills.

These high costs are therefore enough to have those affected by an EPP oppose the policy, which could lead to electoral backlash. Stokes (2016), in her study of whether proposed and operational wind turbines in Ontario led to a retrospective punishment of the incumbent government through voting, shows that those who consider facilities within proximity to their community harmful are likely to punish the current government, whilst mobilizing an opposition to future developments as a result. This might lead to local governments repealing said policies, as supporters are less likely to mobilize on the same level as the opponents. Her results indicate that proposals for wind turbines led to a 5% decline in votes for incumbents, whilst operational wind turbines reduced it by 10% in the 2011 election. Moreover, this was not only the case for those precincts within an immediate proximity, but also those up to 3 km away. Finally, despite the fact that the vast majority were positive towards the change, small groups of opponents were proven to have the ability to incentivize politicians to abandon policies, which led to distorted signaling for the development of public policies (Stokes, 2016).

Like Stokes' investigation of wind power in Ontario, there is a myriad of articles dealing with public opinions on this type of EPPs, and their consequences. While wind power has its benefits, and the population is usually positive towards such benefits, land concessions often clash

with local usage of those lands, including grazing, recreational use, such as hiking, tourism, as well as conservation claims, such as for flora and fauna (Wolsink, 2007). Ek and Matti (2014) indeed found through surveys that the construction of a large wind park in the northern Swedish area of Markbygden, Piteå, was indeed perceived as negative, as it would damage nature conservation, and negatively impact future reindeer herding in the area, giving rise to external costs for the local community. Waldo (2012) also studied the construction of wind parks in Sweden; however, while she took a qualitative approach, the results were the same: the local community opposed the construction of the new wind farms, but, in alignment with Wolsink's work, there was no evidence of NIMBY here.

In addition to the loss of lands, exclusion and alienation of the local community where an EPP is planned is an issue that causes opposition towards the EPP. Large-scale deployment of wind energy in Denmark saw the need to generate social acceptance by reconciling the local communities with green technology (Clausen & Rudolph, 2019). However, this reconciliation is often detached, both economically and politically, from the local host communities of said green technology as a result of the emphasis on "Green Capitalism." This has led to large-scale counter-discourse as a response to the Danish political discourse on reconciliation. Clausen and Rudolph (2019) instead argue that this sort of reconciliation should happen within the local culture and economy to consider local identity, equality, and democracy.

Involving the local community has also been found important, including informing them about the process and making decisions in line with what people want; otherwise, it will erode trust. As the German "Energiewende" expands, so too does the need for considerable expansion and restructuring of current energy infrastructure into one that is renewable (Linzenich & Ziefle, 2018). Linzenich & Ziefle's study on the impact of trust and perceived fairness on wind power plants in Germany underlines the importance for political actors to make decisions that are transparent and consider both environmental and citizen needs if the decisions are to be successful. Moreover, the results showed that the public felt left out from the siting processes of new wind parks, and as such felt a low degree of perceived procedural fairness, resulting in a lower level of trust. Firestone and colleagues (2020) also did research on the connection between procedural fairness and political trust in the case of the Block Island Offshore Wind Project in the US. The study included surveys prior to and after the turbines were installed, in addition to semi-structured interviews with locals. Through their assessment of respondents' engagement in the planning process, the authors found that a negative view of state government did not affect people's opinions on the project; however, trust in state government did affect respondents' perceptions of procedural fairness, which affected project support. The paper emphasized the importance that future siting processes create community engagement plans in order to ensure transparency of the planning process, whilst providing expectations for those affected.

Finally, in Norway attitude towards construction of wind power on land and in the sea has arguably changed over time from highly positive, to less positive due to increasing popularity of counter-movements, such as *MOTVIND* or "*NEI TIL VINDKRAFTVERK PÅ HARAMSØYA!*" [No to wind turbines on Haramsøya]. Gregersen and Tvinnereim (2019), using Norwegian Citizen



Panel, study whether Norwegian population is supportive towards wind power, both on land and in the ocean areas. They find that the population is positive towards construction of ocean-based wind turbines; however, attitudes towards land-based wind turbines are more polarized, with 20% strongly disagreeing with the statement that more turbines should be built on land. The results also show that men and women are relatively in agreement. When it comes to age, those born after 1990 are far more positive towards construction on land than those born before, while all age groups generally agree on ocean-based wind turbines. Finally, analysis of the area of residence shows that those living in Oslo/Akershus and Østlandet are far more positive towards construction of land-based wind turbines compared to Sørlandet, Vestlandet and Trøndelag. On the other hand, they generally agree on construction of ocean-based wind turbines. In conclusion, the study shows that those who live along the coast of Norway carry negative attitudes towards land-based wind turbines and choose to oppose them, as they are more likely to have them built in proximity to their homes. However, this attitude could potentially spread to other parts of Norway, with the abovementioned counter-movements, increasing the number of policy opponents towards wind power development in Norway.

The studies of policy opponents in particular are scant. The literature shows that that opposition often arises within proximity of such EPPs and responds to the growing support of the project (Cheon and Urpelainen 2013). This opposition will affect policy change, and might even halt its progress completely. Previous research shows that policy opponents can take a number of strategies to influence, or completely halt EPPs. Werners et al. (2010), in their study of water policy change in Hungary and the Netherlands, summarize that these strategies often involve garnering sympathy from those outside the communities, and tactical voting in favor of politicians who agree with the policy opponents and could therefore change the tide of the development of certain EPPs.

Jagers et al. (2020) explain how policy opponents' attitudes change over three different stages of policy implementation, namely the input-, throughput- and output stages, where the first stage would affect attitudes and trust over the whole course of implementation. The stages of implementation will likely see differing opinions from policy opponents from various communities that are within proximity of EPPs, and are therefore important to distinguish.

Thus far, the literature on EPPs and the consequences of their siting and subsequent construction on locals has largely been constrained to large-scale surveys (Clausen & Rudolph, 2019; Ek & Matti, 2014; Gregersen & Tvinnereim, 2019; Linzenich & Ziefle, 2018; Stokes, 2017; Wolsink, 1999) as a means to gather a generalizable opinion from the masses, or those affected, in order to present reliable statistics of declining trust. This paper instead addresses the need for qualitative studies on the topic of EPPs' effect on political trust, and argues that previous literature can only be considered a first step towards a deeper understanding of the topic. Studying the perspective and opinions of those affected through interviews allows to develop such an understanding. Still, such in-depth investigations are utilized far less than large surveys that lack a deeper insight (but cf.: Firestone et al., 2020; Waldo, 2012). While there are some qualitative studies done on EPPs and political trust, they do not necessarily provide a deep understanding of

how specific decision-making and implementation processes of EPP siting influence political trust. Previous literature also tends to focus on actors that decide whether an EPP is built; however, other important actors that influence the process, such as the courts or the police, are often ignored.

As a result, we know little on how specific decision-making and implementation processes of EPP siting influence political trust, or which processes are most important to fix in order for decision-makers and politicians to prevent this loss of trust. At the same time, it is crucial to understand the sources of and prevent the erosion of trust in a democracy, as trust is one of its core values. The paper seeks to gain insight into the relationship between newly built EPPs and eroding political trust by focusing on locals' opinions on the process and decisions made by various actors during EPP siting and development. We ask:

*How does environmental policy projects affect political trust among policy opponents?*

In the next section, we explain our conceptualization of EPPs, their policy opponents, political trust, and derive potential reasons for the diminishing political trust among policy opponents during EPPs siting and construction.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

#### **3.1 Environmental policy projects**

Previous research distinguishes between two forms of facility siting: social and infrastructural (Bosley & Bosley, 1988; Cotton & Devine-Wright, 2011; Lesbirel, 1998; Petrova, 2013; Schively, 2007). Social facility siting seeks to address social issues, such as affordable housing, homeless shelters, nursing homes, or other public service offerings. In contrast, infrastructural facility siting focuses on developing a robust infrastructure, oftentimes with a higher environmental impact than social facility siting. These include, for instance, waste collection facilities, roads, railroads, large industries, and conventional power plants. Environmental policy projects, such as wind parks, would fall under the latter category of infrastructural facility siting, aiming for environmentally friendly development.

Locals commonly oppose projects with significant local environmental consequences, depending on the form of siting (Schively, 2007). Opposition to social facility siting is less frequent, as these provide locals with essential services, like housing, schools, or a doctor's office, close to their community. On the other hand, infrastructural facility siting can negatively impact property values and recreational areas, prompting resistance among locals to such projects. Therefore, in the event of a nearby wind power facility siting, political trust may be negatively influenced, as highlighted in the literature (e.g., Clausen & Rudolph, 2019; Ek and Matti, 2014; Linzenich & Ziefle, 2018; Waldo, 2012; Wolsink, 2007).

In Norway, surveys indicate that there are more proponents than opponents of EPPs, and that opponents are more commonly found among those living close to the coast, where wind power

facilities are likely to be built due to favorable wind conditions (Gregersen and Tvinnereim, 2019). Nonetheless, a counter-movement is growing, exemplified by organizations like MOTVIND and Facebook groups such as “NEI TIL VINDKRAFTVERK PÅ HARAMSØYA!” with over 34.000 members, showcasing opposition beyond the coastal areas. Still, opponents are in the minority and are sometimes portrayed as motivated by self-interest, protecting their immediate surroundings (Schively, 2007). Consequently, decision-makers face a dilemma, needing to balance what could be solutions to environmental problems with opponents’ perceived threats to health and the local environment, emphasizing the importance of exploring factors that negatively impact political trust among policy opponents.

### **3.2 Policy opponents and their strategies**

Wherever there are proponents of a policy, there are most likely opponents to face them. Much of what we know about opposition to environmental policy projects comes from the studies of NIMBYism.

The concept of NIMBY involves a nuanced perspective on EPPs, and people’s support or opposition of such projects depends on the characteristics of these projects, as identified by Schively (2007). First, the type of facility significantly influences support or opposition. Public service facilities aimed at quality-of-life improvements, like affordable housing or homeless shelters, may encounter less opposition compared to facilities with an environmental impact, such as industries or waste disposal. Second, the level of opposition varies based on proximity to the project. Those who live near a proposed facility site may actively oppose it, fearing devaluation of their community, moreover those who live further away may engage in opposition due to broader economic, social and political concerns. Third, NIMBY responses can be characterized as both positive and negative. Negative responses are often motivated by citizen’s self-interest in protecting their immediate surroundings, potentially leading policymakers to view them as a nuisance, making discourse more difficult. Moreover, opponents do not necessarily represent the wider population, but instead a vocal minority. However, the positive characterization sees opponents as essential to a healthy democracy, allowing opponents to engage in democratic discourse on a process that will affect them.

The concept of NIMBY, as understood so far in the literature, may seem straightforward, whereas people support EPPs unless they affect one’s own community; however, Wolsink’s (1999) survey data challenges this assumption. Opponents often oppose wind power both locally, and in general, with various motivations explaining their opposition. Wolsink identifies four types of motivations for opposition of an EPP: (A) NIMBY, with a positive attitude towards wind power, but opposes local development; (B) NIABY (Not In Any Backyard), rejecting local EPPs due to general distrust towards the technology; (C) initially positive, but changing attitude due to public discourse during the siting process; and (D) opposing an EPP due to faulty project management, limited to individual projects (Wolsink, 1999, pp. 53-57; 2007). He argues that types B and C are most prevalent; however, that B is less prevalent than C in the case of wind turbine development.

Cheon and Urpelainen (2013) contend that policy support is most impactful when unopposed; however, as support grows, so too does opposition, potentially hindering policy progress. While their study focused on industry and manufacturing opposing environmental policies, it is relevant to consider individuals who oppose EPP developments close to their homes in a similar manner. An increase in civil opposition groups could have a parallel effect on proponents' influence when their efforts gain broader sympathy, thus potentially hindering future developments.

Civil opposition employs diverse strategies to influence policy change. Werners et al. (2010) studied opponents' strategies against water policy change, identifying five key approaches. The first involves creating challenging ideas that highlight the unwanted consequences of policy change, aiming to undermine public technical experts' assessments with alternative viewpoints often based on scientific research journals. The second strategy entails forming coalitions among groups of actors to pool resources and develop common ideas while opposing supporters. Third, recognizing and exploiting windows of opportunity as local actors vote strategically in elections to disrupt ongoing policy change. The fourth strategy involves utilizing multiple venues, including the media, the internet, public communications with politicians, and legal action. Finally, the fifth strategy emphasizes orchestrating and managing large networks, allowing them to engage with national and regional politicians, challenge technical bases for policies through specialists, and gain counter expertise through scientists. In essence, a policy opponent actively voices their opposition towards policies.

While the paper has addressed how policy opponents emerge, who they are, and their strategies, there is another crucial aspect to consider - the evolution of policy opponents' attitudes across stages of policy implementation. Jegers et al. (2020) examined legitimacy across the three stages of implementation of congestion taxes in Gothenburg, Sweden. They found that high or low legitimacy in the input stage significantly influences policy support in subsequent stages. Moreover, while current-stage legitimacy carries more weight than previous-stage legitimacy, they would both influence the legitimacy of the policy in the end.

### **3.3 How environmental policy projects influence political trust**

In this paper, we turn to one of the most popular definitions of political trust, suggested by Pippa Norris, who refers to political trust as “[...] the general belief in the performance capacity of political actors and/or belief in the benevolent motivation and performance capacity of office-holders” (Norris, 2018, p. 24). In order to understand how policy projects and environmental policy projects in particular can influence political trust among policy opponents, we turn to the theories on sources of political trust.

#### ***Procedural Fairness and Institutional Performance***

Two most prominent theories on the sources of political trust relate to procedural fairness and institutional performance. Procedural fairness theories emphasize the importance of fair and democratic decision-making for generating political trust (Grimes, 2017; Miller & Listhaug, 1999;

Tyler, 2000), underscoring the importance of transparent and fair procedures. Indeed, studies on environmental policy projects and procedural fairness show that success of EPPs depends on processes being perceived as fair and transparent (e.g., Linzenich and Ziefle 2018). Moreover, opposition to EPPs often centers on criticism to planning processes and cost-benefit distribution, with perceived unfairness eroding political trust in a community (Walker & Baxter, 2017).

Similarly, institutional performance theories suggest that citizens' trust is influenced by government actors' satisfactory, or poor performance (Chu, Collins, Lai & Xu, 2018; Espinal, Hartlyn, & Kelly, 2006; Lipset & Schneider, 1983; Miller, 1974). Chu and colleagues' (2018) research in China exemplifies how strong institutional performance, driven by green innovation, can enhance financial outcomes and, subsequently, alleviating institutional pressure and increasing trust in the process.

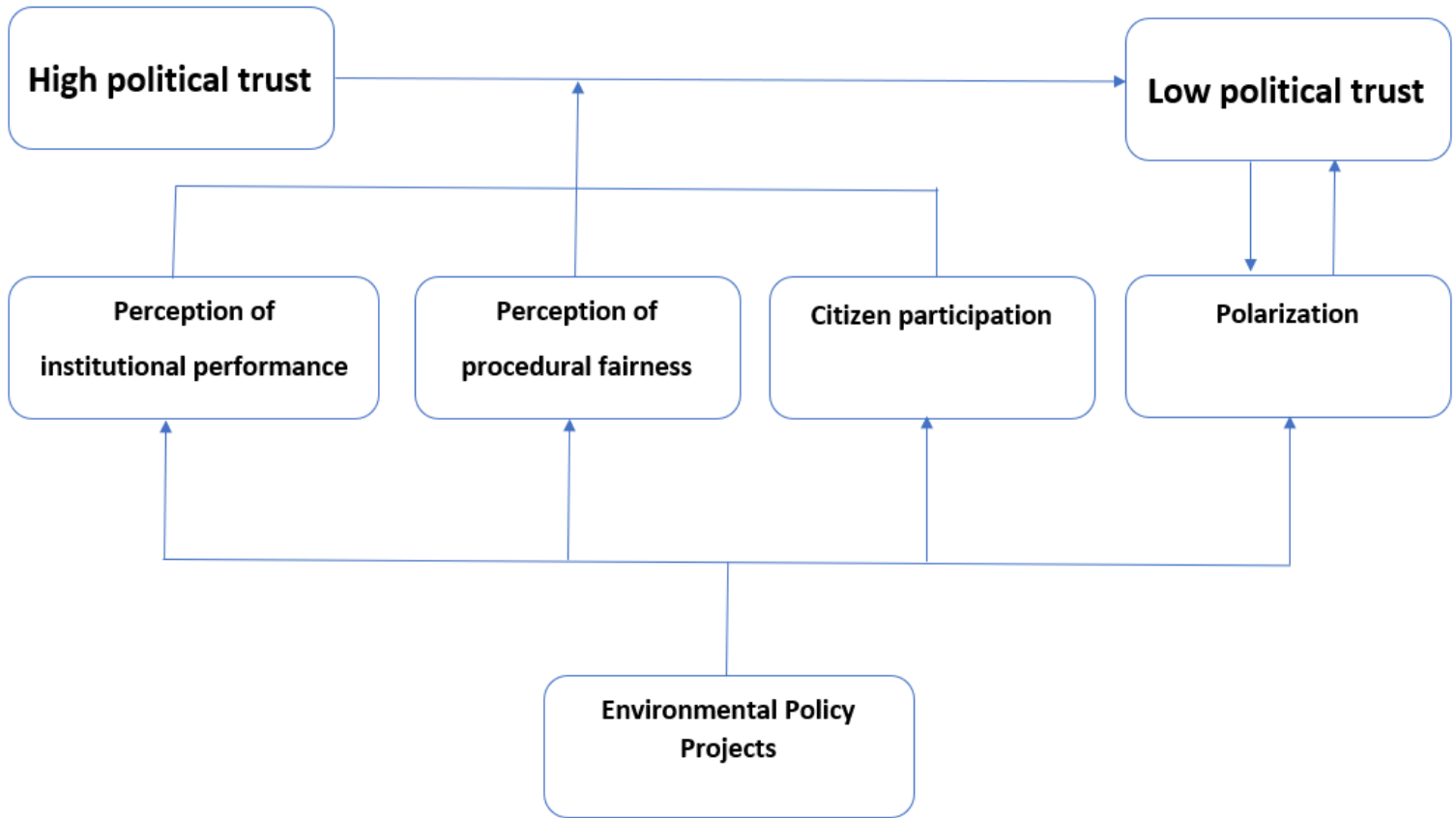
Both theories emphasize the crucial link between government actions and citizen trust, highlighting the need for procedural fairness and institutional quality in EPP development. Procedural fairness is an important factor for the political success of an EPP, and proximity to a project, for instance wind power, will see an increased necessity for perceived transparency compared to those who are less affected. On the other hand, contrary to previous research where the wider population was included, even strong institutional performance might be judged negatively by the local communities *due to* development of green innovation, despite any positive effects it has in a wider society.

### ***Citizen Participation and Polarization***

Dissatisfaction with fairness and institutional performance prompts citizens to increase their political participation, with the hope to change the outcome, or at least the process, and provide their insights and opinions on a given policy or project. If this fails, it may lead to a *polarization* of politics. If the incumbent government is unable to meet the expectations of the citizens in recent EPPs in terms of siting processes and the following completion of the project, increased support for niche parties with a noticeably different set of policies compared to mainstream parties might ensue.

When citizens disagree with a policy or a project, there are several methods they may employ to express their opinions or change the outcome. They may work/volunteer for a non-governmental organization, or engage in public issue advocacy; they may attend a rally, demonstration, or protest; they may contact any elected official in their district; or they may take a more passive approach and post views on political issues on social media. Over the years, the energy sector has faced a rapid deployment of EPPs, resulting in diverse methods of participation, ranging from support to protests (Huijts, Molin & Steg, 2012; van der Schoor & Scholtens, 2015; Santamouris et al., 2007). The link between political trust and participation is complex, with both high and low trust associated with increased engagement or protests (Fennema & Tillie, 1999; Hooghe & Marien, 2013) while participation itself may affect trust positively or negatively depending on whether participation is successful or not (Finkel, Sabatini & Bevis, 2000; Putnam, 1993).

As people hold opposing views towards EPPs, there is a risk of polarization in the communities where EPPs are located. This is especially acute after opponents engage in political participation and get disappointed with the government's lack of response. First, people's increased hostility towards the opposing party leads to a polarized political trust, as people are usually unwilling to trust people, or organizations, they do not favor politically (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2018). On the other hand, those of the same opinion or social group are usually considered more trustworthy. This also applies to an individual's trust in the government, whereas they are more likely to display distrust towards an incumbent who does not share their identity or political preferences (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2018). Second, individuals are more likely to process information or evidence that is in line with their own bias, which enables them to reach the conclusion they themselves desire (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2018). Confirming their own convictions, they feel even more alienated from and hostile to opinions that do not conform with their own. In two-party systems, this might lead to intensified ideological tensions, while in multi-party systems, a shift towards political extremes, or niche parties, could occur (Carter, 2013; Spoon, Hobolt & De Vries, 2013; Otteni & Weisskircher, 2021). Thus EPPs might impact political trust through people's political participation and consequent threat for polarization. If trust weakens due to perceived government shortcomings and failed participation, citizens are more likely to disapprove of future projects, contributing to polarization.



**Figure 1** The relationship between environmental policy projects and political trust.

From the theories on sources of political trust, we can assume that environmental policy implementation may impact political trust through: people's perceptions of the procedural fairness of EPP siting processes in terms of transparency and process; people's assessment of institutional performance in terms of EPP siting, construction, completion, and outcomes, as well as possible involvement from other governmental and non-governmental actors; degree of people's participation in the process; and societal polarization in terms of whether an EPP can alter voting behavior, political preferences, and trust in those who support development. These factors will serve a basis for empirical investigation of how environmental policy implementation influences political trust in local policy opponents.

## **4. Research design**

### **4.1. Method and data**

The foundation of this paper is discourse, understood as collective perceptions of reality, expressed through statements from policy opponents, whose perceptions of decisions and political processes might influence their electoral choices and make EPP policies difficult to adopt in the future. The purpose is to uncover their opinions in the debate surrounding environmental policy projects, and explore how various decisions and processes affect their trust in decision-makers and politicians.

We employ a qualitative approach using case studies to analyze political attitudes that lead to a decrease in political trust among policy opponents due to the construction of wind turbines. We used semi-structured interviews as the primary data source, offering in-depth insights into participants' opinions and interpretations, and allowing participants themselves to raise issues that matter to them.

We focus on the case of Norway as a country that has a reputation of a society with relatively high political trust, compared to other established democracies (Catterberg & Moreno, 2005) and high priority towards switching to renewable energy, with widespread wind power development projects, completed, ongoing, and planned. Our cases are Haramsøya, where construction of wind turbines was complete at the time of data collection, and Bjerkreim where the construction of wind turbines was only planned. Comparison allows for a better understanding of how the policy opponents' opinions on various factors differ at different stages of policy implementation (Jagers et al, 2020).

The population in the study included representatives from Haramsøya and Bjerkreim, recruited through word-of-mouth and Facebook groups "NEI TIL VINDKRAFTVERK PÅ HARAMSØYA!" [No to wind turbines on Haramsøya] and "Nei til vindkraftverk på Faurefjell i Bjerkreim" [No to wind turbines on Faurefjell in Bjerkreim]. As we seek to gain insight into policy opponents' opinions and attitudes, as opposed to the general public, we utilized a purposive, nonrandom sample of participants selecting specifically policy opponents. While not

representative of the average Norwegian population, these interviews provide a valuable example of a specific group - policy opponents living near wind turbines.

In order to get an insight into how wind turbine projects affected political trust, we interviewed a total of 17 participants from Haramsøya and Bjerkreim - 9 participants from Haramsøya and 8 from Bjerkreim - in March 2022. Participants came from a wide variety of professional backgrounds, including civil servants, private sector workers, as well as farmers. They were contacted through either Facebook Messenger, or phone calls. The interview process was guided by an interview guide reflecting the theoretical model. Interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes each, took place face-to-face, with the exception of one, which took place online on Microsoft Teams. 14 of the interviews were conducted at participants' homes, while 2 took place at participants' workplace. Interviews took place in Norwegian and were recorded through note-taking and the University of Oslo's own voice recording app "Nettskjema-diktafon" with participants' consent.

In the interviews, we asked questions related to the four themes - sources of political trust identified in the theory section. The questions were guiding in nature, allowing for flexibility in participants' answers. Participants were asked two overarching questions related to each of the four topics. For example, to inquire about participants' sentiments about procedural fairness, we asked: "What do you know about the process surrounding the wind power development? Have you tried to learn more?". To inquire about institutional performance, asked: "What is your impression on the results from the wind power development? Economically? Socially?". In case participants struggled to voice their opinion, we asked several guiding questions, for instance: "What is your opinion on the police's involvement in connection with the development on Haramsøya?". To learn about citizen participation, we asked: "Have you participated in the opposition against this development? Why/why not? What did you think when it (did not) work out?". To learn about polarization, we asked: "Have you paid attention to wind power supporters' arguments? What do you think about these?" The complete interview guide can be found in the Appendix.

## **4.2. Background on the case**

### ***Wind power in Norway***

In 2015, the "Grønne Skiftet" [The Green Shift] was named word of the year in Norway (Olerud & Halleraker, 2021), symbolizing a societal shift towards sustainable growth and environmentally friendly products and services. Additionally, as a member of the EU internal energy market, Norway had to comply with the 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive, aiming to achieve 67,5% of energy consumption to come from renewable sources by 2020 (Skjærseth & Rosendal, 2022). To incentivize renewable energy development, Norway joined Sweden's "El certificates" system until 2020 (Norges vassdrags- og energidirektorat, 2022a), where power plants received green certificates, encouraging profitability in renewable projects. By 2022, Norway had built approximately 4700MW of wind power, contributing 15TWh of renewable energy, enough to supply 773.000 Norwegian households, primarily along its coastline (Norges vassdrags- og



energidirektorat, 2021). The plans are to build 30000 MW worth of wind turbines by 2040 (Regjeringen, 2023).

The wind power development process in Norway involves multiple steps for a developer to acquire a permit before they can start construction of wind turbines. These steps are as follows: (1) Developers initiate the process by reporting their case according to regulations on impact assessment; (2) Norwegian Water Resource and Energy Directorate (NVE) outlines an impact assessment program based on the report, specifying topics for the developer to investigate further; (3) developers submit an application with a completed impact assessment to NVE for processing; (4) NVE evaluates the case, considering the application, impact assessment, comments, and its expertise on wind power; (5) NVE's decision can be appealed, but if upheld, the case moves to OED for final processing; and finally, (6) NVE, in collaboration with Miljøtilsynet [Norwegian Environmental Protection Agency], must approve the transport- and construction plan (MTA), and the project details before the developer can commence construction (Norges vassdrags- og energidirektorat, 2022b). Therefore, NVE and the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy (OED) are the concession authorities in Norway and are both involved in this process (Norges vassdrags- og energidirektorat, 2022b). The above concession processing, temporarily halted in 2019 due to community backlash, was reintroduced in 2021 in municipalities where processes had already started (Olje- og Energidepartementet, 2021). By 2022, applying for new wind power concessions were possible with host municipality consent, emphasizing the evolving local considerations for such processes (Olje- og Energidepartementet, 2021).

### ***Wind power on Haramsøy***

Haramsøy, an island in Western Norway with nearly 600 inhabitants, has witnessed a battle against wind turbine construction, culminating in the completion of eight turbines out of the planned sixteen. The process dates back to 2005, with initial opposition from the municipal council. Still, construction began in 2019, triggering community resistance efforts such as the creation of the Facebook group “NEI TIL VINDKRAFTVERK PÅ HARAMSØYA!” [No to wind turbines on Haramsøya] , garnering over 34.000 members, at the time of writing, from various parts of Norway, demonstrations, including blocking roads to the mountain to delay construction, blocking the docks, preventing construction vehicles from disembarking, hunger strikes, and artistic imagery of dead protected bird species, as well as attempts to block the project through court appeals (Bjørneset & Sagen, 2020; Bjørnset et al., 2020; Ofstad, 2020; 2021). Despite these efforts, the turbines were completed, reflecting challenges in local democratic decision-making.

### ***Wind power in Bjerkreim***

Similar to Haramsøy, the local community in Bjerkreim, with its roughly 2.800 inhabitants, have seen some opponents fight a long battle to hinder development of wind power on Faurefjell in Bjerkreim. At the time of data collection in March 2022, the future of wind turbine development on Bjerkreim was still uncertain.<sup>1</sup> Rogaland County, which Bjerkreim is part of, is a major wind

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<sup>1</sup> In November 2022, it was confirmed that concession for development was pulled. Interview answers might be different now than when they were conducted.

power area, having roughly 240 wind turbines across 16 facilities (Søndeland & Ellingsen, 2020). However, for several years, the inhabitants of Bjerkreim municipality, have opposed the construction of new wind turbines on Faurefjell, ending with the construction failing to meet the 2021 deadline, showing a win for the opponents (Norges vassdrags- og energidirektorat, 2023). Compared to Haramsøy, opposition in Bjerkreim involved fewer sensational events, and included opinion pieces and letters to the editor, some protests (Espeland, 2022; Tiller, 2022; Vassbø, 2022; Vaule, 2022) and strategic voting (Valgomat 2019). However, in Bjerkreim, some landowners also expressed support for wind power development, showcasing diverse perspectives within the community (Odland, 2022).

## **5. Results**

During the interviews, where we investigated sentiments towards wind turbines, both completed (in Haramsøya) and planned (Bjerkreim), among policy opponents, we examined factors that were found to affect people's political trust, namely, perceptions of: (1) procedural fairness in implementation of environmental policy projects, (2) institutional performance in implementing these projects, (3) citizen participation in these projects, and (4) polarization in the society. The interviews showed that policy opponents in both municipalities harbor negative sentiments about wind turbine projects related to four themes, with concerns regarding procedural fairness dominating others. Table 1 summarizes representative quotes from the interviews that tap upon these four themes.

**Table 1** Illustrative quotations for the four themes related to political trust

Themes	Sub-themes	Topics	Quotes
Procedural fairness	Non-transparent siting process	Surprising process	<p>“I know that the developer is obliged to inform those who are- those who are you could say affected by the development and here there was a demand for if there is a change they are obliged to inform, and this failed completely here on the development on Haramsøya.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“It [concessions for development on Faurefjell] laid dead and you don’t think any more about it, until it BANG suddenly comes back up again when it says in the local newspapers that now- now things are going on.” [Bjerkreim rep.]</p>
		Selective information sharing	<p>“A developer, or an interested party in the state perhaps, go to landowners, picking out individuals, taking direct contact, and this happens in secrecy, and they are not allowed to inform those who are around, neighbors or such, and they lay down the basis there before it has come to public treatment or any sort of announcements.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“I also believe that... the investors, those who have the money, development interests, and the apparatus surrounding them, have a completely different access to those who make the decisions than us the others, including organizations or private persons, either Naturnvernforbundet or our little organization.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p>
	Learning about the development	<p>“This concession - every concession is available online, a good amount, but not everything, and about insight, we didn’t figure it out before it was quite late [...] it felt like it was on purpose that we were not supposed to know much, at least that was the impression.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“This one, consultant- no, MTA detail-plan it came- it was the last to arrive, which is sound – acoustics and sound – and it... is in English, and it should be possible to get it in Norwegian, rather than English.” [Bjerkreim rep.]</p>	
	Undemocratic siting process	Input value	<p>“I think that we should have the opportunity to say no, and we did not get that.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“The processes are weak, and the local democracy is not heard, and they do not care because they always find excuses... no matter what objection you may have, they find a way out because this is going to be built either way. So, the process is in reality decided.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p>

Themes	Sub-themes	Topics	Quotes
			I must say that... it has been a good experience, and it has been interesting. There is a democracy, right? So I would like to say that we have been on municipal council meetings and have been welcome and- I mean there isn't anything that- right there I would say that we appreciate it. Absolutely. [Bjerkreim rep.]
		Expropriation of lands	"They [Hybritech] said that if they got a signature from the two last landowners, they could expropriate the rest, so we [landowners] are put in a bit of a check mate." [Bjerkreim rep.]
		State vs. municipality	"They [Haram municipality] were against... the ocean wind project, alternatively they could accept that BOTH, note BOTH, wind power on the mountain AND Havsul 2 could be built. And the word "both" is essential there because it means that the decision that was made in 2006 that Haram municipality said "no," Haram municipality council said "no" to singular development of... the one on the mountain, but the department- NVE complained about this to the department, and the department said then that Haram municipality had said "yes." [Haramsøya rep.]
		Impact assessment	"And then there is this about the reports they have had about predators and eagle-owls and mapping of... that. And this is done during the times of year and times when those characteristics- I mean, they are not optimal periods for the nature, these are more optimal periods for the developer because then you don't find as much." [Bjerkreim rep.]
			"I did not receive any information that they were working on an impact assessment, and I lived here then. We weren't asked, we weren't informed about anything." [Bjerkreim rep.]
	Fairness in politics	Central vs. local politics	"And then [after Sylvi Listhaug left her post as OED Minister in early 2020] came in a totally useless Petroleum- and Energy minister whose name is Tina Bru... from Høyre. And she- the first thing she did was to move our process along to get it started and started development on Haramsøya." [Haramsøya rep.]
			"During the election I voted for [POLITICAL PARTY 1] <sup>2</sup> for the simple reason that the mayor, he said that he was- he is for wind turbines, and he always said that he is, but he also said that he would vote against the Faure Park, because he thought it was enough- and so on and so forth, and this he did, until now. He suddenly flipped." [Bjerkreim rep.]
		Corruption	"It was very strategic from Norsk Vind when the mayor presents this deal three days before a decision is to be made in the municipal council, can you believe it? I was simply shocked. So right there and then I was paralyzed over the whole ordeal, and I couldn't say anything but my opinion of why I didn't want these wind turbines here because this deal sunk into my head, and I just thought that it was corrupt I would say. It just seemed crazy in my opinion." [Bjerkreim rep.]

<sup>2</sup> The names of the political parties in the interview answers were recoded into POLITICAL PARTY 1, 2 or 3, to ensure anonymity.

Themes	Sub-themes	Topics	Quotes
Institutional performance	Results of wind power policies		<p>“I grew up on Haramsøya [...] and I would hike, and I used the nature everywhere and were used to birds and animals, fish and ocean and yeah, and this was part of growing up, it was a great upbringing that is now ruined by construction machinery, and lots of concrete that is injected into the mountain by each of the 8 turbines.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“If we look at the results, then- outside of my house we can hear quite a lot of noise in certain wind directions. It is suspicious the way it was done because all measurements are close to the maximum value.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p>
		Cost/benefit	<p><b>Negative</b></p> <p>“I have lost faith- long-term, I think the conclusion is - I don’t know how long it will take – will be that this was an erroneous investment. [...] First and foremost, what I think about when it comes to wind power is, at least on land, is that there is a way too big encroachment on nature compared to what we get in return.” [Bjerkreim rep.]</p> <p><b>Positive</b></p> <p>“I assume that they don’t do this if they don’t think they can make money from it [...] and then again, the deal that they came with, then Bjerkreim municipality will earn a lot from this, I see that, I see that they get a lot of money.” [Bjerkreim rep.]</p> <p><b>Few incentives</b></p> <p>“In the end we have enough power and cheap power until they in some ways send it out of the country [...] so this is when we truly start to feel it.” [Bjerkreim rep.]</p> <p>“What we fear, which are houses, is that the value will sink. Let’s hope that the Nordøyveg negates some of the negative consequences... but that is uncertain, but there are definitely some of the houses nearby that have seen a loss of value because of the wind power facility.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p>
	Other alternatives	<p>“Yes, the first thing is hydro power and the Norwegian hydro power it- it have been a part of renewing the falls we already have snow tops and such things we could double our hydro power, I am not a specialist, but these are things I have read... and then you have the thing where you have falls you could also- and they actually started doing this- there you can build several power plants, meaning you can reuse the water several times.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“Nuclear power with thorium is good [...] and then we have a lot of hydro power in this country and that is more than enough, I mean, we export 20TWh... 20TW to other countries [...] and then there is earth geothermal heat.” [Bjerkreim rep.]</p>	
		<p><b>Power saving vs. power generation</b></p> <p>“They must give incentives for people to save power, supporting arrangements that truly gives effect, for instance insulation in older buildings... heating controls... and, yeah, and so on and so forth.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p>	

Themes	Sub-themes	Topics	Quotes
	State institutions	Laws hypocrisy	“If I want to cultivate new lands then I can’t do so in a marsh anymore because that has been made illegal, but to dig up an entire marsh to create roads to a wind turbine, that is completely fine!” [Bjerkreim rep.]
		Police	<p>“It was obvious that they were teamed up with the authorities that wanted this development, and we believe that we were overrun when they started this without the complaints, that we had sent in, were considered, or processed... and it seemed unnecessary and provocative for the police to be active at that time before a verdict was given.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“It was completely exaggerated, what was it? 6-7-8 cars that came over simultaneously and it’s just crazy... they make a narrative of the opposition as if we were terrorists.” [Bjerkreim rep.]</p> <p>“[...] many have said that they lost respect for the police... because they run the capitalists errand without taking care of the people.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“But I do believe that this was heavily imposed on them from politicians actually... so no matter if they’re against it themselves, they need to do their job, otherwise they need to leave their job.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p>
		Courts	“It is terrifying that the incumbent government attempt to find... ways to bypass a Supreme Court judgment, where the Supreme Court have said that development is illegal and in conflict with the rights of the indigenous people.” [Haramsøya rep.]
Citizen participation			<p>“Yes, I have participated in the opposition, but not as much as I should have, nor as much as many other... I am at work during daytime, and much of this goes on during daytime, but I must say that I was eager in the beginning and then I fell off when I noticed that this wasn’t helping.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“We have sent in complaints, and collected signatures, we have demonstrated outside the city hall, which isn’t normal in this municipality, but we have managed to gather a lot of people, so it goes to show how much we care about this... we have read a lot [...] and writing complaints, and then see that whatever you write, there is no point in it.” [Bjerkreim rep.]</p> <p>“I thought we lived in a democracy and because of that I had to fight... those who wish to break down the democracy in the way that they are doing here... because you can’t reach them with factual arguments, nor with lawsuits, or meetings with authorities.” [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>“I signed up for membership in [POLITICAL PARTY 1] to try and be a part of... affecting those who were... unsure of their decision, you could say... and I actually got a taste for politics, so it started with only being</p>

Themes	Sub-themes	Topics	Quotes
			about Faure, but now I've participated in all of their meetings because I find it interesting, it is the only way to truly understand what is happening in town." [Bjerkreim rep.]
	Feelings of (potential) defeat		<p>"It... proved to not be democratic, this was decided and was going to happen, no matter the cost, the people aren't as important, so... I don't know what to compare it to other than a...dictatorship in Africa I think it looks like... and I think Erna looks like an African dictator." [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>"I will, at the very least, have a clean consciousness because I said my piece... it sort of depends on-... the concession have been given, but- but, when it comes to Faurefjell and what has been going on... I have lost a bit of trust in the local politicians." [Bjerkreim rep.]</p>
	Garnering supporters	Facebook groups	<p>"We needed an organization that could gather the opposition, [...] this [wind power development] became bigger and bigger and engaged... the whole local community, and so we chose to build this organization." [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>"It was good for spreading information to most people possible and keep them updated for those who wanted to; however, there is a chance for them to be misused with crass comments, but yeah... otherwise a really useful tool." [Bjerkreim rep.]</p>
		Other organizations	<p>"So that we managed to put focus on this... and open a large portion of the Norwegian population's eyes- so this is why I am also a member in the organization MOTVIND Norge, which is a country-based organization." [Haramsøya rep.]</p>
Polarization	Sources of information		<p>"I believe that must have been from "Nei til Vindkraft på Haramsøy," both that- when we first started we were in doubt how we would gather people, I remember we had this meeting in here, [...], where we gathered, [...], and discussed how we would bring this forward, and a really good tool we ended on was the Facebook group "Nei til Vindkraft på Haramsøy" and it is REALLY good information channel." [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>"And then came the newspapers after a while, and then Dalane Tidende became important for us, and Aftenbladet has also been involved and an important source of information [...] during the municipal meetings, the local newspapers would be present, but lately, NRK has attended as well." [Bjerkreim rep.]</p>
	Openness to other sources	Opposing arguments	<p>"I usually do weigh them against each other, but I don't think it matters too much because much of what has come up regarding the Grønne Skiftet, and then to think about- recently, Skorpen brought up Ukraine as a thing in relation to Faure, and that... made me go a bit crazy, truly, that is taking it a bit far, I think." [Bjerkreim rep.]</p>

Themes	Sub-themes	Topics	Quotes
			<p>"I think that a lot of what is presented is fabricated arguments that doesn't hold up in a discussion and I know people who... doesn't quite reach in debates because... disagree with developers." [Haramsøya rep.]</p>
		Split community	<p>"As mentioned, the split it [wind turbines] create in the local community... and in a small community, like [ours], it is harmful that there are such different opinions between people, and it will take some time for it to heal." [Haramsøya rep.]</p>
	Changed voting behavior		<p>Yes, I voted for... [POLITICAL PARTY 2], I voted for the Democrats this time... I used to vote for [POLITICAL PARTY 1], but we disagree on the negative impacts of, for instance ocean wind [...], but in this last election, I voted for the [POLITICAL PARTY 2] based on their view of energy politics and... yeah. [Haramsøya rep.]</p> <p>Yes... I voted for [POLITICAL PARTY 1] in this election, but it was because we voted tactically, we wanted [their leader] in the Storting and we did that [...] we were supposed to vote [POLITICAL PARTY 3], we voted in a good voice for "Nei til Vindkraft" and [he/she] is important. [Haramsøya rep.]</p>



## **Theme 1: Perceptions of procedural fairness of wind turbines projects**

Surprised that the developers had failed to inform them about the construction of wind turbines in their area, participants from both Haramsøya and Bjerkreim found the process secretive. During the interviews, participants interpreted this as developers not considering them an affected party, and that, for this reason, only some were informed beforehand. On Haramsøy, participants mentioned, more so than participants in Bjerkreim, that only landowners, whose lands the developers wished to build on, those whose house was within the noise zone, and investors were told that wind power would be developed. Moreover, when participants in both communities later learned of the process, most attempted to inform themselves; however, they mentioned that documentation was not transparent, and in some instances only provided in English, rather than in Norwegian, which complicates comprehension. Both communities reported being kept in the dark, and thus experienced a feeling that they were not supposed to know before it was too late, and were discouraged from learning more about the process.

Next, participants in both communities found the process to be less democratic than they would expect from a democracy, and most agreed that their input had little to no value, despite their effort. On Haramsøya, where the opposition lost, some participants argued that the process was already decided upon, making any input useless. Moreover, participants from Bjerkreim explained how landowners are left with little choice themselves when approached by developers, as the developers are potentially able to simply expropriate lands, and if a landowner signs away land for development, they are unable to change their mind later. Participants from Haramsøya also argued that the municipality was, to some extent, ignored during the process, as Haram municipality, which voted against building the wind turbines on Haramsfjellet was overridden by the state. Moreover, participants from both communities criticized the impact assessments of the wind turbines, implying that those were done for the benefit of the developer, rather than the nearby communities. They went on to explain that, despite their local knowledge, their opinions were not considered, often because they were not informed that impact assessment was taking place. Out of all participants in the study, only two considered the experience democratic.

Finally, almost every participant commented on the topic of politics; however, there was a distinct difference between Haramsøya and Bjerkreim: participants in the former were more concerned with central politics, whilst participants in the latter almost exclusively focused on local and regional politics. Despite the difference in the focus on local and central politics, almost every participant agreed on their feelings of disdain towards politicians. During the process of planning and construction of the wind turbines on Haramsøya, both the Conservative Party led by Erna Solberg, as well as the Labor Party government led by Jonas Gahr Støre were incumbents, and both were positive towards wind power in the media when asked, and participants complained that they did not attempt to listen to and help those living in proximity of these projects. Local politicians were also criticized for their involvement with the decision to implement wind turbines in the municipality, including flipping opinions after being elected on a platform based on no more

turbines, as well as perceived shady dealings. Participants in each community also discussed, explicitly, corruption among certain politicians.

## **Theme 2: Institutional performance in wind turbine projects**

When assessing attitudes to the wind turbines themselves, the results were manifold, overall pointing to the dissatisfaction with the institutional performance around the implementation of wind turbine policy projects. First, participants remarked that land concessions for construction of wind turbines often clashed with the recreational use of said lands by the community and that the visual imprint is scarring. Second, participants argued that impact assessments were rushed and not done correctly, as noise was above dangerous levels, bird species were threatened, and during the winter, there was a constant danger of ice throws from the turbine wings. Third, participants claimed that wind power was in general an archaic and inefficient policy solution to renewable energy, and mostly brought negative consequences for those living within its proximity.

Next, participants found wind turbines to be a wasteful policy, as they deemed that the cost and maintenance of the wind turbines were higher than what they provided in terms of power and environmental benefits. Despite this, some of the participants, notably from Bjerkreim, saw certain economic benefits for their municipality; however, even they argued that the generated power oftentimes was exported to other countries, rather than benefiting the community, and the chance of losses in property value left them with few incentives to support construction. Instead, participants mostly agreed that hydropower was the most optimal alternative for renewable energy in terms of cost/benefit, with other sources, such as nuclear and solar close behind. Other participants would have also liked to see power saving alternatives, rather than power generation, which could have also solved concerns regarding power exports.

Aside from issues with the purpose, economic benefits, and policy designs of the wind power turbines, participants had further grievances about institutional performance from processes on both Haramsøya and in Bjerkreim. First, participants discussed the fact that while they must abide by the law, developers seemed to be exempt from them. Next, participants in both communities commented on the police involvement on Haramsøya, where protesters were asked to move, or in some instances forcibly moved, in favor of the developers and construction teams. While some were fine with the police involvement, arguing that they were doing their jobs, most were negative towards it and found it exaggerated, unnecessary, unfair, and in some instances, corrupt. This negative assessment consequently led many participants on Haramsøya to lose trust in the police.

Finally, and exclusive to Haramsøy, there was a perceived failure of the courts. In order to battle the concession, several members of the community on Haramsøya came together to pay for a lawsuit where they challenged the legitimacy of the concession. However, the courts found no mistake in the decision to grant the concession, and, moreover, the plaintiffs had to pay the case costs. This loss was perceived as unfair where the courts were biased and took the side of the developers and NVE to go through with the concession. Many of the participants therefore

wondered, if taking a situation such as this one, to court, and it does not help, then what can they do?

### **Theme 3: Citizen participation in wind turbine projects**

When participants were made aware of the development of wind turbines in their area, most joined the opposition because they had faith that they could stop development, and that they would be heard by decision-makers. The ways in which they chose to participate in the opposition varied, including signing up for membership in political parties that are against wind power on land, direct contact with decision-makers, letters to the editor, as well as demonstrations and protests. However, participants in both communities reported that they quickly felt that their voices went unheard, and thus lost trust in the process. Participants who were aware of development early on Haramsøya often took the route of contacting politicians, as well as informing themselves through various means, likely because they had a high level of political trust at the time. However, in 2019, when development seemed somewhat inevitable, and the involvement of the police and courts, according to participants, already failed, most participants on Haramsøya went protesting. This was also the case in Bjerkreim, where some attempted to contact decision-makers earlier in the process, but later mobilized in demonstrations.

When asked about their feelings after their opposition failed, some participants from Haramsøya reported that they had lost some faith in their participation having an impact on decision-making, while others reported that their opposition was not in vain. Meanwhile, in Bjerkreim, when asked how they would feel should their opposition fail, they reported that they would be disappointed, and some had already lost trust in politicians. Moreover, some participants from Bjerkreim noted how they, in December 2021, celebrated that they managed to stop the concession, only to have to reorganize in early 2022, which felt like a loss. Still, despite participants' feelings on the outcomes of participation, there was no doubt that they were able to bring attention to the topic, especially on Haramsøy, which gained a lot of media coverage, and that is why some participants found the opposition useful despite the loss.

To garner supporters for opposition, both communities created their own Facebook groups, namely “NEI TIL VINDKRAFTVERK PÅ HARAMSØYA!” and “Nei til vindkraft på Faurefjell I Bjerkreim”. These were, according to participants, started for various reasons depending on who we asked, including them being forums for locals to connect and share information, organize meetings, protests, etc. Some participants also mentioned other organizations that opposed wind power of a larger, more national scale, such as MOTVIND.

### **Theme 4: Polarization over wind turbine projects**

While educating themselves on the news and debates surrounding the wind turbines being planned, or built, in their area, participants utilized a wide variety of sources, including newspapers, articles, organizations' forums, etc. However, there were some sources that were used more than others, depending on which community a participant was from. Whereas participants from Haramsøya

were to a larger degree dependent on localized sources, including Facebook, word of mouth, and larger organizations and groups, such as MOTVIND, Miljøvernforbundet, OED, NVE, etc., participants in Bjerkreim mentioned the news media and debates more.

Participants in Bjerkreim were thus more open to sources that might support wind power, and this position also extended to arguments from supporters, which these participants were, to a larger degree, open to discuss and consider. Participants on Haramsøy rarely considered these arguments, while one participant even considered them fabricated. The general distrust of supporters' arguments also extends to some within the community, as participants, especially from Haramsøy, mentioned how the process had sowed distrust within the community, and had split it between those who allowed, or supported, the development, and those who opposed it.

Finally, on Haramsøya, wind turbine development heavily affected voting behavior among the study participants - all but two participants had their voting behavior changed. A few of the participants disclosed who they voted for, while some chose not to. The vote change was towards fringe parties - a right-wing populist party (Democrats) and far-left socialist party (Red Party). On the contrary, participants in Bjerkreim, where the wind turbine project was only at the planning stage, mostly maintained an unchanged voting behavior where only two out of nine participants had changed theirs.

## **6. Discussion**

In this study, we explored attitudes towards wind power projects, in completed and planned stages of completion, that have an impact on people's political trust. These attitudes focused on four themes: (1) perceptions of procedural fairness, (2) perceptions of institutional performance, (3) citizen participation, and (4) polarization. The interviews showed that all these themes were important in people's views of wind turbines and, consequently, for their political trust.

Interviewed opponents in both sites initially perceived the procedures as unfair, and struggled to gain insight into the siting process and felt unable to impact it in any way. This common perception led all participants to oppose the wind turbines, fostering a general distrust in politicians and decision-makers. However, despite the general agreement among participants in different communities where the wind power projects are at different stages of implementation, slight variations emerged. Opponents on Haramsøy, where the wind turbines were completed, perceived procedural fairness more negatively than opponents in Bjerkreim, where the turbines were only planned. This was likely because participants on Haramsøy experienced the whole cycle of the project implementation and had more time to form their opinions about the process, which was deemed undemocratic with lack of participation and communication between authorities and locals. Conversely, participants in Bjerkreim considered the process more democratic, as they still anticipated the potential impact of their participation and hoped decision-makers would take their opinions into account if the project moved past the input phase. Additionally, the emphasis on local and central politics varied, with Haramsøya participants perceiving local politicians as overridden by central politics. In contrast, Bjerkreim participants could still see their politicians

influencing the process. However, the overarching conclusion remains unchanged, highlighting the pervasive distrust in both communities due to poorly perceived procedural fairness.

Participants from both communities shared a common perception of institutional performance, despite the projects being at different stages of implementation, and it becomes clear that the actions or inaction of government actors, such as NVE, OED, the police and the courts, had eroded their political trust. Every participant had concerns about wind turbine technologies, as they saw alternative solutions as advantageous, whilst wind turbines were viewed as an archaic policy. However, variations in responses emerged concerning the role of the police and the courts, with those from Bjerkreim expressing less negative opinions than participants from Haramsøya. This likely stemmed from a higher impact of these actors on Haramsøya, and from the fact that Bjerkreim had not advanced far enough into policy implementation for police intervention and involvement of courts. Community acceptance of wind turbine development hinges on the inclusion of the local community from the early stages of project implementation. Early inclusion might potentially mitigate trust issues in the government actors as some of them, namely the police and the courts, likely would not be involved at the later stages if the community is involved from the start. In addition, a general agreement between the community and the developers could have led to the acceptance of NVE and OED's decisions, reducing opposition and resistance. This, in turn, would have diminished the likelihood of the courts and police involvement on Haramsøya, consequently negating lowered trust in these actors. Moreover, higher project acceptance following inclusion at the initial stages of project implementation would have minimized each communities' time spent opposing decision-makers and bolstering the counter-movement, ultimately fostering less doubt and distrust. Finally, despite dissatisfaction with developers raised in the interviews, participants generally agree that the fault lay with the decision-makers who allowed wind turbine development in the first place.

Citizen participation in actively opposing wind power projects can happen throughout the entire implementation process, with actions ranging from participating in politics to overturn an early decision to construct wind turbines, to blocking construction when construction has already started. Therefore, the interviewees' opinions on their own participation did not differ much between the different communities, and the feeling of a lost opposition was present even in Bjerkreim, where the construction had not yet started, due to the recurring concessions. However, most participants found their efforts to be ignored by authorities and decision-makers, a sentiment shared by both communities, despite projects there being at different stages of implementation. A notable difference was the amount of media attention each opposition received: the opposition on Haramsøy gained much media attention, while the opposition in Bjerkreim received less. In sum, the outcome of participation negatively impacted participants' political attitudes in both communities, which, according to the theory, could affect their political trust, although this was less explicit from the interview answers. Furthermore, media efforts by policy opponents in both communities could have contributed to spreading political distrust by garnering sympathy from those not living within proximity of wind turbines and potentially exposing poor institutional performance.

Finally, the results highlight the impact of wind power development projects on political trust through its effect on polarization between citizens. The fact that the responses were different between communities implies that the stage of policy implementation plays a role in shaping the degree of polarization. In the input phase of wind turbine development, when the project is still getting planned and hindering project development is still possible, participants emphasized the importance of staying informed, even on policy supporters' perspectives, either to strengthen their own arguments or simply to keep track. Conversely, projects in the output phase, when they are already completed, often leave opponents resentful and less receptive to policy supporters' arguments, often ignoring them altogether, and being inclined to alter their voting behavior to prevent future such projects. Accordingly, participants on Haramsøya changed their voting behavior, whilst also showing greater trust in their own sources and less trust in opposing arguments. In contrast, Bjerkreim participants showed minimal changes in voting behavior and were more open to opposing sources and arguments. These findings align with Jagers et al.'s (2020) assertion that environmental policy support varies across the stages of policy implementation, justifying the focus on different communities in the study.

## 7. Conclusion

The study explored the question of how environmental policy projects, namely constructions of wind turbines, affected political trust among opponents of this construction living in its proximity. The study specifically focused on the case of Norway - a country with generally high levels of political trust and a strategy to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

Maintaining a high level of political trust is important for Norway in its "green shift" towards increased renewable energy to ensure continued support of environmental policies. Such support will shape the political maneuverability of decision-makers and politicians, while the lack of it might hinder construction that is critical for the shift. Studying policy opponents is thus important to reveal the sources of political discontent with environmental policies to be able to understand how to sway their opinions and prevent the disruption of political trust in the communities in proximity to the environmental policy projects.

The study explored the opinions of policy opponents living on Haramsøya, where construction of wind turbines was recently completed, and in Bjerkreim, where wind turbines were planned for construction. Exploring projects at different stages of policy implementation allowed us to unpack the nuances in policy opponents' opinions and how they might change throughout the implementation process.

First, opponents of wind turbines in both Haramsøya and Bjerkreim expressed a common perception that the process of wind turbine project implementation was highly unfair and admitted that this had negative consequences for their trust in politicians and decision-makers. The participants noted that they lacked much-desired insight into the siting process, and perceived that their initial attempts to affect decisions and procedures were ignored. While there were slight variations, with participants from Haramsøya perceiving procedural fairness more negatively, the

overarching conclusion remains unchanged - a pervasive political distrust in both communities due to poorly perceived procedural fairness. Therefore, in order to avoid eroding trust, it is important for politicians to ensure transparent and open processes, whereas people feel included and that their voices matter.

Second, opponents in both communities expressed concerns about institutional performance. Wind turbine technologies were viewed as unfavorable and archaic, and dissatisfaction with concession authorities was widespread. Yet, varying opinions on the role of the police and courts emerged, with Bjerkreim participants expressing less negative sentiments than participants on Haramsøya, likely a result of the early stage of policy implementation and lack of interaction with these government actors. Acceptance of wind turbines by the local communities hinges on their involvement, and such involvement might potentially mitigate trust issues in certain government actors. A general agreement between the community and developers could lead to acceptance, reducing opposition, whilst diminishing the likelihood of some government actors' involvement to begin with, such as the police or courts. Moreover, while there is some discontent with the developers, decision-makers received significantly more blame for allowing the construction in the first place. Involving communities in decision-making or at least consultation may solve these negative sentiments.

Third, as participants' efforts to influence the process were often ignored by the authorities in both communities, it resulted in a shared feeling of a lost opposition, contributing to a decrease in the participants' political trust. In turn, as opponents share their sentiments through both social and conventional media, this might potentially spread a decrease in political trust beyond the communities by exposing poor institutional performance.

Finally, the distance between supporters and opponents of wind turbines created polarization in the local communities, and this polarization created an additional source of decreasing political trust. The level of polarization varied depending on the stage of policy implementation. Haramsøya participants changed their voting behavior, showed greater trust in sources agreeing with their own opinions and tended to ignore opposing views (the views of wind turbine supporters), while Bjerkreim participants exhibited minimal changes in voting behavior and showed openness to information that contradicted their own views. This implies that political costs of not listening to policy opponents are larger after the project is completed. In addition, there may be unexpected consequences for political trust and democracy stemming from social polarization, which future studies can explore in greater detail.

Policy implications of our results are clear. Decision-makers need to be aware of how fair the decision-making and implementation process is perceived by those who are affected by the policy and keep them informed, following up during the entire implementation process. If this fails, decision-makers could have invincible opponents from the beginning of the policy implementation and the situation could snowball into a poor assessment of institutional performance, discontent over participation, and societal polarization at the later stages of policy implementation. This might then lead to a decrease in trust in politicians and decision-makers and consequently affect their maneuverability in the shift towards more renewable energy, in addition

to reducing legitimacy of the Norwegian government. However, if decision-makers succeed in addressing these issues at the early stages of implementation, it could prevent political headwind and subsequent loss of political trust, and instead strengthen the perception of implementation processes as fair and democratic in the future.

In order to provide even more nuanced policy recommendations, future research can study policy opponents living further away from the wind turbines, which will minimize the impact of NIMBYism on their responses, allow for a more diverse set of opinions and help build a more comprehensive understanding of the opposition. Future research could also explore if similar sentiments are present in a different set of cases of wind turbine construction. It will also be valuable to know if sentiments during the throughput stage when the wind turbines are under construction are different from the ones found in this study. Our findings can also inform future large-scale surveys studying the effect of environmental policy implementation on political trust among policy opponents in a more generalizable manner. Given that procedural fairness, perceptions of institutional performance, effectiveness of own participation and societal polarization were found important in shaping political trust, although at different degrees at different stages of policy implementation, future quantitative studies should incorporate questions measuring these factors in large-scale surveys for generalizable insights.



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# Appendix

## Interview Guide

\*Interviews are planned to last between 40 minutes and 1 hour

\*Ask for permission to tape record the interview using University of Oslo's own dictaphone and explain Nettskjema

\*Reassure participants that their anonymity will be protected

\*There are no right or wrong answers! I am interested in your experiences, opinions, and feelings

\*Remember to explain the topic and focus of the study briefly

Primary questions are written in **bold** and guiding questions in *italic* in case nothing comes to mind for the interviewees.

## Procedural Fairness

1. **What do you know about the procedures surrounding the wind power development here? Have you tried to learn more? Why?**
2. **Do you think the processes were/are democratic? Why?**
3. *Explain what you think about the processes from concession to complete construction.*
  - a. *What do you think about NVE's data gathering for the concession?*
  - b. *Do you feel like you got to participate? If **NO** – how did you experience that?*
  - c. *How would you change the procedures?*

## Institutional Performance

1. **What is your impression on the results from the wind power development? Economically? Socially? Etc.**
2. **Do you think there are better alternatives to renewable energy compared to wind power? Which? Why?**
3. *What is your opinion on the police's involvement in connection with the development on Haramsfjellet?*

## Citizen Participation

1. **Explain your attitudes towards renewable energy, more specifically wind power, before and after construction/planned construction of the wind power facilities.**
2. **Have you participated in the opposition against this development in any way? Why/why not? What did you think when it (did not) work out?**



3. *Did you participate because you thought the authorities would listen to what you had to say, or because they did not pay enough attention?*

4. *Are you a member of “No to wind turbines on Haramsøya”/ “No to wind turbines on Faurefjell in Bjerkreim”? How did you hear about this group? Why did you join?*

### **Polarization**

1. **Who informed you on this case? (Why) has it been useful?**
2. **Do you believe that you have a different opinion on the development of wind power than someone from, for instance, Oslo? Why?**
3. **Have you paid attention to wind power supporters’ arguments? What do you think about these?**
4. **Did you vote at the parliamentary election in 2021 (last year)?**
  - a. **If YES – Did your vote go to a party based on their environmental policies?**
  - b. **If NO – who not?**
  - c. **Do you believe this has split opinions here?**

### **Final Questions**

1. **Do you have anything to add?**
  2. **Where, on a scale from 1 to 10, where do you place your own political trust?**
    - a. Definition of political trust is “the general belief in the performance capacity of political institutions and/or belief in the benevolent motivation and performance capacity of office-holders”
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