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The people who will not be silent

A case study detailing the effects of repression on climate activism in Sweden

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Abstract

In 2022, a climate activist project group, Återställ Våtmarker (Restore Wetlands), performed several road blockades around Stockholm, Sweden. What followed these acts of civil disobedience were the first criminal charges with Sabotage against Climate Activists, a charge used primarily in times of war. The use of this crime classification was the start of an escalation in the Swedish repression of climate action, and has been followed by other repressive actions, like the first-ever prison sentences of climate activists in Sweden. The Swedish state has been employing everything from painting climate activists as a danger to democracy to police violence in an attempt to repress the movement. This is occurring at the same time as a wave of repressive action towards Climate Activists is washing over the world, especially in the global north. This study seeks to understand the repression Swedish Climate Activists experience and the way it affects individual activists, activist groups and the movement at large. By interviewing Climate activists from groups like Återställ Våtmarker and various Extinction Rebellion cells across the country, I outline the variations in the activists' experiences and adaptations. The surveying of these experiences reveals that repression has a lot of the expected effects on activists; the legal proceedings, police presence, bad mouthing and misinformation are tough on activists' mental health and cause fatigue. Still, the effects on their numbers are difficult for activists to determine. The movement doesn't wane; instead, it goes two ways: they adapt through tactical escalation in various ways or retreat to reconsider their goals and repertoire when the cost of participation becomes too high. Sometimes both happen in close succession.

Keywords: Climate Activism, Civil Disobedience, Governmentality, Social Movements, Repression.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction & Background

Sweden and its people have long been deeply engaged in environmental and climate issues. The early Swedish environmental movement rose in response to industrial capitalism and the environmental degradation it caused in the early 1900s (Cassegård & Thörn, 2023: 49, 61). Information about, more specifically, the effects of climate change became public knowledge in the late 1960s, which meant climate issues started to be taken more seriously in politics and culture. As a consequence, a new, more modern climate movement eventually began to take shape (Larsson Heidenblad, 2021: 11–12).

In 1964, Sweden passed the Nature Conservancy Act, and in 1967, the Environmental Protection Act, which made Sweden the first country in the world to pass legislation of that nature (Villa, 2024: 1). Later, in 1972, the first UN Climate conference was held in Stockholm, Sweden. This was later followed by similar meetings, like the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and several COP (Conference of the Parties) meetings, which led to agreements like the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement in 2015 (Cassegård & Thörn, 2023: 273-274).

Climate activism in Sweden has rarely attracted significant attention abroad. However, in 2018, the then 15-year-old Greta Thunberg started a strike for the climate. Every Friday, she would skip school to instead sit outside the Swedish Parliament to show her frustration with how politicians were dealing with the threat of climate change. This strike eventually turned into an activist group of its own, called Fridays For Future (FFF). FFF gained a lot of global attention and support in the following years, both abroad and within Sweden. Within Sweden, this movement still has a central role in the Climate movement (Cassegård & Thörn, 2023: 340-382; Sjögren, 2023: 475-476). Organisations like Extinction Rebellion (XR) also have a central role in the organising of especially urban climate activism in Sweden (De Rosa et al. 2022: 4). Groups like Återställ Våtmarker (Restore Wetlands) have gotten a significant amount of attention for their use of civil disobedience (Sykes, 2023).

There has been a degradation of the national Climate policy in Sweden, which has noticeably increased the frustrations with the government's handling of Climate Change politics. In 2022, Sweden's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission intensities per unit of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and capita were the lowest in the European Union (EU). But recent policy and leadership changes have shifted these prospects, and Sweden's ability to meet domestic and EU climate targets has been called into question, particularly in the transport sector (OECD, 2025: 9-10). Similarly, the government agency Naturvårdsverket (The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency) expressed its concern that Sweden would not meet their own climate goals (Zachrisson Winberg, 2024).

As of 2024, 19 countries in the EU have decreased their GHG emissions. Sweden is not among these. In fact, Swedish emissions have increased the most among EU member states (Eurostat, 2024). Data from Statistiska Centralbyrån (SCB, 2025) also suggests that in the third quarter of 2024, emissions from the Swedish economy increased by 6,4 %, more than in the same quarter in 2023 (SCB, 2025).

With the change in climate politics, many voices have risen in opposition. Respected environmental organisations like Naturskyddsföreningen (The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation) have expressed that it is going in the wrong direction, criticising, for example, the lack of a Swedish emissions budget, insignificant community investments and energy efficiency (Lindholm et al. 2025). As of November 2024, Naturskyddsföreningen has also reported the government to the European Commission as a consequence of new Swedish politics on climate change being insufficient to reach any of the EU's climate goals (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2024).

Simultaneously, Sweden's right-wing politicians have made several statements that paint people protesting climate politics as a security issue. Among them is the Swedish Prime Minister as of October 2022, and the party leader of the Moderates, Ulf Kristersson. Kristersson held an After-work Q&A event in Malmö in September 2023. This event suffered multiple interruptions from peaceful climate activists who expressed disappointment in the government's environmental policies in the form of shouting and singing (Nygren, 2023). Afterwards, Kristersson made an Instagram post where he expressed his belief that climate activists were an anti-democratic force and a security risk. Kristersson can be seen doing this when he wrote, among other things, "These people are trying to sabotage the democratic process in Sweden" (Kristersson, 2023, Author's translation).

This statement is part of a political campaign to repress Climate activists, which seems to have grown in force since 2022. During this time, several interpolations and motions were published on the parliament website, which attempted to argue that Climate activists are harmful to society. Among these were several suggested law changes to aid in the repression of these activists (Motion 2022/23: 293; Motion 2022/23: 535; Motion 2023/24: 742). More interpolations and motions of a similar vein have also been posted since (Andersson, 2023; Andersson, 2025; Andersson Garpvall, 2024).

Parties like the Moderates and the Sweden Democrats have made several different statements on the parliament website about Climate activists, all in a negative light. One such statement was made by Moderate Party member and Minister of Justice, Gunnar Strömmer (2023), who answered a written question posed to Ulf Kristerson on the parliament's website by the Green Party in reaction to the above-mentioned Instagram post. In reply, Strömmer states: (Strömmer, 2023).

> "We have, in Sweden, during recent times, had several happenings where activists, through their actions, have caused danger to others and brought about societal damage, for example, through different traffic blockades. This spring, it has occurred on several occasions that activists from the gallery also disturbed different debates in the parliament chamber."
> (Strömmer, 2023. Author's translation)

1.2 Research Problem

This change in governmental attitude towards climate activism is not just communicated rhetorically. There has also been an increase in arrests of protestors in conjunction with peaceful climate demonstrations (Holmberg, 2024). Between 2022 and August 2023, over 200 climate activists had been convicted. 25 of these had been charged with the crime "sabotage", which is a crime classification that has not been used in charges relating to demonstrations before 2022 (Persson, 2023). Sabotage is a crime classification closely associated with times of war. This crime can put a person in prison for up to 4 years or a lifetime if the crime is considered severe enough (Alestig, 2025). The new use of the sabotage charge is concerning and suggests that the judicial system's actions are aiding in the repression of Climate activists.

UN's Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, Michel Forst, revealed to the Swedish paper Dagens Nyheter that he was "deeply worried" (Alestig, 2025) about Swedish actions against Climate activists. This is a trend across Europe, Forst says, giving examples like the UK, where several people performing a traffic blockade were charged with 4-5 years in prison for conspiracy, and Italy, where laws that have been made to combat the mafia are used to repress Climate Activists (Alestig, 2025).

Swedish activists also express disappointment with the media, mentioning several instances where the media have reported incorrect information to the public to paint their activism in a bad light. One such example would be from the Autumn of 2022, when the media reported that a patient in an ambulance had died as a result of a traffic blockade. It was later discovered that this was a lie staged by a previous committee member of the Sweden Democrats (Paxling et al. 2023).

To understand the research problem of this thesis, one first has to understand what repression is. Repression of Social Movements can be explained as the attempts by "individuals, groups or corporations or state actors (e.g. militaries, national police, and local police) to control, constrain or prevent protest" (Earl, 2022: 1). In a more historical context this has often involved increasing the cost of participating in social movements through methods like violence, arrest, imprisonment, covert counterintelligence programs and restrictions of free speech and assembly. In a more modern and digital

context, it also includes things like the control or disruption of information and contributing to the spread of misinformation and disinformation into the repressive machine (Earl, 2022: 1).

This thesis explores the ways in which Climate activists are affected by repression and how these consequences affect the Climate movement in Sweden. I hope to understand this by analysing interviews of climate activists from groups Återställ Våtmarker (Restore Wetlands) and Extinction Rebellion. The shares of repression research focused on exploring the ramifications of repression are smaller than, for example, that of state-mandated violence (Earl et al. 2022: 1). This research is therefore valuable to the study of repression at large.

1.3 Aim & Research question

This thesis aims to understand and analyse the effects of state authorities' attempts to repress climate activism in Sweden.

The research question will be as follows:

- How has the attempt at repressing climate activism affected climate activists and their social movement in Sweden?

To help answer the main research question, there are two sub-questions, which aim to make the answer to the main question more nuanced and saturated.

    - How are climate activists experiencing social exclusion?
    - How is the climate movement adapting under the pressure of repression?

The first question touches upon two of the prevalent themes in this thesis: State and Society. The second concerns another two: Movement and the Self.

1.4 Delimitations

This thesis explores an international phenomenon but is limited to Sweden as the empirical site of analysis. It is limited to two of the more prominent groups in the climate movement in Sweden: Extinction Rebellion and the project group Återställ Våtmarker (Restore Wetlands). Some of these activists are also part of sub-groups of Extinction Rebellion, like the Mothers* Rebellion and Psychologist Rebellion. Here, it is important to understand that the group boundaries of climate activist groups are regularly crossed. Many activists are active in several groups at once, although there is usually one they are more actively engaged with. Activists may also plan and/or participate in actions put on by a group they are not officially active in.

There is a temporal limitation to this study: 2022 to 2025. This is because, during the Spring of 2022, Climate activists were for the first time charged with Sabotage, which is, as previously stated, a crime used almost exclusively during times of war (Alestig, 2025). The thesis also has this temporal limitation because of when motions and interpellations started appearing in the parliament in an attempt to paint climate activists as society-threatening actors, as well as enacting stricter laws to restrict the ability of climate activists to do activism (Motion 2022/23: 293; Motion 2022/23: 535; Motion 2023/24: 742).

1.5 Relevance to Global Studies

The field of Global Studies is the interdisciplinary study of Globalisation. Globalisation is often defined as a process of social change that uses transnational activity to bring the world together into more intense interactions. This includes social, economic, demographic, cultural, and technological transnational activity and the creation of transnational relationships. The result of these relationships is a more unified and interactive world. Globalisation can not only be felt on a global level but also locally in pockets around the world. These can take the form of multicultural neighbourhoods with different immigrant communities that intermingle, but also what can be called "Global cities" with strong and essential global nodes of economic and cultural networks (Juergenmeyer, 2024: 5-6).

This thesis examines the climate movement and the repression phenomenon. The ongoing process of repression is not just happening in Sweden. Similar things have and are occurring in the UK, Canada, Australia, Guatemala, India, and more (Lakhani et al., 2023). Therefore, it could be argued that the repression of these types of activism is, if not a global problem, at least a transnational one.

The climate movement is also a global movement, with many different transnational groups that exist across the world (Greenpeace, Extinction Rebellion, etc.). Many smaller activist groups are part of bigger global networks with sister groups in other parts of the world. An example of this would be the A22 Network that connects 11 different activist groups in the global north and has close links to 5 other groups from all over the world (A22 Network, N.A.). One could argue that these networks create local globalised pockets with strong global networks, much like a miniature global city, therefore making them highly relevant in the discipline of global studies.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Social Movements

According to Tilly et al. (2020: 6), social movements are a form of contentious politics. *Contentious*, because social movements involve a collective making of claims. These

claims, if made reality, would, according to Tilly et al. (2020: 6), conflict with the interests of others; *Politics*, because a figure in this claim-making is a type of government, whatever role it takes. Governments play a significant role in the emergence of a social movement. They appear when the political situation allows for it; When there are ways in which ordinary people can participate in public politics. Tilly et al. (2020: 6) use a consequential synthesis of three elements to explain where this type of social movement emerged from:

Firstly, there is the social movement campaign, which is a sustained campaign that extends beyond a single event (Tilly et al. 2020: 6). Secondly, the social movement repertoire, easily described as social movement tactics, is a combination of political action forms. Thirdly, WUNC displays, which is an acronym for worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment. These displays can take the form of statements, slogans or things like labels that infer WUNC (Tilly et al. 2020: 6-7). According to Tilly et al. (2020), a movement has to employ WUNC displays in combination with a social movement repertoire within a social movement campaign to count as a social movement (Tilly et al. 2020: 6-7).

On the other hand, Rucht (2023: 8) uses social relationships as a lens through which to understand social movements. He states that social movements are social products created through interaction. These movements are bound together by numerous different encounters, and share experiences like common values, goals and practices. They exchange various viewpoints and arguments and share a sense of community and belonging. All these processes are part of the internal communication, which is difficult for outsiders to have any insight into. Social movements also have established external relationships with actors which can either grant or refuse the movement information, help in terms of material goods, or moral support (Rucht, 2023: 8).

According to Martin (2015: 8), while social movements can be understood as collective agents of positive change, not all social movements have been progressive, and this has affected social movement research. Social movement research has had different approaches over time, which have seen social movements differently. Some of the early collective behaviour theorists saw mass action as “inherently irrational and ultimately dangerous” (Martin, 2015: 8). At the time, mass action was, to some researchers, associated with the suppression of individual free will. This association came to be as a result of the emergence of fascism in the early 1900s (Martin, 2015: 8).

Since around the 60s, the structural approach to social movement research has been the dominant one. As of the late 1900s, the interest in investigating more agentic aspects has been more prominent, which has given rise to the so-called “Cultural Turn” within social movement research. The “Cultural Turn” was partially fueled by findings that asserted that social movements emerged as a consequence of the declining legitimacy of “the system,” people’s waning fatalism and a surge in collective efficacy.

These findings were later built on, and the people's sense of perceived injustice and collective efficacy were coined as "cognitive liberation". The central insight behind this new concept was the way meaning-making played an important role in mobilisation (Rohlinger & Gentile, 2017: 10, 14-15). "The Cultural Turn" is shortly described by Roggeband and Klandermans (2017: 2-3) as something that brings attention to issues such as frames and framing, emotions and collective identity in relation to social movements and mobilisation. This has brought about conceptual advancement, like a deeper relational approach, which opens up for a more dynamic analysis of participation. According to Robbeband & Klandermans (2017: 3), the innovations resulting from the cultural turn:

> "...bring with them methodological challenges like how to quantify individual feelings or analytically separating overlapping and mutually reinforcing processes of framing and identification."
> (Roggeband & Klandermans, 2017: 3).

Other issues that have taken a more prominent role in social movement research are, according to Roggeband and Klandermans, the role of mass media and social media. Sociologists in particular have shown a lot of interest in the way social movements build legitimacy with the media (Roggeband & Klandermans, 2017: 3).

2.2. Climate activism

Climate activists battle with a lot of emotion, especially as there seems to exist a widespread apathy for Climate Change among the general population (Kleres & Wettergren, 2017: 507). Kleres & Wettergren (2017: 511-512) have shown that for many of these Climate activists, fear of climate change acts not as a paralyser, but as a trigger to action. Still, fear is seldom used as a tool to mobilise. Instead, the general strategy of the movement is the creation of hope. The fact that the climate catastrophe is not yet happening is often perceived as the reason behind fear's inefficiency. The climate catastrophe as it is today lacks the 'moral shock effect' needed to disrupt society's social organising of denial.

As a result of globalisation, the call to climate action has been felt in increasing numbers transnationally. Transnational Climate action is today a large driving part of activism involving the climate. These mass movements are very suitable for working across boundaries. For example, due to their structurelessness, these movements are more capable of tracking down and monitoring transnational corporations than national governments (Doyle, McEachern & MacGregor, 2015: 108-109).

Repertoires of these transnational Climate activists are often inspired by other transnational or transhistoric repertoires of contention. An example would be tree-sitting done in Grenoble in 2003-2004, which resembles similar actions done by

EarthFirst! in California in the 1990s. The tactics used by EarthFirst! take on many of the characteristics of non-violent direct action tactics from the anti-road protestors in the UK in the 1980s, and so on (Doyle, McEachern & MacGregor, 2015: 109).

Globalisation has inspired a need to observe global environmental injustice within the climate movement. This has brought about transnational networks that labour at the intersection of environmental and social concerns. Different injustices have united human rights activists, climate activists, LGBTQ activists and more, creating the Climate Justice Movement. This movement was born in transnational networks, and works hard to influence policymakers, but also to empower people from all over the world to take action (Doyle, McEachern & MacGregor, 2015: 109-110).

Swedish Climate activism is similarly strongly focused on pressuring policymakers to take more sustainable actions in politics. A Fridays For Future activist in Malmö stated that they were not a group whose mission was to build a better society, but a group whose mission was to make sure the politicians of today built a better society for tomorrow (De Rosa et al. 2022:).

But an article by MacGregor (2021) shows that not all climate activism operates in this manner. Some focus specifically on direct local change after giving up hope on influencing policymakers. MacGregor (2021: 329-331) analyses local environmental activism and its transformative potential of collective action. She notes that small-scale, micro-political, and place-based alternatives to environmentalism have emerged as a result of several decades of largely unsuccessful demonstrations, such as mass protests and Climate Camps. Some examples of movements working on direct local change are food justice movements, energy and housing cooperatives, and Transition Towns, many of which sprouted in the quest for alternatives to mass consumption. (MacGregor, 2021: 331)

2.3 Repression of Social Movements

In research on state repression in Asia made by Lukito et al. (2022: 13), they found that propaganda is a cheaper repression strategy alternative to utilise, compared to, for example, military or police violence. States do, however, often resort to violence if protests are persistent enough. Violent repressive action often guarantees that protestors disperse, for example, by getting arrested, injured or killed. In cases where states utilise propaganda, Lukito found that they usually exacerbate polarisation by making the government out to be good and the protestors to be bad. In the research, they could not determine if the propaganda was persuasive, but they did note that the propaganda took a variety of forms, such as references to specific events, disinformation and creating a discourse where the government was a positive actor, and the opposition a negative actor. These actions have seemed to seek to delegitimise the

oppositional protests (Lukito et al., 2022: 13). In this thesis, similar attempts to delegitimise protests will be explored.

Earl et al. (2022) detail the way repression strategies have developed in the digital age. Different actors have long worked to prevent, limit or control social movements (2022: 1). These actors work to prevent, limit and control social movements even in digital spaces. Even digital activists or social movements that use digital tools are victims of overt coercion, and Earl et al. (2022: 3) present several instances where bloggers and online activists have been arrested or made victims of violence by governments. Governments that use overt coercion against activists are not only authoritarian in nature. Some democracies also perform similar forms of repression. In the case of the British police and their national anti-extremist unit, activists' social media presence has been monitored to make pre-emptive arrests before protests can occur. These events reflect a trend in policing, which increasingly relies on pre-emptive policing based on digital analysis and surveillance.

According to Earl et al (2022: 4), digital repression also allows for large-scale surveillance. This provides regimes with an unprecedented overview of public discontent. Many states have direct access to telecommunications networks and the content transferred across them. In both autocratic and democratic societies, this information has been used to perform pre-emptive interventions to limit protest. In many cases, this monitoring happens without a clear legal basis.

Earl et al (2022: 5-6) also highlight how important the control of information is in this age of pervasive digital and social media usage. Controlling and channelling information through propaganda and disinformation campaigns are important elements of digital repression. Traditional propaganda had exclusively focused on changing beliefs, whereas information control and channelling strategies now also changed people's perceptions of the information environment, as well as their beliefs. This research from Earl et al (2022) intersects with the findings of Lukito et al (2022) and makes the knowledge of modern repression strategies richer.

States are not the only actors partaking in the repression of activism. García-García & Calvo Borobia (2019: 1-2, 10) argue that private actors like newspapers and other media also participate in this activity, and that these efforts often coincide with similar efforts of state authorities, such as conservative politicians and the criminal justice system. In the case of Spain in 2011, the conservative press both discredited the protests and participated in the efforts of portraying protesters like threats to security by referring to the protest in words that evoke a "conscious or unconscious identification of protest with threats to security" (García-García & Calvo Borobia, 2019: 6). Columnists explicitly refer to protestors by words such as 'mass', 'mob' and 'horde' a substantial number of times. This facilitated state actors in their efforts to further repress and criminalise political protests (García-García & Calvo Borobia, 2019: 1-2, 10). To hear an activist

perspective on the media's coverage of their acts of activism feels important in light of this information, to further understand the extent to which actors other than the state have facilitated acts of repression. García-García & Calvo Borobia (2019: 2) ask us to consider the media as a non-neutral actor in contentious politics and an actor that can actively produce opportunities for repression.

3.0 Theory & Analytical Concepts

3.1 Political Process Model

There are many theories about social movements, with different approaches and purposes towards the concept. In this chapter, the theories and analytical concepts used to analyse the data will be introduced.

In this thesis, the one used is called the Political Process Model. The Political Process Model is a theory that describes how and why social movements mobilise. It was developed as a reaction to a theory called the Resource Mobilisation Theory. This theory insinuated that wealth and power were concentrated among a few groups, and left the majority without any "real influence over the majority of decisions that affected their lives" (Martin, 2015: 40). Social movements can therefore be defined as excluded groups rational attempts to mobilise political leverage of a sufficient amount to advance their collective interests external to institutionalised means. Additionally, the Resource mobilisation theory has been perceived as apolitical by critics. They argue that the theory is indifferent to the political and ideological content of a social movement (Martin, 2015: 40).

The Political Process Model is, as the term "Political Process" highlights, a theory that holds social movements as a phenomenon that is, above all else, *political* in nature, rather than psychological. It's also argued that social movements represent a *process*, in that they emerge and decline, rather than go through a series of discrete developmental stages (Martin, 2025: 41).

3.1.1 Political Opportunities

One central concept of the Political Process Model is called 'political opportunity structure'. This concept refers to the relative closure or openness of the formal political system. Openness refers to the visible openings for participation in the prevailing political system, which can lead to the emergence of social movements. Closure refers to the repression or discouragement of dissidents to prevent protests, which has a direct relationship with the deterrence of activism. This means the openness or closure of the prevailing political system depends greatly on elite groups in the polity (Martin, 2015: 41-42). Martin (2015: 42) quotes McAdam saying that the Political Process Model was based on the view that "political action by established polity members reflects an abiding conservatism"

(McAdam, 1982: 38). This means that established polity members work to withhold admission to the polity from groups which have political interests that significantly conflict with their own (Martin, 2015: 42).

The Political Opportunities concept can be used to define the current climate that allows or represses social movements and protests. In this thesis, Political Opportunities will be used to analyse the changing political landscape that affects social movements in Sweden and give names to the different aspects that define this political landscape.

3.1.2 Repertoires of Contention

Repertoires of Contention is a concept which examines how social movements mobilise and the tactics these groups use in their struggles. These repertoires are described as a combination of structure and agency, and movements make choices within these repertoires as if following structured options. Repertoires are not static, but change over time. One could describe it as movement participants engaging in endless small-scale innovation in tactics. Some researchers say that these new tactics often strongly resemble previous tactics, but that protest tactics, in general, are highly adaptable to context (Martin, 2015: 46).

In this thesis, repertoires will be used to understand the current state of the climate activism movement and the discussions on tactics that go on behind closed doors.

3.1.3 Cycles of Protest

The Political Process Model has previously been used to study the cycles of protests. This concept tries to explain why protests wane and intensify. Protest cycles proceed in waves. They actively respond to political opportunities and constraints. Intensification is built upon as people use known repertoires and engage in dense social networks. Later in the cycle, movement participation can wane out in several ways, for example, by being separated by repressive forces, or by channelling into organisations that participate in bargaining with the authorities (Martin, 2015: 50-51).

This concept has sometimes been seen as conflicting with repertoires of Contention, but many argue that these two processes happen simultaneously. Changes in repertoires of contention happen much more slowly over a span of time and change the ways in which people protest, while cycles of protest are faster and handle topics of why the intensification of protests happens. Still,

these two concepts certainly have a relationship to one another. For example, more disruptive repertoires often happen early in a protest cycle (Martin, 2015: 51).

This concept is used in this thesis to understand how political constraints have affected the protest cycle, and how the stage in the protest cycle stands in relation to the discussion about repertoires among activists.

3.2.4 Repression & the Political Process Model

Repression of Social movements is, as previously mentioned, the attempts made by different social actors to restrict, prevent and control protests. There are a variety of ways to repress social movements. Repression scholars have created different concepts to distinguish between different types of repressive action. The first two adjectives researchers tend to use to distinguish between repression and repression are covert and overt. Overt repression, which refers to publicly visible repression, like the policing of public protest events. Covert repression refers to covert operations, such as surveillance, that are meant to affect the movement's ability to survive or ability to use certain tactics. The public is to know nothing of the targeting of these movements (Earl, 2022: 1). The other two are coercion and channelling. Coercion refers to violence, harassment and surveillance, going as far as murder in several situations. Finally, channeling, which focuses on proverbial rewards and punishments, which are used to lure protestors towards certain goals or tactics and push them away from others (Earl, 2022: 2). The results of repression remain “empirically varied and theoretically contested” (Earl, 2022: 5). In the case of Political Process theorists, they argue that repression is an indicator of closed political opportunities, and that this repression results in raised costs of participation in social movements. This raised cost is meant to deter activism. Even people interested in rational choice models of collective action and not in Political Process or Political Opportunities, agree with the cost-based argument. However, it is also empirically evident that repression can cause movements to become more radicalised. This is often referred to as Backfire and occurs when repression instead results in the attraction of more radical activists, therefore shifting the movement in a more radical direction (Earl, 2022: 5). Finally, some suggest the effect of repression that needs more attention is a movement's tactical choices, not their resulting mobilisation levels. When a movement is repressed because of one tactic, they sometimes continue performing actions with another tactic. This is called tactical substitution (Earl, 2022: 6).

This knowledge about repression will be used to understand the different struggles activists have had with authorities and what that might mean for the climate activism movement.

3.3 Governmentality

To understand the way society receives and reproduces the repression of Social Movements, this thesis employs the concept of Governmentality. This is a concept Foucault developed as a part of his biopolitics theory, which came to be as a result of Foucault's developing view on power and authority in his book *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1, in 1976. The theory specifically deals with 'biopower', the power exercised over people, specifically in terms of them as living beings: Subjects specifically as members of a population, in which issues of sexuality and reproduction connect to the issues of national power and policy (Foucault et al. 1991: 4-5). Since Governmentality came to be, it has also been used outside of the scope of biopolitics and topics like the regulation of people's sexuality and reproduction. Foucault argues that the church and its 'pastoral power' is what laid the groundwork for Governmentality. He describes that modern governmental rationalities come as a consequence of the coupling of the 'city-game' and the 'shepherd-game' of the church; The way it guides individuals to follow what is deemed appropriate by the church. He calls sixteenth-century Europe the start of modern Governmentality, where government and its principles are no longer a part of, or subordinate to, theology, but the government is followed in a similar way as one previously followed the church (Foucault et al. 1991: 8-10). Governmentality is a concept that seeks to comprehend the way people internalise state mandates and then govern themselves according to the interests of the state and its agents. It is very useful in explaining different phenomena in social studies. The core notion of this theoretical concept is the subject; A subject in the sense of grammatical word categories, but also as a subject of higher power. People are made into subjects through self-recognition, and as subjects, people act in accordance with the suggestion made by their higher power (Robbins, 2020: 76-77). This theoretical concept will be used to analyse the stories of climate activists and the way civilians have reacted to them since the increase in repression.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Empirical Method: Semistructured life world interviews

This study is a case study focusing on the effects repression has on Climate activism and the Climate movement. To find this out, I have conducted several semistructured life world interviews with activists from different activist groups. Semi-structured life world interviews are based on a loose structure that aims to guide the interviewer through the interview but still allows an openness to changes in form and sequence to better be able to follow up on specific answers and stories. A semistructured life world interview aims to see the interviewee's world from their point of view and to understand the meaning of their experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The structure began with questions about how the interview subject became an activist, followed by their experiences and

reactions to repression and their experiences with the media. Finally, the interview subject was asked about the way the movement has been affected by this, how it has had to change, as well as their personal feelings about it. This way, the questions addressed four prevalent themes in this thesis: State, Society, Movement, and the Self. During most of the interviews, the interviewer read a social media post from Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson (2023) to elicit feelings and recollections among the interview subjects. Most of the interviews have been conducted in person in the interviewee's place of choice, taking between 30 and 80 minutes. This way, I was hoping to bring these activists to places they find familiar and comfortable, to ease any tension that the interview situation might bring up. Some interviews were conducted through video call, when the interviewee wished for it, or there was no opportunity to meet.

In this study, I initially conducted purposive sampling, choosing which activism groups to contact. My area of interest includes the climate movement and the climate activism groups with knowledge about recent internal and external changes that have occurred as a result of state authorities' actions and statements (Bryman, 2016: 408-409). There has also been an effort put into ensuring that interview subjects are from different regions in Sweden. By doing this, I hope to represent the Swedish Climate movement fairly.

The means of contacting interview subjects have been email or social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. From these initial contacts, I have practised snowballing, which is a method that entails letting your interviewee direct you to another potential interview subject. The assumption is that your interview subject is more likely to know who might have the knowledge you seek (Bryman, 2016: 415). This has been a very effective method to come into contact with climate activists. Half of the interview subjects were found through the practice of snowballing, and the other half through purposive sampling.

4.1.1 Material

The primary material for analysis will be transcribed interviews with climate activists from different activist groups. These activist groups include: Återställ våtmarker (Restore Wetlands) and Extinction Rebellion. The material will be displayed in the table below. Some of the interviewees are also part of sub-groups of Extinction Rebellion, namely Mothers* Rebellion and Psychologist Rebellion. Because these subgroups tell us something specific about the interviewees' identities, I have opted not to write specifically who is involved in these subgroups. Again, these group boundaries are often crossed by activists and do not hinder participation in other groups' protests and actions of civil disobedience.

The secondary material includes two texts made by the polity, one in the form of an interpolation on the parliament website (Andersson, 2022) and one in the form of an Instagram post made by the prime minister of Sweden, Ulf Kristersson (2023). These will mainly be used to highlight what negatively inclined statements made by the polity might look like.

Table 1: Interviews

Interviewee	**Group**	**Age**	**Date**	**Medium**
Interviewee 1	Återställ Våtmarker	61	12 Feb 2025	In-person
Interviewee 2	Återställ Våtmarker	31	17 Feb 2025	In-person
Interviewee 3	Extinction Rebellion	55	6 Mar 2025	Video call
Interviewee 4	Extinction Rebellion	52	6 Mars 2025	Video call
Interviewee 5	Extinction Rebellion	24	13 Mars 2025	In-person
Interviewee 6	Extinction Rebellion	24	13 Mars 2025	In-person
Interviewee 7	Extinction Rebellion	45	13 Mars 2025	In-person
Interviewee 8	Extinction Rebellion	50	15 Apr 2025	Video call

Most interviewees were conducted one-on-one with the author, but two were conducted with two interviewees at the same time, namely 3 and 4, and 5 and 6. All interviews except for the one with interviewees 5 and 6 have been translated from Swedish to English. The interview held with interviewees 5 and 6 was originally in English.

The decision was made not to include the gender of the interview subjects, as it felt irrelevant to the analysis. The author also wished to mitigate gendered bias among readers. Interviewees are referred to by numbers instead of pseudonyms for similar reasons: to reduce reader presumptions based on preconceived notions about a name and/or gender. All quotes from interviewees have been edited where names and pronouns are mentioned to preserve the interviewee's anonymity and prevent any bias from the reader.

There are some limitations of the material, which relate to the time during which these narratives existed. A lot of the repression that happens does so soon after the COVID-19 pandemic. This means certain processes might not have been driven by repression alone, but could have been affected by COVID-19 as well.

4.2 Analytical Method

The Epistemological viewpoint I used while conducting research is interpretivism. This means I consider social sciences to be an application of science that has influences from different intellectual traditions. I view the subject matter of social sciences differently from the natural sciences. The interpretivist viewpoint is that subject matters of social sciences are fundamentally different from those of the natural sciences, which means the study of these subject matters requires a different research procedural logic to reflect the unique nature of humans within the natural order of the planet. The interpretivist approach is not only to explain human behaviour but to understand it. In practice, this means the researcher seeks to interpret the way the research subject interprets the world and society around them. Then the researchers' interpretations have to be interpreted through the theories, concepts and literature of a discipline. This means that interpretivism is in practice three levels of interpretations which seek to understand the human experience (Bryman, 2016: 26-28).

The Ontological viewpoint used in this thesis is constructivism, which argues that social phenomena and the meanings behind these social phenomena are continuously being made by social actors through social interactions. This also means that the social reality of the researcher is a construction under constant revision. What I present in this thesis is one social reality and not one that can be regarded as definitive (Bryman, 2016: 29).

4.2.1 Narrative Analysis

The data in this thesis will be analysed using Narrative analysis. Wibben (2011: 43) argues that we as humans access the world only through interpretations. Through these interpretations, we tell stories. Narratives.

> “To think of experience as narrative captures the interpretive aspect inherent in any recollection of experience” (Wibben 2011: 44).

All narratives are political in nature. They enable and limit representation of what makes the world as we humans see it, and what is possible within it (Wibben 2011: 43). This is an approach to analysis that emphasises the stories that interview subjects tell to explain events. The focus is not necessarily on what happened, but on how the interview subject makes sense of what happened. The perspectives of the interviewees are unique in relation to each other. This analysis also assumes that stories are told with a purpose (Bryman, 2016: 589-592).

With consideration given to the contents of the thesis’s material, the analysis has been split into four layers: State, Society, Movement and The Self. This will give

an easier overview of the material and the different complexities of repression and its consequences. Included in the State are narratives concerning the criminal justice system, police and polity. Society includes civilians, the media, and capitalism. Movement concerns intra-group, but also movement-wide processes and complexities. The Self category handles the emotional and identity-making processes of the individual.

These aspects are connected to the two sub-questions of this thesis. The question “How are climate activists experiencing social exclusion?” relates to the layers of State and Society. These layers explore how activists experience social disadvantage, are relegated to the fringe of society, and the repression they face. The question “How is the climate movement adapting under the pressure of repression?” speaks to the other two layers, Movement and The Self. These layers handle the ways in which the movement is forced to adapt, and how people reconsider things in the face of hardship.

Table 2: Presentation of data

Layer	**Aspect**	**Code**
State	Criminal Justice System	Repression Overt Coercion
		Silencing activists
	Police	Dispersion of activism
		Positive experiences
		Surveillance of activists
		Violence towards activists
	Polity	Discomfort with adaptation
		Mis-/Disinformation
		Policy vs Speech
		Repression Overt Channelling
Society	Civilians	Governmentality
		Misconception of movement
		Passivity
		Support to cause
		Threats of harm
	Media	Censoring of Journalists

Table 2: Presentation of data		
Layer	**Aspect**	**Code**
		Defining Discourse
		Hardened Climate
		Media Distrust
		Mis-/Disinformation
		Visibility of activism
	Capitalism	Social exclusion
Movement	Intra-group	Bolstering members
		Defining purpose
		Fear of being repressed
	Movement-wide	Backfire
		Collaboration between groups/movements
		Cycles of protest
		Escalation as a tool
		Making the issue visible
		Participation Cost
		Privilege
		Variations in repertoire
		Weaponising experienced repression
The Self	Emotion	Doubting self
		Fulfilment as activists
		Hopelessness with the situation
	Identity-making	Activist identity
		Balancing identities

Table 2 showcases the codes as they appeared under the four layers and their aspects. The codes touch upon feelings and general concepts, but also more theoretical concepts such as participation cost and backfire.

The State category contains codes that describe actions and experiences with the three different aspects: Criminal Justice System, Police and Polity. Society is a category that highlights experiences with the three aspects: Civilians, Media and Capitalism. While Civilians and Media touch upon experiences specifically with these aspects, the Capitalism aspect concerns issues activists have with entities that control or drastically affect their economic situations. These primarily include entities that employ the activists as wage-labourers. The category Movement handles the Intra-group aspect, which in this case concerns more specifically internal feelings and discussion, and the Movement-wide aspect. The Movement-wide aspect goes more into actively used repertoires of contention and social movement theory. Finally, the Self category handles the Emotion aspect and the Identity-making aspect.

4.5 Ethical considerations & Positionality

Ethical considerations are an important part of this study, as the group it aims to study is a target for a lot of hate and threats. To prevent harm from befalling the interviewees, no one will be referred to by name. Details from their life will be kept sparse and only include relevant information to understand the narrative (Bryman, 2016: 126, 133).

To ensure informed consent, I have detailed what an interview would entail and the conditions under which the interviewee enters the interview in the email or message sent out to participants when seeking their participation. Interview subjects have also been given the opportunity to retract specific parts of their stories anytime during the writing process. They have been informed that they are allowed to withdraw completely, should they feel unwilling to partake anymore.

As a social researcher, it is not possible to conduct research in a moral vacuum (Bryman, 2016: 141). In this section, I will make clear the ethical and political presumptions that might have implications for the conduct of my research (Bryman, 2016: 141).

My personal political beliefs align with a lot of the activists in this thesis, which could have led to bias in the analysis of the data. To mitigate this potential bias and assess the accuracy of the data, I practised reflexivity through introspection and self-interviews, which refers to the regular questioning of oneself through different methods, like a questionnaire. Through these methods, the influence of my subjectivity was relatively neutralised (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022: 242, 246-247). This subjectivity is, however, advantageous in meetings with activists. A completely value-neutral way of conducting research in relation to interview subjects might be undesirable, much like in feminist research and the like. This is called ‘conscious partiality’. Maintaining my subjectivity in meetings with activists makes it easier to create smooth conversations and an environment that feels safer for the interview subject (Bryman, 2016: 141).

5.0 Analysis & Discussion

5.1 Experiencing Social Exclusion

On March 28, 2022, the project group called Återställ Våtmarker (Restore Wetlands) performed a blockade of highways around Stockholm, demanding that the government focus on restoring wetlands as an effective way to reduce GHG emissions. Interviewee 1, a member of Återställ Vårmarker, who was previously engaged in Extinction Rebellion, mentions being frustrated with the lack of results they were getting as Extinction Rebellion. So interviewee 1 and some fellow activists, who were heavily inspired by the Insulate Britain movement in the United Kingdom, decided to organise something in a similar vein. Interviewee 1 describes Insulate Britain as having a new, inspiring attitude, which included being disruptive and interrupting journalists. They performed civil disobedience in the form of similar blockades of highways that Återställ Våtmarker would later perform. When Insulate Britain members were arrested, people took to the streets to show their support for the protesters. Seeing Insulate Britain's effectiveness at turning public opinion, interviewee 1 and their fellow activists organised Återställ Våtmarker as a goal-oriented group that used civil disobedience as one of its primary repertoires.

Civil Disobedience is a tactic that involves breaking the law by non-violent means in the name of resistance, and then the subsequent arrest for the crime. The goal is usually to make the government change a law or governmental decision. The act of disobedience is usually directed towards the public's sentiment for justice. The message is often that the principles of social cooperation between free and equal human beings are being disrespected by the authorities (Herngren, 1990: 15, 21).

As a consequence of blocking the highways, the activists of Återställ Våtmarker were arrested and charged with the crime of Sabotage, which came as a shock to many. They were the first climate activists to be charged with this crime. To Interviewee 2, it was completely unexpected.

> "It was the first time they used it. And so it came as a massive shock to me when I sat inside the police station there, and they just, 'You're suspected of two crimes. The first being disobeying police orders, and the other being sabotage.' And I just: 'Oh god'"
> (Interviewee 2)

This event marks the beginning of a rapid escalation of repression towards Climate activists. In Autumn 2022, the first two climate activists were given a prison sentence (Johansson, 2022; Extinction Rebellion, 2022). This came as a consequence of a wave of

actions by Extinction Rebellion against airports, to protest the aviation business. This escalation of repressive action has led to an increase in arrests of non-violent demonstrating Climate activists (Holmberg, 2024), the spreading of misinformation about the movement by politicians and the media (Paxling et al., 2023), and attempts at introducing new policies which would make sentences for protesting more severe (Motion 2022/23:293; Motion 2022/23:535; Motion 2023/24:742).

5.1.1 Words of Politicians

This period of closing of political opportunities is observable through statements made by the polity in official parliamentary channels, as well as on social media. Some of the first statements of this character made through the official parliamentary channels in the 2020s were made by Jonas Andersson in April 2022. Andersson mentions an action where Extinction Rebellion members vandalised a statue of King Karl XII by writing on it with chalk and possibly spray paint. The action can be seen on the conservative media channel Riks' YouTube channel (Riks, 2022). This is notably the only place the author could find and view this video, which affects the video's credibility. On the parliament website, Andersson (2022) uses the word sabotage to describe the repertoire and the crime that the activists are committing during several instances. He also calls the climate activists extreme several times.

> "Groups of extreme climate activists that use sabotage and various criminal methods to drive their agenda through have distinguished themselves in the last weeks in Stockholm, which has generated considerable media attention. For instance, these groups have sabotaged traffic by lying down on trafficated roads to hinder accessibility, which hits the public at large, including socially important functions like emergency service personnel and their vehicles. Sabotage that could cost people their lives. During a vote in Sweden's government on the 27th of April, extreme climate activists also began to sabotage by screaming from the gallery in the plenary hall in a way that is prohibited and disturbs the legislative process…"
> (Andersson, 2022)

Members of the polity making these kinds of statements about social movements are participating in repressive action, specifically, overt channelling. This kind of repression seeks to punish activists with the aim of making them abandon certain kinds of tactics. Similarly, the polity can award social movements when they use repertoires the polity approves of (Earl, 2022: 2). As an example of this awarding, I suggest looking at Greta Thunberg at the beginning of her activism in 2018-2019. Her tactics, which, for example, involved striking in front of the

parliament, were rewarded with invitations to speak at global summits, the European Parliament and finally the UN (Sjögren, 2023: 476). By using this kind of repression, the state usually aims to obtain a preferred set of behaviours without directly using pressure or force to do so (Earl et al., 2022: 4).

Some activists argued, when asked, that this kind of repression from politicians, as seen in the quote above, was relatively unimportant in comparison to changes to policy. Interviewees 5 & 6 expressed the following sentiments when discussing the way politicians had been speaking about the movement.

> "... What do you expect from the state? Like, of course, the state doesn't want us to act... It's not like surprising that of course this is how the state- because it wants to protect itself and it's like status quo with the spending it does and the justifications for it. So I don't think that, like, statements like that shift really the way we act."
> (Interviewee 6)

> "... I think speeches in general they don't really change anything. Of course, if policies change and the way they act towards us, of course they have an impact."
> (Interviewee 5)

Others were of the opinion that these kinds of statements by politicians changed public opinion of activism, which caused other problems for activists in their day-to-day lives. Some of these problems included negative judgments from colleagues and friends, and being painted as extremists or terrorists by others when interviewees' identities as activists were revealed.

> "People who read, the public, see only troublemakers. You are a troublemaker because you perform civil disobedience... Had there been a different tone from above, then maybe the journalism would become a bit different, and there would also be a different atmosphere in society at large, and even in our group ... They trickle down a little, these words..."
> (Interviewee 4)

These statements from the polity function as a way to exacerbate polarisation. By making the protestors out to be a threat to society's functionality and democracy as a system, the polity exacerbates the protestors' bad reputations. Simultaneously, they are making the government out to be good as the defenders of the things protestors supposedly threaten. The primary goal in doing this is, according to Lukito et al. (2022: 13), to delegitimise the protestors as an oppositional force. This becomes more relevant when we consider climate activists' experiences with civilians.

In the Instagram post about climate activists made by Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson in 2023, he made activists out to be a threat to the polity and democracy as a political system, therefore partaking in the repression of climate activists (Kristersson, 2023). When reflecting on this Instagram post, activists expressed frustration and pointed out instances where they felt their actions were portrayed dishonestly. Portraying peaceful citizens trying to get their voices heard as unruly was seen as highly problematic by interviewees.

In the case of interviewee 7, there was also a feeling of appreciation for that kind of statement, because it makes the repression so much more explicit and visible to the public.

> "On the one hand, I think what you read is horrible. It is to mix peaceful activism, and also larger activism, with a totalitarian power, with danger to democracy. It's to differentiate one group ... But this gives us a lot, black on white, evident repression that we activists can use."
> (Interviewee 7)

By this, interviewee 7 means that the more evident the repression is, the more it can be used as a tool in the repertoire of contention. It can be used to show the public how badly climate activists are treated by calling repressive actions out. It is, in some ways, another small-scale innovation in tactics (Martin, 2015: 46).

> "... They started a campaign called hashtag sing for Ulf, where Mothers* Rebellion around the country sang protest songs and posted themselves on video and invited him over for fika and knitting and- In that way, I prefer when politicians are more explicitly expressive in this way."
> (Interviewee 7)

Now, to call the states' repressive actions out, it is important to be able to reach the public with these messages. An important tool used to reach the public is the Media.

5.1.2 Relationship with Media

The relationship between social movements and mass media has historically been unequal. Movements attracted the mass media's attention to the extent that their movements and actions were deemed newsworthy. This meant that activists rarely felt as if they could count on media coverage. Activists and protestors lacked any control over their portrayal in the media. This contributed to a mounting dissatisfaction with the media treatment they received (Tilly et al. 2020). This dissatisfaction can be felt among interviewees, even today.

A conspicuous part of the repression effort seems to come in the form of misinformation by the media. A clear example of this is in the autumn of 2022, when a traffic blockade was said to have resulted in the death of a person in an ambulance. Later, it was discovered to have been a lie staged by a previous committee member of the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna). No one who was caught in the blockade perished (Paxling et al. 2023). When talking to the interview subjects, other such incidents came up. During an action that interviewee 8 participated in, the media printed misinformation about activists stopping ambulance flights, when they, in reality, were outside of the airport the whole time (Borgstöm & Söderin, 2023).

> "We were in the parking lot. Even if we were throwing paint, we were outside of the skyddsobjekt (protected object)."
> (Interviewee 8)

A skyddsobjekt, translated to protected object, is a legal term used to define protected areas where the law allows some protection from outsiders. Unauthorised people can be made to be kept out, authorised people might have to identify themselves, and imaging of the area can be forbidden (SPS 2010:305).

The media had a conversation with the security company at the airport, Swedavia, which delivered the information about climate activists stopping ambulance flights. Journalists decided to trust Swedavia's word without further investigation (Borgström & Söderin, 2023).

> "... That we stopped ambulance flights, that was because Swedavia said so, and then it was written about. And suddenly it became a truth."
> (Interviewee 8)

In the digital age, channelling can take the shape of dis-/misinformation, which activists feel the Swedish media is partially responsible for during this time (Earl et al., 2022: 5). The media's role here is, according to my analysis, similar to that of the study made by García-García & Calvo Borobia (2019). In that study, the media assisted in the repression of protesters by, among other things, painting them as a dangerous mob. The interviewees of this study have, in turn, been painted as dangerous and disruptive to important societal functions.

The media is one of the big actors defining the discourse around climate activism. Activists report on how even the state-owned media company, Sveriges Television (SVT), is reluctant to report on protests where nothing illegal is happening. From interviewee 2's perspective, it seems as if the media is disinterested in activists as humans and their human opinions. One example

brought forward is the time Mothers* Rebellion gathered outside parliament with a one-kilometre-long red scarf (Palmborg, 2024). Interviewee 8, who was present at the action, was not very surprised when the media attention was milder than expected, but expressed that a lot of activists from Mothers* Rebellion were shocked by the lack of media attention. When complaining to SVT, SVT's communicator answered Mothers* Rebellion like this:

> "It is first when the demonstration affects other people's everyday activities, for example, if there is suspicion of crimes being committed in relation to it, or when it forces traffic to stand still, that it becomes more relevant through a news perspective."
> (Järnefors, 2024. Translated by the author)

The demonstration was eventually reported on by SVT, on television and the web (Järnefors, 2024), but the article online was relatively short and contained false information. When the article was published, it claimed the police had not permitted protestors to surround the parliament during the time of the action, which the police had (Bengtsson & Myllynen, 2024).

Interviewee 8 has previous experience with the Media in a similar vein. They say this about journalists who have been following them, intending to write about the interviewee:

> "... I am involved in a lot, so I have had a lot of people at my place. But even then, it never amounts to anything and it- and they- they are very embarrassed. 'I can't get this to work. They only want me to write about Återställ Våtmarker,' for example. They only want to write when something becomes very frightening."
> (Interviewee 8)

According to interviewee 8, this also affects the kind of activism the activist group performs. The likelihood of something appearing in the media is an important factor in the planning process of an action. This also means that groups might decide to do more radical actions, more civil disobedience, to get their message out to the press. Seeing as the polity speaks badly about radical action, and the media deprioritises reporting on less radical action, I would argue that climate activists find themselves in a "damned if they do, damned if they don't" situation. The purpose of activism is to get the message behind your activism out to the public while making yourself as difficult as possible to ignore. The ultimate goal is to make a change. Media attention is a crucial piece of the puzzle, as visibility becomes limited otherwise. I would argue that the media is partaking in repression in the form of channelling by rewarding more confrontational activism with media coverage (Earl, 2022: 1-2), although this

coverage often misrepresents them and their actions. In tandem with the overt channelling performed by the state, these actors are creating an impossibly small window for activists to safely perform actions within while still getting the visibility they require. Activists who wish to do less confrontational activism than civil disobedience find themselves without the ability to do so while reaching their goals of visibility.

5.1.3 The duality of Civilians

The civilians that activists meet and interact with daily behave in several ways around the activist if they are aware of their activist identity. Many have experienced both positive and negative treatment from others. The activists interviewed documented facing a lot of judgment from society for their choice to question the decisions of the state through protest and civil disobedience. Many have been called radicals or extremists by people they meet, and feel as if they are perceived to be "troublemakers" without a cause. The message behind their activism seems to be forgotten. Negative experiences sometimes even include violence.

Some examples of activists' experiences with judgment include that of interviewee 4. Interviewee 4 speaks of the political party they are a part of and the judgment they have faced there as a member of Extinction Rebellion.

> "Yes, it wasn't really accepted to be a part of- of XR (Extinction Rebellion), not because they necessarily disliked XR. I don't think so. But because it could be exploited by opponents, Återställ Våtmarker and that."
> (Interviewee 4)

Interviewees 3 & 4 also reveal that they and other activists were harassed by random passersby during a protest in Stockholm. During the protest, a blockade at Stureplan, interviewee 4 recollects having several people take out their aggressions on the protestors just for participating in the Extinction Rebellion demonstration.

> "... And that I wonder if they would have done to the same extent if the debate in the media was more nuanced."
> (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 7 reveals that after an action aimed at making Malmö city remove a parking lot from a public square, they were run over by a car twice in front of their children. Interviewee 7 found the experience to be difficult, especially as one of their children happened to be quite young at the time.

> "That behaviour for this is- No- no motorist was blocked. No one was hindered from making their way out or away from there. But still it stirred such wrath."
> (Interviewee 7)

Through the lens of Governmentality, a lot of these behaviours from civilians can be seen as a consequence of the internalisation of the state mandate. The state has increasingly used its authority to speak negatively about, try to legislate against, and convict climate activists during their escalation of repressive action towards the movement. At the same time, as seen above, the media have often worked in tandem with the state to normalise these kinds of actions. Some civilians have accepted these repressive actions as legitimate and are now internalising the interests of the state (Robbins, 2020: 76-77). If observed with this in mind, the actions of these civilians can be seen as an effort to not only self-govern but also govern the people in their surroundings according to the values of the state. The actions of the public can then be seen as an effort to correct climate activists through disapproving words and attitudes, or an outright scolding. This affects activists in turn when they feel unwelcome or misunderstood by others. Or, in some cases, have the police called upon them for no ascertainable reason.

> "We were there handing out flyers and it was so funny to see like- they feel threatened. It's just two people outside the company handing out flyers and the security was out … We know that previously they called the police, but it's just like people handing out flyers, you know. So like there is an image we carry."
> (Interviewee 5)

There are also instances of support from the public. Like donations and spontaneous participation in actions. Interviewee 2 received a large amount of hate as a member of Återställ Våtmarker in the beginning, but that amount has decreased. Instead, they feel as if the support has grown in more recent times. In their words, people still find Återställ Våtmarker very annoying, but the public has come to realise that Återställ Våtmarker are peaceful, and that the project group only wants the best for all of them.

> "… I think that it has turned around, like, and that we didn't alter our… our like way to execute our actions made it like, so we could drive it all the way through. From people seeing us like… disgusting, vile humans to like 'Ok shit, these people… they are actually doing peaceful things. They are annoying, but they… they are peaceful and they want the best for us … Had we stopped performing actions, then the image of us would have

> persisted."
> (Interviewee 2)

Extinction Rebellion member, interviewee 7, also mentions occasions where civilians have been supportive of their cause. One instance of support that stuck out to interviewee 7 was the time a truck driver left his post to stand with the activists during a blockade.

> “We were performing a blockade of the oil port in Malmö in connection with when a- a ship, using a false flag bearing Russian oil, came in like sometime after the invasion of Ukraine. Then out comes a truck driver and stands and holds a banner with us. He was also against war and the climate crisis.”
> (Interviewee 7)

These kinds of experiences are emotionally rewarding and uplifting to the activists. These kinds of supportive meetings with civilians supply the interviewed activists with energy to stay active and explore new avenues for their activism. Interviewee 7 shared their story on the internet and got a large supportive response to it.

> “Wrote about the experience, both about being there and performing an action and about- about the legal process and got a large positive response to it. People thought I should, yeah, but send it into this magazine and such. So I absolutely did that.”
> (Interviewee 7, Magazine name has been censored by author)

5.1.4 Meeting the Police

The meetings Swedish climate activists have with the police look different depending on where in the country you are. Many activists have experienced being dispersed by the police. Climate activists are usually long-term activists and are therefore educated in how to handle the police when they try to disperse them. They know all the tricks to avoid police violence or extra charges in court. Still, the threat of violence seems to always be there.

> “We know how to do certain things to avoid being- We know that if we hold onto each other, then they can hit us, so we don’t hold onto each other. If we hold onto things, then they can also say that we have resisted arrest- active resistance or violent resistance. It isn’t violent resistance, but we know that they can say that. So we have educated ourselves at being carried and like just being relaxed.”
> (Interviewee 8)

Among some activists, there is a fear or feeling of being surveilled by the police. In the case of interview subject 7, they have felt both as a person who tends to take on a more leadership-like role during actions. As Extinction Rebellion, the group they work with the most, is an autonomous and flat movement, no such leaders exist. Still, the police have suspected them of being a leader during some actions and expressed this to their face.

> "Have at least on three occasions heard from police on-site that like: 'We suspect that it's you who is the, like, organiser and responsible, so we're going to start an investigation about you for that.' And I often take on a managing role on-site. See, are people feeling good, are things functioning, are people doing what they should. I understand that it looks that way."
> (Interviewee 7)

This threat of police surveillance is what Earl et al. (2022: 3) call pre-emptive policing, which is a type of covert coercion. By engaging what they perceive to be protest leaders to either warn them about their actions being monitored or threaten them with prosecution, the police hope to deter future protests (Earl et al, 2022: 3).

The only place where climate activists document being victims of police violence is in the capital. Previously, activists in this area had a lot of contact with dialogue police, whose role is to keep the right to protest intact while preserving law and order. The dialogue police works as a messenger between the police and the protestors (Polisen, n. a.). In more recent times, a police task force is sent out instead of the dialogue police. According to interviewee 8, this task force uses unnecessary violence. The interviewee explains how the task force twists your arm, which caused interviewee 8's arm to be hurt.

> "... I am both long and big, and they thought I would weigh less, and so they don't succeed in carrying me, and they don't dare stand for that, so they just pull. So. I have like destroyed my arm. I have... Yeah, but things that have emerged are that they twist your arm ..."
> (Interviewee 8)

5.1.5 Going to court

As a result of repression, climate activists have to appear in court more often than before. Things that would allow you to leave with a warning can now land you in prison. This means many of the interviewees have experience of going to court.

Activists have previously expressed that many innocent people have been charged with crimes they did not commit. According to an article in Dagens Arena, this has happened because of a case overload in the courts. The article states that some activists who listened to the police and moved when asked were later charged with disobeying a police order, and in one case, an activist was charged with violent resistance despite not touching the police (Persson, 2023).

In the case of interviewee 6, they were present at a demonstration at an airport in Stockholm. Interviewee 6 was told to remove themselves from the area, but heard none of it over the loud noise of the demonstration. They were brought to court for disobeying a police order.

> “But we also- like because you (referring to Interviewee 6) went to court. This situation happened. They didn't practice anything illegal. They were just there.”
> (Interviewee 5. Pronouns have been changed by the author.)

Interviewee 6 speaks of the process as a rather helpless one, where you are completely dependent on the jurors and their decisions. The chances of getting your charges dropped, as perceived by interviewee 6, are rather low. In many of the cases interviewee 6 was allowed to spectate other activists were heavily restricted in what they were allowed to say in their defence. Some had planned to use the courts as a platform to get their message across. Some had written speeches that they were not allowed to read in court.

> “I mean, I got lucky because I could actually speak.”
> (Interviewee 6)

A few activists also unveil their experience of being handled without respect for their rights when under arrest and held in custody by the courts. Interviewee 7 was held in custody overnight after an action in Växsjö. When being held overnight, you have a right to have your closest family member informed of what is happening to you. Interviewee 7 left their wife’s contact information.

> “... and she was never called by the police.”
> (Interviewee 7)

When speaking of repercussions of these experiences in court, interviewee 6 themselves have not experienced any repercussions as of yet, but also did not seem to be enthusiastic about their prospects for the future.

> "No, I mean, we read it in the news that people like, because of their activism, lose their jobs or like… Like the Hamnarbetare (Dockworker) who did the blockade in the Gothenburg airport. I think that's like serious. But we got no job, so what do we have to lose?"
> (Interviewee 6)

These kinds of arrests and legal consequences are an example of overt coercion, with the goal of using observable punishment to deter the targeted activism movement (Earl et al., 2022: 3). As seen here, activists are put in many situations that can cause some serious harm to their quality of life.

5.1.6 Being a Climate Activist under Capitalism

Living under Capitalism as a climate activist openly is difficult; you might, as a wage labourer, suffer social exclusion, vulnerability on the job market and other participation costs that put your livelihood at risk. Of the interviewed activists, many expressed that they had once been or were currently worried about losing work or work opportunities.

In the case of interviewees 3 and 4, they have both had experiences that made them feel as if they were prevented from advancing in their careers because of their participation in the Climate Movement. While there is no definitive proof that this is true, upward mobility in their careers has stagnated to a degree.

> "… I have not moved forward either… I cannot say it, but you get that feeling. It's probably also that you think that: Yeah, you are not really in sync with the values of society and that."
> (Interviewee 4)

There is a case that displays some of the potential consequences of being a repressed climate activist under Capitalism. Marie, a Swedish Energy Agency Employee, lost her job after she was found to be a part of the group Mothers* Rebellion. As is suggested by its name, it primarily consists of mothers. Marie's probationary employment as the national gas coordinator was terminated after her employer found out which activist group she had participated in. Marie states that she was open about her activism before, but never mentioned specifically which activist group she was engaged in. According to her, the question never came up. Because of Mothers* Rebellion's connection to Extinction Rebellion and Extinction Rebellion's use of civil disobedience, her participation in Mothers* Rebellion was deemed a security risk. Marie herself says she never participated in any civil disobedience (TT, 2024; Birgander, 2024). Following the termination from her post, Marie has been a victim of harassment

and stalking for her participation in peaceful non-confrontational climate activism (Birgander, 2024).

The medial coverage of this case was, to begin with, very negative towards Marie. Interviewee 7 was directly involved in the case and worked, inter alia, to get a sympathetic view of the case on the media's radar. They also mentioned that the Aarhus Convention (UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters) took an interest in the case early on. This case is one of the cases that has caused the Aarhus Convention a lot of worry for Sweden's future as a democracy (Alestig, 2025). Interviewee 7 felt as if the involvement of the Aarhus Convention was majorly beneficial to the movement, especially when the words of activists felt as if they were being disregarded.

> "Things that come out of my mouth are worth nothing. There is no trust for me among the public, but if the same thing comes from a non-activist scientist or a human rights lawyer, or an FN official, then it's- then the same words are worth so much. I can play that game."
> (Interviewee 7)

5.2 Adapting under pressure

Most of the experiences with repression the interviewees chose to relay as stories are a mix of external and character-bound narrators: a mix of second-hand stories and lived stories. While all of them have an in-person experience with some kind of repression, a few have been lucky to mostly hear stories of repression and retell them as external narrators. However, activists feel the fallout, even the ones who have not had an experience with the kind of repression that has drastic, direct consequences on people's lives and livelihoods. This fallout will be explored in this chapter.

5.2.1 Being human under repression

It is difficult to be a human under repression. Most climate activists live normal lives outside their activism and work hard to balance their activist identity with their everyday self. In situations where activists had been victims of overt coercion, like arrests or impeding court proceedings (Earl, 2022: 1), the activists who are parents mention having a lot of complicated feelings of anxiety in connection with arrests or court proceedings.

> "Yes, we have to start explaining different- yeah, how the criminal justice system works for small children. Quite a bizarre thing to do… It kept catching up to me, and I walked with the smallest kids, was about to leave

> them at preschool, and like holding hands in the preschool yard and the thought of being denied- It- To be locked away from the kids somehow…"
> (Interviewee 7)

In the case of interviewee 8, they were once held in a detention centre overnight without the ability to contact one of their children and tell them what was happening. Interviewee 8 had not wanted their child to know about the action the interviewee was partaking in, and was put in a tricky situation because of the inability to contact their child and tell them what was happening.

> "No, there was something about the seriousness of us going to the airport and such things. I didn't want them to know so as not to get them involved in it."
> (Interviewee 8, pronouns have been changed by the author)

Many climate activists battle with feelings of hopelessness and anger because of the current politics of climate change. Especially when their efforts to reach the polity with their dissatisfaction are treated as a crime. According to interviewee 3, the polity is uninterested in listening to climate activists and their cry for more action to prevent and alleviate the climate catastrophe. This is the reason why tactics like civil disobedience become relevant. That way, the polity is being disturbed enough to listen to them (Herngren, 1990: 15, 21).

> "It's not that we want to go and destroy anything. Destroy a meeting or a conversation. But it is a resignation that we must be able to express in some way. And then you use things like civil disobedience in some way; you go in and shout- thus trying to make your voice heard in whatever forum. How are we supposed to reach the authority? How should we- They- they aren't living up to the climate goals they have promised to fulfil. And we just feel like the time is running out and- and the young, who are younger, feel it too. And feel a total hopelessness. And then you must fight back, I feel. Because we have no other way."
> (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 8 was not born in Sweden, but came here 30 years ago. They express anger and disbelief when the government is brought up in conversation. When they arrived, they could never have imagined Sweden having the government it has today. Many depictions of Sweden today are incorrect. That the government wants to present itself as a positive environmental example because Sweden has recycled their plastic bottles for 50 years is wrong, they say.

For some, repression in the form of accusatory statements is very tough to handle. In the case of interviewee 2, backlash from activist action can sometimes lead to self-doubt.

> "This is not something I do because I think it's fun. It's not something I enjoy in any way. It is relatively difficult to have to make people mad."
> (Interviewee 2)

They determine that it is important as a citizen in this society to hold onto the knowledge of what is morally right or wrong. The constant onslaught of hate can cause doubt in one's choices. Interviewee 2 has been a victim of a lot of hate in connection with Återställ Våtmarker's highway blockade in 2022. The public sent threatening emails after a lot of negative media coverage, which caused the interviewee a lot of mental anguish.

> "... it's not always easy to hold onto those things because it can also cause doubt in oneself when there is backlash and such. 'Have I done the right thing?' and so on."
> (Interviewee 2)

5.2.2 Movement Participation Cost

As the closure of political opportunities occurs, as can be ascertained from the increase in repression of protests, there is also an increase in the cost of participation (Earl, 2022: 5). By listening to the words of interviewee 2, it is evident that there is a high cost of participation, for example, in Återställ Våtmarker. After the first accusations of sabotage, people who showed interest in the group were scared to participate in the civil disobedience the group was performing.

> "Like, there were- there were many who were afraid as well. People didn't dare join up. But there was very high interest, and very many people who contacted us and like said: 'I don't dare. I don't dare like go out and sit on the highway, like because I am afraid of the consequences of that. But I would very much like to be a part and work in some way... Be active, give money, things like that.' It was more like that, I think."
> (Interviewee 2)

Simultaneously, the heightened interest was evident. In the case of Återställ Våtmarker, the phenomenon known as backlash eventually began to occur. Repression didn't cause the project group's mobilisation to dampen long-term (Earl, 2022: 5), but instead led to increased interest, and more people joined the project group, according to interviewee 1.

While no interview subject could conclude that their numbers had definitely been negatively affected by repression, many hint that the Climate movement has been brought into a new lull. The movement seems to have entered a later part of the protest cycle (Martin, 2015: 50-51). Some numbers might have been lost, and members have entered an era of reflection as a consequence of the high participation cost. Acts of civil disobedience have been few in bigger groups like Extinction Rebellion, where the group's climate usually allows for it. This suggests mobilisation has been dampened to a certain degree (Martin, 2015: 50-51).

Consequences of the higher cost of participation include increased stress over performing activism that might result in charges. In interviewee 3's Extinction Rebellion cell, which happens to be of a smaller size, many members feel afraid of doing activism. This group has dabbled in civil disobedience and done actions without permission from the police previously. Now, the members have become more cautious. There is a fear of being repressed, and there is a fear of getting an unfavourable outcome, which has caused difficulties for the group.

> "We want to continue so we don't lose- like that, everyone ceases acting. We need to find something where everyone feels comfortable and so on." (Interviewee 3)

Even people in larger groups who have decided to perform civil disobedience feel the effects of the increased participation cost. Interviewee 8 recounts their experience with the consequences of repression. They reveal that a majority of people who perform civil disobedience feel stressed over the potential consequences. While activists are invested in the message they are trying to get across with their activism, activists are also living a life here and now, interviewee 8 explains. There is a need to balance the activism and its consequences with that life.

For some people who perform more civil disobedience, repression has caused burnout, and some have even made the decision to step back from the movement. Interviewee 6 explains what happened to the other people who were charged and went to court alongside them after the demonstration at an airport in Stockholm:

> "A lot of them that went to court afterwards were like burned out because we don't have the resources to support the people like we want to, and like all these things. So for sure, people who then experience the repression are like: 'For what am I doing that? Like, I can't. Like, it's just not sustainable. Like the way we practice activism is just not sustainable."

(Interviewee 6)

Some of the climate activists want to make it clear that, although they are repressed and the participation costs are high, they are a very privileged group of activists. Their experience is that many come from the middle class, are white and well educated, and this is important when speaking about the repression they are subjected to. Environmental or climate movements in the global north are relatively heterogeneous (della Porta & Portos, 2021: 26). However, in research, the class composition of climate and environmental movements is contested. Some studies have found a middle-class majority, but others have found a mix of people from the middle-class and the working-class (della Porta & Portos, 2021: 26-27).

5.2.3 Moving forward as a movement

Some activists see the repression as a sign that they need to escalate, which is something that parts of Extinction Rebellion did early on. Escalation is a tool to be used when the future prospects of the politics of climate change start to look worse, and when the consequences of performing civil disobedience become harsher. Interviewee 7 explains:

> "That criminal classifications used are much more severe than they were before - Things that didn't lead to like criminal proceedings at all are guaranteed to lead to prison today - and that controls how we, like many of us, choose to act. Simultaneously, we have created a systematisation in the disobedience activism and tried to create this mass mobilisation. And that is- There are different ways to escalate within activism. You can like, make increasingly grave statements, or you can go after more high-profile targets, or… Within the frame of the principles of civil disobedience, perfrom more severe crimes, but one way to escalate is to just do it repeatedly or just be many. And to escalate creates like a spotlight on the activists during actions, and also the questions… The side that wants to preserve the status quo in some way also has to escalate and hit back. They begin to create profile cases that people say, 'Yes, that's how bad it went for them, and then I need to be careful.' But when they escalate, they usually push too hard… That repression can become a form of ammunition or a tool that we can use to fight back."
> (Interviewee 7)

This change in tactics in the face of repression could be considered a tactical substitution (Earl, 2022: 6). It is, however, an interesting one, as escalation is more typical earlier in the protest cycle, and also more likely to be met with more repression (Martin, 2015: 50-51). As interviewee 7 expresses, they will use

this repression, especially the repression that is disproportional to the activism it is trying to deter, as a tool in their resistance. Still, we see interviewee 7 hold themselves within the structured options of the current repertoire of contention (Martin, 2015: 46), never straying outside the principles of civil disobedience.

Simultaneously, repression has contributed to a period of reconsideration over tactics and purpose. Repression itself indicates more closed political opportunities and a less intense time in the protest cycle (Martin, 2015: 50-51). As mentioned in the chapter on the movement participation cost, participation in activism under closed political opportunities means a larger sacrifice (Earl, 2022: 5). Some activists experience fatigue as a consequence of the repression they experience. This means there is a need to reconsider the movement's repertoire of contention for a future tactical substitution that feels sustainable for members. Especially when there is a general feeling among activists that ordinary civilians do nothing to change their behaviours in the face of the impending climate catastrophe. Especially then, it is important to know what questions to ask. We see these thoughts being expressed among activists.

> "... in the beginning we had a lot of actions .... In the end, we were like, okay, but why did we decide to do this specific action to achieve this goal? What was the goal?"
> (Interviewee 5)

> "We need to be honest with that we won't save the climate. We know that ... But we perform actions where we still demand- ask for there to be stuff done. And I think the repression is a part of it, and that is horrible. But at the same time we have opened our eyes more and more for like, how all these struggles go together, and how human rights are, well, but like an umbrella. So if we aren't being protected as activists. Then... How are we supposed to be able to keep on resisting if we are beaten down, sit in prison and what do I know... Soon maybe someone dies. Even in Sweden ... There is a lot of reflection and I think there are also some who become a little, 'Oh god! We do nothing now!' and I think that: But... We must actually disrupt even the feeling that exists in society. Everyone runs around and never thinks. That's why it's the way it is. And that we could end up there too, that we just run, run, run and so on.

> "So we started talking about this, well, but what answers are we seeking. No, what questions should we ask now, more than what answers ... And also realise such things as, but we are like- the group that performs civil disobedience will keep doing that, but we begin to see this- You what I said has been the means, to build networks, to organise. To realise: but that is what is the goal. Because whatever happens we will have each

> other. We have learned things. We are going to be more prepared than many others to readjust our thinking, think new thoughts, and like regroup … So on the surface, a bit lost, but really on the way to becoming more wise."
> (Interviewee 8)

Inside the climate movement, we see the escalation that interviewee 7 spoke about sometimes happening in relatively close succession with the discussions about the movement's future purpose and goals. While some groups are experiencing a period of reflection and actively work on their future purpose, others have driven members who have decided to make actions happen and escalate. According to many of the interviewees, Återställ Våtmarker is one such group.

> "Of course, in some groups, we see actions happening and it feels like they are really well organised. But I think when you go inside and see from a different perspective, it's like maybe they just have someone that is pushing through or like leading."
> (Interviewee 5)

> "… Like all the Återställ Våtmarker people, what were they doing before? Like a lot of them were XR people before. Right. So like they, they figured it's not enough and then they stepped up the game."
> (Interviewee 6)

Other tactical substitutions are built upon this need for a more sustainable way to work. The base of the development for this tactic is collaboration. Seeing as there are many different struggles to struggle with, it has always been difficult for climate activists in Sweden to mass mobilise. According to Interviewee 8, the movement has instead worked on making networks that connect different kinds of movements. The aim was to work together, support in areas where others could not, and to begin with, it was called to hook arms. Later, the way of working was called puzzle pieces.

> "… we don't have the energy to be everywhere. We need only see to it to cover- that all pieces are there. And where there are none, then maybe that is where we need to develop and resettle … The previous versions were more, like, 'Yeah, we should cooperate. That's really nice.' But no one has the energy for that. It requires- everything requires so much from you. And it- and now we are more in this- yes, well, we should really have a helicopter view."
> (Interviewee 8)

The new lull that the movement has entered, where discussions surrounding the future of the movement occur, has, however, caused some activists to feel like the emotional fulfilment they get out of performing activism is at risk of running out. Some of the things that contribute to this emotional fulfilment are, according to interviewees 5 & 6, the social elements that organising and performing larger actions entail. After all, as mentioned by Rucht (2023: 8), the social encounters are what bind the movement together, and when something like mutual goals and practices start to misalign, there will be people who feel unsatisfied.

> "So we talk and it's always like, 'Yeah, we don't know what we're doing.' Like we don't know where to be active, where we're gonna be. Because there's also like this feeling of feeling fulfilled doing activism. Right. Because if you just do it and you don't get anything from it, you're gonna burn out really fast."
> (Interviewee 5)

The social dimension of the climate movements remains important, especially when members meet with external actors. Many interviewees speak about how internal support helps them bring internal values and ideas to the outside world. The activist group helps individual activists feel like their concerns about the climate are valid even outside the group.

> "Me and another fellow party member (of a political party) … are a part of the XR-group and we have written a- against the local party executive and that, we have taken the initiative that we are to stop the expansion of the airport The airport, we cannot invest a billion to build more… That went against the party elite, but we still got it though during the annual meeting and now- And a debate about it in the local press. The interesting thing with this group is, I didn't get my energy from my party group, if you can say that. It was this XR group, and without them, we wouldn't have the energy to stand our ground against the party organisation. But still we got it to pass, so I mean, when people come together, you obtain so much energy."
> (Interviewee 4)

This bolsters the social dimension of the climate movement and contributes to helping when fighting injustice, be it repression or changes that risk contributing negatively to climate change. It grants increased bravery in times when bravery is hard to come by.

> "The way I think about activism, it- To find the bravery to even do things I don't actually have the bravery for. What is it called? It permeates my

> whole life, even if I work, and don't do activism full-time, I am still an activist full-time. Everything I do is informed by... Both the climate question, but also that, "I will not be a person who is silent. I will not be the one who is silent, basically"-feeling. And if I am fired? Yeah, then I get fired, damn it."
> (Interviewee 8)

6.0 Conclusion

By investigating the impact repression has had on the climate movement, I have taken a step to expand upon the share of social movement research that focuses on explaining the consequences of repression. By asking the question, "How has the attempt at repressing climate activism affected climate activists and their social movement in Sweden?" this study has attempted to uncover how climate activists experience social exclusion and how they adapt under the pressure of repression. The study was based on data taken from several semistructured life world interviews with 8 climate activists. The data was analysed using the Political Process Model and Governmentality. The Political Process Model was utilised to discuss when and why repression happened, and related concepts such as Political opportunities, Repertoires of contention and Cycles of protest were used in the discussion of the cost of participation, strategies employed by climate activists and the dampening of mobilisation, respectively. Governmentality was used more specifically to discuss the behaviour of civilians that occurred during their meeting with people who are climate activists openly.

Since 2022, Swedish climate activists have been subjected to a wave of repressive actions against them. These repressive actions take the form of increased prosecution from the criminal justice system, more arrests, and the badmouthing and spreading of disinformation about climate activists by the polity. Activists also share their experiences with the media, highlighting how activists' words and actions are manipulated by them, leading to untruths being reported to the public. Additionally, we see some civilians absorbing the image that has been painted of climate activists by politicians and the media. Most of the interview subjects of this study had an experience with judgmental looks and words from people in their surroundings if their identity as activists was known. Activists document being called radicals and extremists for being part of groups which perform, or are associated with groups that perform, civil disobedience. In more extreme cases, activists were victims of verbal or physical assault committed by civilians. Finally, the increased repression has made losing your job as a result of being a climate activist a real threat to many. In this study, we also examined how vulnerable climate activists were in the workplace, with their activism sometimes being perceived as a problem at their place of work. Many of the climate activists interviewed experienced worry about losing their work or felt that their upward mobility was limited because they were open to the public about their activism.

The adaptations made by the Climate movement in response to repression have advanced in two ways. The first being by escalating. Repression often leads to dampened mobilisation (Earl, 2022: 5), and while this seems to be the case in the Swedish context as well, the climate movement finds other ways to resist. By using other means than mobilisation, activists find ways to escalate. One such way has been to perform several actions in several locations at once, or by performing many actions in close succession. The second adaptation is to have a time of reconsideration. A major effect of repression for the climate activists was fatigue. This fatigue is also one of the more important reasons why the time of reconsideration is needed. To create a more sustainable climate within the Climate movement in a time where it is repressed, some activists argued that this was an important step in the process.

Future research could investigate how activists navigate the narrowing window of safe activism that can be performed when state channelling and media channelling work in tandem to deter more confrontational activism and silence the less confrontational, respectively. In a situation where one is guaranteed to get an activist arrested, and the other to remain unseen, who would the activist navigate the situation? Additionally, further research into what adaptations the Climate movements made in the global north under repression could unveil additional information on how these movements work in later stages of the protest cycle.

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