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The heating Climate of Populism

A qualitative analysis of the ideological connection between mainstream populist parties and climate denial

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Abstract

Why is there no *Green Populism*? Though populist parties are growing increasingly stronger in most countries, and climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time, their engagement with the subject seems to be exclusively oppositional towards climate mitigation efforts. This is puzzling since the existence of numerous pro-climate mitigation grassroots movements suggests a public demand for climate policy that is unmet by mainstream political parties and would therefore lend itself well to any populist party. By coding party manifestos of chosen populist parties and analyzing the resulting codes through Goffmanian frame analysis, this paper seeks to find an answer to this question.

Keywords

Populism, Global Warming, Climate Denial, Framings, Political Parties, Ideology

Abstrakt

Warum gibt es keinen *Grünen Populismus*? Obgleich populistische Parteien in den meisten Ländern am Erstarken sind, und der Klimawandel eines der dringendsten Anliegen unserer Zeit darstellt, beschränkt sich ihre Aktivität in dem Bereich auf Opposition gegen Klimaschutz Maßnahmen. Dies verwundert, da die Existenz diverser pro Klimaschutz Graswurzel Bewegungen zeigt, dass es eine öffentliche Nachfrage nach Klimaschutz Politiken gibt, welche von den Parteien des politischen Mainstreams nicht bedient wird, weshalb sie sich populistischen Parteien geradezu anbietet. Durch Codieren und Analysieren der Parteiprogramme ausgewählter populistischer Parteien gemäß der Goffman'schen Frame Analyse, versucht diese Arbeit eine Antwort zu finden.

Stichwörter

Populismus, Erderwärmung, Klimaleugnung, Framings, Politische Parteien, Ideologie

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1. Introduction

In summer of 2024 it had already become apparent, that the year would be the overall hottest on record (c.f. Peck, 2024, Aug 8th). This appearance followed a streak of at the time 14 consecutive months of highest temperatures ever to be recorded (cf. Bateman, 2024, Aug 12th). While this development is alarming, it does not yet spell doom for the planet and its inhabitants. In fact, a lot has already been achieved, when it comes towards the mitigation of climate change. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) policies that have already gone into effect are projected to limit the average global warming to 2.4 °C by the year 2100, while current pledges if followed through would lower it towards 1.7°C. Even so they warn “*global emissions must roughly halve by 2030 to keep the 1.5 °C goal within reach.*” (Wesley, 2024, Jan 22nd). Failure to achieve the 1.5 °C benchmark is not an option, since it may trigger several climate tipping points, resulting in cascading effects, that would take any control over the scope of global devastation out of our hands (cf. Einhorn, 2024, Jan 16th). The necessary economic transition whether it succeeds or fails will be the domineering political task of the 21st century. For its success it is crucial that enacted climate policies need to remain active, pledged policies must be followed through, and additional policies have to be implemented. To do so policy makers will be confronted with the task of harboring the highest possible support of every societal pocket.

Given the scale of the necessary transformation towards Net Zero, it is unsurprising, that societal pockets of opposition have already been established. One such societal pocket that has seemingly unanimously taken the stance of fighting against climate mitigation efforts in almost every country, appear to be mostly right-wing, populist parties. While the connection between populism and opposition towards climate mitigation policies has been firmly established within literature, there is little analysis of the reasons for such a correlation. In this paper, I will strive to better understand the reasoning behind the populist opposition, which may help to counter their argumentations and thus facilitate a higher likelihood of keeping the existential 1.5 °C threshold. To do so I intend to qualitatively analyze the ideological content of the populist worldview, as it relates towards climate mitigation policies.

Within the analysis I will take the standpoint, that populism operates as an ideology, that rhetorically establishes an antagonistic societal dualism between “the People” and “the Elites”. This conceptualization of Populism and alternative interpretations to it, will be discussed in further

detail, within the Literature section. As it is highly topical, I will also discuss Climate Denial - which isn't merely the outright denial of scientific fact, but a multitude of concurring rhetorical strategies, that all have in common that they aim to prevent or hinder climate mitigation policies as much as possible - in the same section.

While the populist framework of the *People vs the Elites* is contingent with opposition towards climate mitigation policies, it does not consistently necessitate this opposition. In fact, this framework would easily allow for the formulation of demands for swift climate mitigation actions, as the world and thus the people are being brought to peril, for the short- to medium-term profit of economic and political elites. This framing may arguably even be a better fit for the populist modus operandi, than something akin to, *for some reason, the elites who are bad, are enacting climate mitigation policies, that supposedly hurt the people in some way*. While such a statement can be formulated, even in a meaningful manner – in contrast to a tautological manner which would state that the policies are bad because they are being enacted by the elites, who are bad – but it requires some contrived argumentations for the elites' reasons, the manners in which climate mitigation is actually harmful, and even needs to redefine the term elites, since economic and political elites who profit from the utilization of fossil fuels are most definitely not among the elites who are enacting climate mitigation policies. It's just not as straightforward, as the comparably simply natural disaster is being taken into account for profits narrative. Since both narratives are possible within populist rhetoric, it surprises, as to why only one of them ever gets utilized by populist parties, especially since the chosen one demands a higher degree of argumentative effort. I believe the reason for this may be discovered within the ideological framework of populism itself. I will further discuss, this puzzle of the absence of pro climate populism and some interpretations of it, within the theory section.

It is my intention to uncover ideological components within populism, that lend themselves towards what can broadly be described as a *climate skeptical* perspective. I believe that common populist attitudes, such as distrust of elites and expertise, general anti-mainstream attitudes, and conspiratorial believe systems are part of the cause for this. The literature further suggests that culture war topics, such as a value-based opposition towards green parties (cf. Wirth 2022), and by proxy opposition towards green policies, and the tendency to reframe every issue as an issue of

migration (cf. Malm 2021) play into this is well. All of this will be discussed in greater detail within the theory section.

There is lively debate about the nature of populism, especially whether it constitutes a form of ideology or a mere style of politics. I will be employing the former conceptualization as it has been suggested by Cas Mudde and other authors (cf. Mudde 2004, Hillje 2018). This conceptualization, alongside with its counterpoint, as it is held by authors such as Chantal Mouffe (cf. Mouffe 2018), will be discussed within the literature section.

There is a wide variety of argumentations and tactics in the promotion of what can be summarized as climate skeptical or denialist attitudes – though these phrasings themselves will need some, clarification, and contextualization. Their different forms, as well as their prevalence among right-wing parties in general, and pronounced to an even higher degree among their populist incarnations - which constitutes the fundamental puzzle of this endeavor – as they have been suggested by numerous authors such as Andreas Malm will be discussed further within the Literature and Theory sections (cf. Malm 2021, Otteni 2022).

To understand the ideological core of populism, as it relates towards climate policies, I intend to analyze framing devices used by populists when they are engaging with the subject. For this I will collect the most recent party manifestos of chosen populist parties as sources; formulate a code-book, comparably to the *Comparative Manifesto Project* (CMD), that defines whether something relates to climate-issues or not, as well as what the expressed stance is; and code the sources accordingly. The relevantly coded segments shall form the data for my analysis, which will be conducted according to Goffmanian Frame Analysis (cf. Goffman 1974).

The intention of my paper is strictly to identify and analyze ideological components of populism and employed framing devices by populist parties. I will not analyze or judge whether these are based in reality, the result of sound logic, lead in their conclusion towards sensible policy proposals, or any such matter.

In the paper I will begin by discussing the literature, as it relates to populism as well as towards climate denial. In the populism section I will discuss different conceptualizations of populism and justify the one I choose to apply for the context of this thesis. In the climate denial section, I will be talking about what constitutes climate denial, what different forms of climate denial exist and

how they relate to populism. In the hence following theory section, I will explain in detail, why I suspect an inherent connection between populism and climate denial. Having done so I will outline the research design with a focus on the designed code book and how the corresponding codes were utilized. Lastly, I'll provide the findings for each examined party individually as well as an overall summary.

Systematic literature has repeatedly demonstrated a link between populist parties and anti-climate mitigation sentiments. Even the texts that do provide interpretations of this phenomenon (cf. eg. Malm 2021, Otteni 2022, and Wirth 2022) focus on the modus operandi in which populists are doing this, but hardly examine, why this connection exists in the first place. Furthermore, it is worth examining how an unclaimed political field, in this case “*Green Populism*” or “*pro-climate Populism*”, can subsist when there exists an unmet demand within the voter base.

2. Literature

2.1 Populism

Two topics of crucial importance need to be discussed for this thesis: Populism and Climate Denial. Starting with Populism, the term Populism is very commonly used in everyday conversations about and media coverage of politics, yet seldom in a way that builds upon a concrete and applicable definition of what Populism supposedly entails. Within everyday speech, meaning the usage of laymen, as well as politicians and public media, the term Populism is most often merely applied as a label for politicians or political parties, who argue in bad faith, appeal to the lower level instincts of their voting base, oversimplify issues, resort to the usage of fake news or conspiracy theories, or any combination of the above (cf. Munro 2024). While all these characteristics frequently correlate with Populism, they offer at best a vague recognition of whether something appears to be populist or not. Since they are only characteristics, they do however not amount to a clear-cut definition of Populism, since they are not limited to the field of Populism – neither their presence nor absence, is sufficiently able to judge whether something is populist. The Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde also points out, that this kind of definition merely describes opportunism and demagoguery and doesn't suffice for a scientific definition (Mudde 2004, 176-177). Another usage of the term Populism that can frequently be found within everyday speech, is it being used as a synonym for right wing nativist, separatist, or exclusionary politics. This is understandable since the most prominent populist movements of the recent past, such as for example *Pegida* and the *Tea*

Party, or populist Parties, such as the UK Independent Party *UKIP* among others neatly fit within this realm of politics. This is however merely a contemporary contingency. None of the listed policies are exclusively found within Populism, nor does a populist party necessarily resort to all or any of them. Therefor this usage only offers a shallow understanding of what Populism is, as it merely conflates it with goals some Populists sometimes seek to achieve. On other occasions Populism is even used in a less operationalization-able fashion, that merely seeks to apply a derogatory term towards a political topic, politician, or party, which the author disagrees with or garners animosity against (cf. Eramo 2013). Neither of these slight of hands applications of the term Populism, that we may come across on a day-to-day basis offer any meaningful understanding of Populism, even though our familiarity with the term may suggest otherwise. At its worst this may create the appearance, that Populism is just another empty signifier within contemporary political discourse.

Gladly this couldn't be further from the truth of the matter. Contrary to the vagueness of everyday speech, the field of political science has conceptualized numerous precise and measurable definitions of Populism within academic literature. A widely agreed upon definition of Populism is "*populism is a way of doing politics in which "the people" are pitted in conflict against others – various "elites", local minorities, immigrants, foreigners*" (Velasco 2022, 13). On top of this mostly consensual view of populism build a multitude of conceptions of the subject. In *Political Theory of Populism* Nadia Urbinati suggests a topology of what she calls *maximalist* and *minimalist* interpretations of Populism (cf. Urbinati 2018). This topology sorts, theories on Populism according to their scope, so that minimalist theories focus on the style, strategies, and ideological tropes of Populism, while maximalist theories concern themselves more with the relation of Populism with democracy, often employing a rather constructivist view (ibid. 2018, 116-118). Another topology of populism proposed by Sergiu Gherghina et al. draws a distinction between classical and advanced populism or *neo-populism*, that aligns with historical contingency, but is defined through the *popular identity* (cf. Gherghina 2013). Where classical populism acted "constituvist" for the formation of a political identity of the people, advanced populism does not require a foundational act but acts through an "*ad-hoc identitarian reunion of individuals, groups, social classes, of ideas and political trends, of ethnic minorities or caste interests, of individual passions, tastes and dispositions*" (ibid. 2013, 18). As the existence of such topologies suggests, there is a multitude of conceptualizations of Populism to be found within academic literature, that

becomes even vaster once one leaves the realm of political science. This may even hinder the understanding of any given author, who does not explicitly state which definition of Populism they are applying. It is furthermore worth mentioning, that the term Populism may have widely differing connotations depending on its historical and regional context. Especially within Latin America are numerous historical parties and political movements to be found, that are defined as populist mostly through means of self-identification¹ but have barely any resemblance to the contemporary application of the term Populism, as it is used within literature that focuses primarily on Europe and Northern America. This last usage of the word is the kind of Populism I'm talking about here, and of it there are basically two interpretations to be found within political science literature, though the details and scope of the application of the term may differ between individual authors.

These two mainline conceptualizations are: Populism as a mere style of politics, as suggested by Chantal Mouffe among others, and Populism as a fully-fledged ideology, as suggested by Johannes Hillje among others (cf. Hillje 2018, Mouffe 2018). Though both concepts agree on a lot of things about Populism, their central difference of style or ideology – one may even paraphrase this as style or substance – is a crucial one. To exemplify this difference, I'd like to take a look at the conceptualizations of Populism by two rather prominent authors. I choose the Belgian political scientist Chantal Mouffe for the Populism is an ideology camp, and the German political scientist Johannes Hillje for the camp that conceptualizes Populism as an ideology. I choose these two examples, since they are basically blueprints of each academic position, and since they have the added benefit of being published in the very same year independent of one-another, which underlines the fact, that this debate is by no means trivial or settled.

Mouffe's view that Populism is a mere style of politics, is grounded in the fact, that Populism in and of itself makes no claims about the organization of a society, but instead lends its political capital and goals from other ideologies. It is therefore a mere tactic of advocacy, that may very well be applied towards any number of useful aims, such as the promotion of democratic values, and advocacy for progressive or labor-oriented goals. She beliefs this would be a worthwhile endeavor, since the appeal of Populism stems from its capacity to turn marginalized groups into

¹ Authors Note: This Latin American self-identified *populist* movements are and were mostly made up of grassroots movements on behalf of marginalized groups, such as the indigenous populations, environmental activists, anti-colonial and -imperial movements, and demand for democratization. They are more akin to the US Civil Rights movement than to any contemporary Populist Party in Western Europe.

political actors, who can henceforth voice their demands for political recognition within the populist movement. This would in turn create an inclusive populist movement, which doesn't need to resort to Xenophobia which mostly constitutes existing populist movements and instead promote an open society (cf. Mouffe 2018, 286-299).²

Hillje's view on Populism differs fundamentally. While he would concede that Populism does not offer positive organization principles in and of itself, he'd view this as a feature rather than a bug, and it doesn't mean that Populism is no ideology. From his point of view Populism offers the same basic functions that any ideology does: a clear anchor, that guides all political and societal beliefs, and serves as a lens to understand the world at large. In the case of Populism this lens or ideological core is the existence of an insurmountable antagonism between the People³ and the Elites, that is ever-present and can exclusively be overcome by rule of the Populist Party. This will constitute the liberation of the People and thusly create *True Democracy*. As one may recognize the People are very much in the center of Hillje's concept of Populism. These people are however neither synonymous with the residents or citizens of a country. They are a very much constructed group, that is usually defined by a combination of national, ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural identifiers and even, when these criteria are met, only encompass the supporters of the Populist Party. The Populist Party will habitually claim that she is the only voice of these People, that these people are the only *rightful* People of the country, and that all of these People support them. And since these People are unjustifiably being exploited, by corrupt elites, as the constituting antagonism between the People and the Elites suggests, their only hope is the Populist Party. This ideological core is always present within Populism, and Populism is therefor always anti-democratic, anti-pluralistic, and exclusionary. When only one Party speaks for the people, there is no way for legitimate political competition to subside. To address its intrinsic lack of organizing principles Populism has a very elegant solution: It is compatible with any number of political ideologies or belief systems. As long as these beliefs are adopted on top of the Populist Ideology, they may very

² Authors Note: Attempts to create such populist movements have in fact been made in at least two cases that I'm aware of. Both were reactions towards right-wing nativist populist movements, namely the *Tea Party* within the United States and the *Gilets Jaunes* in the French Republic. Yet, the mere fact that barely anybody even remembers the *Coffee Party* or the *Foulards Rouges*, as they called themselves suggests that the mobilization potential of such endeavors is marginal at best.

³ Authors Note: Hillje uses the German word *Volk*, and its linguistic connotations of blood and soil – that the English word people lacks – are very much present, within his conceptualization of Populism and should be recognized to understand him correctly.

well function as the Populist Parties proclaimed policy. In that way Populism is a flat or hollow ideology, but an ideology, nonetheless. Non-Populist politicians may very well behave in a similar fashion to their populist counterparts – thus apply a *populist style* of politics – but if they don't believe in Populism's ideological core, they simply are not populists (cf. Hillje 2018, 28-32).

It should by now be clear, that these two conceptualizations, though they certainly have their overlapping factors are in no way identical and need to be treated as such. For the sake of this thesis, I will be sticking to the interpretation of Populism as an ideology. It is the more viable interpretation for my intentions, as we will see in the theory section. For now, it should suffice to recognize that there are different academic interpretations of Populism and that there is by no means a scientific consensus on which of these is the correct one.

2.2 Climate Denial

Let us now discuss the second big topic of this thesis: Climate Denial. The term Climate Denial refers to more than just the outright denial of the factuality of man-made climate change, as it can be witnessed through everyday observations and has been determined by academic consensus (IPCC 2023, 6), but rather it encompasses a multitude of argumentations, fallacies, rhetorical devices, and tropes, that are being employed by political actors and lobbyists towards their common goal of preventing or at least hindering the lawful implementation of large-scale climate mitigation efforts, as they are necessitated by the emerging crisis. The Swedish human ecologist Andreas Malm differentiates four historic mainline phases of Climate Denialism, that emerged concurrently due to different political circumstances and a differing level of public awareness on the topic of climate change (cf. Malm 2021). According to him the commonality of this different phases was, that they all aimed to protect the interest of the *fossil capital* class – the term he uses to summarize the magnitude of economic enterprises, whose business model directly, as in the producers of fossil fuels, or indirectly depends upon the extraction of fossil fuels. The first of these phases, which span from the 1980s to the dawn of the millennium was the phase of *climate skepticism*. It was characterized by the general rebuttal of everything that climate scientists would discover and functioned mainly through an exploitation of the media's tendency towards false balances, that let the greater public to belief, that there was actual ongoing scientific debate on the factuality of man-made climate change. This is also the form of Climate Denial that most people will be familiar with and recognize as such, which is the reason it has grown increasingly less successful over the years

and was succeeded by other phases. Beginning with the new millennium and the presidency of George W. Bush thusly began the phase of the second phase of *Capital Climate Governance*. This phase is characterized by great efforts towards the greenwashing of fossil capital and the mirage that meaningful efforts towards climate mitigation are being made. Exemplary for this phase were toothless international agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the implementation of technocratic mechanisms that only seek to address the symptoms of climate change instead of addressing the underlying causes, which lie within the world's current economic makeup. Both *Skepticism* and *Greenwashing* are sides of the same coin, and both were and are being promoted through the funding of politicians, think tanks, institutes, and plain old marketing. Notably, neither of phases can be strictly separated from the other, less so at an exact point in time, but they are rather being employed simultaneously with greenwashing becoming more fashionable over time and skepticism less so. The phase of Greenwashing was succeeded by a phase of *Public Sponsorship*, as Malm calls it, that is defined through the occurrence that political actors instead of cooperations' start to become the torch bearers of the Climate Denialist movement. The first of these actors was the US republican party as a whole, since they sought to oppose everything, the democratic party did during the years of Obamas presidency. This was the *conservative phase* of Climate Denialism, which itself was preceded by the *rightwing extremist phase* of Denialism, when beginning with Trumps presidency the topic became more of a pet issue for the fringes of the political spectrum. This is by no means meant to suggest that either cooperations or conservative politicians ever stopped opposing climate mitigation entirely, they are just no longer the driving force, and most radical voice within the larger Denialist movement (cf. Malm 2021, 19-45). Andreas Malm spends the greater part of his remaining book upon exemplifying, how this right-wing extremist phase of climate denial, was not a mere US phenomenon, but holds true for basically every European right wing populist party as well. Other authors, such as for example Cyrill Otteni and Manès Weisskirchner, who quantitatively examined the attitudes towards Climate Change alongside party lines in Germany confirmed this correlation between Populism and Climate Denial as well (cf. Otteni 2022).

This leads us to the puzzle which inspired this paper: What causes the populist affinity towards climate denial and is it intrinsically linked with populist ideology? In the next chapter I will present a theoretical conceptualization for the connection of Climate Denial and Populism.

3. Theory

In the literature section we have discussed that there is evidently a connection between right-wing populist parties and the adoption of a Climate Denialist perspective. Below I will explain the reasons, for my expectation, that this is in relationship with populism itself and not simply right-wing attitudes in general. While there is clear evidence, that climate skeptical attitudes are in general more pronounced among right-wing parties, than among liberal or progressive ones, the difference between attitudes is not nearly as pronounced among mainstream conservative parties in contrast to their populist right-wing counterparts (cf. Malm 2021, Otteni 2022). This makes it highly unlikely, that right-wing attitudes are the sole explanation, which therefor suggests that Populism may be the casual factor for this occurrence.

This is puzzling though. Recalling what we have discussed on populism, we can constitute that a basic populist demand should always speak on behalf of people and formulate grievances or demands, that are not being met by the elites. This holds true for either conceptualization of populism be it as an ideology or a mere style of politics. Formulating a stricter demand for climate mitigation efforts in a populist mode akin to: These corrupt elites are sacrificing our natural livelihoods for cooperate gains and personal power, should be but a given especially when one recognizes, that numerous grassroots movements such as *Fridays for Future*, or *Extinction Rebellion*, among others clearly proof that there is in fact a demand for stricter climate mitigation among western constituencies, that is not being met by the mainstream political parties. Yet, populist parties do not only ignore this demand, but consistently position themselves in opposition to it.

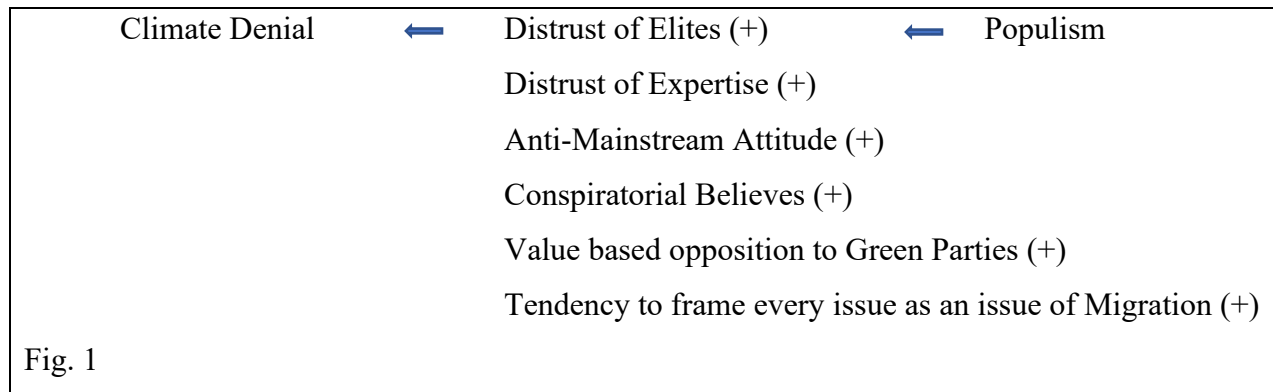
This unanimously opposition amongst populists suggest two things. It lends further credibility to the interpretation of Populism as an ideology. Were populism but a style employed whenever it is useful to generate political mobilization, at least some Populist Parties should choose to meet the demand for climate mitigation and strategically position themselves thusly. Contrary to this there is little variation to be found between the attitudes of different populist parties (cf. Malm 2021). This suggests that applying the interpretation of populism as an ideology is fruitful in this case. And building upon this it suggests that the ideological core of Populism is intrinsically intertwined, with beliefs that oppose climate mitigation efforts and/or oppose the factuality of man-made

climate change in general. This should hold true for all Populist Parties, within Western Europe and Northern America, who have been the focus of the literature this is based upon.

But what intrinsic features of populism could nudge Populist Parties towards Climate Denial? Given that a constituting part of populism is the people vs elites antagonism, a general distrust of elites could be an answer. If extended towards scientific elites, who's consensus acknowledges climate change and who's recommendations are the blueprint for every form of climate mitigation policy, this distrust would mark the scientific community and therefor whatever they are proposing as opponents from the populist point of view. And there is some evidence to suggest this. While studying the prevalence of Covid-19 conspiracy theories Eberl, Huber, and Greussing found, that populist attitudes were a better indicator for the belief in conspiracy theories, than the political left-right spectrum and indirectly affected this outcome through lowered trust in political institutions, and science (cf. Eberl et al. 2021). Regarding the same contexts, there also seems to be evidential Distrust of Expertise in general to be found amongst populist voters (cf. Brubaker 2021).

Another possible explanation lies within the populist parties voting base. Comparing different societal metrics, such as education, employment, and attitudes towards different topics such as authoritarianism among others, Wirth found that the voters of the German AfD and the Grünen are the furthest apart from one-another (Wirth 2022, 191-238). This suggest that specific value-based anti-green sentiments may simply extent upon the realm of environmental politics, such as climate mitigation. Wirth also suggests that these sentiments are fundamentally rooted within emotion and not reason. In other words, it would be Climate Denialism out of spite.

Andreas Malm, whom we've already discussed within the literature section also suggests, that there is a tendency amongst right-wing populist to reframe every issue, including und especially climate change as an issue of migration. While there most likely are other factors to be discovered, these reasonable relations shall suffice as starting hypotheses. For a summary of them see the table Fig.1, on the next page.



4. Research Design

We have previously established, that there is an observable connection between populist parties and the application of climate denial as part of their policy platform (cf. Malm 2021, Otteni 2022). Guided by the assumption, that this observed phenomenon can be sufficiently explained from the premise of engaging with a populist party and does not necessitate any secondary factors, such as government participation or electoral performance, I chose the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ), *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), and *United Kingdom Independent Party* (UKIP) as cases for this study. All three of them are populist in nature, yet all of them have divergent electoral performances, and varied historical as well as perspective roles within government participation. They should therefore provide a varied set of populist parties to test theoretical assumptions laid out in the previous paragraph. This variation between the parties implies a divergent set of strategic political incentives, that the chosen parties employ within their electoral strategies and therefore reduces the risk of another common factor than the populist nature of the parties to be the source of their relation towards climate denial. My assumptions did not require the mutual right-wing nativist stance, which the three parties have in common. However, nothing within this stance determines an anti-climate mitigation positioning of the parties in and of itself, therefore – though this may turn out to be mistaken – I will start by assuming it to be coincidental for the sake of my analysis.

To understand the ideological core of populism, as it relates towards climate policies in general and climate denial specifically, I will employ a qualitative analysis of the framings employed by the chosen populist parties when they engage with climate policies in accordance with Goffmanian Frame analysis (cf. Goffman 1979). This method is chosen to catch the full depth of their statements. To avoid an unintentional overemphasizing of outlier opinions, I intend to use only

officially published party documents for my data collection. These should provide a high confidence of portraying the party's actual stance. The most recent party manifestos, at time of data collection are a straightforward source for this. In the case of the FPÖ, this would be the "Parteiprogramm der Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)" (June 18th, 2011), for the AfD the "Programm für Deutschland. Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland" (April 30th, 2016) and for the UKIP the "National Manifesto: Living Document – Revision 4" (October, 2023). If these sources remain inconclusive towards the parties stand on climate issues, I will also consider other official publications of the parties. For example, the FPÖ's party manifesto doesn't engage with the subject of climate change explicitly – which in and of itself is a rather interesting finding -, they do however engage with the subject of climate change within their election program. I therefore amend the sources with the most recent election manifestos for federal elections. This would be "Deutschland. Aber normal.: Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag" (April 10th, 2021) for the AfD, and "Mit Sicherheit für Österreich: Fair. Sozial. Heimmattreu.: Freiheitliches Wahlprogramm zur Nationalratswahl 2019." (2019) for the FPÖ – the UKIP does not provide election programs that are separated from their party manifesto and will thusly not be amended, for I do not intend to include rather subjective sources such as social media posts, or interviews of individual party delegates, that have no necessary claim of being representative for the general party's stance in this data collection. Within this collected data, passages that relate to the subject, will be identified through keyword searches that relate towards climate change and environmental policies.

Employing Goffmanian Frame Analysis, I will then concur to code the data in accordance with the framings it expresses regarding climate policies (cf. Goffman 1974). If the emerging picture can be derived from the theoretical understanding of populism directly and is consistent among the chosen parties, I will have succeeded in identifying the ideological core of populism, which negates climate mitigation efforts. Otherwise, this analysis will remain inconclusive.

To this end I will utilize a self-formulated code-book, inspired by the *Manifesto Project on Political Representation* (MARPOR)⁴, that defines when something relates, towards climate-issues and when it doesn't, as well as when it is in opposition towards climate-mitigation policies and code

⁴ Webpresence Comparative Manifesto Project: https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/information/documents?name=handbook_v4

the manifestos accordingly utilizing Max QDA. The relevantly coded segments shall form the data set for my analysis. The Codebook sets three distinct criteria R01 – R03 for a statement to be relevant, which are in turn structured into several sub-codes. See Fig 2. below for the codebook and the appendix for a more detailed explanation of the individual codes and sub-codes.

R01: Direct Statements	R02: Implications	R03: Cultural
R01.1: Information	R02.1: Limiting	R03.1: Climate Conscience
R01.2: Pro Mitigation	R02.2: Embracing	R03.2: Denial
R01.3: Anti Mitigation		R03.3: Skepticism
		R03.4: <i>New Denial</i>
		R03.5: Culture War
		R03.6: Non-Related

Fig 2.

A statement shall be relevant if any of the following criteria is met:

- R01: It directly addresses climate change, climate policies or environmental challenges that are related to climate change
- R02: It has direct implications towards the scale and scope that any given climate policy could encompass, i.e. emphasize of free-market economy as a limiting factor; promotion of sustainable growth as a embracing factor; etc.
- R03: It uses or alludes towards cultural or social modes of argumentation, that are used as war cries or rhetorical devices within the political climate discourse.

R01: Direct Statements on Climate Policies⁵

- R01.1: Neutral Statements
 - Mere background information, that informs any given position.
- R01.2: Affirmation of Climate Policies
 - Statements that affirm or demand climate mitigation efforts.
- R01.3: Opposition towards Climate Policies
 - Statements that reject or demand the roll-back of climate mitigation efforts.

R02: Statements that implicate Climate Policies

- R02.1: Limiting Statements
 - Statements that express political or ideological beliefs, that limit or counteract existing or proposed climate mitigation efforts.
- R02.2: Embracing Statements
 - Statements that express political or ideological beliefs, that allow for a liberal implication of climate policies.

R03: Social/Cultural Argumentations

- R03.1: Climate Conscience
 - Statements that embrace the necessity of climate mitigation
- R03.2: Classic Climate Denial
 - Denial of scientific fact about the occurrence of anthropogenic climate change itself or its environmental implications
- R03.3: Climate *Skepticism*
 - Statements that seek to put off the adoption of climate mitigations as long as possible or limit their amount as far as possible.
- R03.4: *New* Climate Denial, sometimes called climate doomerism
 - Accepts climate change with all it's implications, but states that nothing can be done, so we shouldn't even try

⁵ Note by the author: A more extensive version of these codes that includes some illustrative examples may be viewed in the appendix.

In contrast to the MARPOR, this codebook is designed to explicitly allow for a statement to be in multiple categories simultaneously. This eliminates the possible need for subjective judgements if a statement doesn't neatly fit into only one category. It also allows the relevancy criteria R01 – R03 to be organized in a horizontal rather than hierarchical fashion towards one another, thus eliminating the need for duplexes within the subcategories. The scheme is there for very compact and simultaneously allows for any necessary amount of abstraction since the subcategories can be effortlessly expanded upon.

5. Findings

5.1 The UK Independent Party (UKIP)

The UKIP gives large room to the subject of climate change within their party manifesto. While the dedicated section on “Climate Change” only covers about a page of their 94 pages manifesto, the subject of climate change and of relating policies is brought up in many other sections. This suggests a centrality of the issue for the populist party, that is also underlined within their introduction: “[...] *key components of our new manifesto are our push for a democratic referendum to stop Net Zero, abolish the House of Lords, change the unrepresentative Voting System and restore Capital Punishment.*” (UKIP 2023, 2). So even among the policy issues listed as key components, climate change, by merits of their opposition towards the UKs net zero carbon emission goals, takes the first place.

Most statements in relation to climate change within the UKIP Manifesto take the form of direct statements, that oppose a given climate mitigation effort (Code R01.3), for example: “*The party opposes councils declaring 'Climate Emergencies'.*” (ibid, 9), “*The party will remove the UK from all international Climate Treaties.*” (ibid, 15), or “*The party opposes the flawed energy and 'climate' targets being placed on property developers and owners, for example we would scrap the unnecessary cost of installing compulsory heat pumps in new homes.*” (ibid, 36). Such short disavowing statements can be found for pretty much every form climate mitigation effort, for example: electric cars, carbon capture, decarbonization, smart meters, carbon taxes & environmental levies, heat pumps (ibid, 31), hydrogen (ibid, 32), energy performance ratings in housing (ibid, 34), low emission zones, biofuels, speed limits, ban on combustion engines (ibid, 39), and so on and so forth. If it is a form of climate mitigation, it's relatively safe to assume the UKIP opposes it and has taken the time to explicitly say so within their party manifesto. The most

surprising part was the inclusion of hydrogen and biofuels among their extensive list of opposed climate mitigation technologies. Both technologies have been criticized by environmental groups for causing more environmental damage than benefits and being only a “*smokescreen*” that distracts from actual solutions, such as direct electrification (cf. Fairley 2022 Dec 13th, Naujokaitytė 2021 Sep 3rd). I would therefore have expected them to come up as a low-key form of climate denial. The argumentation functions by pitting a promising future technology against forms of climate mitigation that can be readily implemented. In effect readily available candidates are not being pursued and the promised ‘green’ future technology only serves as a justification to perpetuate existing fossil modes of energy consumptions. But apparently such rather nuanced forms of opposing climate mitigation are not to the UKIPs liking and she opposes any form of technology on an equal level.

The second biggest segment of statements relating towards climate policies within the UKIPs manifesto are statements that have implication towards climate mitigation efforts. All of them are from the limiting variety (Code R02.1). These statements stress for the most part the harmful effects of climate mitigation policies and by doing so simultaneously advocate for them to be undone or not pursuit in the first place. Some examples of such claims are: the Net Zero goal putting additional pressure on the housing market and farmers (UKIP 2023, 34 and 49), wind turbines killing birds and bats (ibid, 49), endangered species being dislocated for the cultivation of crops to be used in biofuels (ibid, 55), and climate friendly business not being economically viable (ibid,72). In summary these claims, are mostly concerned with damages to the economy and wildlife supposedly caused by climate mitigation efforts. Another big part is concerned with traffic and transportation in personal vehicles. The UKIP is very much in favor of this, because traffic supposedly doesn’t cause pollution (ibid, 39 and 57), and wind turbines being “*several magnitudes more annoying than a well-manicured road with cars*” (ibid, 56). Traffic being this beneficial overall, the UKIP seeks to employ policies that increase it such as getting rid of low emission zones and opening up bus and cycling lanes for cars (ibid, 57). They are however not in favor of every kind of personal vehicle, as they oppose electric vehicles because they are expensive and there is not enough electricity (ibid, 31 and 39). It is also possible that the UKIP has an underlying desire to harm cyclists, for aside from opening up bicycle lanes for general traffic, they also want to half the clearance when overtaking bicycles to 75 cm (ibid, 39). The last kind of implicating statement seems to only address perceived grievances, especially a sense of being treated unfairly. Allegedly

the UK emits less than 1% of global emission, while having 1% of the world population. It is left unclear whether this is meant to suggest that the UK has already done its share or should actually emit more CO₂, but the statement is paired with an acknowledgement of a supposed global shortage of energy due to the war in Ukraine, which to me points towards the latter interpretation (ibid, 63). But it is not just the UK, that is being treated unfairly on the global stage, they themselves are also the targets of perceived injustices: *“Police officers now actively support and participate in political protests, such as the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020 when officers dropped to their knees in deference to demonstrators who burned the British Flag. Climate change groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil are treated more favourably than groups who profess a patriotic or conservative viewpoint.”* (ibid, 23). Also, schools (ibid, 47), the BBC (ibid, 61), and the mainstream media (ibid, 94) are all pushing woke agendas on behalf of the government or metropolitan elites, that include but are not limited towards climate change (Code R03.5). The implication within these statements is, that their point of view is actively being suppressed in an official state capacity, through the government, the education system, the public and private media, and the police.

When it comes to what I’ve coded as cultural forms of argumentation, the UKIP engages in both Classic Climate Denial (Code R03.2) as well as New Denial (Code R03.4). They are very blunt about the usage of both of these forms of denial and do not hide or disguise what they are saying in any meaningful way, for example: *“CO₂ is not linked to the burning of fossil fuels”* (ibid, 30), which is straight forward denial, but also argumentations such as: *“There has always been evolving weather patterns and always will be. We have to accept that putting more land to use for growing food and a rising level of CO₂ to stimulate growth is desirable to feed humanity but will change weather patterns.”* (ibid, 55), which is a combination of the common denialist talking points It’s-just the-weather and CO₂-is-good-actually. On the front of New Denial, which seeks to hinder the implementation of climate mitigation effort by proclaiming them to be impossible they are very straight forward as well, for example: *“No amount of wind turbines and solar farm will obviate the need for a continuous supply of energy from fossil fuels and nuclear reactors”* (ibid, 31), *“Electric Cars are a failed experiment and only a minority will ever buy them. There will never be enough electricity available to justify a nationwide network of charging points.”* (ibid, 39), *“The government has no mandate from the electorate to spend an ever-increasing amount of GNI on trying to mitigate Climate Change, with no hope of achieving it [...] The*

World energy generation is now increasing at 5% per year of which 45% is fueled by coal. This means an increase of CO2 emissions of 2.25% per year or 1% every 162 days. What is the point of Net Zero by the UK by 2050?" (ibid, 63). Acknowledging – at least implicitly - the occurrence of anthropogenic climate change, while denying that anything can be done about it, is one of the constituting factors of New Climate Denialism. I find it nonetheless remarkable, that the UKIP blatantly contradicts themselves by on the one hand claiming that rising CO2 levels are not linked to the burning of fossil fuels, and on the other hand using this very connection as an example, for why there is no use in climate mitigation efforts.

To sum up the UKIPs position: They oppose all forms of climate mitigation efforts, because they harm the environment and the economy, because they are expensive and don't work, because anthropogenic climate change isn't real and rising CO2 levels are good actually, because rising CO2 levels can't be stopped, given that the world economy is burning more and more coal, because they feel they are being treated unfairly, and because it's all just some woke agenda by the government and elites. That none of this adds up to a coherent story is most likely intentional. It was Steve Bannon, the former head of Breitbart and chief strategist for the Trump campaign who coined the expression "*Flood the zone with shit.*" for this exact propaganda tactic. "*For most of recent history, the goal of propaganda was to reinforce a consistent narrative. But zone-flooding takes a different approach: It seeks to disorient audiences with an avalanche of competing stories.*" (Illing, 2020). Apparently, the UKIP is employing this exact strategy of discourse.

5.2 The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)

The AfD's manifesto is clearly structured by subject matter and only ever mentions climate change once outside of the paragraphs on energy and environmental policies. In the given instance they list, what they call "*climate extremes*" as one of the causes for an unprecedented migration crisis that Europe is allegedly facing due to immigration from Africa, and the Arabic world, which the party opposes (AfD 2016, 59). Their argumentation on climate change exists mostly on the cultural level (Code R03.5) and is rooted within Classic Climate Denial (Code R02.2). According to them the climate has always been changing by natural means, CO2 is a necessary and beneficial part of a healthy environment as it promotes plant growth, and the IPCC models can't explain the current changes in climate (ibid, 79). They also hit conspiratorial notes by suggesting that decarbonization efforts are a plot "*for a "Great Transformation" of society, that results in the massive restriction*

of personal and economic freedoms.”⁶ (ibid, 79). They follow this outright denial of anthropogenic climate change by several Implicating Statements (R02.1) all of which stress the detrimental effects of climate mitigation. Their line of argumentation in this part doesn’t fundamentally differ from the similar mode of argumentation, that we have already encountered in the case of the UKIP: wind turbines are ugly and kill birds, they, and other alternative sources of energy production such as solar power plants are unreliable, they burden the consumers with massive increases in the cost of energy, and harm the environment through their mere existence as they turn “*large regions, including forests into industrial zones with all their related detrimental effects on humans and nature*” (ibid, 80). Besides from these familiar modes the AfD also claims, that the German Renewable Energy Sources Act (Erneuerbare Energien Gesetz EEG) is unconstitutional providing only unspecified “*reliable legal opinions*” in support of this claim (ibid, 80). Climate mitigation efforts, that the AfD explicably opposes besides from solar and wind are the insulation of buildings which supposedly does little to nothing in the reduction of air conditioning and heating (ibid, 81-82), and biogas plants (ibid 82).

In summary their position amounts to, man-made climate change isn’t real, mitigation efforts are overtly expensive and limited in efficacy, and all efforts towards decarbonization serve some larger “*Great Transformation*” of society. The AfD’s manifesto is visibly trying and for the most part succeeding – if you’re willing to accept their claims, that is – to provide a coherent and calm mode of argumentation. This appearance diminishes however to a degree when you also look at the AfD’s federal election program from 2021. While the election program affirms the party manifesto completely, there are some notable addendums and qualitative changes I want to highlight.

While the AfD still talks about the “*Great Transformation*” it now has shifted to use it synonymous and simultaneous with “*The Great Reset*” – a right-wing conspiracy theory that was more prominent at the time of the election programs writing (AfD 2021, 174). There is also a slight shift in their form of Climate Denial noticeable. While their party manifesto was fundamentally based on Classic Climate Denial (R03.2) their election program dials this back a notch to make room for New Climate Denial (R03.4), that was noticeably absent from their manifesto, e.g.: “*The reason for the radical transformation of society is the claim that decarbonization [...] could still prevent*

⁶ Note by the author: The translation of the originally German text into English was done by the author. This will also be the case for any forthcoming direct quotes taken from material provided by the AfD or FPÖ.

a man-made climate catastrophe. We reject this notion and all measures that were derived from it.” (ibid, 174). I find this quote particularly interesting since it manages to accomplish a seemingly impossible task by functioning as Classic and New Climate Denial simultaneously. As a reminder Classic Climate Denial rejects the notion of anthropogenic climate change in its entirety, while New Climate Denial acknowledges man-made climate change and only rejects the possibility to do something about it. The phrasing of the statement leaves it however unclear whether it rejects man-made climate change or merely the notion that something can *still* be done about it. They do later clarify that climate change is by no means a scientific fact, and that climate changes (in contrast to just CO₂ in their manifesto) is good actually (ibid, 174-175) – nonetheless I find this shift noteworthy. Given that the AfD’s election program has a higher focus on policy than their party manifesto, this time there are also numerous Direct Statements that oppose climate mitigation efforts (R01.03) to be found. For the most part they just name a measure, international accord, or piece of legislation and say that they oppose it, e.g.: Carbon taxes (ibid, 175), the “Green Deal” (ibid, 176), maximum speed limits (ibid, 189), or solar power plants (ibid 206). They rarely provide reasons for these demands, but occasionally stress economic detriments (cf. e.g.: ibid, 42, 175, and 177), and supposed harm to the environment (cf. e.g.: ibid, 191, 203, and 206). Aside from these demands to end policies, they also support several policies regarding climate mitigation efforts, that all have in common, that they make business models based on alternative energy sources less competitive and/or harder to implement, such as mandatory minimum distances to housing and public referendums on the construction of any wind turbines (ibid, 177), elimination of subsidies for electromobility (ibid, 178), or an equivalent taxation for electric vehicles and vehicles with combustion engines, that use synthetic fuels (ibid, 191). This last point is supposed to extend towards the fuel as well as the vehicle itself, which would in effect nullify the taxation of any combustion driven vehicle, since they all can technically use synthetic fuels. The AfD furthermore claims, that mitigation efforts are driven by an ideological agenda (ibid, 205) and that children are being indoctrinated into ideologies, such as “*gender-madness and climate hysteria*” (R03.5), a process that is likened to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Third Reich (ibid, 113).

Overall, these additions move the AfD’s mode of argumentation and policy preferences, away from the relatively calm and collected tone of their manifesto towards a more hysterically and enraged style of argumentation. This style is very similar to the UKIPs as far as it comes to the substantive

claims and even singular framings, such as the convulsion of climate policies with both gender topics and migration, or acknowledgement of conspiratorial forces.

5.3 The Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)

The FPÖs party manifesto from 2011 immediately stands apart from the two other parties, by merits of it being incredibly short. Netting only 17 pages it stands in harsh contrast to the AfD's and the UKIP's manifestos, both of which are nearly a hundred pages long. This necessitates, that it can't go into much detail about anything: "*The preservation of our natural environment as a livelihood for our home Austria, sustainable and tender management, and biologic diversity concern us to a high degree. We reject the use of nuclear power.*" (FPÖ 2011, 6) is everything they have to say on any environmental topic within it. While the FPÖs manifesto is by far the oldest active manifesto among the sampled parties, it is not old enough to render climate change as a non-issue. I therefore find this complete non-engagement at least interesting.

While I have already hinted, that the FPÖ does in fact engage with climate change within their election programs, this comes at a caveat. What the FPÖ calls election programs are not election programs within the classical sense, where one expects a party to be laying out their policy on sometimes hundreds of pages. They are in contrast more like flyers, netting less than 30 pages each. Instead of only analyzing the FPÖs 2019 federal election program, I therefore decided to deviate from my originally planned method of analysis, that intended to only look at the most recent federal election program and manifesto of each party and instead, also added the FPÖs 2017 federal election program, and their election program for the European Parliament from 2024 to the data⁷. This tells a more interesting story of the party's stance, than any individual program could, as will become apparent shortly.

In their federal election program of 2017, the FPÖ generally supports some climate mitigation efforts, especially renewable energy sources: "*The application of native renewable energy sources is the safest way to achieve environmental protection goals.*" (R01.2). They stress that renewable energy sources save resources, provide economic opportunities and are unlike fossil fuels infinite.

⁷ Note by the author: Neither the FPÖs federal election program of 2017, nor the one of 2019 are at time of writing still being hosted upon their party's website. They do contain hyperlinks pointing towards the place where they used to be, these do however lead to nowhere. They have however been archived upon the website of the FPÖs educational foundation Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut (FBI).

Therefor they want to end Austria's reliance on fossil fuels (FPÖ 2017, 21). Puzzlingly, neither in their reasoning for this measure, nor in any other instance within the election program do they mention climate change even once. They do however reject emission trading certificates, as they hinder the Austrian economy (ibid, 21) and they want to guarantee the use of combustion engines, especially Diesel driven vehicles until 2050 (ibid, 24) (both coded R02.1).

In the FPÖs federal election program of 2019 they name two policies that arguably constitute climate mitigation efforts among their main goals: the usage of native energy sources (which in the FPÖs vocabulary has consistently referred to wind-, water-, solar-, and geothermic-energy), and the decarbonization of transportation (FPÖ 2019, 1) (R02.2). They even call the reduction of fossil fuels and an increase of E-mobility parts of the Austrian climate strategy (ibid, 5) – interestingly they don't call them part of *their* climate strategy for Austria, but phrase it in a way that suggest the country was an independent actor, which to me leaves this statement somewhat ambiguous. They also explicably acknowledge climate change for the first time withing this program: “*Climate Change is reality and can't be denied. It is on the other hand not rationally explainable, given the high concentration of carbon monoxide in the atmosphere, that a CO2 reduction in Austria or Europe could change anything about it.*” (ibid, 8). This statement is textbook New Climate Denial (R03.4). They reject “*climate hysteria*” and affirm their wish to protect Diesel powered combustion engines, which seems to be in contrast with their stated goal of decarbonization in transportation (ibid, 8).

Finally, in the FPÖs election program for the European parliamentary election of 2024 they reject the EUs “Green Deal”, carbon taxation, and the end of the combustion engine, and possible future “*climate bans*” which they link to “*wantonly destruction of our economy, industry, and competitiveness*” in favor of cheap energy and economic growth (ibid, 10). They still favor the expansion of renewable energies but demand a “*reasonable environmental policy instead of EU-climate dictatorship*” (ibid, 13).

This has literally been everything they say regarding climate change within any of the three election programs and their party manifesto. I believe it was the correct decision to look at all of these, even if I had to bend the preplanned methodology a bit, for less would have constructed a rather distorted image of the FPÖs stance on climate mitigation efforts. In summary: The FPÖ somewhat favors

renewable energy sources but does apparently see them as more of a sensible economic investment, than as a necessity to prevent climate change (R02.2), which she doesn't seem to be concerned about much. In fact, they noticeable only frame these measures in a light of economic opportunity and national sovereignty. There is no instance wherein the FPÖ affirms that climate change is anthropogenic in nature, and they do engage in New Climate Denial (R03.4) as well as conspiratorial notions, when they allude to “*wantonly destruction*” or “*climate dictatorship*”. Though they first appeared to be the odd one out among the inspected populist parties and could be mistaken as climate mitigation positive at a glance, their overall position on the issue doesn't appear to be that distinct from the AfD or UKIPs.

5.4 Summary

To summarize these findings: All of the evaluated parties engaged in some sort of climate denial. Each party engaged in New Denial (R03.4), while Classic Denial (R03.3) was present for two of the parties, the outlier being the FPÖ. All the parties Direct Statements regarding climate change were of the Anti-Mitigation variety (Code R01.3). Except for the FPÖ no other populist party did state Implications that embraced climate mitigation efforts (Code R02.2), yet even the FPÖ never used them in direct relation towards the prevention of climate change. They are mostly applied within framings of national sovereignty and economic opportunity. This is interesting for usually if a political party intends to do something about a problem they want to get as much credit as they possible can for undertaking the effort. Yet in the FPÖs case, though they have some policies that would constitute Climate Mitigation efforts, they apparently don't want them to be connected with the issue, never going further than mentioning *the environment*. The conflation of climate policies with other issues, that I had expected was mostly present in the context of the UKIP, who did it to an immense degree. There were no Climate Conscience statements (Code R03.1) by any party.

For an overview of the parties' similarities and differences please consult the table Fig 3 on the following two pages.

	UKIP	AfD	FPÖ
Data	Combined party manifesto and federal election program of 2023	Party manifesto 2016, Federal election program 2021	Party manifesto 2011, Federal election program 2017 and 2019, European election program 2024
Stance on climate mitigation efforts	Very Oppositional: Exclusive rejection of all climate mitigation efforts.	Very Oppositional: Rejection of all climate mitigation efforts. Notable exception: Synthetic fuels, but only in a way that is intended to prolong combustion engines and hinder electromobility.	Mostly oppositional: Proclaims the importance of mitigation efforts. Rejects all climate mitigation efforts that aren't on the exclusively national level and don't directly concern investments in renewable energy sources.
Mode of climate denial	New and Classic Climate Denial: climate change is not real, mitigation efforts don't work, any measures are prohibitively expensive in investments and economic cost; Climate-Change-Is-Good-Actually	New and Classic Climate Denial: overall focus on Classic Climate Denial, but formulated in a way that makes both interpretations reasonable, stresses expensive investments and economic cost;	New Climate Denial: Centers the importance of climate mitigation, but finds them to be fruitless if they are not implemented on an international level, rejects all such international implementations; doesn't acknowledge

		Climate-Change-Is-Good-Actually	man-made climate change, but doesn't explicitly reject it either
Focus on climate change within their policies	Very central takes up large space in their program, constantly comes up in unrelated sections	Central is given much room, but sticks to dedicated and relating sections for the most part	Side-lined is at times not even mentioned directly within dedicated and relating sections, instead opting to talk only on the given policy at hand
Conspiratorial thinking	Explicit alleges some sort of collusion between schools, the government, and public broadcasting to promote climate mitigation	Very explicit Names conspiracy theories, e.g., " <i>Great Transformation</i> " / " <i>Great Reset</i> "; proclaims supposed indoctrination efforts	Low key Phrases such as " <i>wantonly destruction</i> " and " <i>climate dictatorship</i> ", do allude to some sort of conspiratorial thinking, may however also be interpreted as somewhat crass sleight of hand formulations
Conflation of climate change with other issues	Constantly It's combined with nearly any subject, e.g., police reform	Not really Implicitly links it to migration; alarmist about economic detriments	Not really Alarmist about economic detriments

Fig 3.

6. Conclusions

This thesis sought to examine the connection between populist ideology and the adoption of anti-climate mitigation stances. To accomplish this, I analyzed the framing devices a selection of populist parties employed within their official programs and manifestos regarding climate mitigation efforts. All of this was done in the pursuit of answering the research question: What causes the populist affinity towards climate denial and is it intrinsically linked with populist ideology?

My findings suggest that there is a definite connection between populism and anti-climate mitigation stances, as the literature had suggested. Every party within the data – though to varying degrees – engaged in some sort of climate denial, and positionings towards specific climate mitigation policies were almost exclusively negatory. The outlier being the FPÖs embrace of renewable energy sources that was strikingly only ever framed in terms of economic opportunities and national sovereignty, but not as a worthwhile endeavor towards the mitigation of climate change. Almost as if there was a reluctance to openly position themselves positively regarding any climate mitigation effort.

I hypothesized in the theory section, that populist aversion towards climate mitigation efforts may be rooted within multiple populist tenets, each of which would contribute towards this very aversion: the Distrust of Elites/Expertise, Anti-Mainstream Attitudes, conspiratorial believes, Value based opposition towards Green parties, and a tendency to reframe issues as issues of migration (cf. Fig. 1 on p. 14). Some of these hypotheses were substantiated within my findings.

Every examined party engaged in some sort of climate denial and therefor rejected scientific facts. This may be an expression of their distrust of elites, distrust of expertise, general anti-mainstream attitudes, or a combination there of. Sadly, the formulations within the data were not specific enough to pin it down any further making each of these interpretations as valid as the others. Conspiratorial believes were explicitly present for two of the parties – the UKIP and AfD – the latter of which even namedropped the *Great Reset* conspiracy theory. In the case of the FPÖ it is not as clear cut and personal interpretations may vary, but she also uses formulations that to the very least allude to some sort of conspiracism, though it is not explicitly expressed. Two subjects that got way less room than I did expect beforehand were value-based opposition towards green parties, and the reframing of climate policy as an issue of migration. The former only really comes up within the UKIPs bewildering antagonism towards cyclists and public transportation – though

this interpretation is very much debatable. The latter is only explicitly brought up by the AfD. This is by no means meant to suggest that these factors don't play a role within populist thinking on climate change, it merely means they were barely present within the data.

While most original assumptions seem to hold up, I had hoped that a much clearer picture would emerge, that would allow me to pinpoint a specific aspect of populist ideology as the driving factor in populist opposition towards climate mitigation efforts. In this sense this paper regrettably remains inconclusive. It may be more fruitful to engage the topic with a different approach, maybe one that doesn't center ideology but affective polarization, and relies on a different data set.

There are however some interesting observations to be made that weren't the primary focus of this thesis. The FPÖ which is the closest to government participation among the examined parties also expressed the arguably most moderate position on climate mitigation, while the UKIP that lacks even a theoretical chance of ever serving in any government under the United Kingdom's first past the post voting system sounded unhinged to the highest degree. This may suggest a possible moderating effect of the prospect of government participation. Another interesting observation was the FPÖ's embrace of renewable energies, without addressing climate change. This suggests that populist parties, and their voter bases may be won over for climate mitigation policies, as long as they are being reframed as something else. Both these hypothetical questions are interesting topics within their own right and deserve further investigation.

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Appendix:

The Makeup of the Codebook

R01: Direct Statements	R02: Implications	R03: Cultural
R01.1: Information	R02.1: Limiting	R03.1: Climate Conscience
R01.2: Pro Mitigation	R02.2: Embracing	R03.2: Denial
R01.3: Anti Mitigation		R03.3: Skepticism
		R03.4: <i>New Denial</i>
		R03.5: Culture War
		R03.6: Non-Related

Fig. 2

A policy statement is judged to be relevant if any of the following criteria is met:

- R01: It directly addresses climate change, climate policies or environmental challenges that are related to climate change
- R02: It has direct implications towards the scale and scope that any given climate policy could encompass, i.e. emphasize of free-market economy as a limiting factor; promotion of sustainable growth as a promoting factor; etc.
- R03: It uses ore alludes towards cultural or social modes of argumentation, that are used as war cries or rhetorical devices within the political climate discourse.

R01: Direct Statements on Climate Policies

- R01.1: Neutral Statements
 - Statements that are merely meant to provide background information for the reader of the party's manifesto or serve as a baseline for the party's policy conclusions within the manifesto, i.e.:
 - What current climate policies exist or are being discussed?
 - How is the level of implementation of existing climate policies?
 - What has the scientific consensus on climate change to say about the state of the matter.
- R01.2: Affirmation of Climate Policies
 - Statements that embrace existing climate policies or demand more extensive endeavors towards climate mitigation.
- R01.3: Opposition towards Climate Policies
 - Statements that reject more extensive endeavors towards climate mitigation or seek to roll back existing policies.

R02: Statements that implicate Climate Policies

- R02.1: Limiting Statements
 - Statements that express political or ideological beliefs, that limit or counteract existing or proposed climate mitigation efforts, i.e.:
 - Free-market absolutism
 - Small government conservatism / Focus on Deregulations
 - Etc.
- R02.2: Embracing Statements
 - Statements that express political or ideological beliefs, that allow for a liberal implication of climate policies, i.e.:
 - Analogue to the above

R03: Social/Cultural Argumentations

- R03.1: Climate Conscience
 - Statements that embrace the necessity of climate mitigation due to political responsibility, a national history of environmentalism, out of a religious sense of *shepherdness*, or due to concerns for the overall social good
 - Included for academic purposes; seldom observed in the wild
- R03.2: Classic Climate Denial
 - Denial of scientific fact about the occurrence of man-made climate change itself or its environmental implications
 - This also includes “climate change is good actually” modes of argumentation
- R03.3: Climate *Skepticism*
 - Statements that seek to put off the adoption of climate mitigations as long as possible or limit their amount as far as possible, i.e.:
 - by casting doubt upon the urgency or efficacy of climate mitigation efforts, without scientific consensus or the inclusion of better alternatives, i.e.:
 - one-sided highlighting of technological limitations of existing technology
 - by seemingly accepting the premise of man-made climate change only to deny action in favor of some problem-solving wonder technology, that is allegedly right around the corner
 - *technology openness* is a common slogan for this (hydrogen engines and fusion reactors are examples for such wonder technologies, that won’t have any impact for decades if they do manifest at all)
- R03.4: *New* Climate Denial, sometimes called climate doomerism
 - Very recent phenomenon
 - Accepts climate change with all it’s implications, but states that nothing can be done, so we shouldn’t even try