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Bachelor's Thesis

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Sweden Democrats' Climate Rhetoric

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Abstract

Across Europe, right-wing parties have increasingly challenged mainstream climate policy through narratives of scepticism, delay, and national protectionism. Sweden's shift from a climate leadership toward a more nationally oriented and sceptical climate stance reflects this wider trend, coinciding with the growing influence of the Sweden Democrats (SD), yet little research has examined the discursive mechanisms behind this transformation. This thesis investigates how the SD construct and legitimise their climate positions through discourse, asking which frames and rhetorical devices shape their narrative, how populist logic structures their portrayal of climate policy, and how they challenge dominant interpretations of climate responsibility. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) supported by Framing Theory and Populist Theory, the study analyses 19 official SD documents published between 2010 and 2025, including motions, manifestos, speeches, party programs, and budget proposals. The findings indicate that the SD consistently employs frames of national sovereignty, economic realism, stewardship, and global insignificance, reinforced through a people-versus-elite narrative that casts climate policy as burdensome and externally imposed. While the rhetorical content remains stable across time, its authority increases as SD gain parliamentary influence, enabling these discursive strategies to shift from oppositional critique to institutionalised policy influence despite the party not holding cabinet positions. The thesis concludes that SD's discourse plays a central role in reframing Sweden's climate identity toward "climate realism," demonstrating how stable rhetorical patterns can reshape national climate governance as political power expands.

Keywords: Sweden Democrats; climate discourse; Critical Discourse Analysis; framing theory; populist theory.

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1. Introduction

The rise of right wing actors has resulted in higher levels of scepticism towards climate policies, often framing them as costly, elitist, or disconnected from the concerns of the citizens. The United Kingdom offers a clear example of this thought: despite the ambitious implementation of the Climate Change Act of 2008, political consensus weakened after the 2010 election as economic recession heightened debates over the affordability and sustainability of climate action (Huber 2020). This illustrates a broader trend in which climate policy becomes contested terrain, shaped by ideological struggles and populist narratives. Against this backdrop, examining how the Sweden Democrats (SD) engage with climate discourse is highly relevant as their position on the matter has shown increasing trends of reshaping previous climate policies (Förell & Fischer 2025, pp. 615-616).

Sweden's reputation as a climate leader emerged from decades of progressive environmental policymaking. It was the first country to establish a national environmental protection agency in 1967 and later hosted the inaugural United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 (Hildingsson & Knaggård 2022, Hysing 2014, cited in Malm et al. 2025, pp. 1). Additionally, Sweden was one of the first countries to implement a carbon tax in 1991, which further highlights its commitment to promoting climate-related improvements (Government Offices of Sweden 2018). These milestones, among others, helped establish Sweden as a pioneering model for sustainable governance and a prominent player in the global climate arena.

However, Sweden's climate policy has undergone a drastic shift in recent years, moving from the global leader it once presented itself to be, to a more cautious and nationally focused approach (Anshelm & Hultman 2025, pp. 1). This change has occurred alongside the growing influence of right-wing actors, such as the SD, whose discourse increasingly references concepts like "climate realism" and appears to question international climate cooperation (Malm et al. 2025). Understanding how SD construct and legitimise these positions is therefore essential for situating Sweden's climate shift within the broader trend of right-wing challenges to climate governance.

This study seeks to explore the central debates on climate scepticism, discursive strategies, and institutional change, situating them within the context of Sweden's evolving climate identity. While existing scholarship has provided valuable insights into policy shifts and the rise of populist rhetoric, much of this work has focused on outcomes and political positioning rather than the linguistic processes through which such positions are constructed and legitimised. Discourse is not merely a reflection of political ideas, it actively shapes the boundaries of what is considered legitimate climate governance.

The argument advanced in this thesis is that Sweden's climate shift cannot be understood solely through policy outcomes or ideological realignment, rather it is the discursive work performed by the SD that enables them to challenge dominant interpretations of climate responsibility and reconfigure the terms of national climate debate. The combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), framing theory, and populist theory deepens the understanding of this debate by revealing not only "what" the SD say about climate policy, but "how" and "why" their discourse becomes politically effective. CDA exposes the linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms through which climate responsibility is redefined, while framing theory clarifies the interpretive lenses that structure how climate issues are distinguished. Populist theory adds a crucial layer by showing how these frames are embedded within a people-versus-elite narrative that legitimises scepticism and positions SD as defenders of ordinary citizens against external or technocratic pressures. Together, these tools highlight the discursive work that enables SD to shift the boundaries of legitimate climate governance, offering a more comprehensive explanation than policy analysis or ideological categorisation alone.

By examining the SD's climate discourse, this study addresses the underexplored intersection between populist and environmental politics, highlighting how language itself serves as an arena for competing ideas. The literature review will therefore expand on this gap, tracing how existing studies have approached populism and climate policy. It will demonstrate why a combination of CDA, populist theory and framing theory is necessary to deepen our understanding of Sweden's shifting climate identity.

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to analyse how the SD construct and legitimise their climate policy positions through discourse, thereby contributing to broader debates on populism, climate politics, and institutional change within peace and development studies. To guide this analysis, the following research questions are posed:

1. Which discursive frames and rhetorical devices, as revealed through CDA, structure the SD's climate narrative?

2. How does populist discourse shape the party's portrayal of climate policy and its legitimacy?

3. In what ways does the SD's climate discourse challenge dominant interpretations of climate responsibility and governance at national and international levels?

1.3 Structure of Thesis

The structure of the thesis begins by establishing the background to Sweden's shifting climate identity and introducing the research problem, purpose, and guiding questions. The discussion then moves into a synthesis of existing scholarship on far-right climate politics, discourses of climate delay, and the influence of populist rhetoric on environmental governance, which together help clarify the research gap. Building on this foundation, the theoretical and analytical framework introduces the study's key tools, namely framing theory and populist theory. The methodology chapter outlines the use of CDA and explains how the discussions are organised into three phases: oppositional, transitional reframing, and policy influence. A subsequent background chapter situates the SD by tracing their ideological roots and party development between 2010 and 2025. The core of the thesis then presents a discussion chapter, mapping the party's discursive trajectory across the three identified phases. Finally, the conclusion summarises the key insights and connects them back to the research questions and the broader problem motivating the study.

2. Literature Review

A major debate centres on the role of far-right parties in shaping national climate agendas. Research has shown that SD has contributed to what has been described as a "Green National Paradox," turning Sweden from a climate mitigation pioneer to an obstructionist actor by framing climate policies as costly and lacking alignment with national interest (Malm et al. 2025). Huber & R.A. (2020) demonstrates similar findings, highlighting that populist attitudes are strongly associated with climate change scepticism and reduced support for environmental protection. These findings suggest that the rhetorical strategies employed by parties like SD are not only based on political desirability, but also resonate with deeper ideological mindsets among their voter base. Additionally, studies on climate backlash in Sweden illustrate how discursive mechanisms have legitimised radical shifts in climate policy priorities (Förell & Fischer 2020). These works highlight a tension between Sweden's global climate leadership reputation and the domestic political discourse that now questions the feasibility and desirability of climate action.

Additionally, scholarship has highlighted how the SD further frames institutional structures, both within the nation and internationally, as illegitimate and poses as constraints on Sweden's sovereignty. Malm et al. (2025) delves into this idea highlighting that the SD's climate rhetoric situates responsibility within the nation while delegitimising universalist or globalist narratives, both reflecting a populist strategy of challenging elite institutions and promoting scepticism of supranational impositions. At the national level, SD continues this criticism and opposition towards domestic actors. Criticism of e.g. the Swedish Commission and government agencies is continuously highlighted due to their prioritisation of international obligations over national interest. Similar points are brought up by Förell & Fischer (2020, pp. 622) indicating that supranationally imposed directives, such as global climate policies, is highly criticised as it "tormented" regular, hardworking Swedes due to the financial burdens it created. This was the overall idea that was continuously presented in debates and targeted the previous government for imposing "unjust" regulations while prioritising international obligations over national interest. Similar points are actually seen within the majority of literature discussing the SD rhetoric and discourse on climate.

A Third debate concerns the mechanisms through which climate scepticism is communicated and reinforced. Analyses of far-right Swedish media demonstrate that irony, conspiracy framing, and selective reporting construct narratives that undermine climate urgency (Vowles & Hultman 2021). Similarly, Lamb et al. (2020) identifies "discourses of climate delay", describing strategies that acknowledge climate change while justifying minimal action, deflecting responsibility, or emphasising costs and unequal consequences for "the people". These debates highlight that political rhetoric and media discourse are not neutral but actively shape societal attitudes and perceptions surrounding the legitimacy of climate policy outcomes.

Comparative research further situates these discussions in broader theoretical and research debates on ideas, discourse, and institutions in climate governance. For example, the United Kingdom case presented by Gillard (2016) demonstrates how discursive reframing around economic austerity and governmental responsibility eroded previously consistent climate policies, highlighting the perceptive and institutional power of language in shaping climate agendas. Similarly, meta-analyses of environmental discourse emphasise that while the field has diversified in approach, a need for more comparative studies in non-English-speaking countries remains and analyses that connect micro-level rhetorical strategies with macro-level policy outcomes (Leipold et al. 2019).

At the institutional level, Schaub et al. (2024) highlights how climate policy outcomes are shaped by both developmental and dismantling dynamics, often influenced by political challenges and shifting public priorities. Their comparative analysis highlights that climate governance is not a linear process, but one exposed to possible reversal, stagnation, or redefinition, particularly in contexts where populist actors gain increasing influence in the debate. Sweden's recent policy shifts presents this tension, as discursive reframing by SD has contributed to a dismantling of ambitious climate commitments under the guise of economic realism and national interest (Förell & Fischer 2020, pp. 615-616). These insights further justify the need for discursive analysis that connects rhetorical strategies to broader patterns of institutional change.

Theoretical approaches to discourse and framing offer additional tools for engaging with these debates. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enables the examination of how SD's language

constructs ideological meaning, reproduces power relations, and legitimises certain interpretations of climate responsibility (Fairclough 1995). Framing theory, presented by Chong and Druckman (2007), complements CDA by explaining how political actors influence public opinion through the strategic emphasis of certain issues that adhere to public discontent, guiding interpretation and shaping perceptions of policy legitimacy. As mentioned previously, populist theory adds a crucial dimension by conceptualising populism as a thin-centred ideology that constructs a divide between "the people" and "the elite," often mobilised to oppose international cooperation and expert opinions. Huber & R.A. (2020) extends this understanding by demonstrating how such ideological frameworks can influence the way environmental issues are framed, particularly when climate policy is portrayed as imposed, elitist, or misaligned with national priorities and public interest.

Despite prior rich knowledge, a research gap presents the need to understand the specific rhetorical and discursive strategies employed by SD to reframe Sweden's climate identity from one of global leadership to "climate realism." While previous studies highlighted policy shifts and populist climate scepticism, they often focus on electoral outcomes, media narratives, or ideological trends without systematically analysing the linguistic construction of climate discourse within a specific party and their communication. Few have combined Critical Discourse Analysis, Populist theory, and Framing theory to examine how these discourses function at a textual level and influence institutional and policy change.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs Framing Theory and Populist Theory as its analytical frameworks to examine how the SD construct and communicate climate discourse. Framing theory provides the primary analytical lens. It offers a systematic way to identify how the SD emphasises certain dimensions of climate policy, such as cost, fairness, or threat, while downplaying others. Populist theory complements this by explaining why these frames are mobilised, situating them within SD's ideological standpoint that pits "the pure people" against "the corrupt elite" (Huber & R.A. 2020).

3.1 Framing Theory

Framing Theory, as defined by Chong and Druckman (2007, pp. 105–106), conceptualises frames as interpretive structures that shape public understanding by highlighting certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others. The overall theory builds on two core concepts, Frames in Thought and Frames in Communication. While both concepts are intriguing, the concept that will be utilised for this study is Frames in Communication. This is due to the fact that it focuses on political rhetoric and how it shapes and legitimises political actions. Frames in Communication are the ways issues and decisions are presented in language or media. It highlights the values or consequences surrounding a certain issue while sidelining others, thus shaping the audience's perception and understanding on the matter (Chong & Druckman 2007, pp. 106-107). This theoretical concept will be applied to the collected material by analysing the SD's climate-related language, focusing on how lexical choices, evaluative terms, and rhetorical constructions activate recurring frames such as economic burden or national sovereignty. In doing so, the analysis will show how these linguistic framings reconfigure notions of climate responsibility and policy ambition.

3.2 Populist Theory

Populist theory will be used to interpret how these frames are embedded in a broader populist narrative. It seeks to uncover the ideological purpose behind the frames highlighting how these frames reinforce populist narratives and legitimise political positions. This broader narrative illustrates how it delegitimises mainstream climate policy by portraying it as imposed, globalist, and misaligned with national interests. Populist Theory, like framing theory, builds on three core concepts. According to Huber & R.A. (2020, pp. 961-962), the three conceptual pillars include:

1. Anti-elite attitudes

Anti-elite attitudes entail the notion that political or economic elites are corrupt or self-serving. This indicates that decisions are usually made with little to no regard to the people "below", in terms of how it will impact them, ensuring it remains mostly beneficial for the elites.

2. Central role of "the people"

The central role of “the people” concept pins ordinary citizens as the true and moral core of society. The concept illustrates the idea that policy-making and decisions should reflect the needs and wants of citizens, not the elites themselves.

3. Moral struggle between two groups

This concept creates a binary between the citizens and elites. The ordinary citizens are portrayed as honest, hardworking, or the pure core of a society. The elite, on the other hand, are portrayed as self-serving and morally illegitimate, indicating the rules and regulations they create and implement are often detached to the people's needs. The concept shapes the backbone of populism, describing the elites as an exploitative actor that lacks making decisions based on what the people need. Populism doesn't just describe problems as a political disagreement, rather a moral conflict pitting the morally right side against the morally wrong side.

Together, these frameworks provide both a descriptive and interpretive foundation for the study. Framing Theory, through the lens of Frames in Communication, captures how the SD construct climate discourse by emphasising certain values and sidelining others. Populist Theory complements this by explaining the ideological function of those frames, showing how they are embedded in narratives of anti-elitism, the centrality of “the people,” and moral struggle. The intersection of these approaches ensures that the analysis not only identifies the linguistic strategies used in SD’s rhetoric but also demonstrates how these strategies legitimise reduced climate ambition and reframe governance responsibilities.

4. Methodological Framework

4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This study adopts CDA as its methodology in answering the research questions presented above. CDA is particularly suitable for examining how language produces and reproduces power relations, constructs ideological meaning, and legitimises certain interpretations of climate responsibility (Fairclough 1995). By systematically analysing textual and discursive patterns, CDA enables the study to uncover broader socio-political dynamics embedded in SD’s rhetoric. In simple terms, CDA serves as a tool for studying language that connects what is said, in texts or verbal communication, with how society functions, which includes power, ideology, and

institutions. He created a three dimensional model to help break down the components of CDA, thus making it easier to understand (Fairclough 1987,1995 cited in Janks 1997, pp. 1):

1. Object of analysis (text)

The object of analysis is the raw material that is being studied. This includes speeches, interviews, articles, website content and could also include a mix of words and visuals. To set the tone for the upcoming discussion, an example of materials that will be used is SD speeches involving climate related content or a party manifesto outlining their views, goals, or promises surrounding climate related fields.

2. Processes of production and reception

The process of production and reception involves two components. The first component entails how the text was produced; was the text written, spoken or produced through visual forms such as posters or videos. The second component involves how the text is received; did consumers read, listen to, or view the text through visual means to receive the information. Although sometimes overlooked, this dimension is crucial for understanding the tone for the delivery of the material. This dimension enables the analysis to reach farther than strictly understanding the text itself, it delves into the factors surrounding individuals when the information is received, which impacts their perception. For example, text that is being verbally communicated through a live speech might have an emotional impact on the recipients. This could stem from the tone or gestures that were being used throughout the speech. For example, when SD leaders deliver a live speech opposing EU climate regulations, their tone and gestures may heighten emotional impact alongside using emotionally charged words. In contrast, when the same speech is reported in a newspaper, the delivery is filtered, and gestures or tone are lost, which alters how audiences receive the message. Converting it into a written statement, compared to a live speech, will hold different reception factors. In written form the information might be filtered or emphasise parts of the speech that were of less importance when communicated verbally. This further alters how recipients receive the message being portrayed as the tone of the text and gestures can be lost in translation.

3. Socio-historical conditions

The socio-historical conditions are where you take the above information and connect it to power, ideology, and society. It seeks to answer the question “why does it matter in society”, in which it zooms out of focus on the text and its meaning to how power, ideology, and societal context shapes both the production and reception of the text. To answer the posed question “why does it matter in society”, it matters as the language being used has the ability to shape power relations, challenge elites and their positions, or legitamise different policies and their outcomes. Setting the text and language into a macro level context allows us to understand the greater impact of these texts. It enables us to understand how these texts can e.g. draw in audiences to side with one party over the other, but also shape individuals thoughts, wants, or needs that shape societies.

4.2 Data Collection

The study draws on a primary corpus to address the research questions. The primary corpus was constructed using two selection criteria: date of publication and relevance to official SD discourse. All documents were published between 2010 and 2025, allowing the analysis to capture developments across the period in which the party’s climate positioning has undergone significant transformation. As the study focuses exclusively on the SD’ climate discourse, only texts that explicitly address climate, energy, or environmental policy were included, while documents centred on unrelated policy areas were excluded to maintain analytical coherence. Additionally, any documents discussing climate, energy, and environmental policy from a coalition stance (with the involvement of other party decisions and opinions) were also excluded to ensure the focus remained strictly on SD’s climate discourse.

The primary corpus consists of official SD documents. This includes the following:

- Speeches by SD representatives in the Riksdag
- Election manifestos (National & EU)
- Party programs
- Riksdag motions
- Budget proposals
- Policy documents

The primary materials were selected as they represent the party's most authoritative and publicly accountable statements, allowing for systematic analysis of how climate and energy issues are framed across time. All primary texts were sourced directly from the Riksdag's motion archive and the party's official website, ensuring that the corpus reflects the party's formal communication rather than secondary interpretations. This approach enabled the tracing of discursive developments and rhetoric within a stable set of genres, while also capturing variation across national and EU contexts.

4.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using CDA, which provided a systematic framework for examining how meaning is constructed through language, framing, and rhetorical choices in the SD' climate-related texts. The analysis proceeded by identifying recurrent discursive patterns, framing devices, and rhetorical strategies across the primary corpus, paying close attention to how these elements position climate issues within broader ideological narratives. Each document was read multiple times to trace how specific lexical choices, metaphors, and argumentative structures contribute to the construction of SD's climate discourse and rhetoric.

The overall research design follows an abductive logic, meaning that interpretations are developed through an iterative movement between the empirical material and relevant theoretical frameworks, allowing emerging patterns to refine the analytical focus. For example, when examining the SDs' climate discourse, abductive reasoning allows the analysis to move between textual evidence (e.g., lexical items such as "unprofitable" or "economically justifiable investments") and theoretical frameworks (framing theory & populist theory), repeatedly refining the understanding of how populist ideologies are embedded in their climate narratives. This approach ensures that the analysis captures both the internal coherence of SD's climate discourse and the ideological assumptions embedded within it. This approach ensures that the analysis captures both the internal coherence of SD's climate discourse and the ideological assumptions embedded within it.

4.4 Evaluation of Sources

All primary sources are official and publicly disseminated materials, which enhances their reliability. However, they also reflect the party's self-presentation and strategic communication, meaning they cannot be taken as neutral accounts. The table below illustrates a clear overview of the full corpus divided into five different genres. Sources include both written and verbal material that span across the 2010–2025 timeframe. This makes it possible for readers to see that the findings are grounded in a systematically constructed dataset rather than isolated or atypical examples.

Table 1. Overview of the Primary Corpus

Document Type	**Sources**
Principle Program	The Sweden Democrats Principles Program (2011)
	The Sweden Democrats Principles Program (2019)
	Kommunpolitiskt Inriktningsprogram (2022)
	The Sweden Democrats Principles Program (2023)
Election Manifestos (National & EU)	"99 proposals for a better Sweden" - national election (2010)
	"We Choose Welfare" - national election (2014)
	"Less EU, More Sweden" - EU election (2014)
	Election Platform - EU-parliament election (2019)

	Election platform - national election (2022)
	Election Manifesto - EU-parliament election (2024)
Riksdags Motion	“Swedish environmental goals pave the way” (2013/14)
	“More Efficient Climate Policy” (2015/16)
	“More Efficient Climate Policy” (2016/17)
	“An Efficient Climate Policy” (2019/20)
	“Invest in Sweden – The Sweden Democrats’ proposal for the 2021 state budget” (2020/21)
Budget Proposals	“The Engine in Swedish Politics”- spring budget (2022)
	“Expenditure Area 20 - climate, environment, and nature” - budget proposition (2023/24)
Parliamentary Speeches	“There is no climate crisis” - Beatrice Timgren in EU parliamentary debate (2024)
	“More people are realizing that the EU's climate policy is unreasonable” - Beatrice Timgren in EU parliamentary debate (2025)
	“Stop the climate madness before Europe crashes” - Beatrice Timgren in EU parliamentary debate (2025)

4.5 Limitations and Delimitations

This study is delimited to SD's climate discourse between 2010 and 2025, focusing on publicly available materials such as speeches, media appearances, policy documents, manifestos, principle programs and website content. The decision to concentrate on SD reflects their prominent role in shaping climate scepticism within Swedish parliamentary politics and their use of populist rhetoric. The justification of strictly adhering to the 2010-2025 timeframe is deliberate as it marked the beginning of SDs entry into Riksdagen (2010) and their entry into the Tidö Agreement, which solidified their ability to directly influence national policies (Förell & Fischer 2025, pp. 618). This delimitation ensures that the analysis captures the most politically consequential phases of SD's climate discourse, when their rhetoric shifted from oppositional critique to coalition-level policy framing.

On the other hand, the study does not include internal party communications or non-public materials, which presents a significant limitation. By relying exclusively on publicly available texts such as speeches, interviews, and manifestos, the analysis can only capture the outwardly communicated discourse rather than the internal factors that shape it. This means that the strategic intent behind certain discursive choices remains inaccessible. Examples such as why particular metaphors or words are employed or why specific policy framings are more emphasised than others will thus be excluded. Internal documents and communication between party members could reveal whether these discursive patterns are deliberately chosen or if it differs between speakers. Without such sources, the study must rely on the texts themselves to foster an understanding of intent behind the language being used and situate them within broader socio-political contexts, rather than basing it on the party's communicative strategy. This limitation underscores that the findings reflect the discourses as they are publicly presented, not necessarily the full range of strategic reasoning that underpins them.

Practical considerations include the availability and consistency of source material, particularly across different media formats. Some speeches or interviews may be paraphrased or selectively reported, due to translation or sites that have a fixed standpoint on the topic, potentially formatting the presentation of the material through a biased lens. Additionally, the challenge of interpreting rhetorical intent without overextending claims about political motivation is evident.

To maintain analytical neutrality and credibility, the study will rely on established theoretical frameworks.

4.6 Combined Findings and Analysis (Discussion)

In this thesis, the findings and analysis are presented in a combined format, making up the discussions section, rather than as separate chapters. This decision follows directly from the use of CDA, which does not treat description and interpretation as distinct stages but instead integrates them in the act of examining language. As CDA requires attention to both the textual features and the social meanings they produce, separating "findings" from "analysis" would risk fragmenting the discourse and obscuring how linguistic choices operate within broader ideological frames. By weaving descriptive evidence and analytical interpretation together, the thesis maintains methodological coherence, ensures transparency in how claims are grounded in textual data, and reflects the iterative nature of CDA where interpretation is inseparable from the presentation of results.

4.7 Phases of SD's Discursive Trajectory

To trace the SD's discursive trajectory, the findings are organised into four chronological phases:

1. 2010–2014 opposition
2. 2015–2022 transitional reframing
3. 2022–2025 policy influence

This phased structure is not arbitrary but reflects the methodological demands of CDA, which requires attention to how discourse evolves in relation to shifting political contexts (Fairclough 1995, pp. 9). By dividing the material into phases, the thesis makes visible the gradual transformation of SD's rhetoric from marginal opposition to mainstream influence. Each phase captures a distinct moment in the party's development: the early years of delegitimising elite narratives; the articulation of ambition to reshape national debates; the reframing of climate discourse during their rise in electoral strength; and finally, the consolidation of discursive power through direct policy influence after the Tidö Agreement.

This chronological organisation is important because CDA treats discourse as historically situated (Fairclough 1995, pp. 9). Frames and rhetorical devices do not exist in isolation but gain meaning through repetition, adaptation, and recontextualisation over time. Without a phased approach, the analysis would risk flattening these shifts into a static picture, obscuring how SD's discourse strategically adjusted to new opportunities and constraints. The phases therefore provide a transparent framework for showing how linguistic choices both reflected and shaped the party's trajectory, from challenging opposition and criticising supranational governance to embedding populist frames within institutional frameworks on climate governance. In this way, the methodology ensures that the findings are not only descriptive of textual features but also explanatory of the broader discursive dynamics that underpin SD's growing influence over Sweden' s climate governance.

5. Background

The SD were founded in 1988, emerging from the Sweden Party and earlier far-right movements. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, SD remained outside mainstream politics, excluded from coalitions and stigmatised by other parties. Their discourse initially focused heavily on immigration and identity, but they lacked parliamentary representation until 2010, when they won 5.7% of the vote and entered the Riksdag for the first time. Throughout the years their focus gradually grew within different policy areas. After 2010 they expanded their focus from migration and identity to areas such as crime, EU commitments, climate and energy and many other areas (Jungar 2022, pp. 1-2). This shift led to growing support for the party and resulted in their current upper hand in influencing policies. Thus, after 2010 when they officially entered the Riksdag, it marked the beginning of their growing influence in Swedish politics and reshaping policies.

5.1 Ideologies

Their ideological foundation rests on national conservatism, right-wing populism, and Euroscepticism, with a strong emphasis on immigration restriction, cultural homogeneity, and national sovereignty. Nationalism remained as a core component in SDs' ideology with extreme resistance against European integration (Jungar 2022, pp. 1). A core value of the party encompassed the defending of "Swedish traditions and values", which has continued to be seen

in their rhetoric today. Combined with nationalism, the party introduced social conservatism as another core ideology. This meant that while their policies started to align with more progressive values, the core principle was to continue to defend "Swedish values and traditions". In 2005 the SD elected Jimmie Åkessons as the party leader, in which he aimed to rework SDs' image, distancing itself from overt extremism while retaining a populist narrative of sovereignty and cultural protection. While SD initially pushed for appeals that would enforce very strict and traditional policies, whether it surrounded crime (proposing to re-introduce the death penalty), traditional family values, limited abortion rights and opposing LGBTQ+-rights, throughout the years the party was seen to adapt their policies to more "mainstream" views. A similar shift was seen in regards to Sweden and the EU, initially they wanted Sweden to exit the EU however this became unclear in recent years as shifts regarding their position on this continue to appear (Jungar 2022, pp. 2).

5.2 Electoral Growth

The party's support expanded rapidly from 5,000 in 2010 to over 30,000 by 2022 (Jungar 2022, pp. 1). In the 2014 elections, SD became the third largest party in the nation, securing 12.9% of votes. In 2018, votes rose to 17.5%, establishing their position as a growing force in Swedish politics. By the 2022 elections the SD managed to achieve 20.5%, thus becoming the second largest party in parliament. The rapid growth in support was a contributing factor in their ability to influence policies in the subsequent years.

Initially isolated by a cordon sanitaire, from 2010–2018, SD's growing electoral weight made exclusion of the party increasingly undeniable. In 2022, forming the Tidö Agreement with SD as a support party. The Tidö Agreement is a coalition agreement between the SD and the government. While not holding cabinet positions, SD gained significant influence over policy areas including migration, integration, crime, climate, and energy (Jungar 2022, pp. 1). Their influence became especially apparent within the migration, crime and climate and energy areas after the signing. SD shaped the government's climate position by emphasising "economically viable" measures and resisting EU-driven directives (Förell & Fischer 2020). This led to the Tidö Agreement making large investments in nuclear power and reforms to electricity pricing, which not only reflects SD's scepticism towards wind power and supranational climate commitments

but also their rapid influence over the shaping of national policies (Förell & Fischer 2020, pp. 615-616). Their rhetoric, which was often framed in populist terms of protecting "ordinary Swedes" against elite or supranational governance, has thus been translated into concrete policy shifts leading to more restrictive climate commitments (Jungar 2022, pp. 3).

The SD's trajectory exemplifies the normalisation of populist discourse. Once excluded, they are now central actors in Swedish politics. Their rise reflects both electoral success and discursive mainstreaming, culminating in direct influence over government policy after 2022. This trajectory provides crucial context for analysing their climate discourse, where themes of sovereignty, economic realism, and populist anti-elitism are consistently mobilised.

6. Findings & Analysis

6.1 Phase 1: Opposition (2010-2013)

Initially, the party's interventions sought primarily to delegitimise the positions of political opponents, portraying climate policy as an elite-driven project disconnected from ordinary citizens. This became apparent between 2010 and 2014, where the language they used throughout texts presented climate and energy policies as a matter of sovereignty, stewardship, and economic realism. They emphasize responsibility and affordability while rejecting externally driven solutions. The following texts thus aim to establish a discursive baseline in which the party challenges dominant interpretations of climate responsibility without articulating concrete proposals aimed to influence national or international policy frameworks seen in subsequent years.

The SD's discourse between 2010 and 2013 reveals a consistent effort to frame environmental and energy policy as a matter of national responsibility rather than supranational obligation.

Extract 1 (Sverigedemokraterna 2010, pp. 5)

Swedish: "I vårt Sverige läggs betoningen på en ekologisk grundsyn där begrepp som ansvar,

hållbarhet och förvaltartanken är lika självklara som centrala. I vårt Sverige tar vi övergripande miljöproblem på allvar samtidigt som vi även väger in andra viktiga värden när vi fattar beslut och inser att …Sverige inte ensamt kan lösa världens miljöproblem."

English: "In our Sweden, the emphasis is on an ecological fundamental view where concepts such as responsibility, sustainability and stewardship are as self-evident as they are central. In our Sweden, we take overall environmental problems seriously while also weighing other important values when we make decisions and realize that Sweden alone cannot solve the world's environmental problems."

Extract 1 constructs environmental and energy policy through a dominant ecological responsibility frame, where terms like "responsibility, sustainability, and stewardship" signal a moralised and stewardship-oriented approach. This framing positions environmental action not as ideological or technocratic, but as a natural extension of national values and long-term care. The phrase "in our Sweden" is repeated, functioning as a nationalistic move that ties ecological principles to a culturally specific vision of Sweden, thereby reinforcing a sense of ownership and identity. It further uncovers populist logics, as the extract subtly invokes a people-versus-elite frame by contrasting "our Sweden" with the suggestion that other actors (supranational institutions or global agendas) fail to balance environmental concerns with other "important values." The claim that "Sweden alone cannot solve the world's environmental problems" introduces a global insignificance frame, which shifts responsibility away from Sweden and toward broader international actors. This rhetorical move legitimises a more selective or nationally tailored environmental strategy while criticising overly ambitious or externally imposed expectations. It further sets up a tone of criticism towards EU and national climate regulations, indicating that while climate responsibilities are important to uphold, EU commitments are seen as disproportionately imposed and disconnected, lacking the ability to be implemented in a balanced way.

Extract 2 (Sverigedemokraterna 2011, pp. 40)

Swedish: "energipolitik som säkerställer en prisvärd och tillförlitlig energiförsörjning för såväl

hushåll som näringsliv”

English: “energy policy that ensures an affordable and reliable energy supply for both households and businesses”

The 2011 principal program develops this line of discourse further. Energy policy is outlined as a matter of ensuring “affordable and reliable energy supply” for households and businesses. It continues to frame energy policies as disconnected and emphasises how these policies need to be able to protect ordinary citizens and businesses from financial burdens. This connects to the central role of the people dimension that is a core component in populist logics. The repeated emphasis on protecting “ordinary citizens” from elite driven impositions indicate that supranational governance lacks upholding the needs of the “people” (Huber & R.A. 2020).

Additionally, a sovereignty and stewardship frame is further outlined in the 2011 principle program illustrated in extract 3:

Extract 3 (Sverigedemokraterna 2011, pp. 40)

Swedish: “Förvaltarskapstanken, det vill säga strävandet efter att inte lämna över vår hembygd, vårt land, vår kontinent och vår planet i ett sämre skick till våra barn”

“The idea of stewardship, that is, the effort not to leave our homeland, our country, our continent and our planet in a worse condition to our children”

The term “stewardship” itself carries strong connotations of guardianship, care, and long-term responsibility, positioning environmental action as a moral obligation rather than a technocratic choice. Combined with the sequenced phrasing “our homeland, our country, our continent and our planet”, this ordering is not neutral, rather it points to the nation as the primary site of responsibility. From a populist perspective, the sentence subtly invokes the central role of the people, where “our children” functions as a symbolic representation of the innocent, deserving public. This creates a contrast between those who protect the homeland for future generations and those who, implicitly, fail to do so. Additionally, an emphasis on “our homeland” and “our

children" constructs a collective "people" whose interests must be safeguarded, a classic populist strategy that binds environmental responsibility to national belonging.

At the same time, the framing of stewardship as an "effort not to leave" the country in worse condition introduces a threat-avoidance frame, suggesting that current policies or external actors risk degrading the nation's future. This aligns with populist logics that warn against elite mismanagement or supranational overreach, positioning the speaker as the defender of the nation's long-term well-being. Through this lens, stewardship becomes not only an ecological principle but also a protective stance against perceived external or elite-driven threats.

Extract 4 (Sverigedemokraterna 2014, pp. 13)

Swedish: "Sverigedemokraterna arbetar för ett Sverige där vi värnar vår egen fantastiska och unika naturmiljö och tar vår del av ansvaret för de globala miljöproblemen samtidigt som vi också väger in andra viktiga värden när vi fattar beslut och inser att Sverige inte ensamt kan lösa världens miljöproblem. Ett Sverige där miljöpolitiken tar sin utgångspunkt i kärleken och omtanken om den egna hembygden. Ett Sverige fritt från oljeberoendet med en stabil elförsörjning och rimliga energipriser till gagn för både företagen, välfärden och medborgarnas privatekonomi." English: "The Sweden Democrats work for a Sweden that protects our own fantastic and unique natural environment and takes our share of responsibility for global environmental problems, while also weighing in other important values when making decisions and recognizing that Sweden cannot solve the world's environmental problems alone. A Sweden where environmental policy is based on love and care for the local community. A Sweden free from oil dependence, with a stable electricity supply and reasonable energy prices to the benefit of businesses, welfare, and citizens' personal finances."

Extract 5 (Sverigedemokraterna 2014, pp. 13)

Swedish: "Ett nej till en fortsatt storskalig utbyggnad av kraftigt subventionerad och ineffektiv vindkraft som har en negativ inverkan på natur och kulturmiljöer."

English: “A rejection of continued large-scale expansion of heavily subsidized and inefficient wind power that has a negative impact on natural and cultural environments.”

The extract constructs climate and environmental policy through a populist frame that promotes national identity and ordinary citizens over supranational governance. The mention of “a Sweden where environmental policy is based on love and care for the local community” operates as a rhetorical device of affective nationalism, framing environmental responsibility and the creation of climate policies as rooted in emotional attachment to a place rather than global commitments. The use of affective nationalism as an emotional trigger has the ability to create the “us vs. them” division which is central to populist rhetoric and is continuously used throughout the presented excerpt (Militz & Schurr 2016, pp. 56). Thus this lexical choice positions “the people” as authentic custodians of the environment, contrasting them implicitly with distant elites.

The statement that “Sweden cannot solve the world’s environmental problems alone” reframes climate responsibility by rejecting universalist narratives and situating agency within the nation-state. Through hyperbole, the text dramatises Sweden’s position, exaggerating the notion of a single country solving global problems in order to legitimise a nationalist framing of climate responsibility. Framing theory reveals how this formulation shifts the interpretive schema: climate change is not presented as a collective global crisis but as a matter of national stewardship, bounded by sovereignty.

Populist theory further clarifies the anti-elitist undertone in the emphasis on “reasonable energy prices” and “stable electricity supply” which foregrounds the economic well-being of households and welfare systems. By linking energy affordability to “företagen, välfärden och medborgarnas privatekonomi” (businesses, welfare, and the citizens personal finances), the discourse constructs climate policies as legitimate only if it protects ordinary citizens from elite-driven burdens.

On a similar note, SD’s position on international climate commitments and supranational governance are further highlighted throughout the texts. In the 2014 EU election manifesto “Less EU, More Sweden” the EU is described as having “too much influence over member states' climate policy”, portraying supranational governance as overreaching and illegitimate. This framing is further reinforced with the following statements: “the measures to achieve these goals

should be determined nationally" and "Sweden should be free to make its own decisions" as it highlights that decisions and rules should not be externally imposed, but needs to remain within the nation. Furthermore, the title "Mindre EU, Mer Sverige" sets the tone for the audience regarding their ideology. Written in a direct and punchy manner it signals their opposition and criticism towards the EU and its involvement in Swedish politics.

This circles back to the anti-elite undertones and central role of the people, but in a slightly different way. On the one hand, it is framed as a defence of national sovereignty, asserting that decisions about climate measures should be determined domestically rather than imposed by supranational institutions. On the other hand, this critique is also mobilised to highlight the protection of the "ordinary citizens". By presenting EU influence as excessive, the discourse suggests that supranational directives risk undermining national competitiveness, raising costs, or imposing policies that do not align with local realities. In this way, the SD position themselves as defenders of everyday Swedes against distant elites, reinforcing a populist narrative in which institutional overreach is contrasted with the lived concerns of the people. The sovereignty frame thus intertwines with a populist protection frame: resisting EU authority is not only about preserving national autonomy but also about safeguarding citizens from burdens perceived as unfair or disconnected from their interests.

Across these texts, the SD's climate and energy discourse remains fundamentally oppositional, characterised by efforts to delegitimise existing policy frameworks rather than propose detailed alternatives. The party positions climate action as an elite-driven project detached from the needs of "ordinary citizens," while framing national sovereignty, stewardship, and economic realism as corrective principles against supranational overreach. Although themes of responsibility and care are present, they function primarily as rhetorical tools to critique dominant interpretations of climate responsibility rather than to articulate actionable policy pathways. This phase therefore reflects a discourse aimed at resisting, reframing, and challenging established climate governance, marking it as a period defined by contestation rather than constructive policy engagement.

6.2 Phase 2: Transitional Reframing (2015-2021)

From 2015-2021, the SD's climate and energy discourse contains more frequent and detailed references to policy instruments, governance structures, and institutional responsibility. As the party consolidated increasing electoral strength, its climate rhetoric shifted from merely contesting elite narratives to presenting itself as a credible alternative capable of shaping national debates. The emphasis on affordability, reliability, and sovereignty was retained, but increasingly articulated in ways that signalled readiness to govern with propositions of constructive solutions. This transition marks the beginning of a new phase in which the SD sought not only to resist externally imposed governance but also to position themselves as a supporting actor within Swedish climate politics. The following documents contain more explicit descriptions of how climate and energy policy should be organised and implemented rather than strictly opposing existing frameworks.

Initially, while national and EU elections were not present from 2015-2017, SD continued to highlight their stance on climate issues through motions and speeches, parallel to proposing "better solutions". The 2015/16, 2016/17, 2019/20 motions and 2018 national election manifesto describe Swedish climate policies using terms such as "föregångspolitik" ("pioneering climate policy") followed by calls for analysing its impacts on cost, effectiveness, and sustainability and proposals that promoted alternatives such as hydro-power and nuclear power. Combined with the proposals they introduced a budgeting plan in order to lower costs surrounding

Extract 1 (Åkesson & Kinnunen 2015/16, 2016/17, 2019/20, pp. 1)

Swedish: "Riksdagen ställer sig bakom det som anförs i motionen om att regeringen bör göra en analys av effekterna av en föregångspolitik på klimatområdet och tillkännager detta för regeringen."
English: "The Riksdag supports the motion that the government should conduct an analysis of the effects of a pioneering climate policy and announces this to the government"

The formulation "The Riksdag supports the motion that the government should conduct an analysis of the effects of a pioneering climate policy and announces this to the government" functions as an important discursive move within the SD's climate rhetoric. In parliamentary

terms, the use of "announces" signals that the Riksdag is formally urging the government to act, and its presence in SD-supported motions reveals how the party seeks to institutionalise its critique of Swedish climate ambition. This can be understood as an attempt to reframe "pioneering climate policy" (föregångspolitik) as a potential threat to economic security rather than a marker of climate leadership. Additionally, by pushing for an official analysis, SD transforms its oppositional claims about competitiveness, carbon leakage, and disproportionate burdens into a demand for governmental evaluation, thereby shifting its discourse from reactive criticism toward procedural influence.

Framing the climate policies as costly and unrealistic while calling for an investigation of its "real" effects shows how SD embeds these thoughts within institutional processes. Circling back to frames in communication, climate ambition becomes a factor that must be justified in terms of cost, efficiency, and fairness (Chong & Druckman 2007, pp. 106-107).

This is further clarified by populist undertones, as assessing whether climate policies are more harmful than effective thus positions SD as a protector of the "people" against harmful, elite-driven agendas. This is both done by calling for the government to act but also through explicitly questioning the "ambitious" climate agenda for its "effectiveness". In this way, the statement marks a subtle but significant step in the party's trajectory: opposition is maintained, but it is now channelled through parliamentary tools that signal a transitional phase with growing abilities to shape, constrain, and influence Sweden's climate policy from within institutional structures.

Extract 3 (Åkesson & Kinnunen 2015/16, 2016/17, 2019/20, pp. 1)

Swedish: "Vi avhåller oss från domedagsprofetior och lägger fokus på realistiska lösningar på verkliga problem."
English: "We refrain from doomsday prophecies and focus on realistic solutions to real problems."

Extract 4 (Åkesson & Kinnunen 2015/16, 2016/17, 2019/20, pp. 1)

Swedish: “Riksdagen ställer sig bakom det som anförs i motionen om att ökat fokus bör ligga på insatser för att åstadkomma teknisk utveckling snarare än på att genom ökade skatter minska utsläppen i Sverige och tillkännager detta för regeringen.”
English: “The Riksdag supports what is stated in the motion that increased focus should be on efforts to achieve technological development rather than on reducing emissions in Sweden through increased taxes and announces this to the government.”

Additionally, the motions contain statements in favour of “realistic solutions” and include proposals that emphasize technological development and efficiency. While similar statements were made in earlier years, the formulation was primarily directed towards opposition in order to delegitimise their prioritisation of disconnected climate policies. The use of “realistic solutions” combined with calls for change points to the transitional stage. It signals a shift away from strictly rejecting and opposing climate impositions towards proposing alternative pathways to position themselves as active and dominant participants in Swedish climate politics. Additionally, combined with “doomsday prophecies” and “real problems”, this contrastive framing allows the party to delegitimise existing climate narratives as exaggerated or ideologically driven while elevating their own proposals as pragmatic, proportionate, and grounded in the everyday concerns of citizens. Through this rhetorical juxtaposition, SD reframes the climate debate by positioning themselves as the rational actors capable of steering Sweden away from alarmism and toward what they present as credible, nationally anchored solutions.

Extract 5 (Åkesson & Kinnunen 2015/16, 2016/17, 2019/20, pp. 1)

Swedish: “Riksdagen ställer sig bakom det som anförs i motionen om att regeringen ska utreda riskerna för s.k. koldioxidläckage till följd av ogynnsamma konkurrensförhållanden för svensk industri och tillkännager detta för regeringen.”

English: “The Riksdag supports what is stated in the motion that the government should investigate the risks of so-called carbon leakage as a result of unfavorable competitive conditions for Swedish industry and announces this to the government.”

It further includes references to “carbon leakage” and concerns regarding the risk of production relocation, constructing climate policies as a threat to competition within the nation. The lexical choice of “risks” and “unfavorable competitive conditions” constructs climate policy as potentially harmful, thereby legitimising a precautionary stance that prioritises economic stability over ambitious emissions reductions. This further reinforces their narrative in which ambitious emission targets undermine Sweden’s economic stability rather than foster sustainable climate development. Within this understanding, populist undertones continue to emerge in similar ways seen in the previous years/phase. Describing supranational directives as costly, disproportionately imposed, and unrealistic while highlighting a need to protect citizens from these impositions further reinforces the “us vs them” binary in populist rhetoric.

To reinforce showcasing their transitional phase through proposals, specific budgeting allocations were proposed in 2018 in their national election manifesto which aimed to be discussed in the 2019 election period. The following tables illustrate their main ideas surrounding savings and investments:

Table 2: Climate-Related Savings (Sverigedemokraterna 2018, pp. 28)

Category	**Description**	**Annuel Range (2019-2022)**
Reduced subsidies for biofuels	Reduction of subsidies for biofuels	4,700 - 5,700 million SEK
Abolish other subsidies	Elimination of subsidies for solar panels, electric vehicles, electric buses, electric bicycles, etc.	4,025 - 4,745 million SEK
Inefficient	Cuts to environmental measures	3,550 - 4,550 million

environmental measures	deemed inefficient (e.g. forest purchases)	SEK

These savings reflect a consistent effort to delegitimise subsidy-based climate instruments, specifically those linked to renewable energy and consumer incentives. This adds in a layer of populist undertones as the direction of finances should always benefit the "people" rather than consumers needing to buy certain products to avoid "financial burdens" created by "greedy elites". Additionally, framing renewable measures as "ineffective" or "disproportionate" aligns with SD's broader discourse of economic realism and national pragmatism.

Table 3: Climate-Related Investments (Sverigedemokraterna 2018, pp. 28)

Category	Description	Annual Range (2019-2022)
International climate investment initiatives	Funding for international climate measures (e.g. CDM projects)	500 million SEK
Hydrogen strategy and charging infrastructure	Investments in Hydrogen strategy and charging infrastructure	175 million SEK

The investments signal a selective and technology-driven approach to climate involvement. The emphasis on hydrogen and infrastructure reflects SD's preference for energy solutions tied to national competitiveness. While international climate funding is framed as cost-effective, aligning with their position that optimal climate benefits can only be achieved through investments in developing countries. This further links to absolving Sweden of needing to maintain "unfair" and "unequal" climate responsibilities as blame is shifted onto developing countries.

This was further reinforced in the 2019 Riksdags motion through the following statements in extract 6 and 7:

Extract 6 (Sverigedemokraterna 2019/20, pp. 1)

Swedish: “Riksdagen ställer sig bakom det som anförs i motionen om att satsningarna på internationella klimatinvesteringar bör ökas på bekostnad av ineffektiva åtgärder i Sverige och tillkännager detta för regeringen.”
English: “The Riksdag supports the motion that international climate investments should be increased at the expense of ineffective measures in Sweden and announces this to the government.”

Extract 7 (Sverigedemokraterna 2019/20, pp. 4)

Swedish: ”Mot bakgrund av att koldioxidutsläppen ökar avsevärt på andra håll i världen anser vi att djupare konsekvensanalyser bör genomföras av en ambitiös klimatpolitik som ensidigt genomförs i en begränsad del av världen.”
English: “In light of the fact that carbon dioxide emissions are increasing significantly elsewhere in our world, we believe that deeper impact analyses should be carried out of an ambitious climate policy being unilaterally implemented in a limited part of the world.”

The statement that “In light of the fact that carbon dioxide emissions are increasing significantly elsewhere in our world,” followed by describing ambitious climate policies being “unilaterally implemented” in “a limited part of the world”. This firstly indicates that climate responsibility is reframed through shifting agency away from Sweden and the EU, toward developing countries. Secondly, it uses terms such as “unilaterally” and “ineffective” to highlight disproportionality in its implementation indicating the “unfair” conditions Sweden and the EU are faced with. This is all combined with describing Sweden as already “climate effective”, constructing a narrative in which further obligations are not only unnecessary but unfair for Sweden to uphold. A rhetorical move has thus been recognised, shifting responsibility towards the “real” high-level emitters, resulting in legitimising their position of wanting Sweden to limit supranationally imposed commitments.

This transitional phase marks a clear shift in the SD's climate and energy discourse. While earlier years were dominated by oppositional rhetoric, delegitimisation of elite-driven climate agendas, and a strong emphasis on symbolic resistance, the texts from 2015-2021 reveal a movement toward institutional engagement. The party continues to frame climate policy through economic realism, sovereignty, and protection of "ordinary people", but these themes are now embedded within parliamentary mechanisms such as motions, formal requests for analyses, and structured policy proposals. Instead of solely rejecting existing frameworks, SD begins to articulate alternative pathways such as technological development, cost-effectiveness, and selective international investments, signalling a desire to influence climate governance from within rather than from the margins. This phase therefore represents a pivotal moment in which oppositional populist discourse evolves into governing-oriented positioning, laying the groundwork for the more assertive stance that emerges in the subsequent years.

6.3 Phase 3: Policy Influence (2022-2025)

During the period 2022-2025, the SD's climate and energy discourse is presented in official budgets, election programs, municipal policy documents, and the updated principal program. The texts describe climate and energy policy in terms of affordability, reliability, and national interest, while also outlining concrete measures within government and municipal frameworks.

Across the texts the SD constructed a coherent climate and energy discourse organised around several recurring frames. A central pattern is the framing of climate and energy policy as fundamentally an issue of economic efficiency, where the legitimacy of political action is tied to cost-effectiveness and fiscal responsibility. This is closely linked to a second frame that emphasises Sweden's limited global impact, which positions ambitious national climate measures as disproportionate or ineffective in relation to global emissions. They further draw heavily on a populist people-versus-elites logic, contrasting the interests of ordinary citizens and productive sectors with those of political elites, bureaucratic actors, and supranational institutions. This is reinforced by a national competitiveness frame, where climate and energy transitions are depicted as potential threats to jobs, industry, and economic stability. Alongside these concerns, the texts advance a strong technological optimism, particularly around nuclear power, which is presented as the rational and necessary foundation for future energy security.

Finally, both documents rely on an anti-symbolic frame that characterises existing climate policy as ideological, unrealistic, or performative, thereby legitimising the party's alternative proposals as pragmatic and grounded in real-world constraints.

Extract 1 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 24)

Swedish: "Genom att utforma klimatåtgärder mer effektivt och evidensbaserat kan vi få mer effekt för varje satsad krona, bäst klimatpolitik är inte likställt med dyrast sådan. Att behålla och utveckla kärnkraften är utifrån den aspekten en av de viktigaste åtgärderna."
English: "By designing climate measures more effectively and evidence-based, we can get more effect for every dollar invested. The best climate policy is not the same as the most expensive one. From that perspective, maintaining and developing nuclear power is one of the most important measures."

Extract 2 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 24)

Swedish: "Klimatet är en global fråga där landsgränserna saknar betydelse. Svensk klimatpolitik har istället kommit att förvandlas till en kostsam plakatpolitik där det är viktigare att spendera mycket skattemedel, införa nya skatter och införa överdimensionerade regelverk än att göra skillnad på riktigt."
English: "Climate is a global issue where national borders are irrelevant. Swedish climate policy has instead turned into a costly poster-policy where it is more important to spend a lot of tax money, introduce new taxes and introduce oversized regulations than to make a real difference."

SD constructs climate policy primarily through an economic efficiency frame, foregrounding cost-effectiveness as the central criterion for legitimate action. Expressions such as "more effect for every dollar invested" and "The best climate policy is not the same as the most expensive one" position climate measures within a logic of financial optimisation, suggesting that the value of policy is measurable in economic terms rather than environmental terms. Through CDA, these formulations can be seen as discursively elevating technocratic rationality while delegitimising

alternative approaches. This contrast becomes apparent in the description of existing Swedish climate policy as “costly poster-policy”, a phrase that frames other actors’ measures as symbolic, wasteful, and disconnected from “real” impact. This is further exaggerated by describing the “poster policy” implementing “oversized regulations”, that don't have the ability to make a real difference. Nuclear power is simultaneously constructed as “nuclear power is one of the most important measures.”, reinforcing a preference for technological solutions that align with the party’s broader ideological positioning, seen to be used throughout earlier years.

A central aim of the 2022 budget plan is the push for increasing nuclear power, now signifying that they are putting their words into action. An early marker of their ideological standpoint is made when presenting their energy proposal under the subheading “ Protect and develop nuclear power”. Throughout the text, the repeated emphasis on “competitiveness”, “jobs and development” and “risks for the Swedish economy” continues to frame climate and energy transitions as threats to national development and prosperity. This is in combination with the closure of nuclear reactors where they describe it as “unresponsible energy politics” as existing energy systems are portrayed as “weak”, “vulnerable” and lacking "resilience". These lexical choices construct a crisis narrative where the nation is put under danger through detached or misguided political decisions. The crisis framing thus legitimises the party’s push for returning to “manageable fossil-free electricity production”, in which nuclear power is presented as the only reliable solution.

Further seen in the 2022 spring budget plan and election manifesto, the same dominant economic efficiency frame is presented, where cost-effectiveness and fiscal restraint continues to be positioned as the primary markers of legitimate climate action.

Extract 3 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 16)

Swedish: “Kostnaderna för skattebetalare, företag och konsumenter är redan oacceptabla.”
English: “The costs for taxpayers, businesses and consumers are already unacceptable.”

Extract 4 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 16)

Swedish: “...minska utsläppen i de sektorer där investeringarna ger bäst resultat per spenderad krona.”

English: “...reduce emissions in the sectors where investments yield the best results per krona spent.”

This frame becomes evident in additional formulations such as “unacceptable costs”, and “best results per krona spent”, which again, discursively foregrounds economic burden as the central problem. These lexical choices further function to delegitimise existing climate targets by presenting them as financially irresponsible and disconnected from societal realities.

Extract 5 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 16)

Swedish: “Målet har kreativt tolkats … Detta projekt handlar ytterst om att posera inför en radikal opinion och saknar i princip global relevans.”

English: “The goal has been creatively interpreted … This project is ultimately about posing for a radical public opinion and lacks global relevance in principle.”

The 2030 transport target is described as “creatively interpreted” and ultimately “lacks global relevance in principle”, framing this policy target as symbolic rather than substantive in achieving Sweden' s climate goals. This aligns with the broader efficiency frame, where climate policy is evaluated not by environmental ambition but by economic return. Combining the statement with “posing for a radical public opinion” further exacerbates how existing climate policies are created to satisfy certain people's ambitions and that it is a mere “poster-policy” that holds no substance.

Extract 6 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 24)

Swedish: “Samtidigt som det är viktigt att understryka att ett land som Sverige som står för en promille av utsläppen inte kan ha direkt påverkan på klimatet.”

English: “At the same time, it is important to emphasize that a country like Sweden, which accounts for one per thousand of the emissions, cannot have a direct impact on the climate.”

Extract 7 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 24)

Swedish: “Sverige bidrar exempelvis inte till minskade utsläpp genom att höja drivmedelspriserna, höja elpriserna och göra det mer kostsamt för företag att verka i Sverige om Kina samtidigt kan öka sina utsläpp varje år med mer än vad hela Sverige släpper ut.”

English: “For example, Sweden does not contribute to reduced emissions by raising fuel prices, raising electricity prices and making it more costly for companies to operate in Sweden if China can simultaneously increase its emissions every year by more than the entire country of Sweden emits.”

A second prominent pattern is the construction of Sweden as globally insignificant in terms of emissions, which functions to justify a more restrained national climate strategy. The repeated reference to Sweden’s emissions as “one per thousand of the emissions” and the claim that the country “cannot have a direct impact on the climate” discursively minimise Sweden’s responsibility while shifting attention toward major emitters. The comparison to China reinforces a narrative of imbalance and futility. It refers to the argument that Sweden’s climate actions are pointless as they are too small to affect global emissions.

Framing theory helps illuminate how this global-scale argument is mobilised to undermine the legitimacy of ambitious domestic policy, even as the text simultaneously asserts that “Climate is a global issue where national borders are irrelevant.”. The tension between global responsibility and national insignificance becomes a strategic discursive resource that supports a call for reduced domestic ambition. This is further seen in 1.3 where the 2030 climate goal is described

as “lacking global relevance in principle”, positioning Sweden as structurally incapable of influencing global emissions. This rhetorical move again relies on asymmetry and futility as ambitious national action is pointless due to the project holding no substance. Through framing theory, this can be understood as a strategic reframing of climate responsibility. Rather than emphasising leadership or moral obligation to uphold this goal, SD constructs a logic where restraint and reduction is the rational choice for climate action. This type of discursive minimisation of national agency further justifies shifting away from ambitious domestic targets, towards measures framed as more “realistic” or “globally aligned”.

Populist logics surface through the construction of a divide between ordinary citizens and businesses on one side and political elites or supranational institutions on the other. The critique of “oversized regulations”, “new taxes”, and “costly poster-politics”, seen in extract 2, positions current climate policy as imposed from above and harmful to national prosperity and sovereignty. This aligns with a broader populist narrative in which elites are portrayed as detached from everyday realities, while the party presents itself as defenders of economic stability and national competitiveness. This construction of a divide is further seen in the budget plan:

Extract 8 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 16)

Swedish: “Detta representerar inte hållbar utveckling, utan utgör ett besynnerligt resultat av politisk-byråkratiskt grupptänk.”
English: “This does not represent sustainable development, but is a bizarre result of political-bureaucratic groupthink.”

The description of existing policies as “political-bureaucratic groupthink” positions current decision-makers as irrational, detached, and driven by symbolic politics. On the other hand SD presents themselves as defenders or “tax-payers, businesses, and consumers”, constructing a moralised opposition between the “ordinary people” who bear the costs and burdens and the elites who impose them. This aligns with core populist discourse, where political legitimacy is

claimed through relation to ordinary citizens and opposition to supranational authority. Combining this thought with the use of “bizarre result” further highlights how the divide is created. Blame is shifted directly onto the “elites” as their supposedly narrow-minded decision-making is framed as producing outcomes that are both irrational and harmful to the public they are meant to serve.

Extract 9 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 24)

Swedish: “EU:s klimatpolitik blir allt mer omfattande och påverkar i betydande omfattning Sveriges möjligheter till nationella åtgärder.”
English: “The EU's climate policy is becoming increasingly comprehensive and significantly affects Sweden's possibilities for national action.”

The text also frames EU climate legislation as a constraint, “EU climate policy is becoming increasingly comprehensive and is affecting… Sweden's opportunities”, which reinforces a sense of external imposition and diminished national autonomy. Through CDA, these formulations can be read as constructing a protective stance toward the nation, where climate ambition is acceptable as long as it does not threaten “competitiveness” or living standards.

Extract 10 (Sverigedemokraterna 2022, pp. 24)

Swedish: “Med tanke på att svenska företag håller världsklass när det kommer till miljötänk och låg utsläppsnivå i produktionen kan Sverige genom att öka exporten bidra till att minska utsläppen.”
English: “Given that Swedish companies are world-class when it comes to environmental awareness and low emissions in production, Sweden can contribute to reducing emissions by increasing exports.”

Alongside these critical framings, both texts introduce a discourse of technological optimism and national exceptionalism. Claims that Swedish companies are *"*world-class when it comes to environmental awareness*"* construct Sweden as an innovative, environmentally responsible actor whose global contribution should occur through technological leadership rather than domestic emissions reductions. This supports the argument that increasing exports is itself a climate measure, reframing economic expansion as a form of environmental responsibility. Through framing theory, this can be understood as a shift from a mitigation frame to a competitiveness-through-innovation frame, which aligns with the party's broader ideological emphasis on national strength and economic sovereignty.

In 2023 SD starts to focus mainly on energy politics. Through the 2023 principle program, SD continues to construct energy policy through similar interlinked frames seen in 2022. These include national competitiveness and technological realism but have now woven in more economic security frames than in 2022.

Extract 11 (Sverigedemokraterna 2023, pp. 31)

Swedish: "För att Sverige ska kunna upprätthålla en hög internationell konkurrenskraft och levnadsstandard … energipolitik som säkerställer en prisvärd och tillförlitlig energiförsörjning för såväl hushåll som näringsliv och samtidigt tillgodose högt ställda krav på miljövänlighet."
English: "In order for Sweden to maintain high international competitiveness and living standards … energy policy that ensures an affordable and reliable energy supply for both households and businesses while at the same time meeting high demands for environmental friendliness."

The text starts off by framing energy policy as essential to maintaining Sweden's international competitiveness and living standards, which positions energy supply not merely as a technical issue but as a foundation of national prosperity. By explicitly stressing "affordable and reliable energy supply for both households and businesses" it establishes an economic-security frame. This highlights SD's ideological standpoint where reliable and affordable energy is not only a

prerequisite for the security of households and business but also creates the divide that is central to populist discourse. By framing existing energy policies as a security issue it evokes distress and a need for solutions grounded in protecting "ordinary citizens" economic stability. Additionally, the lexical choices of "international competitiveness", "standard of living", and "affordable and reliable" foregrounds the economic security and national competitiveness frames as energy policies and measures need to uphold these factors to be considered legitimate and environmentally responsible.

Extract 12 (Sverigedemokraterna 2023, pp. 31)

Swedish: "Det är viktigt för en nation att ha kontroll över sin egen energiförsörjning, men detta utesluter inte att energisystem kan delas och utvecklas genom samarbete mellan nationer i vårt närområde. En hög grad av självförsörjning är dock att föredra för att säkerställa att vi uppnår målen med vår energipolitik." English: "It is important for a nation to have control over its own energy supply, but this does not preclude energy systems from being shared and developed through cooperation between nations in our vicinity. However, a high degree of self-sufficiency is preferable to ensure that we achieve the goals of our energy policy."

Alongside the security frame, a strong sovereignty frame appears, stressing the importance of national control over energy supply even while acknowledging the value to regional cooperation. The preference for a high degree of self-sufficiency constructs energy autonomy as a strategic necessity, reinforcing the idea that Sweden must protect itself from external vulnerabilities.

Extract 13 (Sverigedemokraterna 2023, pp. 31)

Swedish: "Under överskådlig framtid kommer kärnkraften och vattenkraften att utgöra grundstommen i Sveriges elproduktion … Våra orörda nationalälvar skall bevaras från vidare vattenkraftsutbyggnad."

English: “For the foreseeable future, nuclear power and hydropower will form the backbone of Sweden's electricity production … Our pristine national rivers must be preserved from further hydropower expansion.”

Extract 15 (Sverigedemokraterna 2023, pp. 31)

Swedish: “Vid utbyggnad av förnybara kraftkällor så som vind, sol, våg- och vattenkraft måste stor hänsyn tas till kultur- och landskapsmässiga värden”

English: “When expanding renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, wave and hydropower, great consideration must be given to cultural and landscape values”

Nuclear and hydropower are again presented as the long-term backbone of the Swedish energy system, which reflects a technological-stability frame that prioritises established, large-scale, and controllable energy sources over more variable and “unreliable” renewable energy. Linking back to earlier phases, the lexical choice of using “pristine” in describing Sweden’s national rivers combined with “must be preserved from hydropower expansion” evokes two interrelated meaning potentials: first, an environmental-protection stance that constructs these rivers as inherently valuable and vulnerable, and second, a boundary-drawing move that positions certain forms of energy development as intrusive or even threatening to the national landscape. This also seeps into populistic discursive strategies as framing hydropower expansion as an imposition from above, in tension with the interests and identities of local communities and culture, thereby reinforcing a people-versus-elite dynamic in which the party positions itself as the defender of local autonomy and cultural heritage against distant decision-makers. This is clearly seen when they highlight how renewable energy sources need to consider cultural and landscape values. This positioning constructs existing renewable energy alternatives as potentially disruptive or risky unless tightly regulated, reinforcing a risk and security frame that contrasts with the more optimistic portrayal of nuclear development.

Extract 16 (Sverigedemokraterna 2023, pp. 31)

Swedish: “Energisektorn befinner sig i ett kontinuerligt förändringsarbete. Strävan är att energisektorn skall vara fossilfri, men fossila bränslen kommer att behövas under en övergångsperiod.” English: “The energy sector is in a continuous process of change. The aim is for the energy sector to be fossil-free, but fossil fuels will be needed during a transition period.”

Moreover, a transition-realism frame becomes apparent as SD acknowledges that while the long-term goal is a fossil-free energy sector, during the transition period fossil fuels will remain necessary. This positions the party as pragmatic and grounded in real world constraints rather than ideological ambition. It also points to their populist rhetoric in which they acknowledge the struggle that “ordinary citizens” and businesses face economically, further positioning themselves as the defenders and protectors of the “ordinary people”.

By 2024 and 2025 SD continues to weave in the same frames seen in earlier years, but the emphasis on realism stands out to be prominent. The realism frames uncover underlying populist logics and a higher intensity of scepticism towards supranational climate governance throughout these years.

Extract 17 (Sverigedemokraterna 2024, pp. 6)

Swedish: “De senaste decennierna har miljöpolitiken kommit att präglas av godhetssignalerande, känslor och ren alarmism. Sverige och Europa behöver en kostnadseffektiv miljö- och klimatpolitik med robusta konsekvensanalyser som tar hänsyn till att all klimatpolitik kräver folklig förankring. Politiken måste kunna kombineras med välstånd, rimliga samhällskostnader och konkurrenskraft.” English: “In recent decades, environmental policy has been characterized by do-gooding, emotions and pure alarmism. Sweden and Europe need a cost-effective environmental and

climate policy with robust impact analyses that take into account that all climate policy requires democratic support. The policy must be able to be combined with prosperity, reasonable social costs and competitiveness."

Extract 17 constructs climate and environmental policy through a dominant realism frame that contrasts "realistic" approaches with what is depicted as emotional, alarmist, or ideologically driven policymaking. By characterising previous environmental politics as shaped by "do-gooding", "emotions", and "alarmism", SD delegitimises competing climate agendas and positions their own stance as rational and grounded in common sense. This rhetorical move is reinforced through a cost-effectiveness frame, where legitimate climate policy must be compatible with prosperity, reasonable societal costs, and competitiveness. Through CDA, these lexical choices construct a hierarchy of values in which economic stability and social acceptance are prerequisites for environmental action, thereby narrowing the range of acceptable climate measures to those that do not disrupt existing economic structures. At this point their language has become increasingly authoritative, a discursive move indicating a shift in modal strength (Flowerdew & Richardson). In earlier phases their language pointed to wording suggesting a softer modality, such as "should" when describing proposals. This indicates that climate proposals were more advisory or open to interpretation, whereas the use of "must" suggests a strong modality, where policies at this point in time have an urgent need of ensuring "prosperity, reasonable social costs and competitiveness". This suggests their climate policy proposals have shifted from mere suggestions to authoritative and urgent impositions. This is further seen in the use of "need" when discussing environmental and climate policies as they "need" to be cost effective, further promoting the economic-efficiency frame seen throughout all phases.

A second point is brought up within extract 17, pointing to high levels of criticism on how "alarming" the climate-crisis actually is. By 2024 and 2025 SD is seen to commit to the economic realism frame characterised throughout all phases but cracks down on supranational climate governance by stating that the climate crisis is exaggerated. Speeches conducted by Beatrice Timgren in the EU parliament in 2024 and 2025 develops this thought further:

Extract 18 (Timgren 2024, 0:30)

Swedish: “Låt mig vara tydlig, det råder ingen klimatkris. Men vi har en kostnadskris. EU-eliten talar om klimatmål, samtidigt som man levererar ännu mer lagar och regler som steg för steg minskar vår frihet. Bryssel vill diktera vilken bil vi ska köra… och medborgarnas oro för skenande priser. Det tas inte på allvar.

English: “Let me be clear, there is no climate crisis. But we have a cost crisis. The EU elite talks about climate goals, while delivering even more laws and regulations that step by step reduce our freedom. Brussels wants to dictate which car we should drive… and citizens’ concerns about skyrocketing prices. It is not being taken seriously.

The statement “there is no climate crisis. But we have a cost crisis” represents a deliberate problem-reframing move, shifting the interpretive focus from environmental urgency to economic threat. Through framing theory, this can be understood as a crisis-substitution frame: the environmental crisis is delegitimised, while a new, economically grounded crisis is elevated as the “real” issue. This reframing reinforces SD’s long-standing economic realism frame, where legitimate climate action must be evaluated through affordability, competitiveness, and financial restraint rather than environmental necessity.

The reference to the “EU elite” introduces a clear people-versus-elite frame, a core mechanism in populist theory. By contrasting “EU elites” with “citizens’ concerns,” the discourse constructs a moralised divide between distant decision-makers and ordinary people whose economic anxieties are allegedly ignored (Huber 2020). The claim that Brussels “wants to dictate which car we should drive” activates a sovereignty-loss frame, portraying supranational governance as intrusive, coercive, and detached from everyday realities. This aligns with populist logics that depict elites as overreaching and unaccountable, while positioning the party as the defender of national autonomy and personal freedom.

The phrase “step by step reduce our freedom” further intensifies a threat-to-freedom frame, transforming regulatory climate policy into a creeping erosion of civil liberties. This rhetorical escalation not only delegitimises EU climate governance but also constructs a sense of urgency and vulnerability that justifies SD’s oppositional stance (Chong & Druckman 2007, pp. 106-107). Finally, the assertion that citizens’ concerns about “skyrocketing prices” are “not being

taken seriously" reinforces a neglected-people frame, where the party claims exclusive moral closeness to the public, further intensifying the anti-elitist framing central to populist theory as they position themselves as the defenders of the "ordinary" people.

A particularly interesting note about this speech is how the speaker delivers the message. Throughout the speech, sentences are short and direct when delivered, demonstrating a controlled process of production in which linguistic choices are deliberately shaped to construct authority, and exerting power by limiting ambiguity and guiding audience reception. The use of "let me be clear" followed by "there is no climate crisis" sets up the authoritative tone used throughout the speech, invoking heightened alarmism within audiences (Fairclough 1995).

Extract 19 (Sverigedemokraterna 2024, pp. 6)

Swedish: "Europas möjlighet att bidra till minskade utsläpp av växthusgaser globalt avgörs av att Europa kan visa sig vara ett föredöme för övriga världen. Detta är inte fallet idag där radikal klimatpolitik kombineras med stagnerad tillväxt. Risken är överhängande att en radikal klimatpolitik leder till höga kostnader för hushållen samtidigt som jobb, tillväxt och utsläpp flyttas till andra länder utan nytta för det globala klimatarbetet."
English: "Europe's ability to contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions globally depends on Europe being able to set an example for the rest of the world. This is not the case today, where radical climate policy is combined with stagnant growth. The risk is imminent that radical climate policy will lead to high costs for households while jobs, growth and emissions are shifted to other countries without benefit to global climate work."

A major recurring pattern seen again is the deployment of a global insignificance frame, where Europe's share of global emissions is emphasised to argue that ambitious climate policy risks being ineffective or even counterproductive. The text constructs a causal chain in which "radical" climate measures lead to stagnating growth, job losses, and carbon leakage, thereby undermining global climate efforts rather than advancing them. This framing positions the EU as structurally incapable of influencing global emissions unless it first secures economic growth and competitiveness. This functions as a discursive strategy that shifts responsibility away from domestic mitigation and toward external actors, while simultaneously legitimising a scaling-back

of EU-level ambition. The lexical choices of using “risk” and “lead to” suggests that the policies are a threat or unstable and will eventually lead to economic despair if policies remain the same.

Extract 20 (Sverigedemokraterna 2024, pp. 6)

Swedish: “Genom klimatpakten Fit for 55 önskar Bryssel reformera den europeiska ekonomin i grunden, med oöverblickbara konsekvenser … Samtidigt som vi behöver fortsätta med ett hållbart svenskt skogsbruk för att ställa om till fossilfrihet styr EU:s politik mot att sabotera möjligheterna till ett livskraftigt svenskt skogsbruk.”
English: “Through the Fit for 55 climate pact, Brussels wants to fundamentally reform the European economy, with unpredictable consequences … At the same time as we need to continue with sustainable Swedish forestry to transition to fossil-freedom, EU policy is steering towards sabotaging the opportunities for viable Swedish forestry.”

Populist logics appear again when discussing the Fit for 55 package, particularly through a people-versus-elite frame that contrasts ordinary households and national industries with distant, unaccountable decision-makers in “Brussels”. The depiction of the Fit for 55 package as an attempt to fundamentally reform the European economy “with unforeseeable consequences” constructs EU institutions as reckless and detached from everyday realities. The claim that EU policy “sabotages” Swedish forestry further intensifies this antagonistic relationship, portraying supranational governance as actively harmful to national livelihoods. This aligns with the core principle of populist discourse, where political legitimacy is grounded in proximity to “the people” and opposition to supranational authority.

Extract 21 (Sverigedemokraterna 2024, pp. 6)

Swedish: “Därför vill vi riva upp EU:s klimatpakt … I Sverige har vi genom Tidöavtalet fått en ny inriktning mot en effektiv och folkligt förankrad miljö- och klimatpolitik. Vi önskar ta detta arbete vidare till Europaparlamentet och avskaffa den miljöpartistiska politiken även på EU-nivå. EU måste upphöra med att motarbeta kärnkraft och istället arbeta strategiskt för att

utarbeta regelverk som främjar forskning. På det sättet kan EU bidra till att stimulera till mer kärnkraft i Europa och världen.”

English: “That is why we want to tear up the EU's climate pact... In Sweden, through the Tidö Agreement, we have received a new direction towards an effective and democratically anchored environmental and climate policy. We wish to take this work forward to the European Parliament and abolish the environmentalist policy also at EU level. The EU must stop opposing nuclear power and instead work strategically to develop regulations that promote research. In this way, the EU can help stimulate more nuclear power in Europe and the world.”

The texts further advance the recurring sovereignty frame, where Sweden’s ability to shape its own climate and energy policy is threatened by EU-level decisions. Calls to “repeal” the climate pact and to “abolish” green politics at the EU level construct national autonomy as the solution to externally imposed burdens. This is reinforced by the emphasis on “democratically anchored”, which positions public acceptance as a democratic requirement and implicitly frames EU climate policy as lacking such legitimacy. Through CDA, this can be read as a strategy that redefines climate governance as a matter of democratic self-determination rather than environmental necessity. Additionally, the use of “democratically” demonstrates the central role of the “people” dimension within populist theory, where all decisions regarding climate policies should be made to prioritise the “people” of the nation and not “unrealistic” ambitions that elites priorities (Huber & R.A. 2020).

Across the 2022-2025 texts, the SD’s discourse moves decisively beyond the transitional phase, shifting from tentative institutional engagement toward a fully developed, governing-oriented climate and energy agenda. Unlike the transitional period, where the party blended critique with emerging proposals, this phase is marked by authoritative policy articulation, stronger modal claims, and explicit attempts to reshape national and EU-level frameworks. Climate and energy policy is no longer framed merely as something to be questioned or cautiously redirected; instead, SD positions itself as a central actor capable of defining legitimate climate action through economic efficiency, technological realism, and national competitiveness. The

intensification of global insignificance arguments and people-versus-elite narratives further consolidates their ideological stance, but now in service of a coherent alternative policy vision rather than oppositional critique. This phase therefore represents a shift from influencing the climate debate from the sidelines to asserting a directive role in shaping Sweden's current climate and energy trajectory.

7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to understand how the SD construct and legitimise their climate policy positions through discourse, and how this contributes to Sweden's broader shift from climate leadership toward what the party calls "climate realism." Returning to the argument introduced at the beginning of the thesis, the findings show that this shift cannot be understood solely through policy outcomes or ideological positioning. Instead, it is the discursive work that enables the SD to challenge dominant interpretations of climate responsibility and reshape the boundaries of legitimate climate governance in Sweden.

Across the three phases analysed, a clear pattern emerges: the rhetoric itself remains remarkably stable, but the political power behind it changed dramatically. In Phase 1, the party relied on oppositional rhetoric to delegitimise elite-driven climate agendas, drawing heavily on frames of sovereignty, stewardship, and economic realism. In Phase 2, as their parliamentary influence grew, the same rhetorical foundations were repurposed to justify procedural demands, budget reallocations, and calls for governmental analyses. By Phase 3, these discursive strategies became embedded in formal policy proposals and budget frameworks, signalling a shift from rhetorical resistance to authoritative influence, even without holding cabinet positions. This evolution demonstrates that the SD's discursive power did not stem from changing arguments, but from their increasing ability to institutionalise those arguments within Sweden's climate governance structures.

Methodologically, combining Framing Theory, Populist Theory, and CDA proved particularly effective for uncovering this trajectory. CDA allowed the analysis to move beyond surface-level statements and examine how lexical choices, evaluative terms, and narrative structures construct ideological meaning. Framing Theory clarified how SD strategically emphasises cost, fairness, sovereignty, and global insignificance to guide interpretation, while Populist Theory illuminated

the ideological function of these frames, especially the persistent people-versus-elite divide. This combination worked well precisely because SD's climate discourse operates simultaneously at these two levels: as both a linguistic performance and a political strategy.

The findings also show how SD challenges dominant interpretations of climate responsibility. By reframing Sweden as a small, efficient, and unfairly burdened actor, the party undermines universalist climate narratives and promotes a nationally bounded model of responsibility rooted in sovereignty and economic pragmatism. This discursive shift aligns with broader European trends in which right-wing populist actors question the legitimacy of supranational governance and recast climate action as a threat to ordinary citizens (Huber & R.A. 2020, pp. 960-961). It further contributes to the broader scholarly debate on how right-wing actors reshape climate governance through discourse rather than through policy change alone. By showing how stable rhetorical frames, centred on sovereignty, economic realism, and a people-versus-elite logic, gain political force as parties expand their institutional influence, the study highlights a mechanism that extends beyond the Swedish context. The SD's trajectory illustrates how discursive strategies can reshape national climate identities, redefine what counts as legitimate climate action, and erode long-standing climate commitments even in countries with strong environmental traditions.

Looking forward, these findings raise important questions about the future of climate governance in contexts where populist rhetoric gains institutional footholds. Future research should examine how these discursive patterns influence policy outcomes over time, particularly as SD continues to shape climate debates without holding ministerial cabinets. Comparative studies could also explore whether similar rhetorical trajectories appear in other European populist parties, or whether Sweden represents a distinct case of discursive influence without formal executive power. Finally, research on audience reception would deepen understanding of how these narratives resonate with citizens and how they contribute to shifting public perceptions of climate legitimacy.

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