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The Fridays for Future Movement and the Repoliticization of Climate Change Policy in Germany

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Germany is among the most studied countries in environmental and climate politics due to the distinct features of its political system and some pioneering policy decisions made in the past, such as the feed-in electricity tariffs to encourage the use of new renewable energy technologies. One of the most outstanding features of the German political system is the sustained electoral strength of its green political party, Alliance '90/The Greens (henceforth: the Greens) since the 1980s. The Greens served as a junior coalition partner in two federal governments between 1998 and 2005 and are members of the current federal government led by Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Since 2011, the Minister-President of the State of Baden-Württemberg has been the Green politician Winfried Kretschmann, and in many other states the Greens have participated in government as junior coalition partners since the mid 1980s.

As the Greens "own" the issue of environmental protection (Abou-Chadi 2016), they are the obvious electoral preference of Germans who are concerned about the environment. The other political parties are not against environmental protection, but they give less priority to it than the Greens (Carter 2013). Since all German governments, regardless of their ideological composition, have adopted public policies addressing environmental degradation, environmental issues have been of mostly moderate-level salience: Citizens were aware of policy activity and this was enough for most of them.

However, this changed in two ways in 2018. First, the salience (i.e. the awareness of the citizens) of environmental issues increased dramatically; second, the public's attention shifted away from environmental protection to tackling climate change, which until then had been perceived as a mere aspect of environmental protection and consequently had received little attention as a stand-alone issue, including from political parties (Farstad 2018).

What resulted in this shift in the German public's awareness of climate change? In August 2018, the then teenager Greta Thunberg boycotted school and instead

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009352444.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

protested in front of the Swedish parliament to call for more urgent and effective climate action. The protest rapidly attracted followers, giving birth to the Fridays for Future (FFF) movement, which borrowed its name from the corresponding social media hashtag (Venghaus, Henseleit, and Belka 2022). As in other countries, and despite the fact that Germany has an electorally successful Green party, FFF succeeded in mobilizing a large number of individuals, of whom most were newcomers to social movements, such as pupils (Moor et al. 2021). Given the mobilization of young people in particular, FFF credibly made a case for the generational aspect of anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the need for urgent climate action in order to protect the interests of current young and future generations (Tosun, Geese, and Lorenzoni 2023).

The mobilization of this group was unprecedented, even in Germany, and resulted in solidarity and the launch of spin-off movements. The involvement of these groups in climate activism has helped to draw even broader attention to the issue of climate change and resulted in an increased salience of climate change.

In this chapter, we hypothesize increased salience to have resulted in a politicization of the issue and affected climate politics in general and party competition more specifically. In the remainder, we assess this argument empirically and show that Germany has embarked on a journey to reduce carbon emissions from burning coal and is in the process of changing the status quo of its climate policy.

2.1 Is Climate Change Salient and Politicized?

Politicization, defined in different ways (see Paterson, Tobin, and VanDeveer, Chapter 1, this volume), has long been a research interest of political science and has been studied in relation to electoral campaigns, voting behavior, and parliamentary representation. An increasing number of empirical studies have applied this notion to European Union (EU) politics following a rise in the number of legal competences transferred to EU institutions (Grande and Hutter 2016; Wilde and Zürn 2012). Recently, politicization has also entered policy studies. In this context, Feindt, Schwindenhammer, and Tosun (2021), for instance, contend that political action can be conducive to policy change as long as it does not surpass a "critical" level.

In the literature, the conceptualization of politicization by Wilde (2011) has received considerable attention. Wilde argues that politicization is observable in rising salience, mobilization, and polarization. Consequently, salience is only one of three indicators and does not alone account for politicization. Mobilization, the second indicator, refers to an increase in the number of political actors engaged in an issue and the resources they spend on their engagement. The third indicator, polarization, denotes the emergence of (extremely) opposing demands in addressing the issue concerned (Wilde and Zürn 2012).

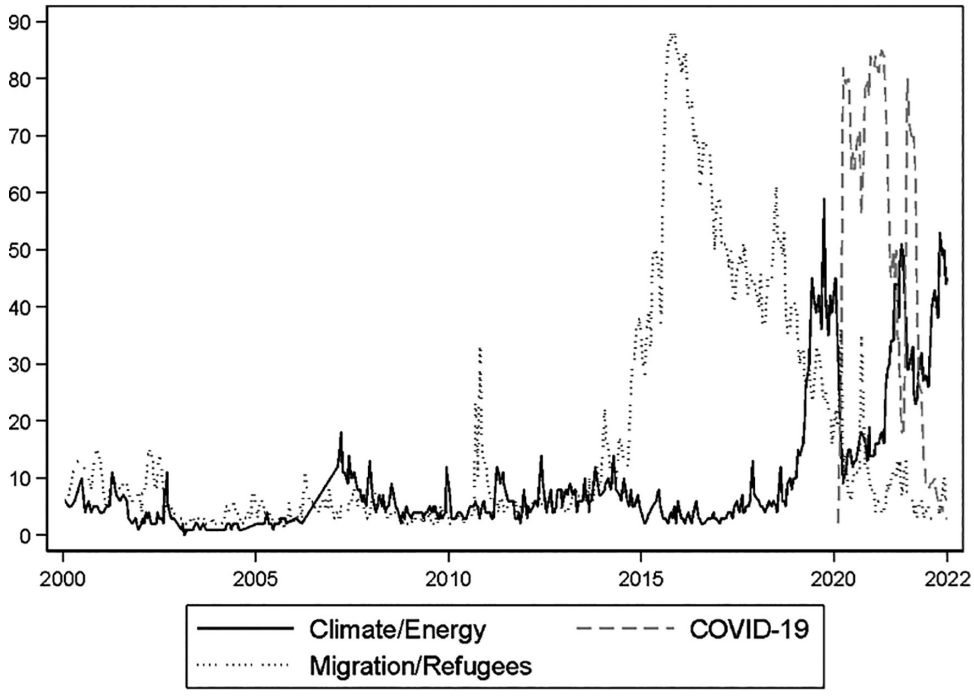

Figure 2.1 Percentage share of individuals indicating climate and energy policy as the most important problem in Germany, 2000–2022.
Note: Own elaboration based on data from the Research Group for Elections, www.forschungsgruppe.de (the full data are available from Forschungsgruppe Wahlen E.V. 2024).

As stated in the opening section of this chapter and argued consistently in the literature, the emergence of FFF has increased the salience of climate change. The data from the 2022 Politbarometer survey confirm this assessment. The Politbarometer has been conducted since 1977 on an almost monthly basis by the Research Group for Elections. The survey focuses on the opinions and attitudes of the German voting population on current political topics, parties, and politicians, and it screens the voting intention of the respondents. It also provides an apt database for learning about the salience of climate and energy issues and how they have developed over time. The survey item capturing an issue's salience is the problem which the survey participants consider to be of the highest importance in Germany. Figure 2.1 illustrates the salience of energy and climate issues, which were treated as one joint category, between 2000 and 2022.

The data show that there was some concern throughout the 2000s and 2010s over climate and energy issues, but it was volatile. A well-known event that drove up public concern among Germans regarding climate and energy was the accident that occurred on March 11, 2011, at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in

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Japan. This event marked a turning point for nuclear power production in particular and the energy policy of the federal government in general (see, e.g., Jahn and Korolczuk 2012). Attention to climate and energy issues went down in the second half of the 2010s because of the massive influx of refugees to Germany and the EU in 2015 and 2016, which became the dominant concern among Germans. However, in 2019 climate concern skyrocketed, which coincides with the emergence of FFF. The outbreak of COVID-19 then became the main concern in 2020. In 2021 and 2022, both issues competed against each other for attention. The last data point captured by Figure 2.1 for the year 2022 shows that climate change was on the rise again, whereas COVID-19 was of minimal concern to Germans, which is plausible given the wide availability of vaccines and the emergence of milder virus variants.

The second indicator of politicization, mobilization, is given because of the emergence and institutionalization of FFF, though it should be noted that FFF was not the only social movement targeting climate change which emerged around the same time. A second emblematic group is Extinction Rebellion, which has equally mobilized large numbers of people, particularly young people, since it was founded in 2018. Predating the founding of these two groups, mobilization for climate action had increased in 2015 following the high-profile Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Paris, where the post-Kyoto international climate regime was negotiated (Moor et al. 2021). Thus, overall, the degree of mobilization was high in 2018 and 2019.

However, for a complete assessment of the politicization of climate change, the third indicator, polarization, is paramount. To assess the degree of polarization, the analysis by Berker and Pollex (2023) is helpful since it offers insights into how the German political parties have reacted to FFF. The German party system comprises the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) as the right-leaning parties, in particular on environmental issues. The left-leaning parties are the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens, and the socialist Left. In addition, the German party system comprises the far-right populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which was first represented in the Federal Parliament in 2017. Berker and Pollex (2023) show that the Greens were the most supportive of FFF and the AfD the least supportive – a finding that resonates with the prevailing view in the literature, namely that right-wing populist parties tend to be dismissive of the anthropogenic origins of climate change (see, e.g., Lockwood 2018).

The AfD's stance on climate change aligns with the corresponding attitudes of the party's voters. Figure 2.2 presents survey data from the collaborative research project Digitalization in Dialogue. The data were collected in October 2021 and cover information on the attitudes and preferences of 1,075 respondents who, as

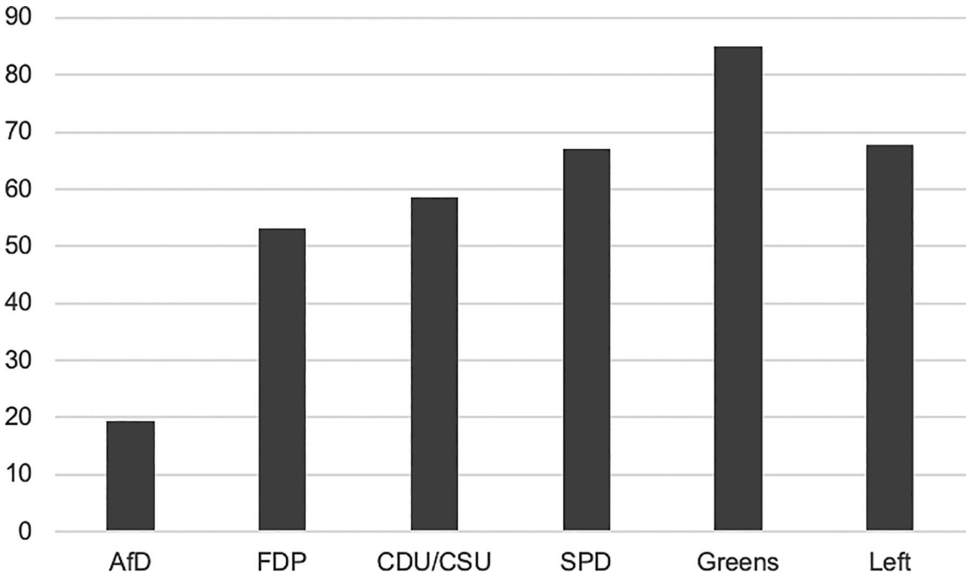

Figure 2.2 Percentage share of individuals indicating that climate change is mostly or only manmade, 2022.
Note: Own elaboration based on data from the Digitalization in Dialogue (https://digilog-bw.de/) collaborative project.

a whole, are representative of the German population in terms of age, gender, and education. The survey shows the share of survey participants who believe climate change is mostly or exclusively manmade. The responses are broken down by the political parties for which the participants intended to vote. The figure reveals that with almost 85 percent, the share of individuals agreeing that climate change is mostly or exclusively manmade is highest among supporters of the Greens and lowest among supporters of the AfD, where the agreement rate is 19 percent.

The AfD is the most vocal against climate action; while the other parties agree on the need for climate action, they differ in their preferred types of policy instruments or their levels of ambition. As the past electoral campaigns have witnessed, the mainstream parties agree on a set of issues, which results in a constellation in which they compete against each other, but jointly against the AfD. From this, the following situation emerges for polarization. In terms of whether climate action should be taken at all, the polarization concerns the AfD and its supporters on the one side and all the other mainstream parties and their supporters on the other. In relation to the level of ambition of climate policy, the Greens represent one extreme and the FDP the other. Altogether, the issue is polarized but not excessively so, since the main question for most parties and their supporters is not whether climate action is necessary but what kind of climate action they consider necessary or desirable.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009352444.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Overall, the emergence of FFF helped to mobilize action for climate change and increased the salience of this issue among young people, which resulted in rising issue salience within the broader population. At the time when FFF began, the issue became polarized but not excessively so, since all of Germany's mainstream political parties agreed on the need for policy action, thereby distinguishing themselves from the AfD. Consequently, all three criteria for politicization as put forth by Wilde (2011) were met in Germany in the period between 2018 and 2021.

In line with Feindt, Schwindenhammer, and Tosun (2021), we hypothesize that this high, though not excessive, level of politicization resulted in an opportunity to adopt more ambitious policies addressing climate change. The impact of politicization on climate politics lends itself to more refined expectations because politicization has been widely applied in comparative politics already. Given the increased politicization of climate change vote-seeking, responsive political parties should not only integrate energy and climate policy issues into their election manifestos and basic policy programs but also develop a distinct policy position on them that resonates with the policy preferences of their (likely) voters. Furthermore, and given the support of a clear majority of German citizens and likely voters for increasing climate action (Bohdanowicz 2021), we postulate that all mainstream parties – CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, and FDP – will converge in their positions on climate change over time, so that they promote more political activities to fight climate change. In line with its character as a right-wing populist party, the AfD should, conversely, adopt an opposite stance on climate policy compared to the center-right and center-left parties and should thus favor less state activity in fighting climate change, which is, according to the AfD 2016 party program, not caused by human activities. Because the socialist Left party also incorporates populist elements in their program, we expect them to be less in favor of more state activities to fight climate change, too.

2.2 Issue Politicization as a Driver of Policy Change

Because of its large industrial sector, Germany is one of the EU member states with above-average GHG emissions relative to its population. Between 2005 and 2019, the country's carbon emissions fell by 18 percent, indicating that some moderate-level climate action had been taken by the various governments of Chancellor Angela Merkel (2005–2021). However, Germany's performance lagged behind the EU-wide reduction of carbon emissions of 19 percent for the same period. The reduction in carbon emissions mostly resulted from an increase in the share of renewable energy, the switch from coal to gas, and the conversion of its coal-fired power plants into gas-fired ones, as well as from the implementation of the EU Emissions Trading System (European Parliamentary Research Service 2021).

The most challenging aspect of German climate policy has concerned the role of hard coal and lignite (Markard, Rinscheid, and Widdel 2021). The coal sector has been the backbone of the German industry and an important generator of jobs, so the regions that will be affected by the phaseout will need to undergo fundamental transformations and receive financial support in order to reduce the social impact. However, it is worth noting that the coal industry was also contested because of its adverse effects on the environment, but protests against it were mostly local. Compared to coal, nuclear power had been more contested in Germany, and the Greens have predominantly been anti-nuclear power since the formation of their West German predecessor in 1980. Therefore, nationwide environmental organizations had focused on mobilizing against nuclear power, paying limited attention to coal (Brauers, Oei, and Walk 2020).

However, the EU's announcement in 2017 that it would adopt stricter emission standards for large combustion plants (i.e. combustion installations with a rated thermal input exceeding 50 MW) burning coal and lignite as a fuel put pressure on the German federal government to take action. Therefore, even before FFF emerged, the ruling parties of the CDU/CSU and the SPD agreed in the coalition contract of March 2018 to phase out coal-fired power plants, which must be regarded as a radical shift from the previously existing policy regime.

To this end, the government launched, as stated in the coalition agreement, a "Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment" (known as the Coal Commission), which consisted of four chairs and twenty-four representatives from industry, unions, environmental NGOs, the German states, and selected scientists. Multistakeholder commissions are a typical feature of the German political system; as an instrument for incorporating expertise and interests from different groups, they have been informing policymaking in Germany since the 1960s (Müller-Hansen et al. 2022).

The Coal Commission was launched on June 6, 2018, and presented its policy recommendations on January 26, 2019. Most importantly, it recommended the gradual phaseout of coal-fired power generation, ending completely no later than the end of 2038. To achieve this goal, the proposal recommended that by 2022, the power generated from anthracite and lignite (two types of coal) should be reduced to around 15 GW. By 2030, this figure would be reduced further, to an output of about 8 GW for anthracite-fired power stations and 9 GW for lignite-fired power stations, respectively. By 2038 at the latest, the use of coal-fired power stations is to be completely ended (Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment 2019).

Some groups regarded the recommendations of the Coal Commission as a success, whereas scientists, climate experts, and social movements such as FFF criticized it for not being ambitious enough (Brauers, Oei, and Walk 2020). Analyzing

the debate on the social media platform then known as Twitter, Müller-Hansen et al. (2022) show a negative trend of average sentiment scores throughout the entire period of study – from January 2017 to February 2020 – as well as a polarization of sentiments on the work of the Coal Commission over time. While the online debate on the coal phaseout was strongly affected by events related to the working of the Coal Commission, FFF and their online activities were also important for stimulating discussion among Twitter users. FFF held a negative view on both the recommendations of the Coal Commission and the Phaseout of Coal-Fired Power Plants Act adopted on July 3, 2020, which directly translated into law the recommendations made by the Coal Commission.

In addition to setting the wheels in motion for phasing out coal-fired power plants and banning the deployment of new coal-fired plants after August 14, 2020, with the exception of those that received their operation licenses before January 29, 2020, this act promised financial compensation to operators of coal-fired plants. This clause has been criticized by environmental and climate groups as being too generous (Gearino 2020) and reflects the Coal Commission's attention to the notion of a just transition and to transition assistance policies that target potential losers in the process (Bang, Rosendahl, and Böhringer 2022).

In addition to the Phaseout of Coal-Fired Power Plants Act, the federal government amended the German Renewable Energy Sources Act to codify the goal of raising the percentage of renewables to 65 percent by 2030. And through the Fuel Emissions Trading Act of January 2021, the federal government introduced a price of EUR 25 per ton of carbon dioxide emitted from the transport and heat generation sectors. The prices will increase in 2025, and from the following year onward emissions certificates will be auctioned (European Parliamentary Research Service 2021).

According to Brauers, Oei, and Walk (2020: 244), "rising civil society pressure, as well as from the coal regions demanding financial support, pushed the government to introduce a 'Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment' in 2018." While we agree with this statement, we contend that it is important to add that the German federal government was also under pressure to address the issue because of the EU. In fact, we are inclined to argue that it was above all the pressure from the EU that induced the Bundestag to make reforms and that it was the level of politicization, as it unfolded from the end of 2018 and throughout 2019, which affected the government's work on the Coal Commission and the level of ambition inherent in its recommendations.

Reflecting on the theoretical argument put forth by Feindt, Schwindenhammer, and Tosun (2021), we can state that politicization did not trigger policy change but facilitated and shaped the outcome of the corresponding process, while pressure exerted by FFF and other climate policy advocates resulted in a modification of the

coal phaseout trajectory after the Greens became a junior partner in the coalition government of Olaf Scholz. In response to ongoing criticism that the phaseout would take too long, the Federal Parliament adopted on December 1, 2021, an act in order to bring forward to 2030 the phaseout of coal in the Rhenish lignite area in North Rhine-Westphalia, the most important coal-producing state.

2.3 Issue Politicization as a Driver of Electoral Competition

We now take a closer look at the positions the political parties' candidates adopted on climate change between 2017 and 2021, a period that covers the year 2018 when climate change became the most important problem in Germany as viewed by the public (see Figure 2.1). The focus on the candidate level allows for a more conservative test of our expectation that parties respond to the politicization of issues. The conservativeness of the approach results from the fact that candidates nominated by the respective political party normally follow the party line when positioning themselves on issues; however, they may choose not to, since the characteristics of the electoral districts in which the candidates compete for votes can set incentives to deviate from the party's position (Bäck and Debus 2019; Baumann, Debus, and Müller 2015). If the parties' candidates shifted their position on climate change between 2017 and 2021 in a decisive manner, then we can assume that the respective party changed its position not only at the leadership level but also at the candidate level.

A further advantage of focusing on the candidate level instead of the party leadership level is the availability of data that cover the positions of the parliamentary candidates on fighting climate change. We make use of the German Candidate Studies for the 2017 and 2021 Bundestag elections (GLES 2018, 2022). This dataset covers attitudes, policy preferences, and individual characteristics of the candidates for the 2017 and 2021 Federal Parliament elections and is part of both the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) research network. The data were collected using a survey on the candidates of the six parliamentary party groups that were represented in the federal parliaments elected in 2017 and 2021. Participants of the candidate study were asked about their position on climate change by means of the following question: "Some believe that much more needs to be done in politics to combat climate change. Others believe that policies to combat climate change have already gone far too far. What is your opinion on combating climate change?"

All candidates were asked to participate in the study by mail or email; they included candidates from CDU and the CSU (the CSU only competes for votes in the state of Bavaria and is therefore considered in the following as a separate party), the SPD, the AfD, the FDP, the Left, and the Greens. In the case of the 2017 candidate

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009352444.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

study, 803 of the 2,516 candidates participated in the survey and completed it; in the 2021 candidate study, 735 partial and full interviews were carried out during the data collection process, which took place in the four months after the respective election.

Figures 2.3 and 2.4 show the distribution and median position of the candidates on climate change policy after the 2017 and 2021 elections. The candidates were asked about their position on a policy dimension differentiating between preferences for more climate action or less. In the case of the 2017 federal election, when migration and integration were the most important problems for the voters and climate change was not so salient among the population (see Figure 2.1), the candidates clearly differed – on average – in their positions on the issue of change. While candidates of the right-wing AfD and of the center-right parties the CDU, CSU, and FDP stated on average that existing climate policy was sufficient, left-leaning parties, and here in particular the Greens, called for more climate action (see Figure 2.3). There is,

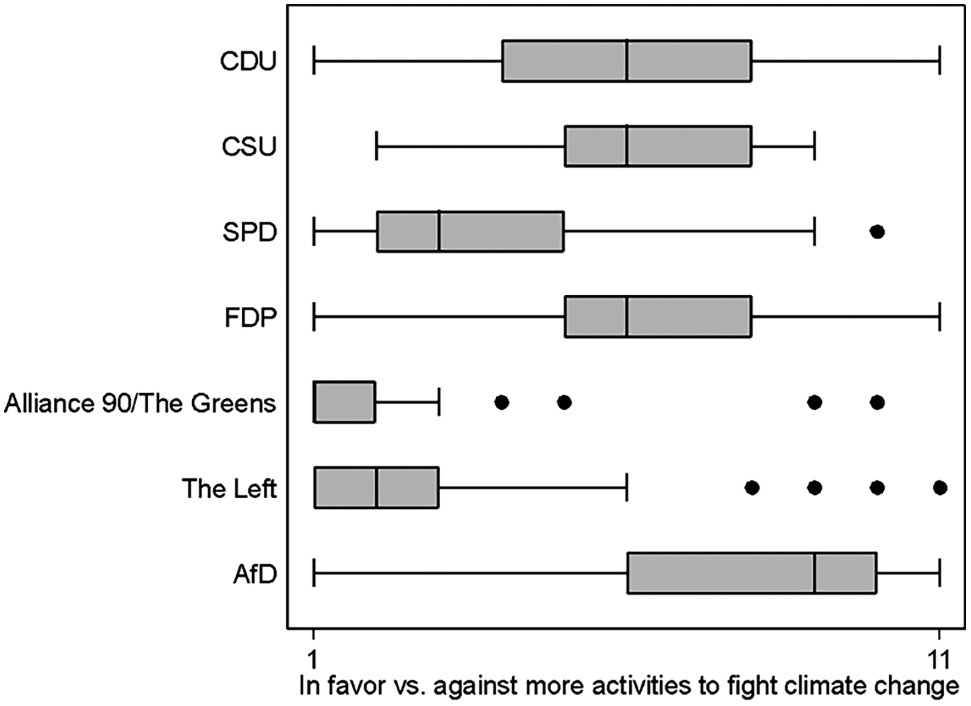

Figure 2.3 Climate policy positions of candidates of the major German parties for the 2017 Bundestag election.
Note: Own elaboration and calculation based on GLES (2018). The presented boxplots provide information on the distribution of the climate policy positions within the respective party. The line within the box shows the median position; the box provides information on the 25th and 75th percentile of the distribution of climate policy positions among the candidates of the parties. Dots indicate candidates that have climate policy positions outside the 1.5 interquartile range, which are indicates by the whiskers.

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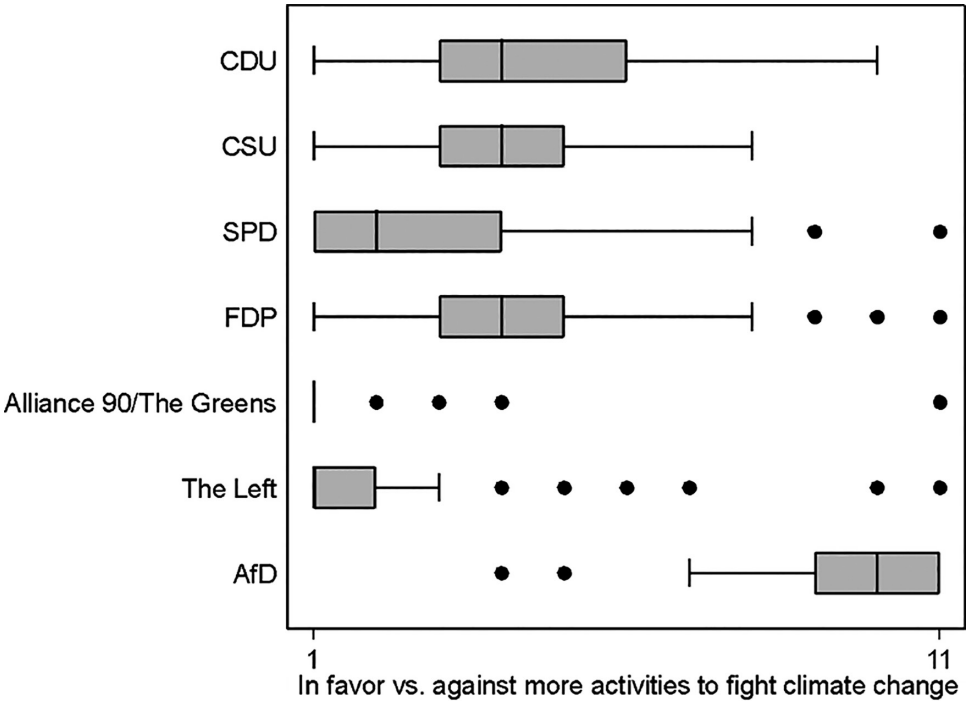

Figure 2.4 Climate policy positions of candidates of the major German parties for the 2021 Bundestag election.
Note: Own elaboration and calculation based on GLES (2022). See also the notes for Figure 2.3.

furthermore, a high level of intraparty diversity, in particular within the CDU and the FDP, indicating that the candidates of these parties varied a lot in their position on fighting climate change, possibly because their respective party leadership did not adopt a clear and consistent policy position on that very issue.

In 2021, when climate change became a politicized issue, the intraparty heterogeneity on fighting climate change decreased and the positions of the candidates converged clearly toward one that is more in favor of more ambitious climate action. The only exception regarding the latter is the AfD: The candidates of this party moved to the opposite side of this dimension and preferred, on average, significantly less climate action. In contrast to our expectation, the Left and its candidates did not change their position on climate change and preferred more climate action; however, there are, as the boxplot in Figure 2.4 indicates, a number of candidates of the Left who differed from this position and preferred less climate action. No such variation existed in the AfD. This indicates that the position of the candidates from the Left is less cohesive than it is for those of the AfD when it comes to climate action.

The positions of the two largest German parties – the "catch-all" parties the CDU/CSU and the SPD – were, in contrast to 2017, very similar on climate change

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009352444.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in 2021, and even the market-liberal FDP showed a position similar to that of the CDU/CSU and the SPD with regard to support for climate action.

These findings not only align with our expectations but also support the reasoning of the studies by Kriesi and their coauthors (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008), who regard environmental issues and related policy areas such as climate change as part of a broader societal cleavage that differentiates between left-libertarian parties, such as the Greens, on the one side, and right-wing populist parties, such as the AfD, on the other. These two parties form the extreme ends of the climate policy dimension we are studying here, which indicates that an increase in the salience and politicization of climate policy can result in greater support for the parties that formulate the clearest and most extreme positions on how to deal with climate change.

The convergence of the climate policy positions of the mainstream parties provides an opportunity for more ambitious climate action. This interpretation is supported, inter alia, by the fact that the 2022 act on the accelerated coal phaseout in the industrial Rhenish lignite area was supported by 523 Members of Parliament (MPs) and rejected by only 92, indicating cross-parliamentary support, including from factions affiliated with the opposition. Indeed, the oppositional Christian Democrats voted in favor of the bill initiated by the traffic light coalition (the FDP, the SPD, and the Greens), while the AfD and the Left voted against it (for details on this vote in the Bundestag, see Deutscher Bundestag 2022).

It will be interesting to see how this new political constellation acts in future climate policy proposals. What is already apparent is that the MPs of the different factions agree on the need to decarbonize the energy sector, though they hold differing views on the other sectors.

Most importantly, the decarbonization of the traffic sector is likely to spark more controversy than the measures targeting the energy sector. In fact, one of the main demands of FFF, as well as of more radical spin-off movements such as the Last Generation, is to introduce a general speed limit on the *Autobahn* (motorway), on which the views among Germans are heavily polarized. The polarization is also reflected in the parties' positions on this policy demand: The right-leaning parties – the CDU/CSU, the FDP, and the AfD – oppose a general speed limit, whereas the left-leaning parties support it. The introduction of general speed limit would mean a fundamental shift in Germany's identity as a "car state."

2.4 Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, we assessed the extent to which the emergence of FFF resulted in a politicization of climate change and how this affected climate policy and politics from 2018 to 2022. While the emergence of FFF itself is a manifestation of the issue of politicization, that is, of societal mobilization, it has been accompanied by an increase

in the salience of climate change and a polarization of how political parties and their electoral candidates have positioned themselves on it. Thus, from 2018 onward, climate change underwent strong politicization; while this then decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, it increased again afterward. In Germany, in late 2023, climate change was widely regarded as an important issue and one that requires policy action.

The politicization resulted in a situation in which the former federal government of Angela Merkel, after years of hesitation, took an important yet painful step to curb the country's carbon emissions: the gradual phaseout of coal-fired power plants. In light of the importance of industry and the coal sector to the country, this decision was of a transformative nature. A transformative policy approach is what Germany needs in order to reduce its carbon emissions to such a degree that they are proportionate to its population size and in line with the EU's reduction targets. However, the phaseout of coal-fired power plants also came at a price. The government granted the energy producers compensation payments which many criticized as being too high and benefiting loss-making power plants through the creation of windfall profits (Tiedemann and Müller-Hansen 2023).

As the analysis of the positions of the political parties and their electoral candidates has shown, the mainstream political parties have converged in their positions on climate change and the need for climate action. The only exceptions have and continue to be the AfD, which holds a dismissive stance on climate action, and some intraparty factions within the socialist Left. However, this convergence referred to climate policy in abstract terms and not to the specific policy measures supported by the individual parties. The current federal government is ideologically heterogeneous as it comprises two center-left parties – the SPD and the Greens – and the fiscally conservative FDP. Since they entered into office in December 2021, the policy positions of the Greens and the FDP in particular have diverged. In line with their ideology, the Greens have pushed for more ambitious climate action, which the FDP, also in line with its market-liberal ideology, has opposed. The best-known case is the FDP's opposition to the Building Energy law proposed by the federal minister of the economy, Robert Habeck (the Greens), to phase out gas and oil heating. The liberal FDP delayed the introduction of the bill to the Federal Parliament as it disapproved of its stipulations, which led to an increase in the number of intragovernmental conflicts.

The present situation – in which the Greens are a member of the federal government and actually propose climate policies while the issue is politicized – is different from the one before they entered government. Now the politicization rather results in parties diverging on the corresponding policy positions and in a more contentious climate politics. In the longer run, the politicization of the issue in combination with the stock of climate policies that entail not only benefits but also costs to certain groups may require strategies that ensure the stability of

climate policies, for example by depoliticizing the issue. Otherwise, depending on the preferences of the electorate and of future governments, it might be strategically reasonable to dismantle climate policy.

Despite Russia's attack on Ukraine and the implications for Germany's energy mix, which used to rely heavily on Russian gas, the coal phaseout was not questioned while the shutdown of the last three operating nuclear power stations in April 2023 was. However, in November 2023 the federal minister of finance, Christian Lindner, of the FDP cast doubts on the country's ability to phase out coal-fired power plants by 2030. It remains to be seen how the politics around the coal phaseout will evolve given that in addition to Russia's war on Ukraine there now exists a conflict in the Middle East which could affect oil prices.

In their introduction to this volume, Paterson, Tobin, and VanDeveer state that the literature treats politicization and policy change as one strategy and depoliticization and policy stability as another. Based on the analysis of the German case between 2017 and 2021, we can confirm that politicization can change climate policy and politics. However, by drawing on the situation after 2021 especially, when more policy action took place thanks to the government participation of the Greens, the case can also offer a caveat that politicization cannot be the only mechanism for the long-term implementation of a transformative policy agenda. Politicization can entail an expansion in the density and the level of ambition of climate policy, but it can also make climate policy prone to dismantling and ultimately reduce the level of ambition. We know from the literature that dismantling is more difficult to achieve than expansion, but we equally know that it happens, even if less directly or less visibly (Burns and Tobin 2020).

We invite future research to pay more attention to the relationship between politicization, policy change, and changes in the political dynamics. What extensive literature otherwise seems to have neglected until now is how a changing stock of public policy adopted in response to politicization affects the degree of the politicization of the future political process. We suggest studying this aspect particularly for climate change governance, given that it will require sustained policy action for a long period of time.

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