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RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND THE POLITICIZATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE: THE CASE OF THE GERMANY'S ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND (AFD)

Memoona Fiaz[*1], Baber Ali[2], Muhammad Sufyan Haider[3], Aftab Ahmed[4]

[*1,2,3,4]*Department of International Relations, University of Gujrat*

[*1]memoonaf074@gmail.com, [2]baberali02955@gmail.com, [3]sufyanhaider0017@gmail.com, [4]aftabahmed20344@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *
Memoona Fiaz
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ABSTRACT

Climate change has shifted from a largely technical policy challenge to a politically contested issue in European democracies, particularly amid the rise of right-wing populism. The research examines how the right-wing populist movement through its political activities and discourse of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) political party has made climate change a political issue in Germany and the resulting effects on democratic systems and environmental protection. The research used qualitative document analysis to study party manifestos and parliamentary statements and contextual materials which revealed common patterns of climate policy. The study demonstrates that the AfD does not totally reject climate change as it uses scientific and institutional knowledge to challenge climate governance, which it describes as a danger to both economic stability and public democratic rights. The study uses liberal institutionalist and environmental security frameworks to show how this type of political behavior decreases public confidence in institutions while making political divisions worse and limiting climate change research as a permanent security problem. The article shows how populist leaders change the way democratic nations handle international security threats through its actor-based research which studies how populist leaders operate in established democratic systems.

Keywords: *Right-wing populism; Climate change politicization; Democratic governance; Environmental security; Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)*

INTRODUCTION

Populism has become the most important political development shaping contemporary European democracy. Populist and far-right parties have increased their electoral reach throughout Europe, which results in challenges to established political institutions, democratic norms and existing policy agreements about migration and climate change (Mudde, 2007; Kriesi, 2025). Populism lacks a single defining character, but right-wing populist movements successfully used their platform to create public opposition against technocratic governance and supranational institutions and expert-driven policymaking because they presented themselves as protectors of popular sovereignty against elite rule (Müller, 2016).

The findings from empirical research demonstrate that right-wing populist parties have experienced their most significant growth during the period from mid-2010s to present day because of multiple simultaneous economic and political and social

crises. The political landscape now faces two major changes because these developments have created stronger political divides and new forms of democratic discussion. The growing political involvement with climate change represents one of the most important outcomes of this situation. European democracies, which once viewed climate policy as a technocratic field, now treat it as a major battleground for partisan disputes and populist political mobilization (Selk & Kemmerzell, 2022).

The transformation provides Germany as an informative case study which needs examination. Germany which has been recognized as a stable democratic system since its establishment in 1949 experienced a continuous electoral growth of the right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD) throughout its history. The AfD has built its presence in the Bundestag since 2017 by establishing multiple parliamentary seats while increasing its voter support among eastern German states and people who doubt political leaders and expert knowledge (Weisskircher et al. 2026). The party used the latest federal election cycle to enhance its political power while increasing its resistance against essential policy matters which dealt with climate and energy issues (Reuters 2025).

The AfD party has gained more political power which has resulted in more hostile public attitude towards climate change and climate policies. The domestic climate discussions in Germany have become highly divided despite the country meeting its emission reduction goals and its European climate leadership commitments (Oberthür & Dupont, 2021). AfD representatives consistently argue that climate policies generate economic harm and social discrimination while violating democratic rights which they used to dispute scientific climate research and official climate policymaking processes (Boecher et al., 2022; Küppers, 2024). Right-wing populist groups in Europe use this framing to organize their environmental protection protests by connecting environmental rules to elite power systems and international governance and national economic security threats (Huber et al., 2021).

International Relations and political science studies show that these developments create critical inquiries about how populism interacts with democratic systems while affecting environmental security. Climate change has become recognized as a security threat which extends beyond conventional boundaries because it disrupts economic systems and social structures and political systems (IPCC, 2018). Liberal democracies need three main elements to handle these situations successfully: they need institutional stability and public confidence, and their decisions should rely on scientific evidence. Populist movements create dangers because they reduce public trust in experts and they increase political disputes and they present environmental protection as a danger to democratic rights instead of a shared security issue (Mede & Schäfer, 2020; Meyer, 2023).

The existing research which studies European populism together with its relationship to climate politics needs additional research which focuses on how different populist parties especially the AfD operate and how their activities affect democratic decision-making processes and environmental protection efforts in European democracies. The article addresses this gap by demonstrating how right-wing populism through AfD political activities and their public statements has made climate change a political issue in Germany.

The analysis is directed by a theoretical framework of liberal institutionalism which uses environmental security studies and scientific populism research as additional sources of knowledge. The institutional framework of liberal institutionalism requires stable institutions and expert knowledge and rule-based decision-making to solve climate change collective action challenges according to Delreux and Ohler 2019 and Oberthür and Dupont 2021. Environmental security and science-related populism perspectives further illuminate how climate governance becomes politicized through challenges to expertise, institutional legitimacy, and democratic deliberation (IPCC, 2018; Mede & Schäfer, 2020).

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study uses qualitative research methods to investigate how right-wing populism has made climate change political in Germany. The research requires a qualitative method because it investigates political framing and discourse analysis and the process of constructing meaning without using quantitative methods to establish causal links. The research investigates how elite political discourse functions as a main force that determines both the climate change debate and its resolution in democratic political systems.

The research uses liberal institutionalism and science-related populism as its foundation to show that elite discourse functions as the main way which institutions build their power and expertise and their democratic authority gets tested (Müller, 2016; Mede & Schäfer, 2020).

Research Questions

What role has right-wing populism, especially the activities and rhetoric of the Alternative fur Deutschland (AfD) played in politicizing climate change in Germany and what does it mean to the democratization of politics and environmental security?

Hypothesis

The study tests its hypothesis through existing research on populism and climate politics.

Right-wing populist actors in Germany create climate change political disputes through their scientific expertise challenges and their climate policy defense. They use economic security and democratic choice threats to control climate governance.

Data Sources and Selection

The empirical analysis is based on document-based data. Official AfD party documents which include the 2016 basic program and the 2025 federal election manifesto serve as the primary sources. The selected texts serve as official party ideological statements which show how the party has developed its climate change messaging over time. The research used public parliamentary materials which included Bundestag debates and official statements to examine how party members spoke about their institutional environments.

The study used secondary sources which included peer-reviewed academic literature that studied populism and climate politics and democratic governance and environmental security. The researchers chose their sources because the selected sources were needed to answer their research questions while maintaining academic standards.

Method of Analysis

The research uses qualitative document analysis to find and interpret major themes and narratives that describe climate change and its associated climate policy. The researchers analyzed documents by reading them multiple times and applying thematic coding to identify repeating patterns of framing and arguments and ways of information was presented. The researchers focused on narratives that depicted climate policy as elitist and financially burdensome and undemocratic while examining cases where scientific knowledge and institutional power were directly contested.

This study uses interpretive methods for its analysis which does not attempt to measure how often particular words are used. The study investigates how political meaning is created and used in populist political discourse while assessing its impact on the rising public awareness of climate change as a political issue.

Assumptions

The research relies on official party documents and parliamentary discussions to assess political strategies and political priorities while it demonstrates that elite framing affects policy disputes in democratic systems.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis examines elite discourse without investigating public opinion or voter behavior. The research findings which emerge from this single-country case study should not be applied to all European contexts. The exclusive use of document sources needs to be acknowledged

because it creates limitations in understanding political activities and internal party operations. The selected method enables researchers to study right-wing populist groups who use climate change as a political tool while examining climate change and democratic governance and environmental security.

Literature Review

The rise of populism has become the most frequently studied political trend which currently exists in European political systems because it has led to the growth of right-wing populist parties whose existence challenges democratic governance systems. Populism functions as a thin-centered ideology which presents political conflicts as moral battles between "the people" and "corrupt elites," while its right-wing version combines with nativist and exclusionary narratives (Mudde, 2007; Müller, 2016; Kriesi, 2014). Right-wing populist parties in Europe have started to oppose expert-based policy development and international alliance building and institutional control, which has resulted in increased political divisions and novel methods of political competition (Kriesi, 2025).

Recent research demonstrates that right-wing populism maintains its importance through both electoral results and its effects on policy discussions and democratic decision-making. Populist actors use their power to challenge political systems by establishing their own political agendas which they achieve through their critical assessment of technocratic rule and their ability to transform intricate governmental matters into evidence of elitist control (Kriesi, 2025). The climate governance system visually demonstrates these dynamics through its dependence on scientific knowledge and its requirement for long-term institutional cooperation. European democratic systems have transformed climate policy from a field of shared agreement into an ongoing battle between political parties and ideological groups (Huber et al., 2021).

The increasing number of studies investigates how populism affects climate politics and shows that political identity determines climate change attitudes more than scientific evidence. Cross-national analyses show that nationalist beliefs and right-wing populist tendencies lead to decreased climate change concern and lower support for climate mitigation measures in all situations that include high scientific knowledge (Kulin et al., 2021). Populist climate skepticism should not be understood as a single form of denialism according to scholars' warnings about its interpretation. Right-wing populist parties typically use strategic methods that first acknowledge climate change through their statements yet they continue to reject climate policies because of their economic impact and democratic principles and sovereignty considerations (Selk & Kemmerzell, 2022).

The patterns show their strongest presence in Germany which people see as a democratically stable country that operates through institutional systems while serving as a main force for EU climate policies. The domestic importance of climate policy in Germany has increased because of the country's ambitious climate targets and its role in European Union climate policy decision-making (Oberthür & Dupont, 2021). The *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* political party has maintained its continuous growth while it acts as a populist force that challenges both expert knowledge and established authority. The AfD political party achieves electoral success because people in eastern federal states show institutional distrust and they doubt experts and they believe that their economic and cultural security is at risk (Weisskircher et al., 2026).

The research about public opinion and political communication in Germany shows that people have developed more divided opinions about climate change. Metag et al. (2017) identify distinct segments of the German population that differ markedly in climate concern, trust in science, and media use patterns that have persisted and, in some cases, intensified over time (Klinger et al., 2022). The different groups that emerged from this process created an opening for political groups to use framing techniques which associate environmental regulations with economic expenses and limits on democratic processes to build opposition against climate policies.

Several studies directly examine the AfD's engagement with climate politics. The party uses

its climate policy expertise to challenge scientific knowledge by presenting alternative information and disputing the independence of research institutions. AfD discourse employs emotionally charged narratives through its use of "eco-dictatorship" climate policy depiction which makes environmental regulations appear to be oppressive and unfair. Right-wing populist movements across Europe use this method to make climate change a political issue because they present it as a danger that threatens national sovereignty and economic stability and democratic rights rather than an environmental problem that requires joint action (Huber et al., 2021).

Researchers investigate populism as a threat to expert-based government systems which extend beyond their studies of climate policies. Mede and Schäfer (2020) define "science-related populism" as a political method which undermines expert credibility through its depiction of scientists and policy experts as people who lack connection to public interests. Meyer (2023) demonstrates that contemporary climate politics use knowledge and truth as their main battleground because populist groups destroy democratic processes through their attacks on fundamental knowledge systems.

The literature presents comprehensive evidence which explains how right-wing populism emerged during climate change became a political issue while expert-based governance systems faced decline throughout Europe. Yet there exist significant understanding of deficiencies. The research findings show that researchers from various fields study populist movements through comparative analysis yet fail to identify the distinct methods used by national populist groups. Researchers have not sufficiently investigated how populist climate dialogue connects with democratic governance and environmental security discussions. The article investigates existing research deficiencies by analyzing how the AfD political party in Germany used its power to create climate change political issues which affected environmental security and democratic processes.

Theoretical Framework

The research uses liberal institutionalism as the main theoretical framework to study how climate change became a political issue in Germany. The theory of liberal institutionalism explains how climate change requires collective action solutions through its emphasis on established institutions and expert power and its system of regulatory decision-making (Delreux & Ohler, 2019; Oberthür & Dupont, 2021). The framework receives support from environmental security studies and science-related populism research because these fields provide understanding about how challenges against expertise and institutional authority affect climate governance in democratic systems.

The liberal institutionalist theory shows that successful governance of complex transnational problems needs institutions to remain stable while political leaders and scientific experts work together, and people use scientific evidence. The academic tradition defines climate change as a collective-action problem which requires permanent policy coordination to protect national and supranational systems from short-term political influences (Delreux & Ohler, 2019; Oberthür & Dupont, 2021). The European Union established climate governance through its extensive institutional system which connects national policymaking processes to EU legislation and international obligations and expert advisory systems. The German climate policy system shows this model because the country has used parliamentary procedures and administrative processes and expert opinions to develop climate policy instead of relying on public votes or majority rule.

Environmental security scholarship demonstrates that climate change exists as a non-traditional security threat. Climate change does not create a direct military threat, but it brings extended dangers which will impact both economic systems and social structures and governmental systems. The assessment of such dangers needs anticipatory governance together with institutional capacity and evidence-based policy development according to IPCC (2018). Environmental security methods in democratic systems demonstrate how

democratic governance enables governments to implement climate initiatives when their organizations maintain public confidence and institutional credibility.

The governance structure faces growing difficulties because of the increasing presence of right-wing populism. Populism, especially in its right-wing form, uses a political system which assigns power to the majority while showing strong distrust towards specialists and political institutions (Mudde, 2007; Müller, 2016). The system demonstrates how experts run government systems which people see as non-democratic because they lack public accountability and disregard the needs of regular citizens. Populist groups challenge both specific policies and the fundamental systems which support those policies. Research on science-related populism explains how these challenges operate. The study by Mede and Schäfer (2020) demonstrates how populist movements create scientific authority problems through their portrayal of expertise as politically biased and ideologically motivated. Populist actors use this strategy in climate change contexts to undermine climate policy legitimacy while they maintain their scientific climate evidence. Meyer (2023) states that current climate politics depend on epistemic contestation because it destroys the knowledge base necessary for democracy to make decisions about intricate policy matters.

The framework shows how the *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* in Germany has brought climate change issues into political debate through its activities. The AfD spends its resources to challenge scientific authority and institutional rule and democratic standards which climate governance systems use to operate. Populist groups present climate policy as an elite initiative which endangers economic stability and citizen choice thereby undermining the liberal institutional systems which exist to tackle climate change as a permanent security problem (Boecher et al., 2022; Küppers, 2024).

The theoretical perspectives work together to create specific analytical predictions about their expected outcomes. The combination of liberal institutionalism and environmental security research shows that ongoing expert authority challenges will decrease institutional legitimacy which will result in diminished governance capacity needed to sustain climate policy development. Science-related populism demonstrates that the challenges to climate science evidence operate through two main pathways. The empirical analysis of *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* discourse in the upcoming section will use these expectations as a research framework.

Results and Analysis

Right-wing populist discourse in Germany has established a new political interpretation of climate change which presents the issue as a dispute between two opposing sides who hold different opinions about elite power, economic instability, and the legitimacy of democratic systems. The study of AfD party programs, parliamentary statements, and contextual sources reveals three recurring patterns through which this politicization is articulated.

Climate Policy as an Elite and Technocratic Project

The AfD discourse presents climate policy as an elitist project which technical experts' control because it fails to serve the needs of average citizens. The 2016 basic program and 2025 federal election manifesto present climate policy because of political elites and international institutions and expert communities instead of democratic processes (Alternative für Deutschland, 2016; 2025). The framing establishes a fundamental populist principle which depicts politics as a battle between virtuous citizens and corrupt political authorities (Mudde, 2007; Müller, 2016).

The opposition movement targets both specific policy tools and the complete system of climate governance institutions. European Union climate regulations and international commitments are frequently depicted as infringements on national sovereignty and democratic self-determination. The way populist groups in Europe challenge climate governance through their connection to international institutions and government bureaucracy demonstrates a common European trend according to Huber et al. 2021. The German

climate policy system developed through expert-led institutional processes needs this practice because it significantly impacts German climate policy development.

AfD discourse presents scientists and administrative bodies as politically biased entities which lack neutrality to provide expert knowledge. The party questions climate policy expertise credibility through its approach of presenting alternative explanations and choosing specific dissenting experts (Boecher et al., 2022). The ongoing dispute prevents institutional trust from developing which serves as an essential requirement for effective governance of complicated policy issues and it redirects political tensions from policy results to the authentic authority of government operations.

Climate Policy as a Threat to Economic Security

The second main pattern shows climate policy implementation as an immediate danger which threatens both economic security and social stability. The AfD political party tracks climate action expenses through their narratives while focusing on three specific costs which include higher energy prices and industrial competitiveness and employment risks. The 2025 election manifesto links climate measures to both deindustrialization and their excessive impact on lower-income households and energy-dependent regions according to the Alternative für Deutschland party.

The economic framework supports research evidence which shows that right-wing populist movements use economic distress and distributional injustice perceptions to mobilize their supporters (Weisskircher et al., 2016). Populist movements use their focus on current material expenses to shift public interest from environmental hazards that develop over time to urgent economic matters. Populist supporters who oppose climate policies do so because of their political beliefs and party affiliations rather than their understanding of scientific information (Kulin et al., 2021).

The environmental security perspective of this narrative creates a major reversal because climate change creates permanent economic risks which harm social stability and political systems according to IPCC 2018, but AfD discourse shows climate policy as the chief economic danger. The process de-securitizes climate change because it transforms into an environmental threat, while the economic harm that results from mitigation efforts receives re-securitization. The new framework restricts the range of policy discussion and limits institutions from tackling climate change as an ongoing security problem. Populist groups throughout Europe use economic cost arguments to undermine climate governance according to Selk and Kemmerzell 2022.

Contesting Scientific Authority and Democratic Legitimacy

A third pattern shows how people consistently challenge scientific authority, which affects the democratic process. The AfD party base employs climate science denial to question climate scientists' political affiliations and research objectivity. The Mede and Schäfer (2020) study shows that this method represents populism which dismisses scientific expertise as a political tool that lacks connection to common public needs.

Party documents and parliamentary statements repeatedly demonstrate that climate experts together with advisory institutions form an elite group which restricts the ability of people to make democratic choices. Climate policy is thus framed as democratically illegitimate, justified through allegedly politicized science. The challenges to democratic decision-making processes weaken their epistemic foundations in policy areas which have complex and uncertain characteristics (Meyer, 2023).

The democratic system in Germany depends on citizens who possess knowledge and established governmental methods to function effectively. The AfD party uses emotionally powerful stories to demonstrate that climate policy creates an "eco-dictatorship" which prevents people from enjoying their democratic rights, according to Küppers in 2024. The climate skepticism movement creates a double effect because it unites people with democratic rights and national sovereignty beliefs, according to the study.

Public opinion research shows that German residents develop their climate change views according to their political identity and the media presents environmental issues, which creates two separate groups of people who hold different views (Metag et al., 2017; Klinger et al., 2022). The AfD political party uses existing social divisions to strengthen its negative approach which drives people from taking part in political discussions.

Implications for Environmental Security Governance

These patterns demonstrate that right-wing populist discourse changes how climate change is understood as a political issue in Germany. Populist groups instead of eliminating climate policy from political discussions, use it to demonstrate how elite power operates and creates economic risks and restricts democratic processes. The new definition makes it more difficult to solve climate change because it demands extended institutional cooperation to tackle climate change as a national security problem.

The German case shows effective educational value because Germany has a strong tradition of expertise-based governance and it serves as a core European nation for climate leadership (Huber et al., 2021). The AfD party uses its ongoing presence in parliament to demonstrate how populist movements can create political chaos in established democratic systems, which leads to changes in both environmental security governance and policy discussions. The study results confirm that right-wing populism leads to greater climate change politicization because it challenges scientific knowledge and presents climate policies as risks to both economic stability and democratic decision-making which undermines the institutional and epistemic foundations required for effective long-term climate governance.

Discussion

The research results show that right-wing populism gained more power to shape climate change politics in Germany through the political speech and activities of the Alternative for Germany party. The AfD does not outright reject climate change but instead presents climate policy as a challenge between elite groups and their economic power and their ability to control democratic processes. The study confirms its hypothesis through evidence which matches existing European research that shows populism transforms climate politics because it creates conflicts in both discourse and institutional frameworks instead of developing clear policy solutions (Huber et al. 2021 Selk and Kemmerzell 2022).

The research results demonstrate that expertise-based governance systems which depend on specialized knowledge face operational difficulties when political parties become deeply divided. Germany's climate governance system has depended on three key elements which include institutional stability, extended policy development, and the use of scientific knowledge for democratic decision-making processes. The AfD demonstrates how populist groups can damage governmental systems while still maintaining their commitment to democratic methods through their attack on established political foundations. Populist discourse presents climate policy as a requirement established by unaccountable elite groups who use scientific research for political purposes which results in the loss of institutional trust that enables successful climate governance (Boecher et al., 2022; Mede & Schäfer, 2020). The process weakens democratic systems because it does not use direct authoritarian methods but instead operates through the slow destruction of public discussion standards and the decline of trust in knowledge.

The analysis reveals how populist framing changes climate change security assessment which impacts environmental security discussions. The study of environmental security defines climate change as a permanent danger which undermines economic stability and social unity and governmental structure (IPCC, 2018) while German populist discourse uses an opposing argument. The security issue of climate change receives less attention because climate policy now positions itself as a danger that will endanger both economic stability and citizens' right to vote. The political discussion time frame gets limited through this reversal which

focuses on immediate distribution issues instead of protecting shared long-term hazards, thus leading to more disjointed climate governance systems.

The German case shows European trends but also demonstrates their importance within the framework of a structured democratic system. Across Europe, right-wing populist parties demonstrate climate policy opposition through their belief that environmental regulations lead to national sovereignty and economic decline (Kulin et al., 2021; Selk & Kemmerzell, 2022). The politicization in Germany proves critical because of its strong institutional framework and its position as a main European Union climate leadership center. The case shows that strong institutional systems cannot protect climate governance from challenges originating from populist movements. The study shows that institutional strength does not provide guaranteed policy stability. The study shows that institutional strength does not provide policy stability. The study shows that institutional strength does not guarantee policy stability.

The research demonstrates that populist climate politics creates a democratic paradox which exists within their democratic systems. The populist movements fight against climate policies through their use of popular sovereignty and democratic electoral rights, yet their public statements destroy essential elements required for genuine democratic discussion. The populist stories about science create a false image of scientific authority which restricts the public from proper dialogue and diverse negotiation processes. Meyer 2023 shows that epistemic polarization leads to identity conflicts which transform policy disputes into personal conflicts that exist in the German climate debate.

The analysis shows that researchers should not consider populist climate politicization as a single pattern which will occur without exception. The AfD's political approach combines three distinct elements which guide its electoral strategy and its response to climate change issues. The need to understand this variation exists because researchers must avoid creating deterministic populism models which show how different political settings affect populist behavior towards environmental laws (Huber et al., 2021).

The research results demonstrate that right-wing populism operates as an obstacle to policy progress while it transforms the democratic process of climate change understanding and discussion and decision-making about climate change. The solution to this problem demands that people focus their efforts on building institutional strength while maintaining democratic dialogue and ensure fair resource allocation and determine how expert knowledge should influence public choices.

Way Forward and Policy Implications

The findings demonstrate that climate change politicization requires solutions which go beyond both policy design and technological solutions. The success of climate governance in politically divided countries depends on the institutional framework and democratic processes used to create and enforce climate policies. The liberal institutionalist perspective shows that climate action needs institutional credibility and democratic accountability and public confidence in expertise to succeed.

First, climate policy development needs increased public access and transparency to reduce perceived technical dominance which exists in current policies. The scientific community needs to maintain its essential role in climate research, yet the public should receive more structured chances to engage with climate topics because it will show that climate governance does not operate as an elite system. Public decision-making processes which explain policy trade-offs and distribution effects and long-term goals will enable better democratic discussions while keeping expert knowledge as a vital component.

Second, the distributive dimensions of climate policies need more investigation. People who oppose climate change solutions express their objections through two main arguments, which include economic costs and social justice issues. The presence of social compensation elements together with regional differences and sector transition assistance in policies helps to decrease zero-sum narratives while enabling more

democratic acceptance of climate policies that maintain their environmental goals.

The third point shows that challenges to scientific authority require better methods to combine expert knowledge into democratic processes. The governance system should show how scientific advice works together with political accountability instead of treating it as a replacement for democratic decision-making. The approach will reduce science populism because it strengthens the democratic process through expert knowledge validation.

The combined implications of these findings lead to a governance-focused solution which aims to control political disputes about climate change without destroying the process of democratic decision-making and the institutional framework. The solution needs this method because democratic societies require a sustainable approach to climate change as an ongoing threat to environmental security.

Conclusion

Climate change politicization is a crucial issue to democratic governance in Europe, especially in cases where populist forces challenge the policy systems based on expertise. The article has demonstrated that right-wing populism as expressed through the discourse and the political activities of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (*AfD*) has transformed climate debate in Germany by redefine environmental governance as a problem of elite domination, economic insecurity and democratic restriction. Instead of out and out climate denial, the AfD is positioning itself as a strategic de-institutionalization of the institutional and epistemic structures of climate governance, through delegitimization of scientific knowledge, depiction of mitigation as a threat to social and economic stability, and the climatic policy as not something that can be chosen democratically. By combining a liberal institutionalist approach and a environmental security approach, the paper will show that the populist contestation on the issue is not only impacting the policy outcomes but also the conditions of governance necessary to tackle climate change as a non-traditional, long-term security issue. The German example shows that even strongly institutionalized democracies can be prone to populist politicization of climate governance, which exemplifies the significance of regulating the political contestation in a manner that will not hamper democratic discourse, institutional credibility, and sustainability of environmental security in the long run.

Author Contribution

Memoona Fiaz, BS from the Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of Gujrat

Baber Ali, BS from the Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of Gujrat

M. Sufyan Haider,BS from the Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of Gujrat

Aftab Ahmed,BS from the Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of Gujrat

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