

Climate policy during times of governmental change

Can EU climate frontrunners maintain their position when
climate-skeptic governments are on the rise?

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August 2024



O'Donnell, 2020

Bachelor thesis Geography, Planning and Environment (GPE)

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[20.455 words]

Radboud Universiteit



Summary

Climate change is among one of the biggest threats that society is currently facing. If climate change will not be tackled with strong climate legislation, there will be severe consequences for planet and society. The EU has actively been setting out ambitious climate policy and is frontrunner on a global scale in terms of climate policy legislation. Also within the EU, there are many differences between member states in terms of how well they implement climate policy and how ambitious their climate legislation is. While some countries, mostly Eastern European, try slowing down the EU's climate policies, others aim to go beyond this, setting out even more ambitious climate policies. Finland and the Netherlands have been among these EU climate frontrunners for several years, and aim to combat climate change and by doing so attracting investors and setting out an example for others.

However, while both countries' governments have been consistently performing well and have been regarded as pro-climate, in 2023 they both faced a shift in government. Climate skeptic parties have been growing rapidly in both countries, leading to them being included in the new government coalition after 2023 elections. For the Finnish case, the Finns Party got second to most points – a party that does not prioritize combatting climate change. For the Dutch case, the PVV won national elections – having a chairman that denies climate change as a problem and wants to get rid of climate measures.

During times like this, when government priorities are shifting, it is uncertain how Finland's and the Netherlands' position as climate frontrunner will be influenced. This research looked at three factors that might indicate whether both countries will remain their frontrunner position, or if their climate ambitions will be watered down. These factors are policy preferences, bindingness of EU climate legislation and public support towards climate change action.

For Finland, it is mostly policy preferences that ensure the country's ambitious climate policy implementation. While bindingness is an important factor, both the previous government led by Marin, as well as the current government led by Orpo already prioritize climate as one of the most pressing issues. Marin's government set out new climate targets that are more ambitious than the EU's targets, and agreed to opt for even climate negativity. Even though the new government formation includes the less pro-climate Finns Party, the whole government is committed to reach the ambitious climate goals and continue creating new legislation. Even though the public support is generally very positive towards climate action, this will not have much influence on climate policy with Orpo's government. What could happen however is that the Finns Party will try to make the public more skeptic about climate

change, leading to more resistance and this might even lead to watered down climate policy on the long run.

For the Netherlands, policy preferences are also influencing climate policy the most. The previous government led by Rutte was overall pro-climate, striving for more ambitious climate policy than what the EU has set out. While the new government still tries to stick to the agreed upon climate targets, parties like the PVV and BBB will try to do their best to water down climate ambitions, and have even had already success in doing so. Therefore bindingness is an important factor for the Dutch government to ensure that climate policies will still be implemented if the Netherlands does not want to get faced with high fines. In the Netherlands, the public support is currently also very positive towards ambitious climate policy. This does directly impact Dutch policymaking. However, here as well public opinion might shift towards more climate skepticism, because those parties will try to bring these skeptic ideas among society. Since public support does influence Dutch climate policymaking, this might pose serious problems in the future, leading to climate measures being watered down.

Overall, it will not be likely that Finland and the Netherlands will stop putting out ambitious climate policies, mainly because they bound themselves to EU reduction targets and because policy preferences overall are still positive towards climate action. It can however happen that the presence of climate skeptic parties will slow down the implementation of climate policy, and these parties will try their best to shift the public opinion towards more climate skepticism. This in turn can influence both countries' position as frontrunner.

Abbreviations

NCP	National Coalition Party
PVV	Party for Freedom
EU	European Union
GHG	Greenhouse gas
ETS	Emission Trading Scheme
EGD	European Green Deal
NECP	National Energy and Climate Plans
CJEU	Court of Justice
UNFCCC	United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change
U.S.	United States
BBB	Dutch Farmers Party
VVD	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy
NSC	Social Contract Party

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1. Introduction

In April 2023, the Finnish National Coalition Party (NCP) won the most seats in the country's parliamentary election, leading to the establishment of the most right-wing coalition government in its modern history (Tanner, 2023). This government coalition includes, apart from the leading NCP, the Finns Party with almost as many votes as the NCP, the Christian Democrats and the Swedish People's Party of Finland. Later that year, in November 2023, the Dutch right-wing Party for Freedom (PVV) becomes by far the biggest party during national elections, making it highly likely to lead to a major shift in government ¹(Nws, 2023). Both of these shifts have at least one thing in common. They both indicate a new governmental era in which the political standpoint is quite different from before. Both the PVV and the Finns party have a certain view on climate change that might be concerning when trying to establish sufficient measures to battle this. Because both countries so far have been frontrunners on climate policy in the European Union (EU), this new shift might influence the position that Finland and the Netherlands have regarding climate change.

Within the new Finnish coalition government, there has been opposition to the idea that Finns need to take radical steps in order to combat the climate crisis, because of their often-held belief that Finns are among the least polluting people on the planet (Mac Dougall, 2023) This belief is for example spread by the Finns Party, the party that is growing rapidly and got second to most votes during the 2023 Finnish parliamentary elections. It is said that this new government is taking the country backwards when talking about climate action. While this new government formally is not holding back on its commitment for carbon neutrality by 2035, its new emerging policies might lead away from that goal (Mac Dougall, 2023). Similarly, the Dutch PVV, likely to lead the new Dutch government, sees any measure that tackles climate change as wasted money. Their election program states that they would want all current climate acts and other measures to be gone, because they see climate change as something natural that is always out there and we should not fight against it (Ekker, 2023). The PVV party also claims that we should not worry about climate mitigation, because this would end up being "30 times more expensive than adapting to possible climate change" (PVV, z.d.)

But why would it be such an issue if governments stop taking measures to tackle climate change? Over the past decades, it has become clear that anthropogenic activities have had significant effects on the climate (Ewans & Jonathan, 2023). Deforestation and increased

¹ Note that at the time of writing the thesis, talks on forming a coalition government were still ongoing and up until the final phase of writing, the new cabinet had yet to be formally sworn in.

greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions contributed to climate change in a way that is unsustainable. While the earth's climate is changing constantly, the speed in which this is happening currently is way higher than it has ever been before, which makes it difficult to estimate its effects and makes it hard to avoid its consequences. Burghila et al. (2015) state how climate change could lead to poverty, starvation, droughts, fires, and food insecurity. On top of that, it is expected that the proportion of intense tropical cyclones and peak wind speeds will increase as a result of global warming (Ewans & Jonathan, 2023). This could have disastrous effects on human and nature (Burghila et al., 2015; Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2020). It is thus important to act in time to avoid these consequences.

Furthermore, the EU has a relatively long history of taking climate initiatives, producing a large body of environmental and climate related policies over the years (Lenschow, 2014). Currently, the EU has one of the most ambitious climate change reduction targets (Oberthür, 2010). From the 1990s onward, the EU's climate policy has gradually taken shape and transitioned from a stage of development to implementation. In the beginning of the 1990s, climate change was put on both international and European policy agendas for the first time. Since the early 2000s however, the EU has moved ahead of the international framework, especially on climate and energy legislation and setting of ambitious emission reduction targets (Oberthür, 2010). Since that time, the EU has for example set up the largest Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) known worldwide, and in 2019 the European Green Deal (EGD) got published, in which, among other, the EU strives for climate neutrality by 2050 (EU Monitor, 2018).

Despite all of the ambitious reduction targets and climate policies that the EU has set out, responsibility of complying with these lies with the member states. Indeed, implementation appears to be problematic for some member states (Kryk & Guzowska, 2021). Take for example countries in the Eastern European bloc, where the energy sector is based mostly on fossil fuels. They are therefore struggling to transform to a low carbon economy. On the contrary, northern European countries have consistently performed well in climate policy. Two of the good performing member states are Finland and the Netherlands (Kryk & Guzowska, 2021). Both countries are known to be doing well in implementing climate policy to reach the agreed reduction targets of GHG-emissions, and both have worked on initiatives to develop this even more. While both member states have adopted strict climate policies for both short- and long-term, the question may arise whether they can maintain their position as a good performer, light of the current governmental changes that might change their climate policy. Their climate policy is in fact, as explained above, facing challenges surrounding

governmental changes that might influence their views on climate policy and their level of ambition (Koskimaa et al., 2021).

1.1 Problem statement

Both the Finland and the Netherlands are considered 'green' member states within the EU and have a frontrunner position regarding climate policy (Lieverink, 2009). What is defined as a green member state are EU member states that are pushers in the environmental field. This can be either for purely environmental reasons, to create a competitive advantage for domestic green industries, or to minimize adaptation costs in the implementation field (Lieverink, 2023). However, currently both countries face changes in government that may influence both countries' climate policy, because of changes in climate-related ideologies and preferences. The question is thus if current policies and structures are strong enough to maintain a frontrunner position.

1.2 Research aim

The aim of this research is to find out if forerunners of climate policy in the EU can maintain their position, by finding out what influence government changes can have on national implementation of EU climate policies. By means of comparative qualitative research, it will be clarified how this strong climate policy has come about in both countries and what influences it, in order to estimate properly what impact a changing government has on this. This research will thus be done to find out if EU climate policies in Finland and the Netherlands are strong enough to endure in times of governmental changes.

1.3 Research question

Based on the above discussion, the two EU member states offer an interesting puzzle given their until recently strong governmental commitment towards ambitious climate targets. To this end, the central question guiding this thesis is:

To what extent can radical governmental changes influence climate policy of EU-frontrunners?

1.4 Societal relevance

It is important to find out more about green member states' strategies of adopting climate policy, because climate change is something from which the effects will be felt by everyone of us. By finding out what effect changing government ideologies have on climate policies of influential green member states, it will become clear if additional action is required to still be able to meet the emission reduction goals that were set up in order to avoid the most disastrous effects of climate change. It will therefore also show policymakers the importance of sturdy long-term climate policy, as a possible way of avoiding the negative consequences

that changing governments bring upon in a democracy (Boston & Stuart, 2015). On top of that, it can be applied to similar contested policy areas. While this research is specifically done about climate policy, radical government changes in ideologies are also evident in other policy fields like migration or social policies and seem to be influenced in a similar way. The findings of this research could thus also lend support for the impact of governmental changes in other controversial areas.

1.5 Scientific relevance

A lot of research has been done already on why both Finland and the Netherlands are forerunners in climate policy. Koskimaa et al. (2021) state that Finland has performed consistently well in successful environmental policy. Key factors that played a role in this are its negotiating skills within EU policymaking and its great policy implementation. Jackson (2023) and Greiner (2022) both studied the efforts that are being made in Finland for decarbonizing. They, together with Chen et al. (2023), find that as a decarbonization strategy opting for zero-emission electricity, Finland and the Netherlands both rely upon wind energy by means of wind farms for example. Gupta et al. (2008) reviewed how the Netherlands has adopted climate policy from relatively early on.

However, not a lot of studies have questioned what would happen with the country's forerunner position when a new government gets elected that has other opposing ideologies concerning climate change. Boston and Stuart (2015) argue for why it is difficult within democracies to make steady long-term policy. This has to do with the fact that it is hard for democratic institutions to create incentives strong enough to protect both the long-term interests of current citizens and those of future citizens and because vote-maximizing politicians are tempted to discount the future. Koskimaa et al. (2021) agree with this view and add to this that politicians play a big role in shaping policy.

Existing literature thus acknowledges that changing governmental ideologies might pose some problems in terms of making long-term climate policy, but there is not yet a lot of research on what this inquires in the case of Finland and the Netherlands, because both countries have been performing so consistently well in adopting and implementing climate policy. Now that both governments are changing it is relevant to study in more depth what these changes might imply when looking at climate policy, and also empirically test the value of a number of theory-derived factors about sturdy long-term policy implementation during these times of change.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The following chapter will dig deeper into the literature that is to be found around climate policy in the EU, and later on the efforts that both Finland and the Netherlands have made so

far, to illustrate how they are considered climate frontrunners. On top of that, the growing climate skepticism that is emerging within the EU context will be discussed. The next chapter on Theoretical Framework will discuss existing theories on what affects the stability of climate policy implementation during times of governmental change. In the Research Design chapter the choice for the used data collection methods is explained, after which the results can be found in the Analysis chapter. The thesis will finish up with a general conclusion, discusses the implications of the findings and draws on possible recommendations for future research.

2. Literature review

This section will first touch upon climate related policymaking in the EU. It is made clear what climate policies the EU has set out, and what makes some EU countries to be frontrunners as opposed to others. After explaining the different type of leadership styles that are to be found within the EU, Finland's and the Netherlands' climate efforts are described in more detail. In the last section, the governmental shifts that are occurring all over Europe, and in Finland and the Netherlands more specifically, are explained to give more context about the political background against which this thesis is written.

2.1 EU climate policy

2.1.1 What efforts has the EU been making?

While climate policy touches upon a lot of different areas such as the built environment, agriculture and waste (Aal et al., 2018), in this thesis climate policy will be dealt with in a more broad sense, looking at emission reduction targets and the turn towards more green energy. These are fields in which both the EU and Finland and the Netherlands are making great efforts (Spencer & Fazekas, 2013). The goals of climate policies are to reduce risk and vulnerability to climate change, strengthen resilience, enhance well-being and the capacity to anticipate, and respond successfully to change (Dittmann, 2022).

The EU's domestic climate policy measures are currently one of the most advanced in the world (Dupont et al., 2023). EU climate policy started in the 1990s, where limited progress was made. This was marked by a failed carbon tax proposal that was blocked by member states. During the 2000s, there was growing politicization of climate change. This period marked the design, creation, implementation and revision of the ETS, which was a very innovative system within climate policy during this time. It is to this day the largest example of emissions trading out there (Laing et al., 2013). The EU explains this cap and trade system as follows: there is a limit (cap) on the total amount of GHGs that can be emitted. This cap is reduced annually to make sure that emissions decrease over time. The system works with allowances that each give the right to emit one tonne CO₂ and these allowances can in turn be traded among companies (European Commission, z.d.). It also introduces national caps for emissions from power and industry sectors in each member state (Prahl et al., z.d.). Overall, the ETS, together with renewable energy policies have been most prominent and impactful in the EU when looking at climate protection (Bausch et al., 2017).

During the first half of the 2010s, however, climate policy development slowed down. In 2012, "the EU's dependence on energy imports was 53%, compared to 43% in 1995" (Delbeke & Vis, 2016). During this time, both oil and gas imports increased with over 10% compared to 1995 levels. Despite these developments, during the second half of the 2010s,

new policy efforts, especially around target-setting were advanced. The EU's dependency on fossil fuel imports has been a key reason to develop a more competitive and secure energy system. This includes increased energy efficiency, increased utilization of low-carbon technologies and using these innovations to create a comparative advantage on the global energy market (Delbeke & Vis, 2016).

More recently, as part of the Clean Energy for all Europeans package, the Regulation on the governance of the energy union and climate action (EU) 2018/1999 introduced the national energy and climate plans (NECPs). These plans outline how EU member states plan to address decarbonization; energy efficiency; energy security; internal energy market and research, innovation and competitiveness. These NECPs are set up for the period 2021-2030, and EU countries need to submit a progress report every 2 years (European Commission, z.d.). The idea was to form a solid base to aim in a realistic and responsible way to a higher GHG emissions reduction target for 2030 (EUR-Lex, 2020).

Furthermore, the European Green Deal (EGD) published in 2019 (Dupont et al., 2023), representing the first commitment in the world to reduce GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to the GHG-levels in 1990. With the European Green Deal, the EU aims to be completely climate neutral by 2050, striving to be the first continent to do so. Climate neutrality is about achieving net zero GHG emissions by balancing those emissions so that they are either equal or less than those that get removed through natural absorption (United Nations Climate Change, 2021). The key point of this agreement is to decouple economic growth from carbon emissions (Almeida et al., 2023). The European Green Deal appeared to take a far more holistic approach to climate governance than what was seen before, by extending the policy to focus on all sectors and systems. The deal highlights that every EU policy and project needs to integrate the overarching goal of climate neutrality. So while the EU has a relatively long history of climate policy, its tempo and scope increased a lot more as a result of the EU Green Deal (Dupont et al., 2023).

When looking at EU-level overall, it has not always been easy to implement the ambitious climate policies in practice. Both Haugh et al. (2009) and Skjærseth (2014) discuss this implementation gap in EU environmental policy. This gap entails that several measures that are outlined in the European Climate Change Programme have incomplete implementation. To increase the chances of realizing a low-carbon economy by 2050, the EU adopted a climate and energy package in 2008, with binding policies to harmonize climate and energy legislation. The package included climate and energy goals for the year 2020 and was unanimously adopted by all EU member states. However, this unanimity disappeared already in 2014, when multiple Central European countries started questioning the need for new and

more ambitious energy and climate policies. As the largest coal producer, Poland led this opposition, together with Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. These countries did not want new, stricter binding renewable or energy-efficiency targets that were proposed during this time. By consequence, this could hamper further developments towards new policies for the year 2030. Arguably, such national developments have far reaching consequences for the overall direction of EU climate policy, putting at risk the EU's long-term low-carbon ambitions (Skjærseth, 2014).

Furthermore, Skjærseth (2014) explains how it has been challenging for member states to transform policies that promote EU-level agreement into gains also at the national level, because of high potential costs for the affected sectors. There remains a division between countries, with some demanding full control and stating that ambitious member states are the ones that should deliver the reductions towards 2030 themselves (Skjærseth, 2014).

According to Perino et al. (2022) the implementation gap of EU climate policy is due to diversity of sources of GHG emissions. This would mean, for example, that no single regulatory instrument will suffice to combat climate change. The diversity means that (1) no single EU body bears responsibility for implementing climate targets, (2) it is hard to determine who is going to bear the costs, and (3) can lead to clashing ideologies (Perino et al., 2022). This could lead to climate goals not being realized fully because they cannot be implemented completely.

2.1.2 Differences between Member States

While the EU overall has been performing well in setting up solid climate policies, there remains a large division between member states in terms of implementation performance within EU climate policy. A distinction that is often made to denote this difference is found within the 'leader-laggard' dynamic (Liefferink et al., 2009).

According to Knill et al. (2012) there are four main criteria on which member states can be classified as either leader or laggard: the number of adopted environmental policies, the time of their adoption, the stringency of regulations, and the achievement of good environmental quality. Knill et al. (2012) explain that leaders are member states that are able to drag along other member states and that have advanced environmental policies. It can be defined as a state that "effectuates and pursues the most stringent approach in environmental policy and thereby sets an example that can be emulated" (Knill et al., 2012, p.37). This term is often combined with the term forerunner, which Liefferink & Andersen (1998, p. 256) have defined as "a member state which is ahead of EU environmental policy in the sense of having developed more advanced policies with a higher level of protection". Member states that have advanced domestic environmental policies, tend to pull along other states either

through regulatory competition, by stimulating international regulation, or by spreading innovations through transnational communication (Liefferink et al., 2009). An environmental laggard on the other hand can be defined as a member state that is characterized by a low ambition in environmental policy, and is reluctant and resistant to the adoptions of stringent environmental regulations (Knill et al., 2012).

When looking at EU environmental policy-making, a distinction can be generally made between three groups of countries (Liefferink et al., 2009). Under environmental leaders are falling Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. These are industrial states that have strict, highly differentiated legal regulations of environmental pollution, with highly differentiated state implementation agreements. This gives them a reason to harmonize their high standards at the EU level (Börzel, 2002). Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland, as well as most central European countries can be in contrast seen as environmental laggards; and in between these two classifications fall Belgium, France and Italy (Liefferink et al., 2009).

Motivations for a member state to act as an environmental leader, are a high domestic demand for green policies, creating a competitive advantage for the domestic industry and to influence future international legislation (Liefferink et al., 2009). Within the EU, it is also a way with which 'green' member states can upload their own interests into EU level and shape its policymaking. Jänicke (2005) and Börzel (2002) add to this that there are certain domestic factors that further enable or restrain a member state's ability to act as leader. These are for example the present skills and knowledge, the strength of a green coalition and most importantly a high economic development.

Börzel (2002) and Liefferink et al. (2009) argue that Finland and the Netherlands can both be characterized as leaders, because of their high economic development, skills and knowledge, high domestic demand for green policies and strong (green) government that has been present for a long period. Finland and the Netherlands are two of the few countries that have been consistent high-performers of environmental regulations that regularly stand out as particularly successful. On top of that, Finland and the Netherlands hold respectively rank 3 and 11 in the global Environmental Performance Index, and perform specifically well on energy use and renewable energy (EPI, 2022). Finland can furthermore be seen of as an engaged forerunner in terms of policy ambition, because it has often adopted stricter policies than those required by the EU (Koskimaa et al., 2021).

However, between leader member states there is also differentiation in the way they lead climate policy within the EU (Wurzel et al., 2018). In the literature, there is often a distinction made between four types of leadership styles. The first one is *structural leadership*, which

has to do with military and economic power, that fall under material resources (Wurzel et al., 2016). Wurzel et al. (2018) claim that an actor who possesses power, only becomes a structural leader if its power is used for collective goods. *Entrepreneurial leadership* is characterized by diplomatic and/or negotiating skills with a view to achieve compromises and agreements. *Cognitive leadership* involves (re)defining ideas which states that ambitious climate measures might also benefit the economy. This leadership style has been provided by for example the Netherlands for over a long period of time. Lastly, there is *exemplary leadership*, that has as a basic principle the idea of setting an example for others. These leaders intentionally put forward domestic climate policies as an example for others (Wurzel et al., 2018; Wurzel et al., 2016). Finland can therefore be seen as an exemplary leader, because it has often adopted stricter policies than those that are required by the EU.

2.2 Climate policy in Finland and the Netherlands

2.2.1 Finland

Finland has performed consistently well in international comparisons of successful, environmental policy (Koskimaa et al., 2021). Since the country entered the EU in 1995, it has been considered one of the forerunners with regard to environmental policy (Knill & Liefferink, 2007, as cited in Koskimaa et al., 2021). After joining the EU, Finland united with the other so-called 'Green member states' in which it has remained one of the forerunners (Lindholm, 2002; Knill & Liefferink, 2007, as cited in Koskimaa et al., 2021). The country has been considered an ideal negotiating partner on topics such as climate change. Katz (2006) argues that this is because the country's main negotiation style is cooperative and people may be open to compromising. They also focus on equally short-term and long-term benefits. Finns are also known for their strategy of building trust in negotiations. The country was also the first in the world to introduce a tax on CO₂ emissions (Giuli et al., 2018). Because of their strong negotiation skills, Finland can be seen as an entrepreneurial leader.

While initially not taking a lot of climate-based initiatives, it could maintain its 'green' status by acting as – in the words of Koskimaa et al. (2021, p.6) – “the good pupil”. Since then, Finland has actively supported the development of international environmental laws and agreements, and Finland's pressure was necessary to obtain this in the 1998 Amsterdam Summit Agenda (Lindholm, 2002). Currently, the country aims at being carbon neutral by 2035 and even carbon negative by 2040, which makes its schedule the third most ambitious in the world, with Uruguay and Norway aiming to be carbon neutral by 2030 (Kuittinen et al., 2020). This is going to be a challenge for the country, because it relies heavily on forests as carbon sinks, all the while the numbers of forests are declining. This could mean that Finland will not be able to reach its 2035 goals of being carbon neutral if there are not going to be additional measures (CCPI, 2024). Finland is planning on becoming Europe's first carbon negative

economy. These climate targets were set out by a group of economists from the Finnish climate change panel and was made during the previous government coalition which was characterized by pro-climate parties within (Lo, 2022).

The key pillar of Finland's climate policy is the national Climate Act (July 2022), which lays down new emission reduction targets for 2030 and 2050, and updates the reduction target for 2050. The act will be supplemented with an obligation for municipalities to draw up climate plans and with provisions on requests for review concerning the climate policy plans. Annual Climate reports are published to monitor the achievement of the targets and adequacy of the measures. The obligations and policy decisions under the EU climate and energy legislation are binding on Finland too (Ministry of the Environment, z.d.).

Finland has made several efforts to implement EU climate-related directives into both national and city-level (Monni & Raes, 2009). This is for example the case for energy efficiency and security, transportation and waste management. Monni and Raes (2009) conclude by stating that climate policy in Helsinki complements EU and national climate policies. They also state that the different governance levels work well together to make this possible. They find how the lower levels of governance often have the key responsibilities in implementing EU directives and national policy, while the overall responsibility remains at the national level. Legislators in Finland have been ahead of the EU ones when we look at green transition, in particular when it comes to renewables. On top of that, the city of Helsinki is ahead of both EU and national action and implements on a voluntary basis measures that bring short-term benefits to the city directly. Initiatives at the city level, such as for example the waste prevention strategy, public transportation and parking policies, might show the feasibility of certain measures and pave the way for EU wide implementation. This case shows how cities play a role in mitigating climate change through removing implementation barriers of national and EU policies (Monni & Raes, 2008).

2.2.2 The Netherlands

The Netherlands is one of the founders of the EU, and one of the first countries to develop a national climate policy. Already in 1990, the country aimed at reducing national CO₂ emissions by 3-5% in 2000 (Gupta et al., 2008). On top of that, a National Climate Policy Plan was drawn up and since then, follow up plans were regularly prepared. Dutch national climate policy has over the years strived for "a safe and healthy environment, in an active living space without damaging global biodiversity and resources" (Gupta et al., 2008). The country has long promoted renewable energy; energy efficiency and new energy technologies (Gupta et al., 2008).

Furthermore one of the reasons why creating a firm climate policy was important for the Netherlands, has been the country's expected increase of the costs of climate change, as a result of water damage, droughts and heat stress. These are affecting the Netherlands so much, because the country is very vulnerable to sea level rise, one of the main effects of climate change. Because of this importance, the Netherlands has pleaded for ambitious targets in the European context (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2020).

To reach the EU goals of being climate neutral by 2050 at the latest, the Dutch outgoing cabinet aimed its climate policy at reducing emissions by 60% in 2030. These aims are covered in the national Climate Law (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2023). This Law sets out national climate targets for the years 2030 and 2050. By sharpening the emission reduction goals, the Netherlands aims to realize higher climate targets within the group of green member states: they work together with other member states to phase out coal; make the EU budget 'Paris-proof'; go further in carbon pricing; deploy renewable energy and create a quicker pace in electrical vehicle usage (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2023).

Since 2012, the amount of renewable energy generation in the Netherlands has risen from 4% to 16% in 2023. The country aims to realize a contribution of 27% of renewables to the EU. The Netherlands is also doing really well in electric vehicle usage, in which it is now a European frontrunner. In terms of renewables, the Netherlands is looking for innovations in wind energy that is generated on sea. This way of producing electricity will account for forty times less GHG emissions than its production in a natural gas power station and even eighty times less than those produced in coal power plants (Rijksoverheid, z.d.).

The Dutch government has reduced taxes on selected energy products, making it more attractive for citizens to opt for more green options. The high energy prices in the Netherlands also gave the county an extra reason to move away from fossil fuels to address climate change, as well as reduce dependance on insecure energy sources. Other climate related initiatives that the Netherlands is planning to achieve to reach the reduction targets are green hydrogen, zero emission services and aviation in transition, although these are not quite as big as the wind at sea initiative (Chen et al., 2023).

2.3 Governmental changes

Governmental changes are defined in this thesis as changes in the importance that a certain government formation attaches to a specific issue, in this case climate change. This can be referred to as issue salience, in which political focus is given to just a small part of issues that either attracted their attention, or the ones with which the mass public is concerned (Paul & Fitzgerald, 2021; Spendzharova & Versluis, 2013). Spendzharova & Versluis (2013) claim

how the presence of green parties can speed up the transposition process of EU environmental directives into national laws, and therefore their implementation, and that a public opinion that assigns high importance to the environment contributes to the implementation of EU environmental policies as well.

2.3.1 Climate skepticism patterns within the EU

While there is generally more agreement upon the dangers of climate change and extreme climate events keep occurring more often, there seems to be a trend of growing climate skepticism (Ipsos, 2022)). More often, people argue that climate change is something natural and do not consider human activity to play a key role in this. Globally, there can be found a growing polarization within climate change politics, for example in the US, Australia, Canada and the UK (McCright et al., 2015b). However, due to activities of climate-skeptics, climate skepticism is growing four times as fast as pro-climate content (Mazzai, 2023). This is found especially on online platforms, which is dangerous because "social media can act as an echo-chamber where people's existing beliefs are reinforced", which can in turn influence policy preferences (Mazzai, 2023). Therefore, climate policy implementation could be halted because those parties prioritize other issues as more pressing.

While there is little climate denialism in Europe, there is strong disagreement about who is responsible and what to do about it. This leads to climate-skeptic parties being critical of the climate policies that the EU is putting forward, such as in Poland or France. These climate-skeptic parties, namely the PiS and the National Front respectively often also have more extreme visions about other contested areas such as migration, which they see as the real threat. What is often happening then is that those parties that oppose to taking climate action base their argument around the view that "we should not spend so much time addressing the threat of climate change because the real threat is the threat to our borders" (Fieschi, 2022).

Such parties with extremist views on contested areas are on the rise all over Europe: the Freedom Party in Vienna, Fratelli d'Italia, the Sweden Democrats, the Finns Party, but also in Greece, Poland, Hungary, Spain and the Netherlands these kind of parties are growing. A reason for this growth could be that it is a way in which citizens show their dissatisfaction with the political mainstream, in which frustration is prominent (Adlet, 2023).

2.3.2 Finland

In Finland, there has recently been a polarization of attitudes or citizens and the elite concerning climate change. With 20,8% of the votes, the National Coalition Party (NCP) became the biggest party of the new Finnish government (Raunio, 2023). However, with 20,1% of the votes, the Finns Party became the second largest party with almost as many

votes as the NCP, forming together with the latter, the Christian Democrats and the Swedish People's Party of Finland the new coalition government.

Importantly the Finns Party questions climate change and expert driven policymaking, and has been growing rapidly (Tiihonen & Vadén, 2019). Rikka Purra, chair of the Finns Party, talked about postponing Finland's 2035 carbon neutrality target until 2050 (Yle news, 2023). The Finns Party sees supranational environmental protection as a threat that hinders the competitiveness of the Finnish economy. In 2016, the Finns Party office even launched a campaign, in which they attacked wind power (Hatakka & Välimäki, 2019). Because of politician's relevance in national policymaking, it might have negative effects on this when the widespread support is transformed into policymaking power in the environmental sector (Koskimaa et al., 2021).

In the previous government programme led by Sanna Marin, who served as the prime minister of Finland from 2019-2023, there was a strong focus on the target for carbon neutral Finland and the country's objectives and commitments that Finland has made with the EU and global climate policy (Finnish government, 2019). During this government formation, plans have been made to make Finland carbon neutral by 2035, and even carbon negative soon after that. On top of that, this government had as objective to further strengthen the position of Nordic countries as leaders in international climate policy. The climate measures that were taken during this formation covered a lot of different sectors: biodiversity, circular economy, renewable energy, mining, food policy, housing, carbon sinks (Finnish government, 2019).

While the new government formation currently led by Petteri Orpo seems to have mainly economic incentives to move towards carbon neutrality, the government is committed to meeting emission reduction targets and will promote effective energy policy that takes a long-term view, and is even planning on advancing Finland's position as a frontrunner (Finnish government, 2023). Despite this, the Finns Party however still controls seven ministries, amongst which finance, home affairs, justice and international development and thus plays a major role in Finland's new government, trying to water down climate agreements (Civicus, 2023). For example, while during Marin's government new ambitious climate policies were set up to achieve net-zero emissions by 2035, to which the National Coalition Party had agreed to. The Finns Party on the contrary, had promised to defer this target. Following the Finns Party's views, climate and international development spending are supposedly among the funding lines that will be cut (Civicus, 2023).

2.3.3 The Netherlands

During the recent 2023 national elections in the Netherlands a similar situation occurred, where the PVV became the biggest party of the country. Its chairman denies climate change as a big problem, all the while it might be the last chance to act in time as a government. Their main argument for this is that 'the climate is always changing' (PVV, 2023). While the main driver for the PVV winning the 2023 elections most likely was not its anti-green stance, but rather its views on immigration, voters at least must have been okay with these stances (Weise, 2023).

A few of their viewpoints are to stop spending so much money on CO₂-reduction, contracting long-term gas imports and withdrawing from the UN climate agreement (Poelen, 2023). The party's programme states there is an economic crisis going on and that this could be resolved mainly by quitting climate policy (PVV, z.d.). They state that climate change policies are a waste of money, and the costs of mitigating will be higher than the benefits of implementing, claiming that this will negatively affect the Dutch economy. This might undermine the Dutch cognitive leadership style in which they so far sought to implement climate measures to benefit the economy. Even though a lot of Dutch emissions fall upon European rules, there apply several climate laws, and Dutch citizens take climate change very seriously, the party may stand in the way of adopting stricter measures (van der Aar, 2023). Additionally, the party's platform includes exiting the Paris Agreement, dismantling domestic green legislation, and scrapping other measures to reduce GHG emissions. While there is multi-party politics in the Netherlands and other parties are not as climate-skeptic as the PVV, it is likely that the PVV will have significant influence on setting climate policy in the Netherlands (Weise, 2023). If Geert Wilders, the chairman of the PVV, wants to secure the support of other parties to form a coalition, he might however have to tone down his opposition to attaining climate policy goals (Corder, 2023).

3. Theoretical framework

Given the fact that both the Finnish and Dutch government experienced a recent shift in the importance they assign to climate policy, and this new view differing a lot from previous government formations, it is still unsure how this will affect both countries' positions as EU climate forerunners. A first possible scenario is that the shift in government will not affect the ambitious climate policies that both countries have been carrying out over the years. Another scenario could be that this shift will change Finland's and the Netherlands' positions as EU climate forerunner, because of the strong presence of climate-skeptic politicians in the new government formations.

This chapter will discuss these scenarios in more depth, and current debates around the relationship between governmental changes and climate policy will be discussed. The factors that can be extracted from these debates that might influence this relationship are policy preferences, bindingness of the EU climate legislation and public support towards climate change action. These factors can also be found in the schematic overview of the conceptual model presented below (figure 1).

3.1 Policy preferences

The first factor that might influence the relationship between governmental changes and climate policy is the preferences that a new government formation has compared to previous ones, regarding policy issues, in this case climate change.

Preferences are an important factor, because governments expect policy outcomes to favor their policy preferences. With this expectation, it is likely that governments with affinity to green politics, as is the case with a strong green coalition, will most likely be inclined to take ambitious climate measures and to continue established measures to realize climate goals. This could also mean however, that when such affinity with green politics does not exist within the government coalition, the opposite can happen.

In general, politicians have strong incentives to discount the future and tend to prefer focus more on current issues, because this usually is what voters prefer (Koskimaa et al., 2021). In the case of climate change, this translates to governments being confronted with the dilemma whether to pay short-term social costs to invest in long-term social benefits. The European Commission (z.d.) states that long-term strategies are crucial to achieve sustainable development goals and economic transformation. Instead however, people tend to focus more on the short-term benefits of not changing their lifestyle and thus ignoring climate change while doing so, also because the threats of climate change will only be felt, at least more strongly, in the future. It is a way for governments today to save money, even

though sustainable options are more cost-effective on the long run (Markman, 2018). Jacobs and Matthews (2012) claim that this investment on the long run can be an acute political risk for elected officials. They argue that the reasons for politicians to discount the future are because voters value near-term welfare most, because earlier benefits can help out smoothing out the income over time or because they have less trust in longer-term policy promises. Sheffer et al. (2023) add to this that the uncertainty of the consequences of long-term policies is reason for politicians to focus more on short-term policy.

Another reason why governments often opt for more short-term instead of long-term policy has to do with political uncertainty. Boston & Stuart (2015) and Koskimaa et al. (2021) explain that there is often emphasis on short-term policy because it remains uncertain that the next government will also support the same policies that the current government establishes. This is because different government formations might have different views and preferences, on climate change for example, and also because certain issues are given priority at different times within society. One of the reasons why the Dutch PVV won the recent elections was not because of their climate-skeptic viewpoints per se. Instead of people voting for the party out of political beliefs, people used it more as a vote against the current political system. On top of that, the PVV has very skeptic views on migration, which was a very hot topic during the time of elections in the Netherlands (Frederik, 2024). For the PVV, top priority is to “put the Dutch first again”, and “huge expenditures for climate policy should be stopped” (PVV, 2023). Most of their viewpoints tend to focus on asylum and migration policy, which is going to leave little room for climate policy. On top of that, what they do mention about climate policy is that money should not be “wasted” on CO₂-reduction and that they want to withdraw from the UN Climate Agreement and the Dutch Climate Act (PVV, 2023). So while their preferences towards climate policy are not in favor of combatting climate change, this preference is not top priority on their list. These changes in political preferences however might negatively affect the trajectory of the country’s climate policy.

3.2 Bindingness of EU climate legislation

A second factor that might influence the relationship between governmental changes and climate policy is bindingness of agreements and EU climate legislation. Urpelainen (2011) states that “if climate-friendly governments gain power in major emitter countries and expect their successor to be less interested in climate policy, they will have an incentive to tie their successor’s hands with a legally binding global climate agreement” (Urpelainen, 2011, as stated in Bernauer, 2012). This way, governments can bind themselves into commitments that are hard to turn away from, so that a new climate-skeptic government would not affect a country’s climate policies as much (Bernauer, 2012). So when long-term binding climate regulations are already agreed on, these will still apply within a new government.

Since most of the EU legislation is binding upon enactment, similar pressure is exerted upon all EU member states, and non-compliance would often lead to high fines which makes it more appealing to just comply (van der Aar, 2023). When an EU member state fails to comply, and does not apply correctly EU law, the Commission can bring the case before the Court of Justice (CJEU). Upon ruling against an EU member state, the CJEU may impose financial penalties and then after member states must conform with EU law (EUR-Lex, z.d.). These financial penalties consist of two elements: a fixed sum depending on the time that has past, and a daily penalty payment for each day after the second Court ruling until the infringement ends (European Commission, 2022). Because only EU institutions can renegotiate and revise already agreed legislation, which makes it hard for them to be changed, EU climate forerunners have strived hard to influence the results of EU-level negotiations to be able to bind themselves to these agreements (Koskimaa et al., 2021). Other member states who see climate policies as a risk for their own country would however rather oppose, reject or delay these processes instead of adopting these common policies in their national legislation (Maris & Flouros, 2021).

Contrary to the bindingness of EU climate legislation, when looking at the global arena and international climate agreements, it is possible for parties to withdraw (Legal Response International, 2015). The United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) states the following:

“At any time after three years from the date on which the Convention has entered into force for a Party, that Party may withdraw from the Convention by giving written notification to the Depositary. Any such withdrawal shall take effect upon expiry of one year from the date of receipt by the Depositary of the notification of withdrawal, or on such later date as may be specified in the notification of withdrawal. Any Party that withdraws from the Convention shall be considered as also having withdrawn from any protocol to which it is a Party” (UNFCCC Article 25).

An prominent example of how this can influence a country's climate policies negatively can be found in the United States (U.S.) back in June 2017. Before this, Barack Obama was president of the U.S. and remained in this position from 2009 till 2017. He believed that “there is no challenge that poses a greater threat to our planet and future generations than climate change” and combatting climate change was one of his top priorities (the White House, 2017; Obama Foundation, z.d.). The Paris Agreement remains one of Obama's best achievements, in which he committed almost all nations to binding emissions reductions (Obama Foundation, z.d.). In 2017 however, Donald Trump got elected as U.S. president. Trump called climate change a “hoax” and while he was in office he tried hard to undermine and cut environmental regulations (Rese, 2024). In June 2017, he formally withdrew from the Paris Agreement, making the U.S. the first nation in the world to do so (McGrath, 2020). Previously, under this binding agreement, the U.S. had submitted a Nationally Determined

Contribution “in which they committed to reducing the country’s GHG-emissions by 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2025 (Columbia Law School, z.d.). However, Trump announced that the U.S. would cease all implementation of the Paris Agreement.

While the EU ensures compliance of EU legislative acts by attaching high penalties when member states fail to implement them and thus making non-compliance less appealing to any member state, it is nonetheless possible for countries to withdraw from legally binding international climate agreements. The example of the U.S. illustrates how this can be the case when a climate skeptic government gets power, even after previous pro-climate leaders. It seems like it is easy for states to withdraw from international agreements with little to no consequences, while non-compliance with EU legislation on the other hand, comes with the possibility of economic consequences, such as fines, but also reputational consequences, such as loss of credibility within the EU. This shows the importance of binding climate agreements within the EU for prolonging a country’s climate ambitions.

3.3 Public support towards EU climate policy

Another factor that plays a significant role in the implementation of climate policies is public support (Kalk & Sorger, 2023). Political pressure from the public determines the behavior of policymakers, and oppositions by the public make the government subject to political pressure when they want to invest in cleaner technologies. Bernauer et al. (2016) and Rabinowitz (z.d.) also mention that governments need the support of their citizens in order to adopt and implement ambitious environmental protection policies. They explain that public support is crucial to help gain future support, to lend credibility for their efforts and to provide strength for political pressure.

Future support is needed because politicians seek re-election after their electoral cycle. A key characteristic of a democratic government is then that it is responsive to the preferences of its citizens (Ahrens, 2024). Ahrens (2024) argues that public opinion shapes voting behavior, which influences government composition. This in turn influences future policies. This is also emphasized by Liefferink et al. (2009), explaining that a high domestic demand for green policies can be a reason for governments to act as an environmental leader. Public opinion supposedly shapes political phenomena, while leaving room for parties to establish the specific policies. While on the one hand political parties may shape public opinion, they still need to act within the ‘walls’ of public beliefs to attract as many voters as possible. This could mean that when there are strong pro-climate voices from the public, a government will choose to go along with this by means of establishing climate policies and strategies. The downside of this importance of public support is described by Fairbrother (2022). He states that there have been instances where strong public backlash towards climate change has led

to the withdrawal of new climate policy proposals. This was for example the case in France, where criticism by the Yellow Vests movement led the government to drop a proposal that would lead to an increased tax on fossil fuels (Fairbrother, 2022). A more recent example of this public backlash can be found within farmer protests that are happening all over Europe and are very prominent in the Netherlands. These protests have been going on since the beginning of 2024, and already have led to concessions from national governments (Di Mambro, 2024). The farmers go protesting because they feel like climate regulations are damaging their business. This, for example, has led to a rapid growth of the Dutch Farmers Party BBB, who inherently is not pro-climate (van Hees et al., 2024). When these anti-climate groups are growing amongst the population, climate policy might be even influenced negatively by means of pressuring the government.

3.4 Conceptual model

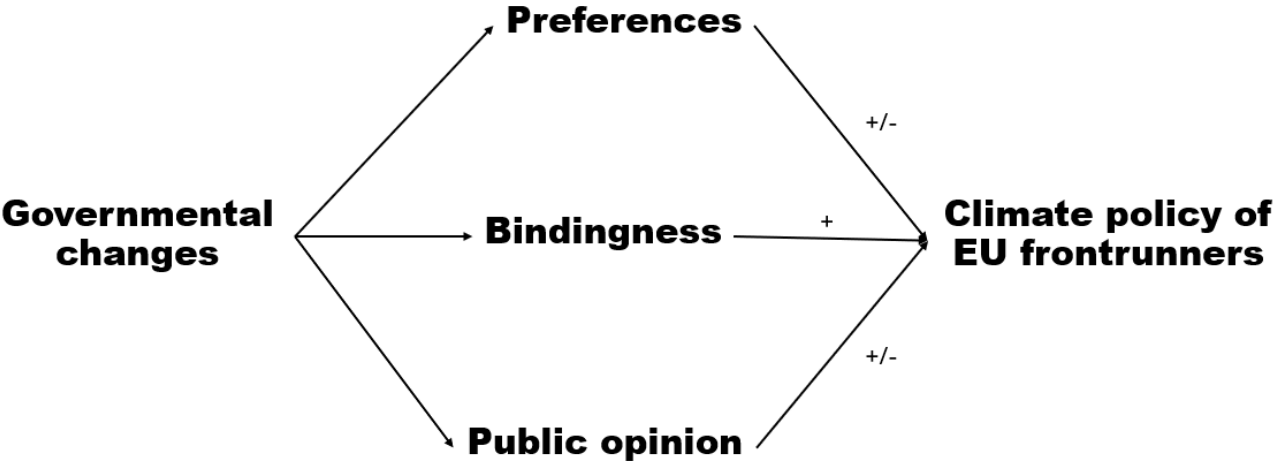


Figure 1 Conceptual model

3.4.1 Elaboration on conceptual model

Following this model, political preferences can have both negative or positive consequences. When it appears that the new government formations prefer to continue setting out ambitious climate policy, then the influence will be positive and not much will be changed about current climate policies. However, when the new government formations appear to be skeptic towards climate policy and prefer to focus on other issues, the expectation is that the countries' positions will be changed due to them setting out less ambitious climate policies. Bindingness of EU climate policies will either way be an important factor that contributes to both countries frontrunner position. When this bindingness is present, together with strong political preferences as well as strong public support in favor of climate policy, the first hypothesis will likely to come true, meaning that both countries will maintain their frontrunner

position. However, when public support is low and political preferences are negative towards climate policy, it is likely that their positions will be changed despite the importance of bindingness.

4. Research design

This chapter will dive further into the methodology employed and the motivations for the chosen methods of data collection. After explaining why a qualitative, comparative study has been chosen, the data collection methods, namely interviews and document analysis, are described. The chapter also contains the operationalization of the key concepts used and discusses the reliability and validity of the study.

4.1 Research strategy

To be able to answer the research question, a comparative, qualitative study will be conducted between Finland and the Netherlands. The unit of analysis of this research will thus be the country-level. Because the research question is exploratory and the study is case specific, qualitative research will help to better understand the cases and to dig deeper into the factors that influence climate policy in times of governmental shifts. It is thus used to understand complex social phenomena and leads to deeper insights into these two countries' climate policies (Sirisilla, 2023). A quantitative study on the contrary is used when one wants to obtain results that are generalizable. On top of that, it would be hard to do a quantitative study, because this thesis is only focused on a limited number of cases (Sirisilla, 2023).

4.2 Data collection methods and method analysis

To be able to study the research question, both a document analysis and semi-structured interviews were carried out. To understand to what extent governmental changes influence the position of forerunners of climate policy in the EU, there first needs to be a firm descriptive foundation that was made through a document analysis. First of all, government party manifestos for current governments were analyzed. For the Finnish case, this includes the manifestos of the NCP, Finns Party, Christian Democrats and the Swedish People's Party of Finland, that they published for the 2023 elections. For the Dutch case, the party manifestos of the PVV (2023) was analyzed, since it was still unsure what parties would form the new Dutch coalition government during the time of writing this thesis. On top of that, manifestos of the BBB, VVD and NSC were analyzed since talks were going on between these parties to form a coalition together. Additionally, for Finland, the previous government programme led by Marin (2019-2023), as well as the new government programme led by Orpo (2023-) were studied. For the Netherlands, the previous government programme led by Rutte (2021-2023) was studied, as well as the main headline agreement of the new government coalition that got published during the final phase of writing this thesis (June 2024). Finally, legal and policy documents from both environmental ministries were studied. This includes the national Climate Acts for Finland (2022) and the Netherlands (2019), and

the NECP’s for both countries for the years 2019 and 2023/2024, respectively. After studying these documents, it became clear what was missing that still needed to be answered.

On top of that, the existing theories that are found can then be tested by means of conducting expert interviews. Interviewing is used to gain an understanding of how people subjectively interpret social phenomena around them and provide a holistic description of unexplored phenomena that cannot be explained through hypothesized relationships between variables, as with quantitative research (Dunwoodie et al., 2022). By conducting semi-structured expert interviews, it can be ensured that all aspects of the theory are covered, while at the same time leaving room for respondents’ own input and to be able to react to certain responses. This would not have been possible to achieve with open or fully closed interviews (Magaldi & Berler, 2020).

The two expert interviews took place online, during the month of June 2024. The first interview that took place was with a representative of the NCP who is concerned with climate policy; the next interview that took place was with a representative of the environmental NGO Oxfam Novib in the Netherlands, who’s main goals are to achieve climate justice and building climate resilience (Oxfam Novib, 2023).

Interviews were recorded and transcribed and put into Atlas.ti for coding. To find out what the relationships are between the different variables, there was made use of both main- and subcodes. The main codes that were distinguished between were drawn deductively, and are the following: governmental changes, climate policy, preferences, bindingness and public support. The subcodes can be found in the table below under the heading ‘dimensions’ (see table 1)

Table 1: Operationalization of main concepts

Concept	Dimensions	Meaning
Governmental changes	Issue salience	The importance that a certain government formation attaches to climate change
Climate policy	Emission reduction targets Green energy	Policies established to reduce risk and vulnerability to climate change
Preferences	Policy timeline Policy priorities	Issues on what the government prefers to focus on while establishing policies
Bindingness	Financial penalties Influencing EU policy Non-compliance	Governments tying their hands with agreements that are hard to turn away from,

	Withdrawal	because of the negative consequences of non-compliance
Public support	Societal attitudes/pressure Future support	To what extent the public gives priority to combatting climate change

4.2 Case selection

The cases that are studied in this research are Finland and the Netherlands. These cases are valuable to answer the research question, because both countries have experienced a change in government: while both countries can be seen as a climate forerunner in the EU, the biggest parties after the 2023 elections have a skeptic view on climate change and this could have negative effects on their climate policies. The main focus in this study is on Finland, since their new coalition was formed in June 2023, meaning that its initial effects can be studied already.

The Netherlands is used more as a secondary case, because national elections took place only in November 2023 which means that there are little initial effects to be studied yet. It thus needs to be noted that while writing this thesis, there was mostly still a caretaker government under Rutte in the Netherlands and discussions on forming a coalition were still ongoing between the Party for Freedom (PVV), the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the Social Contract Party (NSC) and the Farmers Party (BBB). The Dutch case therefore poses limitations in terms of being able to attach consequences to this governmental shift, but since speculations are that this shift will water down climate ambitions it is still an interesting case to investigate how likely it is that this will happen.

4.3 Reliability and validity

Reliability is defined by Kellstedt & Whitten (2013, pp. 99-101) as a measure that is repeatable or consistent. This means that identical results will be produced if the same measurements are applied to the same case. Kellstedt & Whitten (2013, pp. 99-101) define validity as how accurate the concept that is supposed to measure is represented. It is thus the extent to which the concept is accurately measured, and to which the results are close to reality. Generally there is a distinction made between three kinds of validity. Face validity is the extent to which a measurement method appears to measure the construct of interest on its face; content validity has to do with the extent to which a measure covers the construct of interest; criterion validity is the extent to which the score's on a measure are correlated with other variables that are expected to be correlated with it (Chiang et al., 2015; Kellstedt & Whiten, 2013).

To ensure that the results are reliable, there will be made use of semi-structured interviews. Compared to open interviews, this means that the same topics are discussed to collect insights about the topic. A way to improve reliability is also to explain your interpretations of the respondents' answers back to them to ensure that there was no mis-interpretation made. The danger of interviewing however does remain there either way there is always room for interpretations, meaning that it is hard to produce identical results. The reliability could be further improved by using fully structured interviews, but this would bring the validity further down because it is harder in that case to discuss every possible factor.

To ensure the validity of the results, there is made use of different data-collection methods: document analysis and interviewing. This is referred to as data triangulation. This means that all factors that might influence climate policy during times of governmental change are discovered and discussed. To create a higher external validity, having to do with generalizability, this research will look not just at one, but two countries experiencing a similar shift in government. It however does remain impossible to ensure high external validity, because this research nonetheless is case-specific and limited to two cases.

4.4 Reflection on interviews

It is important to note that interviewing as a method always comes with some form of interpretation. Since both interviews took place online, it can be that the interpretations are not always fully accurate. On top of that, one of the interviews that took place was in Dutch. This means that the translation of this interview is just an interpretation of the answers that were given in Dutch. Additionally, it was only possible to arrange two interviews, because most government officials were busy because of European elections for example. This leads to the results being less accurate and less generalizable.

Both interviews were arranged by means of non-probability sampling that started with a positional approach. This means that the samples were selected based on the selective judgement of me as a researcher. This means that there is high dependence on the researchers' expertise (Fleetwood, 2024). Because the Dutch case had a very low response rate, it was not possible to arrange an interview with any politician. Therefore I had to settle for an NGO representative which means that there are no additional insights from within the new government coalition. This is a big limitation because the results might therefore be less accurate.

4.5 Positionality of the reader

Being a Dutch pro-EU and pro-climate citizen, the analysis might be influenced a bit because of own preferences. Since I prefer firm climate policies and find climate change one of the most urgent problems that needs to be tackled, this might lead to viewing the climate skeptic

parties as inherently 'bad'. While realizing this, during the writing of this thesis I have tried to be as neutral as possible to minimize biases.

5. Analysis

5.1 Finland

5.1.1 Climate policy before governmental change

In 2019, Finland submitted their first NECP for the years 2021-2030 as part of the Clean energy for all Europeans package. In this Plan, the country outlined how to address decarbonization, energy efficiency, energy security, internal energy market and research, innovation and competitiveness. A progress report needs to be submitted every 2 years, which means that the last progress report needed to be submitted by 2023, which Finland succeeded in doing so (European Commission, z.d.). The initial NECP was created under Sanna Marin's government programme and had the following objectives: achieving carbon neutrality by 2035, becoming the first fossil-free welfare society worldwide and strengthening carbon sinks and stocks. Under Marin's government, combatting climate change was a priority because climate change is seen as one of the most critical issues in society. Additionally, Marin's government program stated that long-term climate measures are needed if Finland wants to reach the goals that have been set within the EU, to which the country is committed. Marin's government program explained that Finland aims to develop the EU's long-term climate measures to ensure that the EU achieves carbon neutrality by 2050 as an objective (Finnish government, 2019).

The above shows that the climate policies that were set out during this time, were based mostly off of the preferences that Marin's government had in relation to combatting climate change. This led to ambitious climate measurements since all coalition parties were in favor of ambitious climate policy. However, the fact that Finland bound itself to EU regulations also was a big motivation for Marin to continue setting these policies out. On top of that, Finnish citizens also played a role in influencing the climate policies that were set out during this period. In 2016, the Energy and Climate Strategy was prepared, for which the Ministry of Economic Affairs created a website where citizens could participate in its preparation. The most popular proposals among citizens were a continuation of tax-exemption from electricity tax granted to small-scale energy production for own use; promotion of geothermal energy; promotion of decentralized energy production. People opposed however to the idea of using wind power potential and a ban on the use of coal (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2019). For the preparation of this strategy, the public opinion on climate change policies could thus determine the outcomes directly. Citizens were also involved in the creation of the Medium-term Climate Change Policy Plan 2030, by means of commenting on the planned measures from government officials. Additionally, Finnish citizens were able to give statements on the initial NECP that got published in 2019. Even though the general public was in favor of most measurements, they stated that the competitiveness of the

Finnish industry must be nurtured. This statement was however in line with the political motivations, so there was no need to influence policy even more on this topic (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2019). Overall, it seems that the input from the public was taken into consideration while creating the NECP, and therefore also Finland's plans and goals to reach carbon neutrality.

In 2021-2022, the European Investment Bank (EIB) Climate Survey set out to explore people's view on climate change. They found that 74% of all Finns agree that climate change is humanity's biggest challenge, and 70% are in favor of stricter government measure to combat this. 75% of Finnish citizens are open to a tax on products that contribute to global warming (EIB, 2021). With these large numbers it would be difficult for a government to make climate policy less ambitious, since they will lose a lot of support from their citizens. The EIB did however find gaps between people with different political views. They state that 84% of citizens with left-wing political views think that climate change is our biggest threat, while only 69% of those with right-wing political views do so (EIB, 2021). This could be dangerous when right-wing parties are on the rise and are getting more and more support, leading to less support for climate policies.

Before the governmental change that occurred in 2023, the following goals and policies were created to reach carbon neutrality. To reach carbon neutrality by 2035, Finland aimed to have a net carbon sink of -20.1 Mt CO₂ by 2025. Additionally, an act banning the use of coal for energy generation in 2029 was passed in April 2019, and the country aimed to halve the use of oil to reduce emissions in the effort sharing sector (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2019). Another aim was to have at least 250.000 electricity-powered cars in Finland, a target which could be slowed down given that the Finns Party was not in favor of this measure. In terms of renewable energy sources, the country estimated in its 2019 NECP for a minimum share of 41% in 2022, to reach the 2030 target of 51%.

Concerning the Climate act, that lays down emission reduction targets for 2030, 2040 and 2050, the Medium-term Climate Plan presented the measures that will reduce GHG-emissions. The targets that the 2022 Climate Act had set out were a reduction of GHG emissions by 60% in 2030, 80% in 2040 and 90-95% by 2050, and becoming carbon neutral by 2035 (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2023). This Medium-term Climate Plan was submitted in June 2022. It states how Finland should reduce its GHG emissions by 39% by 2023, compared to 2005 levels (Ministry of the Environment, z.d.). This translates for the Finnish case to a maximum of 20.6 Mt CO₂. The plan did however state that the need to reduce emissions will increase towards the end of this period. The initial measures that were included in the baseline scenario will not be sufficient to achieve this target. The gap of a little more than 5 Mt CO₂ will

be closed mainly by reducing transport emissions (Ministry of the Environment, 2022). This is important, because 36% of total emissions are coming from the transport sector. The goal is therefore to halve these emissions by 2030, compared to 2005 levels (Ministry of the Environment, 2023). NCP representative of the Finnish government states the following concerning transport emissions:

“Mainly where I can see especially the transport. It’s very hard for the Finns Party to define together the right solutions because they are not into electric cars, which we are. We support the, electrization of transportation. So their voters are more rural based and drive with other cars and so it means that they are not that much into this kind of new things. So there are very concrete different approaches with them, with our parties, and, this will have, if they are in the coalition with us, it will. You can see it.” (Interview 1, 2024)

To monitor the developments that are made in GHG-emission reductions, and to check the efficiency of the climate measures made, the Ministry of the Environment prepares an Annual Climate Report. For reference, the goals that were laid down in the Climate Act are to achieve carbon neutrality by 2035, and emissions must be reduced by 60% by 2030, translating to 28.5 Mt CO₂. This development, with expectations incorporated, is shown in the graph below.

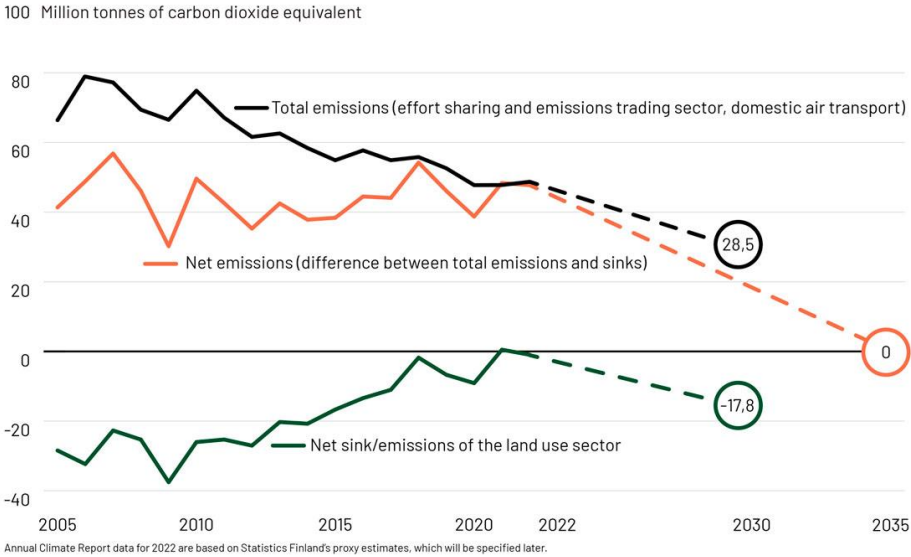


Figure 2 Development of Finnish CO₂ emissions (Ministry of the Environment, 2023)

To achieve net-zero emissions, Finland thus traditionally combined reducing the total emissions on the one hand and enlarging the carbon sinks on the other. What stands out is that in 2021, the land use sector turned from a carbon sink into an additional emission source. This could mean that other sectors will need to reduce their emissions even further to reach the goals (Ministry of the Environment, 2023). Reasons for this are the large volumes of harvesting and a slowdown of forest growth. In 2022 however, the land use sector turned into a minor carbon sink again, and Finland’s GHG-emissions decreased by around 4%. To be able to achieve the Finnish land sector obligation that is set at EU-level, more measures

are needed to strengthen those carbon sinks. With the Finns Party growing, this could become problematic.

5.1.2 Climate policy after governmental change

As the biggest party in the current government coalition, the NCP states in their party programme that they will “turn Finland into a superpower of clean, affordable and reliable energy” (Kokoomus, 2023). They aim for this, among other things, by fighting climate change, defending biodiversity and investing in clean energy. The representative of the NCP for the current Finnish government added to this that the party strongly supports climate legislation and is an active player to try to cut the emissions and slow down global warming. Their motivations for supporting strong climate policies are on the one hand to save the planet from global warming, but on the other hand they do acknowledge that Finland alone cannot make a big difference globally. Therefore another big motivation is more economically, creating technological advantages on the global scale, plus creating more jobs in the meanwhile (Interview 1 NCP representative, 2024).

For the Finns Party, priorities lay within redistribution of public funds because they believe that the people who are most in need are disadvantaged the most. The party argues that the government should not spend huge sums on improving the world, when priorities lay within the country. Their party program does not state a lot about climate policy and commitments that they made with the EU, indicating that the Finns Party finds other issues more pressing to tackle. They do however highlight the importance of the effect of climate policies on Finnish industrial competitiveness that should not suffer from it (The Finns Party, 2019). They thus prioritize the Finnish industrial competitiveness over climate mitigation, but this might still lead to climate policies being set out since they go hand in hand. The NCP representative of the Finnish government (Interview 1, 2024) explains the Finns Party’s stance on climate change as follows:

“There are climate sceptic parliamentarians [...], so it's not clean this climate sceptics in, this party but their leader and the senior MP's spoke many times to support climate action. That would not harm ordinary people. [...], they do support climate action as long as it doesn't have straight bad impact to people. They're thinking, that the global warming is true and they want to help to solve the problem, if it doesn't have bad impact on anything.” (Interview 1, 2024).

One could thus say that the Finns Party is not inherently climate skeptic, but does not prioritize climate change as a top-issue. However, the government programme of the new Finnish coalition, including the Finns Party, does prioritize climate change and wants to “punch Finland above its weight in climate policy” (Finnish Government, 2023). This shows how the preferences of a party who prefers to focus on other issues than climate change

does not necessarily mean a reduction in climate ambitions. This is also explained by the NCP representative of the Finnish government. He states that the Finns Party does have influence in the government, as it is part of the coalition, but it is limited. On top of that, he sees how the NCP has visibly most influence on policy outcomes, more than other coalition parties (Interview 1, 2024). So, other parties who are more pro-climate than the Finns Party appear to have most influence on the policies that are set out, and are thus important in advancing these climate policies and creating common ground. He also states that while one might speak of a governmental shift in light of climate-skeptic parties joining government coalitions, policy officials and bureaucrats are not changed through the government. He explains:

“So there is the same officials now writing the legislation as there would be after four years, so it means that these quick changes to the whole system would not be possible for any government to make, obviously it can make huge changes to another direction and waving their back, it's possible, but yeah, at the moment as I see it, if you see the political atmosphere I think it's unlikely and that quick changes are not possible, so I wouldn't consider the risk very high.” (Interview 1, 2024)

On the other hand, it has been evident that Purra, chairwoman of the Finns Party, will refuse to be just a “junior partner” for the NCP. In May 2023, she accounted for a shift in focus in the negotiations within the government, by demanding that most theme-specific task forces suspended their work until more progress was made on climate and immigration policy. These are the topics on which the Finns Party has most extreme views and on which they clash most with the other coalition parties. However, even though the Finns Party's stance on these topics are almost opposite to those of the other parties, Purra acknowledged that compromises have to be made in order to be able to set out policy (Teivainen, 2023). This essentially implies that climate and immigration policy will likely not be changed as extreme as how the Finns Party would want to see it in the (near) future.

As also being part of the coalition, the Swedish People's Party prioritizes freedom and safety, and wants to build on Finland's strengths and tackle their weaknesses. They see the green transition as a big opportunity, and state that “we must save the climate and biodiversity now” (SFP, 2023). The party wants to aim for Finland's climate neutrality by 2035, and continues to set out ambitious climate policy. This goes both for national and EU-level. One of their motivations too, is the potential for businesses to invest when Finland is a frontrunner of climate-smart technology (SFP, 2023). While the party programme of the Christian Democrats does not state much about their stance on climate change, they do argue the importance of taking responsibility for the environment. They want to “secure a clean and balanced environment for coming generations, and we must be capable of controlling global warming” (Christian Democrats, z.d.). Overall we can thus see that while the Finns Party, that

prioritizes other issues over climate change, is growing rapidly, the remainder of the Finnish coalition can be regarded as pro-climate, albeit each party to a different degree. Additionally, the Finns Party is open to reach climate goals that have been already set out by the country. The differences in preferences between the 4 party leaders are however clear in debates. While Purra wants the country's carbon neutrality target to be postponed until 2050, all other leaders agreed that Finland should continue to opt for 2035 at latest. She states that Finland is "kicking itself in the ankles" by aiming for more ambitious targets than what the EU has set out (Yle News, 2023b). Regarding the whole government coalition, the NCP representative of the Finnish government (2024) states the following:

"And the government is fully committed. To achieve the climate neutrality in 2035, so, therefore we are looking [...] to find the right policies which are not affecting people that lead to reaching the targets but we are doing the job and the whole government also the Finns Party have committed to achieve this." (Interview 1, 2024).

The current Finnish government, led by Petteri Orpo from the National Coalition Party that thus prioritizes clean energy, plans on reaching their climate goals mainly by increasing wind energy, as a strategy for decarbonizing. However, employment, security and competence remain at the heart of the Government Program of Orpo. Prime minister Orpo has expressed his enthusiasm regarding Finnish ambitious climate policy, mainly because this has made Finland an attractive investment hub because of the available expertise and the skilled labor force (Mäenpää-Wirtz, 2023). This is in line with the literature, claiming that present skills and knowledge make that a country can act as a climate leader, because these qualities will attract investors which makes it appealing for a country to set out ambitious climate policy (Jänicke, 2005; Börzel, 2002). It thus seems like the party preferences of all coalition parties of the Finnish government will be determining how ambitious the Finnish climate policy will be. Even though Finnish citizens have so far been involved regularly in climate policymaking, for the current government formation, NCP representative of the Finnish government however says this:

"it (public opinion) does not affect what we are committed in this government and we are doing it all the time. So we would be doing exactly the same things as we are doing now". (Interview 1, 2024).

On top of that, he states that the Finnish people are at the moment more concerned about other topics. He states that the public does think that climate action is needed, but this is getting down in the opinion polls with other threats occurring like the Russian war and COVID-19. Additionally, he explains his worries about climate-skeptic parties further influencing people's views on climate change, which eventually might influence Finland's ambitiousness of climate policies:

"I'm a bit worried that the public opinion is morally swifiting in the position that is more sceptic towards very big climate action. So, what we are doing at the moment, I am worried that the public opinion could get even against this.

[...] The Finns Party lost very badly yesterday in the European Parliament elections that may have this kind of consequence that they want to do, even more less active climate policies that we have been doing so far. And, and that's what I'm bit worried about at the moment." (Interview 1, 2024)

The government program states that they are "committed to meeting emission reduction targets and moving towards carbon neutrality" and "the government will advance Finland's position as a frontrunner by developing a new energy and climate strategy aimed at carbon negativity, focusing on a clean transition and investments in the industry" (Finnish Government, 2023). Conditions for wind power will be developed in a way that takes into account the need to increase electricity production, and a way that creates higher social acceptability of wind power (Finnish Government, 2023). Finland aims for electrification, and is a leading location when it comes to cleantech with the lowest electricity prices in Europe (2022). NCP representative of the Finnish government states that last year (2023), over 90% of all electricity production in Finland was carbon neutral. However, to achieve full carbon neutral energy production, the whole Finnish government formation is also extremely pro nuclear energy and finds this a secure way of energy production with almost zero impact on the environment. When looking at policy timeline preferences, he explains that nuclear energy can be risky for attracting investors:

"And as the nuclear plants are built for like 50 years or more, it means that it's an unsecure investment. It's obviously safe in investment, but unsecure from the fiscal point of view, for the businesses. This is where we actually find very concrete problem that the investors are not investing enough because they have the risk that the next government might not support the solution that much." (Interview 1, 2024).

However, he also states how climate change is a topic that generally is not affected much by governments preferences to focus on short-term policies. This is because the path to carbon neutrality affects all decision making and emissions. When any legislation is implemented, it's implemented relating to this target. He states that all governments are committed to this goal, which is why policy timeline preferences are not affecting this much.

A key pillar of the EU's Green Deal plan to become climate neutral is hydrogen production: the Finnish government has committed to creating 10% of the European bloc's hydrogen. This hydrogen can be used for carbon sequestration, which is necessary to get from carbon neutral to carbon negative, thus it is a way to actively reduce the GHGs in the atmosphere (Jackson, 2023). The Finnish government will promote pumped-storage hydropower projects, and will explore the possibility of easing the real estate tax classification of projects that increase hydropower capacity (Finnish Government, z.d.).

The current Finnish government, will create circumstances in which the country can raise its Research and Development Infrastructure (RDI) funding to 4% of the GDP. Additionally, it will promote cooperation between business and industry, higher education institutions, research institutes, central government and municipalities, and growth enterprise environments, to enable innovations in climate policy. As Finnish businesses export their solutions to the rest of the world, it can increase its carbon handprint. The sustainable energy sector and reasonably priced electricity will create a comparative advantage, as well as favorable conditions for sustainable industry in Finland (Finnish Government, z.d.; National Coalition Party, 2023).

NCP representative of the Finnish government talked about the importance of bindingness and how this bindingness of EU climate legislation makes the country committed to setting out climate policy to reach these goals. One of the most important examples of this is the ETS. The ETS is of big importance for the Finnish emission reduction system. Almost half of the country's emissions are generated by the emissions trading sector, and this sector accounted for 42% of total emissions in 2022. It is expected that the rate of emission reductions in the emissions trading sector will increase, because of an increase in investments in the green transition (Ministry of the Environment, 2023). NCP representative of the Finnish government says the following about the ETS:

“we want to do technologically neutral solutions, that does not include detailed regulation about things, but more about the big picture like we are a strong supporter of the emission trading system.

[...] we think, I think that the Emission Trading System, for example, and even binded, our party strongly supports ETS, the whole ETS having implemented throughout the whole economy like this kind of big picture for us, like large scale solutions are, are needed. We think they are needed and we support them, even as they might have some kind of consequences to certain parties, I mean certain group of people or certain economies or certain sectors.” (Interview 1, 2024).

In terms of bindingness, Finland is also the first country that has bound itself to carbon negativity, instead of just carbon neutrality (Rosane, 2022). This was agreed upon in the Climate Act that got set out under Marin's government. However, the bindingness ensures that following government cannot just get rid of it when there are less pro-climate parties in the government coalition.

On top of the ETS, emissions reductions are further to be driven by energy taxation. The Finns Party programme states that they want energy taxes to be lowered to the minimum EU requirements (Finns Party, 2019). NCP representative of the Finnish government (2024) explains that this is a field in which the governmental shift of the Finns Party joining the coalition has impacted the ambitiousness of Finnish climate policies. While gas and gasoline

prices are still high in Finland, the Finns Party has caused for a small tax-cut to be made, which would slightly affect the current emission levels. This shows how the Finns Party is in fact able to weaken climate policies.

The most recent NECP was published in June 2023, and presents the vision of the new government programme, led by Orpo, as well as policies and measures adopted by the previous government (Marin). It states that Finland aims to reach carbon neutrality mainly “by maintaining a high share of nuclear energy, increasing electricity generation and heat production from renewables, improving energy efficiency, and electrifying most energy demand” (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2023). The measures that are discussed are based on the emission reduction goals that were set out in the 2022 Climate Act. The main focus here is on new emerging energy technologies and the ETS. This will improve business opportunities for long-term investments in advanced clean technologies. Since the initial NEPC that was uploaded in 2019, the country made progress in reducing GHG emissions and moving towards carbon neutrality. Finland deployed Europe’s first nuclear reactor in over 15 years, and made a lot of progress in generating onshore wind energy. Still, transport is the most important sector when Finland aims to achieve their emission reduction targets (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2023). In the road of achieving a share of 51% renewables by 2030, the 2019 NECP estimated a needed share of 41% by 2022. Finland succeeded in this with a total share of 41.8% of renewables (State Treasury Republic of Finland, 2022).

5.2 The Netherlands

Because of the fact that during the time of writing this, the new Dutch coalition was still to be formed, the focus of this analysis will be on the plans that the previous government has made with their progress, as well as progress concerning EU climate commitments. On top of that, the PVV’s 2023 election program will be analyzed, together with the preferences of other big parties after the 2023 elections. During the final phase of writing, the new coalition got formed, which made it possible to have a look at the new government program as well and see if climate ambitions are reduced and assess potential impacts on the Netherlands’ frontrunner position.

5.2.1 Climate policy before governmental change

On December 15th 2021, the coalition agreement of the outgoing government, led by Mark Rutte from the VVD, got published. Together with the VVD, also the democrats party (D66), the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Christian Union were in the government formation. This coalition can be considered as a green one, especially because of D66, who’s main concern is climate, nature and the environment (D66, z.d.). They aim for the Netherlands to

become a frontrunner in circular economy by 2050, and aim for a 60% CO₂ reduction by 2030. One of the main topics that is discussed in this coalition agreement is to make the Netherlands a sustainable country. It states that solid climate policies offer opportunities for creating a sustainable and strong economy, and to create more jobs, and aims for a climate neutral, fossil-free and circular Netherlands (VVD et al., 2021). This previous government wanted the Netherlands to remain part of the climate forerunners of Europe, and sharpened the CO₂ reduction goal from the Climate Act to at least 55% in 2030, aiming with their policymaking for even 60% reduction in 2030. On top of that, they stressed the importance of further reduction after 2030, with 70% in 2035 and 80% in 2040. The previous government found it important that Dutch citizens were involved in climate policymaking. In terms of energy, this government formation mainly wanted to stimulate the use of renewables, while also creating nuclear energy. On top of that, they found it important to invest more in clean mobility, mainly electric vehicles (VVD et al., 2021).

In 2019, the Netherlands submitted their first NECP as part of the Clean energy for all Europeans package. Because a progress report needs to be submitted every 2 years, the last progress report needed to be submitted by 2023. The Netherlands succeeded in doing so, and in 2024 published their final updated NECP (European Commission, z.d.). The initial NECP was created under the Rutte III government, having in coalition the VVD, the Christian Democrats, D66 and the Christian Union. It states that most of the content of this NECP is based on the Climate Act that was set out in 2019. The Rutte III government program was determined to the Paris Agreement, which is why the Netherlands should take measurements to reduce GHG emissions with at least 49% by 2030. This cabinet even opted for a reduction of 55% in 2030. Measurements have to do with closing all coal power plants by 2030, recycling of industrial raw materials, generating more wind energy at sea, stimulating electrification and creating gas-free housing. They see most potential in generating wind energy at sea and on land, to be able to generate electricity with no CO₂ emissions. On top of that they want to move towards an emission-free mobility system. Also in businesses and industry, emission reduction was viewed to be key. In terms of electricity, policy focus was on replacing fossil fuels by renewables (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2019).

The Climate Act, that was also set out in 2019 thus formed the basis for this initial NECP, and is one of the main elements of the Dutch climate legislation. This act contains national climate goals, as well as the policy framework to reach these goals. The aim of the Climate Act is to reduce GHG emissions that contribute to climate change. Within this act, the target is a 95% GHG reduction by 2050, compared to 1990 levels. Furthermore, the act states how these emissions should be reduced by 49% by 2030 and even striving for this to be 55%,

and that electricity production will be fully CO₂ neutral in 2050 (Raad van State, z.d; Rijksoverheid, 2019). To be able to reach these goals, the Climate Act contains three policy instruments, namely a five-yearly Climate Plan, a two-yearly Progress Report and an annual Climate Memorandum. The first Climate Plan that was set out applies to the period 2021-2030, and entails the policy instruments with which the Dutch cabinet wants to reach the goals (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, z.d.). This means that the policy plans that were made during the previous, more climate ambitious government, still apply now when there is a new government formation. However, 5 years after the creation of the Climate Act, so in 2024, this Climate Plan will be revised and might be changed for the years 2025-2035 (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2023). This will thus be created by the new government, who overall is less pro-climate than the previous one.

The Climate Plan does not only include the national measurements from the Climate Act, but also policy that emerged from EU legislation and already existing climate policy. This means that all of the climate policies that are set out in this plan are the complete climate policies for all the governments until 2030. In 2017, the CO₂ reduction was at 15%, which means that plans had to be made to reduce another 36% before 2030 (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2020). Most important in policymaking was found to be GHG emission reduction, but also renewables and energy savings are important means to reach the agreed upon reduction levels. The Climate Plan states that priority for the cabinet is to keep the transition costs as low as possible, and therefore is not steering towards a specific technology to have all the options open. The Netherlands had the ambition to realize at least a share of 27% of renewable energy in 2030, which is a bit higher than EU requirements. To reach this, the idea is to realize more wind parks at sea in the coming years, for example by changing law to make it easier to give permits for wind energy at sea without subsidy. On top of that, they aim to realize more locations for wind- and solar energy on land (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2020). These ways of generating energy will be crucial elements for the electrification in the Netherlands. Policy therefore is focused on facing out coal and an increasing price on CO₂ emissions (on top of the ETS). In terms of mobility, priorities lay within creating an emission-free system, where cars are electric, public transport and biking will be more attractive, and where shared mobility is growing. When looking at housing, there will be a stop to the use of gas. They aim for this by making policy to raise gas-taxes and lower the electricity taxes

In the Climate Memorandum, the cabinet is holding accountability for climate policy, and the progress over the previous year is described. The last published Memorandum was in October 2023, so a little before national elections, and 4 years after the Climate Act was set out. During this time period, the Climate Act got tightened further and the government

decided upon additional climate policies. The government that was ruling during this time was led by Rutte, and still had green party D66 in the coalition. The cabinet strived for ambitious, just and executable policy, and they replaced the goal of 95% CO₂ reduction by 2050 to being fully climate neutral. This is in line with the EGD that got published in 2020, and is binding upon all member states (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2023). When the progress report was published, there was still a caretaker government led by Rutte, and it states that to be able to reach the goals, it is necessary for the next government to continue to reduce CO₂ emissions and the use of fossil fuels. It also states that the Climate Act is keeping the government to continue implement and set out climate policy, but new decisions will be left for the new government. While being on track with the move towards a fossil-free, electrified society, the 2023 renewed goal is to have a completely CO₂-free electricity system by 2035. This will be realized by a growing share of renewables, as well as a larger role for nuclear energy. Top priority however lays within increasing the transmission capacity on the power grid (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2023).

The Climate Plan acknowledges the importance of the role of citizens in the implementation of policy, and the need to create awareness among the people about their role in the transition. It states that governments have primary responsibility to communicate about the urgent need for the transition (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2020). This could be problematic when a climate-skeptic government is ruling.

5.2.2 Climate policy after governmental change

The election program with which the PVV won the 2023 elections has as a starting point that we should shift priorities and stop spending billions on nitrogen and climate policy. They also claim that they would not want to cooperate within a "political union" like the EU, which is the body that sets out most important climate legislations. For the PVV, priorities lay within anti-immigration policies, and they aim to increase the purchasing power of the Dutch by quitting spending money on "useless climate policy" (PVV, 2023). They are therefore striving to lower energy taxes, fuel taxes and to get rid of the frequent flyer tax. Concerning climate change, the PVV states that we should stop trying to mitigate climate change, since the climate is always changing. "We adapt when circumstances are changing, but we are well protected and there is no need to reduce CO₂ emissions" (PVV, 2023). They state that it would be useless for a small country like the Netherlands to try and save the climate and after all, the Netherlands accounts for not even 0,5% of worldwide CO₂ emissions. The PVV is against wind turbines, heat pumps and electrical cars, and emphasizes that gas is the cleanest fossil fuel which is why we should continue using it (PVV, 2023). Additionally, it will try putting a stop to existing climate measurements, including the Climate Act which is one of the most

important ones for the Netherlands. They are however in favor of nuclear energy, which is a low carbon energy option. Representative of the environmental NGO Oxfam Novib states the following about the PVV:

“PVV is denying the problem and is talking about climate hysteria, and tries to spread this idea to the rest of Dutch citizens.” (Interview 2, 2024).

Chairman Wilders stated in a debate with Timmermans, chairman of the Green-Left party, that we should not do nothing, but if we continue with their plans to save the environment, capitals are being spent while Dutch citizens are “not even able to pay for their groceries”. He adds that we can address the consequences of climate change, but should not spend so much on trying to prevent it (NOS, 2023). In 2021, Wilders stated during a debate in the Second Chamber that “the Netherlands is getting taken over by a group of fanatics who only want to focus on diversity, gender and climate change, while ignoring the problems of the normal citizens”. He adds that the country is full and the most urgent issue that needs to be tackled is the migration issue, and he prioritized putting a stop to incoming immigrants. In this debate he explains how the PVV want to use the 7 Billion Euros that were going to be spent in the upcoming year on lower rents, lower energy prices and lower healthcare costs (Tweede Kamer, 2021).

Even though the PVV won the 2023 elections, they still have to form a coalition with other parties to be able to govern the country. These other coalition parties namely the Farmers Party (BBB), the Social Contract Party (NSC) and the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), with whom talks have been going on, do not have the extreme anti-climate stances as the PVV has. When looking at their party manifestos however, it does seem likely that climate ambitions will be watered down significantly when these parties work together with the PVV in the new coalition. This is because of their overlapping ideas on nuclear power and natural gas usage (Bhimji, 2023). The main disagreement that is to be found is that the NSC and the VVD want to stick to the carbon reduction targets that were earlier agreed upon within the Climate Law, while the PVV is severely against this (Bhimji, 2023).

The NSC does not prioritize the climate in their party program, but it does state that they aim for a circular economy, where reusing and recycling is key. Additionally, the NSC expects the new government to ensure energy security and climate policy, and they are committed to the Paris Agreement to move towards carbon neutrality (NSC, 2023). They aim for this amongst others, by developing solar energy, wind energy and nuclear energy. The NSC also argues that the ETS is the best way in which the Netherlands can transition towards a low-carbon industry (NSC, 2023). The VVD aims for “clean growth” to create more jobs and innovation,

and to be less dependent on others. They state how the effects of climate change are not only directly impacting us, but also lead to worsen other problems like migration, which is why it is urgent to combat climate change (VVD, 2023). The party aims for climate neutrality by 2050, but also acknowledges that this is still a long way to go. The VVD is in favor of electrical car usage and they want nuclear energy to play a prominent role in the energy transition, as well as solar- and wind energy. The party is aiming for an 85% CO₂ reduction by 2040, which is even more ambitious than the goal that the previous government under Rutte had set out. The VVD finds it important that citizens get involved in the transition towards sustainable energy (VVD, 2023). Representative of the environmental NGO Oxfam Novib mentioned the following about the VVD:

“The VVD already made clear that uhm, ‘we do not have the intention to get rid of any of the existing EU climate legislations and the corresponding national climate policies, we are going to continue with that’.” (Interview 2, 2024).

As being an NGO, she states that it is important to look for the motives of those other coalition parties to implement ambitious climate policy, to create a majority against the climate-skeptic PVV. This could mean that ambitious climate policy can still be set out, but the intentions might be different because the other possible coalition parties see this more as an opportunity for job creation and investments.

“So for the VVD, business is most important, and that leads to different argumentations. The argumentation will then be that it is important to have predictable policy. And they have now committed themselves to net-zero by 2050, with a lot of money to be able to invest in the sustainable transition. And it is important that this predictability remains, so that a next government won’t just get rid of it.” (Interview 2, 2024).

The BBB states in their party program that they do want to take responsibility for climate change and they do acknowledge that people are in fact impacting climate change. The party wants to make the transition towards sustainable energy sources and to contribute to climate targets (BBB, 2023). While they are in favor of nuclear energy and solar energy, they want to put a stop to realizing more wind turbines on both land and sea, even though this is one of the most important sustainable energy sources of the Netherlands. While the BBB does not see climate action as a priority, they could help with speeding up the energy transition, because they do aim to reach climate goals and the party has gained big support from the Dutch. The dangerous thing however is that, even though the party does not deny climate change, they also do not acknowledge it, and party leader van der Plas is creating impossible terms under which they are willing to accept nitrogen reduction measures (Beukel van den, 2023).

Representative of the environmental NGO Oxfam Novib stated during the second interview (2024) that in contrast to the previous government, when it appears that we will not be able to reach the climate goals that were agreed upon, a new government containing these parties will just agree to set out less ambitious climate policies instead of working harder to reach them. On top of that, even though the other possible coalition parties are in favor of climate policies and reaching the agreed targets,

“we all know that the PVV does not care about any of that, you’ll never get them to your side on this.” (Interview 2, 2024).

About the governmental change she mentioned the following:

“It will most certainly affect policy! VVD member Hermans already mentioned that the targets are not holy, and if the underlying package is not reachable, then the targets are also going to be gone. I believe they are already picking out some measurements from the package, so that is about the mandatory heat pumps, we are allowed again to drive 130 km/h and part of CO₂ pricing is taken out of the package.” (Interview 2, 2024).

After the PVV won national elections, Ed Nijpels, who served as former chairman of the Dutch Climate Council, mentioned how Wilders is more or less prisoner of the EU’s climate measurements. “So even though Wilders gets power now, it will be very difficult to force this to stop. He will be able to delay it, but to stop it one has to leave the EU and that will not happen to the Netherlands” (BNR, 2024). Van der Graag, chairman of the sustainable energy association, adds to this that we are already so far into the energy transition that it is unstoppable, but Wilders can try to hinder it and come in the way of it. They both mention that it is possible in theory for the new coalition to get rid of the Climate Act and the Climate Fund, but because of the bindingness of EU climate legislation still such a possibility will be very unlikely. Additionally, Nijpels mentions that another reason why it will be unlikely to make climate policy go down the drain is because for the other coalition parties (NSC, VVD) are not being in favor of this (BNR, 2024). About this bindingness, the representative of environmental NGO Oxfam Novib stated the following during the second interview:

“The bindingness is important, but there is still a lot of freedom. The EU will not say how to reach the goals, that is up to the countries. So how they design that depends on the government at that time, and if they do that sufficiently.” (Interview 2, 2024).

Op top of that, Dutch citizens are still overall positive towards ambitious climate action. The most recent NECP states that 6 out of 10 Dutch citizens are worried about climate change, and half of the population thinks that the government should take measures to tackle this problem. However, most citizens (76%) find the division of costs between poor and rich

unjust. Therefore, the government aims to use a policy principle where “the polluter pays”, also to ensure that the gap between rich and poor will not increase with the climate measures. The government is actively making efforts to let citizens participate in the transition. Key points are that all citizens should be able to participate, and that participants are an accurate representation of the population. Also the new government has been asked to continue with this initiative. Additionally, one of the top priorities is citizen participation in designing the energy system (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2024). The Second Chamber of the Netherlands explains how citizens can influence Dutch politics by expressing their opinion. Even after elections, people can criticize and influence the actions of the government and the parliament. Those with shared interests around a certain topic can join forces and have the power to put forward their ideas with more force. This can be done through the media, demonstrating, lobbying or citizens’ initiatives for example (House of Representatives, 2023).

One of the biggest protest groups through which this public opinion on climate change is translated in the Netherlands is Extinction Rebellion. They organize regular protests and by blocking highways for example, they want the Dutch government to do more to tackle climate change (Reters, 2023). When the PVV won Dutch elections back in November 2023, around 10.000 people came together in Amsterdam to show their concerns about a possible climate skeptic future cabinet. These people include environmental organizations and pro-climate political parties. While this was not necessarily a protest, it was a way of showing concern and the importance of taking climate action for example (Keultjes & Roele, 2023). Over the past years, governments and companies have tried to focus more on citizen participation in the establishment of climate policy. To expand the extent to which Dutch citizens are able to influence policymaking, a citizen forum got established, because it should not be sufficient to only be able to influence policymaking by voting once every 4 years. This citizen participation is also prominent in the Climate Act that got set out in 2019, which acknowledges that it is necessary for the act to succeed that citizens get actively involved in policymaking (Brenninkmeijer, 2021). Representative of environmental NGO Oxfam Novib explained her concerns about the public opinion now the government is less positive towards climate policy:

“It is very likely that the public opinion, which is currently positive towards climate policy, will be undone with parties like BBB and PVV ruling the country. So, it is not that citizens who are positive will influence climate policy positively, but more like the party preferences will influence the public opinion negatively. And then the parties can use that to weaken climate policy and make it less ambitious.” (Interview 2, 2024).

After forming the new coalition in July 2024, the PVV, VVD, NSC and BBB published an agreement containing their main priorities during the period from 2024-2028. The first priorities that are described are related to the Dutch economy with an aim for increasing the purchasing power, and to get a grip on migration. This is very much in line with the PVV's party program. In terms of the built environment, the agreement states how this government formation is not going to apply any extra national sustainability limits. They do however state that they aim to stimulate to make transportation sustainable, but are also going to increase the speed limit to 130 km/h (PVV, VVD, NSC, BBB, 2024). The main motivation for the energy transition within this new government formation appears to become less dependent on other countries. They find it especially important to adapt to climate change, instead of mitigating it. The agreement states that this government formation does plan to stick to current agreements. However, if the Netherlands does not manage to reach those goals, alternative policies will be set out. They say that with the right measurements, green growth will be improved and harmful emissions will be reduced. The idea is that by investing in sustainable solutions, the Netherlands will create a favorable investment climate, leading also to economic growth. The already existing nuclear power plant will remain opened, and additionally two new ones will be opened. However, the agreement also states that long term contracts will be made for gas, and gas extraction on the North Sea will be enlarged (PVV, VVD, NSC, BBB, 2024).

If we compare this coalition agreement to the original stances of the PVV, then it seems that climate plans will remain, but will still be less ambitious than what would be the case if more green parties were part of the coalition. This coalition wants to stick to current climate measurements and agreements, but does not aim to be frontrunner anymore, watering down their climate ambitiousness. Therefore, there should also not be additional measured added to the current package (Maks, 2024). In terms of energy, it seems that nuclear energy will become an important source. All coalition parties are in favor of sticking to nuclear energy and even enlarge this share in the Dutch energy mix (Riemersma et al., 2024). Originally, the PVV wanted to get rid of the Climate Fund. However, the party did not succeed in this and the fund will remain to collect and store CO₂. With the farmers party BBB in the coalition, a big change is that nitrogen policy is going down the drain. By means of subsidies the government aims to stimulate electrical vehicle usage, and public transport will become more attractive. Overall, the whole coalition is in favor of electrification of the energy system. However, the speed limit will be increased again to 130 km/h and they want to postpone the development of zero-emission zones (Maks, 2024). On top of that, all parties in the coalition prefer generating wind and solar energy on roofs and at sea, leading to resistance towards solar and wind field on land (Riemersma et al., 2024). So while the government is planning to

set out some climate policies, they also want to cut some others. This could mean that no more progress will be made in terms of setting out ambitious climate policy. However, it also seems like climate policy will not decline, but if this is sufficient to remain frontrunner is still to be seen.

The most recent final NECP that the Netherlands published was in June 2024, so after PVV won the national elections but when talks were still going on between possible coalition parties. In the time since the first NECP, the outgoing Dutch government had made their climate targets more ambitious, and to ensure that the Netherlands reaches the goal of 55% reduction by 2030, policy aimed at even 60% (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2024). In 2023, the Dutch Climate Law got aligned with the European Climate Law. This means that the net GHG emissions are reduced to zero by 2050 at latest. Additionally, electricity ambitions got further sharpened. So far it thus seems like the Netherlands is doing well and ambitions have been high and even sharpened so far. However, the latest NECP does state that the new government formation will lead to a new modified policy that will replace the policy as it is described in the NECP. They want to become CO₂ neutral by stimulating the use of renewables and hydrogen production, as well as by opening up two new nuclear reactors. The Netherlands wants to improve their electricity storage as well by investing in battery-innovations, to ensure that the country is less dependent on the sun for its energy. In this NECP it is explained that even though GHG emissions were reduced a lot during Covid, the demand for GHG usage has risen again compared to previous years. The key principles of Dutch climate policy are described in the 2024 NECP as just, executable and ambitious (Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat, 2024).

5.3 Comparison

5.3.1 Preferences

For both Finland and the Netherlands, preferences are likely to determine climate policy outcomes most. For Finland, all coalition parties do want to stick to the targets that the country has set out. Even though the Finns Party does not want to aim for more ambitious targets than EU targets, they are in coalition with parties who do want this, and Purra acknowledges that compromises have to be made. Motivations are for most parties a combination of combatting climate change, and ensuring Finland remains frontrunner to attract investors to boost the Finnish economy. For the Netherlands, party preferences is also the most important factor influencing climate policy. During recent years, there was no really climate skeptic party in coalition, leading to ambitious climate police because all parties were in favor of this. However, with PVV as biggest coalition party these preferences have changed. Other coalition parties do want to stick to the agreed upon targets, mainly for economic reasons, but the PVV prioritizes other policy areas and finds climate change policy

a waste of money. Since preferences are most determining climate policy outcomes, this could lead to a reduction in new climate policies, even though the existing ones will remain.

5.3.2 Bindingness

Bindingness seems to positively influence the climate policy outcomes in both countries. So far, it ensured that Finland and the Netherlands set out policies to reach the EU targets. However, with the pro-climate governments that have been ruling this bindingness was not necessary for their ambitious climate policy, since their pro-climate preferences already made this happen. Especially for the Dutch context, this bindingness will become more important, because it forces the government, including the PVV, to continue setting out climate policies. So as long as the EU agreements will be ambitious enough, both countries will have to stick to this when making new policies. It could lead to them not being EU frontrunner anymore, since doing the bare minimum would also be enough and the PVV does not seek to go more ambitious. On the contrary, both countries do realize that this bindingness is hard to go against, and even though climate skeptic parties will try to slow down the processes of climate change policy they will have to comply eventually, ensuring they stay on track in reaching climate goals.

5.3.3 Public opinion

For the Finnish case, the public has been generally positive towards climate policy, and agrees that more ambitious climate policies are needed. Before the governmental change, the public got actively involved in agreements that were set out, and could thus determine the ambitiousness of the policies. However, currently the public is more and more focused on other issues, and with right-wing parties on the rise, the public image on climate change can be negatively impacted leading to less ambitious policies. This is also the case for the Dutch case. However, in the Netherlands the citizens are still actively involved in the climate policymaking process, which could lead to a continuation of ambitious climate policy. The PVV will however try and negatively influence this public opinion, and in that case the involvement of the public can lead to less ambitious climate policies.

We can thus see that while one of the reasons that both countries are climate leaders is the high domestic demand for green policies that has been present for a long time (Börzel, 2002), the public opinion might now turn more negative towards ambitious climate policy, because of the Finns Party and PVV being part of the government. Therefore one can expect that once public is not demanding those green policies and governments anymore, their positions as forerunners will be harmed.

6. Conclusion

This research has been done to estimate to what extent radical governmental changes can influence climate policy of EU frontrunners, namely Finland and the Netherlands. Altogether, one can say that radical governmental changes can indeed influence the climate policy of EU-frontrunners to some extent mainly by means of shifting priorities that can influence the public opinion, but not change it completely since member states are bound to ambitious, already agreed upon targets.

While both countries have been performing consistently well on implementing ambitious climate policy, governmental shifts are happening leading to climate skeptic parties joining both government coalitions. However, it will be most likely that at least on the short-term, this shift in government will not affect the ambitious climate policies that both countries have been carrying out over the years. Overall, policy preferences are mostly determining the policy outcomes. This could mean that a change in government can directly change the ambitiousness of their climate policy, if preferences shift towards climate-skeptic. For the Finnish case, even the "climate-skeptic" Finns Party wants to reach the goals that Finland has agreed upon with the EU, and the remainder of the coalition is very pro-climate. Since preferences are most determining, this would mean that their position will not be affected. Additionally, government officials remain the same when a government is changing, and since these actors are also influential, changes are unlikely even though political priorities might shift. Based on preferences it will therefore not happen that Finland's frontrunner position changes on the short term.

For the Dutch case, the PVV is very climate skeptic, but will have to stick to EU regulations that are binding, making it impossible for countries to just get rid of existing regulations. On top of that, most of the other coalition parties do want to continue setting out ambitious climate policies. Because most national climate agreements are revised every few years, it remains to be seen how the new government, led by the PVV, will implement climate measures and reach the targets. This goes for existing policy that is described in the recent NECP as well. Even though it is unsure to what extent the ambitiousness will be watered down, it is certain that the PVV and the BBB will try and slow down climate policy implementation in order to be able to focus more on other issues.

In the Netherlands, also the public opinion is important within climate policymaking. For both countries, it is expected that on the long-term, the Finns Party and the PVV will influence the public opinion negatively, leading to possibilities of watering down climate ambitions because there will be less resistance.

While it is hard to predict the long-term effects of this governmental change in both countries, on the short-term it can be stated that it will not be likely that the shift in governments is going to affect the ambitious climate policies that both countries have been carrying out. The bindingness of EU regulations ensures that policies will remain ambitious. Because of pro-climate preferences in Finland, together with a positive public opinion regarding climate policy, the country will remain one of the EU climate frontrunners. However, the Netherlands might slowly lose their frontrunner position since policy preferences are not as pro-climate anymore, leading to less ambitious climate initiatives. The governmental shift will however lead to a public opinion that is more skeptic about climate policy, which on the long run can lead to less ambitious climate policy for both countries. This in turn will affect the EU's position as a global frontrunner of climate policy, since there will be more resistance and both Finland and the Netherlands might join the camp of anti-climate member states. This could mean less unanimity in EU about climate policies when central European countries have more allies. A similar thing might happen as what happened in 2014, where the opposition of anti-climate member states led to reduction of ambitious climate targets in the EU.

6.1 Future research

To be able to draw better conclusions, it is important to look at both cases after a longer period of time to research the impact of the shift on the new policies that are set out. On top of that, it is needed to conduct more interviews with Finnish and Dutch government officials, to gain more insights on possible implications of the shift, and about the party preferences. To form a more general conclusion, it would also be good to look at more than 2 cases, to create a larger generalizability.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Interview guide

Opening questions

1. How would you describe your role within (organization, ministry, party)?
2. What made you want to work within this field?
3. For how long have you been doing this?
4. How do you see the role of (organization, ministry, party) within climate change policies?

General questions climate policy

1. How does (organization, ministry, party) view climate change?
2. What do you think is the role of Netherlands/Finland in establishing firm climate policies?
 - a. Do you see them as a frontrunner?
 - b. Are they doing enough? Should they do more/less?
 - c. Is it important that the Netherlands/Finland continues taking the lead?
3. What do you think are factors that explain why the Netherlands/Finland have been regarded as frontrunners of climate policy?

Explain the shift in government preferences concerning climate change

4. Do you think this can influence the position of the Netherlands/Finland as frontrunner?
 - a. If so, in what way?
 - b. If no, why not?

In the case of NGO:

5. Do you see a change of importance in your role as NGO, now that this shift has taken place?
 - a. If so, in what way?
 - b. If not, why?

Preferences

1. In what way do you think that government preferences to focus on short-term policies affects the establishment of climate policies?
2. Do you think that it is a risk for climate policies that policy preferences are so sensitive to governmental change?
 - a. If so, how can we ensure that climate change remains priority? How do you see your role within this?
 - b. If not, why?

Bindingness

1. What do you think is the role of bindingness of most climate agreements concerning climate policies?
 - a. Do you think it's necessary that we bind ourselves to these agreements?
If so, why?
If not, why?
 - b. Do you think this helps countries in reaching climate goals?

2. Do you think that the financial penalties of non-compliance are enough/too much to stimulate member states to comply?
3. Do you think it is important as climate frontrunners to establish binding climate agreements?
 - a. Why?
4. In what way do you think that the possibility of withdrawal from binding climate agreements can affect a country's climate ambitions?
 - a. How do you see this in the context of governmental changes?

Public opinion

1. How dependent do you think that climate policy in the Netherlands/Finland is on the opinion of the public?
 - a. Do you think that governments/parties would give this priority over own preferences?
 - b. Do you think that the public can pressure a climate skeptic government into establishing climate policies?
 - c. If so, how important is it then to create awareness among the public about the importance of climate policies?

How do you see your role in this as (organization, ministry, party)

8.2 Analyzed documents

Here follows a list of the official documents that have been analyzed during this research.

Finland	The Netherlands
<i>"A strong and committed Finland" Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government (2023)</i>	<i>Omzien naar elkaar, vooruitkijken naar de toekomst Coalition agreement 2021-2025</i>
<i>Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government 10 December 2019. Inclusive and competent Finland - a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society</i>	<i>Nederlanders weer op 1 PVV election program (2023)</i>
<i>National Coalition Party's election Program (2023)</i>	<i>Climate Act (2019)</i>
<i>Vote Finland back The Finns Party election program (2019)</i>	<i>Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 (NECP, 2019)</i>
<i>Christian Democrats party program</i>	<i>Draft update of the National Plan Energy and Climate (NECP, 2023)</i>
<i>SFP Parliamentary election manifesto (2023)</i>	<i>HOOP, LEF EN TROTS - Hoofdlijnenakkoord 2024 – 2028 van PVV, VVD, NSC en BBB</i>
<i>Finland's National Climate Act (2022)</i>	<i>Ruimte geven. Grenzen stellen. VVD election program 2023</i>

<i>Government Report on Medium-term Climate Change Plan for 2030 – Towards Climate-Smart Day-to-Day Living (2017)</i>	<i>Van vertrouwenscrisis naar Noaberstaat BBB election program 2023-2027</i>
<i>Finland's Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (NECP, 2019)</i>	<i>Tijd voor herstel NSC election program 2023</i>
<i>Finland's Integrated Energy and Climate Plan draft (NECP, 2023)</i>	