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**Contentious Policymaking on Climate Change
Mitigation in Austria after 2019. An Actor
Analysis.**

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Contentious Policymaking on Climate Change Mitigation in Austria after 2019. An Actor Analysis.

By Mel Christian Arnecke

Abstract

A spike in civil society engagement initiated by the FridaysForFuture movement and the Green Party's first representation in government marked in a new historical phase in Austrian climate politics in 2019. This study traces policy conflicts around climate change mitigation (CCM) to reconstruct the main developments and features of this period. It analyzes three groups of political actors (political parties, movements and civil society organizations, and organized interest groups) with regard to their perspectives, interests, strategies and resources relevant to their engagement in the field of CCM. The study identifies fourteen key actors and relates their strategic behavior to the structural and historical conditions of their agency, while also paying attention to the continuous shifts within these conditions. The study uses actors' strategic engagement in some of the most relevant policy conflicts on CCM in Austria to provide a better understanding of how heightened public support and awareness for climate protection as well as increasingly favorable conditions within the European Union have faced and interacted with the inert structures of the Austrian political and economic system.

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Index of Abbreviations

<i>abbr.</i>	<i>full length</i>	<i>translation (German)</i>
AfD	Alternative for Germany	Alternative für Deutschland
AI	artificial intelligence	
AK	Chamber of Labor	Arbeiterkammer
APA	Austria Press Agency	Austria Presse Agentur
BAK	Federal Chamber of Labor	Bundesarbeitskammer
BMF	Federal Ministry of Finance	Bundesministerium für Finanzen
BMK	Federal Ministry for Climate Protection	Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz
CCA	Climate Citizens' Assembly	Klimarat der Bürgerinnen und Bürger
CCCA	Climate Change Center Austria	
CCM	climate change mitigation	
CCS	Carbon Capture and Storage	
CMS	Carbon Management Strategy	Carbon-Management-Strategie
CPA	Climate Protection Act	Klimaschutzgesetz
CTF	Climate Transformation Fund	Klimatransformationsfonds
EAG	Renewables Expansion Act	Erneuerbaren-Ausbau-Gesetz
EEffG	Energy Efficiency Act	Energieeffizienzgesetz
EGG	Renewable Gas Act	Erneuerbares-Gas-Gesetz
EU	European Union	
EWG	Renewable Heat Act	Erneuerbare-Wärme-Gesetz
FFF	FridaysForFuture	
FPÖ	Freedom Party of Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreich
GBH	Union for Construction and Wood	Gewerkschaft Bau-Holz
GHG	greenhouse gas	
HMPA	Historical-Materialist Policy Analysis	

ICE	internal combustion engine	
IV	Federation of Austrian Industries	Industriellenvereinigung
KPÖ	Communist Party of Austria	Kommunistische Partei Österreichs
KVB	Popular Petition on Climate	Klimavolksbegehren
LG	Letzte Generation	
LKO	Austrian Chamber of Agriculture	Landwirtschaftskammer Österreich
MP	member of parliament	
MST	Materialist State Theory	
NC	National Council	Nationalrat
NECP	National Energy and Climate Plan	
NEOS	New Austria and Liberal Forum	Neues Österreich und Liberales Forum
NRL	Natural Restoration Law	
ÖGB	Austrian Trade Union Federation	Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund
ÖVP	Austrian People's Party	Österreichische Volkspartei
PA	Paris Agreement	
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SPÖ	Social Democratic Party of Austria	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs
WKO	Austrian Economic Chamber	Wirtschaftskammer Österreich
WW2	Second World War	

1 Introduction

As the climate crisis has become an increasingly central aspect of environmentalism, Austria's long-standing image as a vanguard of environmental protection has taken considerable damage. The long-continued rise in Austrian greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions has demonstrated the country's shortcomings over the past decades, leading experts to speak of a "complete failure in climate policy" (Nash/Steurer 2022, 510). While climate change mitigation (CCM) faces numerous obstacles of all sorts, one aspect that has been frequently identified as an important impediment of climate protection in Austria is the country's political system and the institutional landscape in which CCM policies are developed and negotiated. Specifically, this concerns the role of state governments in the Austrian federal system as well as the considerable influence of the organized interest groups within the neo-corporatist structure of the Austrian social partnership (Tobin 2017; Brand/Niedermaier 2019; Steurer et al. 2023). The Austrian shortcomings in CCM have thus often been attributed to the Austrian polity as an institutional context structurally encouraging inertia in the field of climate politics.

Nevertheless, the discrepancy between the political priority and increased attention that climate change as a political issue has received over the past years and the deficiency of Austrian CCM measures is striking. In the context of the climate crisis becoming stronger and more palpable, an increased civil society engagement in climate protection initiated by the FridaysForFuture movement (FFF) and, subsequently, the return of the Green Party to parliament leading to their first government participation after the 2019 national snap election, climate change has become one of the most salient political issues in Austria. While several meaningful CCM policies have been adopted during this period, the fact that the institutional context of climate politics did not keep up with these developments is, for instance, underscored by the ongoing protraction of a renewed Climate Protection Act (CPA) determining sector-specific targets for GHG reduction in Austria. Nevertheless, it seems important to acknowledge recent shifts in the discourse on and political contention of CCM. Following a periodization of Niedertscheider et al. (2018) and its expansion by Nash and Steurer (2022), this paper thus utilizes the notion of a new historical phase in Austrian climate politics starting in 2019 as a time frame for the analysis of relevant actors strategically engaged in the contention of CCM policies in Austria. Adopting a broad perspective, this study attempts to provide an overview over the positions, interests, strategies and resources of fourteen key actors in Austria, including parties, civil society organizations, and organized interest groups. Drawing from materialist state theory, Historical-Materialist Policy Analysis (HMPA) as well as its operationalization proposed by Buckel et al. (2014; 2017) it is further interested in the ways these actors engage in – and with – the institutional context of policymaking on CCM in Austria.

The second section will provide a brief overview over the academic literature on CCM policymaking in Austria, identifying some of the structural conditions frequently identified as impediments of more ambitious CCM policies. In a second step, the section introduces a five-phase periodization model of CCM contention in Austria (Niedertscheider et al. 2018; Nash/Steurer 2022) to illustrate the ongoing shifts in the field's historical conditions. The subsequent third section is concerned with methodology and the operationalization of HMPA and, more precisely, the actor analysis proposed by Buckel et al. (2014; 2017) adopted in this paper. In the fourth section, the results of the actor analysis are presented and discussed, making it the longest and most comprehensive one. In three subsections formed by groups of

actors – Parties (4.1), Movements and Civil Society (4.2), and Organized Interest Groups (4.3) – the fourteen actors are analyzed individually. Applying the methodological framework for actor analysis laid out in the third section, each actor’s perspectives on CCM, their goals and interests, the strategies they employ in CCM-related policy conflicts, and the strategic resources at their disposal are examined. Focusing on some of the most relevant policy conflicts in a respective actor’s activity since 2019, the empirical base comprises academic literature and, to a greater extent, publicly available primary sources like parliamentary documents, party manifestos, press releases and other public statements, or media coverage. To enhance clarity and make visible the overarching trajectories underlying the actors’ various strategies, the extensive insights gained in the actor analysis are bound together in the fifth chapter. This interpretation directly precedes the conclusion, which provides a condensed assessment of the main features of the most recent historical period in Austrian CCM policy.

2 Climate Politics in Austria

2.1 Literature Review

Environmental politics in Austria have by no means gone unnoticed in research. In fact, Austria was long considered a leading country in environmental questions – a reputation which outlasted its 1995 accession to the EU by some years (Börzel 2002, 197). More recently, however, this perception has been damaged, especially since climate change has become an increasingly central issue in environmental protection and policymaking. Whereas in other environmental issue areas – such as the dismissal of nuclear energy production or the protection of the immediate environment – Austria has had ambitious regulation in place for a long time (Tobin 2017, 42), the country’s efforts to reduce GHG-emissions show clear deficits. While EU-countries averaged a reduction of 23.5 per cent between 1990 and 2017, Austrian emissions increased by 4.6 per cent in that period (Nash/Steurer 2022, 511) and have only fallen below their 1990 level as late as 2020 (Umweltbundesamt 2024, 9). Accordingly, the Austrian policy outcomes in climate protection constitute a clear mismatch with both the country’s own ambitions as well as its reputation as an environmental leader within the EU and beyond (Melidis/Russel 2020, 200).

This mismatch is also reflected in several recent studies on CCM policies in Austria. Scherhauser and Clar (2021) point out that climate protection did not achieve the political priority needed for an overarching and profound transformation. Instead, Austrian efforts are often described as fragmented and insufficient (Niedertscheider et al. 2018, 13). Government programs are further criticized for both their focus on climate change adaptation rather than mitigation (Steurer/Clar 2018) as well as their aversion to profound economic interventions that go beyond “ecological modernization” (Krenmayr et al. 2020). In other words, instead of changing the societal modes of production and consumption, most policies seek to promote changes in the energy and resource basis of the Austrian economy. While academic literature provides numerous theories and explanations for these deficiencies, three of the structural conditions that are particularly often identified as potential impediments of CCM policymaking will be briefly discussed here.

A *first* relevant aspect concerns the relative weight of carbon-intensive production and consumption patterns within the Austrian economy and society. While carbon-intensive

industries have been vital to economic growth in Austria, they are unsurprisingly also among the main contributors to the country's GHG emissions. In 2022, for instance, the metals industry alone was responsible for as much as 14 percent of Austrian emissions (Klimadashboard Österreich n.d.). The automotive sector, another economically important industry, has a strong interest in avoiding profound transformation projects in favor of ecological modernization programs. Instead of trying to abandon the predominant, carbon-intensive mobility patterns, e.g., for public transport, the transition to EVs focuses on the energy source powering individual transport (Krenmayr et al. 2020). Politically, the centrality of the automotive industry is reflected both in a strong emphasis on the sector's relevance as a core industry as well as individual transport as a strongly normalized and structurally privileged form of mobility (Stellner et al. 2022). While emissions in transportation have been further exacerbated by diesel subsidies that may well be phased out in the near future (Tobin 2017; Kern et al. 2024), transport has long been one of the major contributors to Austria's emissions.

Important as they may be, the interests of core industries like the automotive sector do, of course, not automatically translate into CCM policies or the lack thereof. Instead, their great influence on policymaking in this field relates to the *second* structural condition often associated with impeding climate protection efforts: the corporatist system of the Austrian social partnership. Tasked with representing both labor and business interests and mediating conflicts between these two sides, the social partners – which will be discussed below in more detail (4.3) – are supposed to safeguard economic and social stability in Austria. In the context of climate politics, however, their concerted efforts to obstruct CCM policies like feed-in tariffs have been identified as important hurdles of decarbonizing the Austrian economy (Brand/Pawloff 2014). While the Chamber of Labor (AK) and the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB), the two organizations representing labor interests within the social partnership, seem to have shifted their strategy towards a more supportive stance on many CCM policies (4.3.1 and 4.3.2; Brand/Niedermoser 2019), both the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO) and the Federation of Austrian Industries (IV), which represent various business interests, are still widely considered to be among the main obstructors of climate protection in Austria (Steurer et al. 2023).

A *third* important aspect of Austrian shortcomings on CCM policies is the country's federalist structure. The Austrian political system equips state or *Länder* governments with relatively far-reaching competencies and strong opportunities to obstruct or impede policies initiated at the federal level. The consequential necessity to find compromises between the governments at state and federal level is often considered to structurally favor unambitious targets, especially in a distinctly transregional policy area like climate protection (Steurer/Clar 2018; Scherhauser/Clar 2021). Here, the federal system's potential to impede the policymaking process is further increased by the unclear distribution of competencies relevant to CCM (Schmidinger 2021). State governments have thus repeatedly made use of the opportunity to obstruct, delay or water down efforts to reduce GHG emissions in sectors like spatial planning or housing, which were essential for the successful implementation of federal CCM efforts (Steurer et al. 2023, 397).

Besides these valuable insights into the structural context of CCM policymaking in Austria, the literature offers numerous studies on the strategic behavior of specific institutional actors.

Besides trade unions and the social partnership (Brand/Pawloff 2014; Brand/Niedermoser 2019; Pichler et al. 2021), this is also the case with some political parties, whose ideological positions and strategies relating to CCM were at the center of numerous relevant publications. This is especially true for the Green Party (Buzogány/Scherhauser 2018; Eberl et al. 2020) and the far-right FPÖ (Ruser/Machin 2019; Voss 2019; Selk/Kemmerzell 2022), while the climate politics of other large parties did not receive similar attention. Similarly, in-depth analyzes of civil society organizations and movements have been rare, even though some publications on movements like FFF (Daniel/Deutschmann 2019; Simsa 2024) can be found.

While many of these studies help to understand some of the most important actors engaging in climate politics in Austria, they leave open a space for a more extensive and broad analysis on numerous actors strategically engaged in this field. Meanwhile, the few existing studies covering a broader range of actors (Abstiens et al. 2021; CCCA 2019) – while providing a valuable overview over the positioning of some actors – often lack a differentiated and theoretically informed perspective on the actors' respective interests and strategies. More importantly even, they do not systematically relate the actors' strategic behavior to the structural conditions they navigate and engage with. This is precisely the void the actor analysis conducted here sets out to fill. Drawing from Materialist State Theory (MST) and Historical-Materialist Policy Analysis (HMPA), the actor analysis attempts to illuminate the ways in which some of the most important individual actors have strategically engaged within the specific structural conditions of the field that is Austrian climate politics. While these conditions, three of which were discussed above, may prove relatively persistent, it is also crucial to acknowledge their malleable character. As historically unique configurations, they are – at least potentially – always subject to change. In the following subsection, this is illustrated using a five-phase model for the development of CCM policymaking in Austria, before the third chapter introduces HMPA and elaborates on the methodological framework of the actor analysis below.

2.2 Development of CCM Policymaking in Austria

Bearing in mind the persistence of some of the structural conditions discussed above and the power dynamics they produce or accentuate, it is equally important to pay close attention to changes within the field of Austrian climate politics. For one, studying shifts in the institutional landscape affecting the contention of CCM policies provides deeper insights into the (non)emergence of these policies. Moreover, acknowledging the ever-changing character of the structural conditions relevant to Austrian climate politics enhances our understanding of the dialectical relationship between the specifics of a historical situation and the ways in which actors strategically engage with it. The strategic behavior of actors analyzed below is not merely influenced by the historical context; it also retroacts on the structural conditions that shape the political terrain and hold the potential to favor certain policy outcomes over others. A diachronic view of the development of CCM policymaking in Austria and the significant changes that have shaped the field over the past decades is therefore invaluable. To illustrate these shifts, Niedertscheider et al. (2018) proposed a periodization of Austrian climate politics going back to 1990. This four-phase model was later expanded to include a fifth phase by Nash and Steurer (2022), resulting in the following five phases laid out in *Table 1*:

Awareness	1990-1995
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • domestic environmentalist successes increase visibility of climate change • commitment to ambitious GHG-emission targets (i.a. Toronto Agreement) • strengthening of environmental ministry and foundation of new institutions 	
Stagnation	1995-2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase of carbon-intensive motorised transit due to EU-accession • Toronto replaced by less ambitious targets (EU and Kyoto) • politicians and social partners withdraw from national climate change institutions 	
EU-Influence	2002-2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rising GHG-emissions • federal and state governments agree on first Federal Climate Strategy • several EU-directives boost national CCM-efforts 	
Legislation	2007-2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduction of additional binding regulations at national and EU-level • first Climate Protection Act (CPA) in 2011, Paris Agreement (PA) in 2016 • social partners increasingly active in prevention or dilution of CCM-efforts 	
Politicisation	from 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • global spike in climate protests, new activist groups and movements formed • Green Party triples share of votes and forms government coalition with ÖVP • CCM achieves new centrality in national and European politics • progress in some policy areas, stagnation and backsliding in others (incl. CPA) 	

Table 1: Periodization of climate change politics in Austria. First four phases based on Niedertscheider et al. (2018), fifth phase inspired by Nash/Steurer (2022).

The periodization shows how CCM measures in Austria were adopted under the ever-shifting circumstances affecting the field of climate politics and situates these policies in their respective historical context. In the first half of the 1990s, increased awareness of climate change led to the adoption of fairly ambitious GHG reduction targets under the Toronto Agreement and contributed to the strengthening and integration of the institutional landscape focused on CCM. However, following this initial phase, Austria's 1995 accession to the EU marked the beginning of a period of stagnation in national climate politics. The ambitious Toronto targets were abandoned in favor of the less demanding goals of both the EU and the Kyoto Protocol, while the institutional landscape established earlier was drastically weakened and depoliticized. This was evident in the exodus of policymakers and social partners from commissions tasked with GHG reduction (Niedertscheider et al. 2018, 12).

By the early 2000s, emissions had risen to new heights, prompting the introduction of corrective measures that defined the third phase of climate protection. These measures, including Austria's first federal climate strategy, were primarily driven by external pressures

from the Kyoto Protocol and several new EU directives.¹ The fourth phase, which the authors date to 2007, saw binding regulations in the form of legislation becoming increasingly prominent in CCM at both national and EU-level. In addition to numerous binding EU directives, Austria passed the CPA in 2011, and at the global level, the PA was ratified in 2016 (ibid., 13). During this period, the social partners regained influence, adopting an increasingly central role in climate politics (Brand/Pawloff 2014). Their evolving position as powerful yet hesitant forces attempting to dilute or block CCM policies underscores the importance of considering long-term developments in the field (4.3).

The notion of a fifth historical phase in Austrian climate politics initiated by the FridaysForFuture (FFF) movement and a global surge in climate protests since 2019, as argued by Nash and Steurer (2022), reflects a more recent reconfiguration within the field of climate politics. The authors associate this fifth phase with increased civil society engagement—exemplified by initiatives such as the Popular Petition for Climate (KVB) and the Climate Citizens’ Council (CCA) – as well as the Green Party’s return to parliament and their first participation in a government coalition following a historically high vote share in the 2019 national snap election. At the institutional level, one significant change was the establishment of the Federal Climate Ministry (BMK), led by the Greens since 2019. At EU level, the European Green Deal has demonstrated that market-driven ecological modernization has gained new momentum, increasingly coupled with selective, geopolitically motivated state intervention, particularly in industrial policy (Pichler et al. 2021; Krenmayr et al. 2020; Eder and Schneider 2020).

As discussed above, the heightened discursive salience of climate change and the centrality of ecological modernization projects at the European level often stand in stark contrast to the perceived inadequacies of CCM policymaking in Austria after 2019. Nash and Steurer (2022, 510), describe Austrian climate politics as a “complete failure”, citing the continued absence of binding, sector-specific reduction targets in the CPA as a key factor. To better understand the extent and nature of these shortcomings, the actor analysis below adopts the fifth phase as its time frame.

Crucially, this period, beginning in 2019 and ongoing as of summer 2024, represents a moving target. Therefore, the purpose of this section is not to provide a definitive or exhaustive account of climate politics during this phase. Rather, it aims to help contextualize the historical circumstances navigated by the actors analyzed below. The third chapter will introduce the analytical tools necessary to explore policy conflicts as entry points for understanding the development of CCM policymaking in Austria and outline the methodology used in the actor analysis below.

3 Methodology

This study analyzes some of the most relevant actors in Austrian climate politics focusing specifically on their positions, interests, strategies, and resources. Methodologically, it draws on a four-step structure proposed by Buckel et al. (2014, 55ff) in the context of the Research

¹ As Steurer and Claar (2014) point out, Austria’s most significant climate protection measure during the Kyoto period was the purchase of carbon certificates that would otherwise not have been used within the EU.

Group “State Project Europe” to operationalise the *actor analysis*, one of the three analytic steps of Ulrich Brand’s (2013) Historical-Materialist Policy Analysis (HMPA). With its ambition to introduce a materialist and Poulantzian perspective in a field otherwise dominated by rationalist approaches, HMPA can be conceived of as a critical intervention in Policy Analysis. While Brand also seeks to strengthen *policies* – defined as „concrete framework[s] for the implementation of institutionalized politics“ (Brand 2013, 426) – as an analytical category in critical and materialist research, Buckel et al. specifically emphasize the analysis of *politics* rather than *policy*. With their politics-oriented “Hessen” version of HMPA, Buckel et al. depart from the policy-oriented “Vienna” approach championed by Brand, aiming to “place an analytical emphasis on those processes structured by power and hierarchical relations effective within them” (Buckel et al. 2017, 16). In the context of this study, specific policies and their contention will be discussed. With the study’s broad focus on numerous conflicts within the field of CCM policymaking, however, it is instructive to consider the power dynamics at play throughout the field. The perspective adopted in the actor analysis below therefore is therefore strongly influenced by the politics-oriented Hessen approach to HMPA.

In its operationalized form, HMPA is usually structured into three analytical steps: context analysis, actor analysis and process analysis. The *context analysis* seeks to “identify the elements of a historical situation, to which social forces and political actors react in different and conflicting ways” (Buckel et al. 2014, 54). This way, the context analysis attempts to lay bare the historical and material conditions underlying the conflict at stake (Kannankulam/Georgi 2014, 63). While the scope of this paper does not allow for a comprehensive context analysis, the four- and five-phase models laid out above (Section 2) were introduced to provide an understanding of the ways the historical situation evolves and shapes the policy conflicts around CCM. The *actor analysis*, which is carried out in the fourth section below, is then concerned with how various actors react to a given context, why they react in different ways, and what enables them to do so. Its purpose is to arrive at substantiated assertions about the configuration of actors strategically engaged in a particular conflict (Buckel et al. 2014, 55). In the context of this study, the actor analysis is not confined to a single policy conflict but covers a range of conflicts around CCM policymaking, resulting in a more extensive, less in-depth approach. The *process analysis*, which usually tries to reconstruct the complex forms of contention between a conflict’s relevant actors as the third step of HMPA, is thus omitted, as a sufficiently detailed account of the various contention processes would have exceeded the limitations of this study by far.

Importantly, the three steps of HMPA and their order are best conceived of as a way to present the results of a study rather than an accurate representation of the research process. To suit their respective interest, Buckel et al. (2017, 20) explicitly call for researchers to weight differently or rearrange the three analytical steps of HMPA. Each of these steps may thus be foregrounded or even detached to stand on its own. As this paper explores an entire political field rather than a specific policy outcome, the method employed below is best understood as an extensive actor analysis rather than a full-blown HMPA. In their operationalisation of the actor analysis, Buckel et al. (2014, 56f) propose a structure of four steps. Since some aspects of this structure – e.g. the “analytical aggregation into hegemony projects” – do not suit the focus of this study, they will be left out here. Instead, an emphasis will be placed on four aspects reflected in the simplified four-step structure briefly laid out here.

In an initial step, each actor's *situation analysis* (1) is examined. This term refers to "discourse elements describing who or what is identified as the problem or as its cause." (ibid., 56) In the context of CCM, this includes but is not limited to an actor's perspective on scientific evidence for human-induced climate change. The situation analysis also entails an actor's outlook as to how, by whom, to what extent, at what cost, or at what institutional level climate change can and should be addressed. As such the situation analysis is closely tied to an actor's knowledge and beliefs.

Secondly, the fundamental *strategic goals* (2) of an actor are focused. While short-term tactical maneuvers are excluded from this step, it goes beyond merely identifying an organization's core aims. It also examines how their broader purpose and fundamental interests relate to CCM. For instance, if an organization's strategic goal is to protect business interests in the automotive industry, this may conflict with CCM strategies in the transportation sector, such as reducing car use or introducing new regulations. The nature of an actor's strategic goals can vary greatly and may include economic or electoral interests connected to CCM policymaking.

In a third step, the analysis of an actor's *conflictual strategy* (3) then focuses on the strategic behavior by which actors pursue their goals within specific policy conflicts related to CCM in Austria. The conflictual strategy employed by an actor may depend on several factors, including the actor's institutional structure or the nature of the political conflict in question. Accordingly, the conflictual strategy of an actor can always shift due to changing circumstances, new alliances, or strategic reorientations.

Finally, the fourth step examines the *strategic resources* (4) available to an actor. Strategic resources can be manifold and include things like organizational power, knowledge, money, discursive visibility, tactical leverage, or a favorable institutional context (Schmalz/Dörre 2014). These resources are also an important aspect of the strategic options available to an actor. Meanwhile, the efficacy of a given resource may be very different depending on the conflict at stake.

In the following section, each actor will be examined individually using this four-step analytical framework. To account for the differences between actors, they are grouped into three categories: political parties (4.1), civil society organizations (4.2), and organized interest groups (4.3). The specifics of each group – such as their institutional make-up, their strategic priorities, their resources, or the corpus of analyzed sources – will be briefly addressed at the beginning of each subsection. The availability and nature of sources and literature on a given actor can vary strongly. While some actors, particularly political parties, have been covered extensively, others have received less attention. However, these differences in coverage do not necessarily reflect an actor's strategic influence in climate politics. Similarly, the policy conflicts examined in this analysis range from local infrastructure projects, such as the Viennese Lobau Tunnel, to broader decarbonization strategies, like in the cases of the CMS or the NECP. As the scope of this paper did not allow for a discussion of every actor's behavior in every conflict, the conflicts selected for discussion were chosen either for their importance to a specific actor or because they illustrate an actor's position or strategy particularly well. Consequently, the discussion of an actor's strategic behavior in certain conflicts should not be conceived as a fully comprehensive or accurately weighted representation of their engagement in climate politics.

The empirical base of the actor analysis generally consists of some academic literature and, to a much larger extent, primary sources such as legislative documents, party manifestos, public statements, press releases, or media coverage. Since the availability of sources varies among actors and groups, the introductory paragraph for each group briefly addresses the amount and nature of the sources. The research process reinforced the impression that collecting empirical data holds an enormous potential for the in-depth analysis of specific actors or particular policy conflicts. However, the broad perspective of this study did not allow for a comprehensive survey of each actor and conflict discussed. As a result, the empirical base relies exclusively on existing and publicly available sources. This deliberately broad focus aims to provide a foundation that may help researchers in identifying promising entry points for more detailed empirical studies of specific conflicts or actors relevant to CCM policymaking in Austria. While the subsections on a given actor do not generally build upon one another, concepts or developments mentioned earlier in the text are not reintroduced. Cross-references are provided to facilitate navigation within the document.

4 Actor Analysis

4.1 Political Parties

Political parties are a key group of actors in climate politics. At the federal level, the Austrian party system has traditionally been characterized by power-sharing and cooperation in numerous coalition governments, predominantly formed by the two major parties – the conservative *Austrian People's Party* (ÖVP) and the *Social Democratic Party of Austria* (SPÖ). While both parties have formed coalitions with the right-wing *Freedom Party of Austria* (FPÖ) in the past, the party system was historically defined by institutionalized cooperation between conservatives and social democrats. This dynamic has shifted over time due to several developments, including the FPÖ's establishment as a third major political force and the emergence of additional parties over the past decades. Among these, the *Green Party* (Grüne) has been a near-permanent presence in the Austrian parliament, the *National Council* (NC), since its founding in 1986, though they were not involved in a federal coalition government until 2019. The liberal *New Austria and Liberal Forum* (NEOS) rounds out the current set of parliament parties. In the run-up to the 2024 national election, polls indicate that two additional parties – the socially liberal *Beer Party* and the *Communist Party of Austria* (KPÖ) – had hoped to enter parliament but ultimately failed due to the NC's four-percent threshold.

Nevertheless, the diversification of the Austrian party system since the 1980s has led to an increase prevalence of coalitions at both federal and state level. At federal level, the coalition between the ÖVP and the Greens in 2019 exemplifies this trend. In many federal states (*Länder*), the dominance of either the ÖVP or the SPÖ has remained stronger, but coalition governments have recently become increasingly common at state level as well. Compared to other actors, such as civil society and organized interest groups, political parties typically have a broader set of strategic goals and priorities. Consequently, many of the strategies employed by parties cannot be traced back to manifest material interests than is often the case with other actors, including organized interest groups. As parties aim to politically represent a relatively wide range of people and their collective interests to gather and maintain public support, they are structurally inclined to mediate between the material interests of different groups. Moreover, parties' broad focus across a wide range of issue areas distinguishes them

from many of the civil society organizations and movements discussed later. This broader scope of priorities and fundamental strategic goals is an important factor to consider when analyzing the strategic behavior of different actors. Among the three groups of actors analyzed in this study, the availability of sources and literature was highest for political parties. This is likely due to several factors, including strong media and academic interest, the (usually) more transparent processes in parties' internal decision-making, and the stronger structural incentive for parties to publicly articulate positions on a broad range of issues relevant to CCM.

4.1.1 Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)

The ambiguities of the ÖVP's *situation analysis* in the context of climate change and climate politics are reflected in the 2019 assessment of their climate agenda by the Climate Change Center Austria (CCCA). According to this evaluation, the Party's "orientation towards the Parisian climate targets" was the only aspect of its program considered to be "partially aligned" with the ambitions of the PA, while significant deficits were identified in areas like taxation, circular economy, spatial planning and carbon storage (CCCA 2019, 2). On one hand, the ÖVP does not systematically cast doubt on scientific evidence, has emphasized Austria's responsibility in the global effort to mitigate climate change (ÖVP 2015, 35) and supported the ratification of the PA in the National Council (Parlament Österreich 2016). On the other hand, the Party seems committed to preventing or diluting ambitious climate policies, particularly those believed to conflict with economic growth. The Party's dominant rationale on climate change mitigation revolves around the belief in technological innovation within a growing "eco-social market economy" (ÖVP 2015, 21), rather than on regulation. In the "Austria Plan" – an eighty-page manifesto in which chancellor Karl Nehammer identifies political targets for the coming decade – the ÖVP's optimistic outlook on technologically driven climate protection is clearly reflected. Here, Austrian technological innovation is presented as both a significant contribution to global climate protection efforts and a key export (Nehammer 2024, 74). Similarly, on a global scale, the ambition to lead in the production of future technologies is also envisioned for the EU (ÖVP 2024, 45). This aspiration of economic growth in the course of climate change mitigation is a characteristic element of the ÖVP's situation analysis and lies at the core of the Party's concept of "climate protection with common sense" (ibid.).

The ÖVP's *strategic goals* are largely in line with prototypically conservative demands. In the socio-political field, the Party advocates a heteronormative family ideal, calls for an Austrian "*Leitkultur*" and has, especially since former chair Sebastian Kurz took over in 2017, adopted an increasingly repressive stance on migration. Regarding climate protection, however, the Party's economics are of particular importance. For one thing, the ÖVP asserts resource-intensive consumption patterns, sometimes by explicitly associating it with an affirmative notion of normality (APA/Der Standard 2023c). Beyond these rhetorical aspects, the ÖVP's strong commitment to foster economic growth in key sectors like automotive, agriculture, and tourism can also be observed at the institutional level. The Party's personal and institutional proximity to Austrian businesses and the interest groups representing them is both long-standing and well-documented. The ÖVP's efforts to prevent more ambitious CCM policies, especially approaches revolving around regulation, are thus often interpreted against the background of the Party's relationship with business and pro-business organizations, including LKO, WKO and IV (Steurer et al. 2023). Another central aspect of the ÖVP's economic policy, which was adopted in the aftermath of both the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and the subsequent European Debt Crisis, is its strong commitment to a restrictive fiscal policy (Reuters

2023). As the decarbonization of the Austrian economy, infrastructure and energy sector is likely to be among the most cost-intensive political projects in Austrian history, approaching it within a restrictive budget substantially narrows the corridor in which climate protection efforts are developed and implemented.

The *conflictual strategy* of the ÖVP has changed significantly since the party formed a federal government with the Greens in 2019. Making considerable concessions in climate politics, the party largely avoided confrontation with its coalition partner at the beginning of the term. Flagship projects included the subsidized Climate Ticket, valid in virtually all Austrian trains, and an eco-social tax-reform that redistributes CO₂ tax revenues to residents in Austria through annual payments. Other issue areas, however, were not characterized by similar levels of consent. Crucially, the renewal of the CPA has been strongly opposed by the ÖVP. The Act's binding and sector-specific GHG reduction targets, which are at the core of its political efficacy, expired in 2020. A draft given to ÖVP-officials by the Green-led Climate Ministry has reportedly not been met with a reaction, while press enquiries regarding the bill have also been ignored (Laufer 2024b). These tactics point to a protraction strategy aimed at waiting out the current coalition's term and the political pressures associated with it. The importance of the CPA's regulations, which tie policymakers to sector-specific targets regardless of short-term majorities, must not be underestimated. The ÖVP's ongoing protraction of the Act's renewal thus has disastrous effects on Austria's climate protection efforts. That being said, the strategic behavior of the ÖVP in some other issue areas indicates a more reconciliatory approach. In several policy conflicts related to energy, the Party has not attempted to protract or obstruct the legislative process, but rather chose to focus on the negotiation of details. In the case of the "Renewable Gas Bill" (EGG), for instance, the ÖVP prioritized the bill's overall market-orientation and its economic effects for farmers as one of their key supporter groups. Similarly, during negotiations on the "Renewables Expansion Bill" (EAG), the ÖVP reportedly argued for extending the gas grid and developing a hydrogen infrastructure, particularly to support its use in motorized private transport (Hammer 2021).

While the latter is deemed highly inefficient by most experts, it points to the ÖVP's strong commitment to individual motorized transport, which is exemplified in a more confrontational strategy employed by the Conservatives in the conflict surrounding the Lobau Tunnel. This underground segment of a bypass highway underneath a Viennese conservation area, has been halted since a 2021 initiative by Green climate minister Leonore Gewessler. Here, the ÖVP has repeatedly stated that they will not accept a departure from the project, contributing to a manifest policy conflict within the government coalition (Krutzler 2023). Similarly, the minister Gewessler expressing Austria's support for the EU's Natural Restoration Law (NRL) has been met with outrage and the threat to legally challenge the Bill by the ÖVP, which was not consulted beforehand (APA/Die Presse 2024).

Overall, the Party's strategic behavior in climate-related policy conflicts is variegated. While in some conflicts, the ÖVP uses their strategic advantage to impede more ambitious CCM measures and seeks out confrontation with the Greens, the Party exhibits a more cooperative approach in the context of some energy-related policies. This is the case with the Austrian Carbon Management Strategy (CMS), which aims at the integration of carbon capture and storage (CCS), carbon capture and utilization (CCU) and biomass-based carbon dioxide removal (BECCU/S) into Austrian climate policy. The development of the CMS was co-led by Ministries

for Finance (ÖVP) and Climate (Greens). While especially CCS was initially a divisive issue within the Coalition, as the Green Party feared it could undermine efforts to reduce CO₂ (Pilch 2023), the Greens and the BMK shifted their position towards a cautious promotion of the CMS (Brad et al. 2024). With the Strategy, the Government envisions to develop a legal framework for the introduction of carbon capture and storage (CCS) measures in Austria, which have so far been prohibited (BMF/BMK 2024). This step deserves close attention, as it is one of the central elements of the renewed National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) submitted to the European Commission with a delay in Summer of 2024 (BMK 2024b). While the NECP has sparked controversy, the support for CCS measures was particularly vocal in the ÖVP and among some of the Party's closer allies, including WKO and IV (4.3.4 and 4.3.5). While the technology's potential to mitigate GHG emissions in so-called hard-to-abate industries is generally acknowledged, experts from the CCCA emphasized that CCS is "not an alternative to the transition to renewables or energy efficiency measures" (Steininger et al. 2024, 20). The ÖVP's support for CCS thus illustrates the Party's preference for technological solutions as an approach to CCM, especially over further-reaching market-directing interventions or exposing Austrian businesses to further regulation. The development of Austria's carbon management strategy therefore reflects major fault lines and diverging material interests in Austria climate politics (Brad et al. 2024).

The ÖVP's *strategic resources* are manifold. Notably, the Party has direct access to key state apparatuses. At the federal level, this includes the chancellorship, the ministries of finance, economics, and agriculture, as well as the position of the speaker of parliament. This direct control provides the ÖVP with a privileged position in the design, assertion and also the prevention of policies. Still, as the conflicts surrounding both the Lobau Tunnel and the NRL indicate, the Conservatives' degree of influence may vary depending on which ministry holds the decision-making power over a particular issue. Secondly, the ÖVP remains the strongest political force at the state level, where the ÖVP has a similarly strong influence on policymaking and leads the government in six out of nine federal states. This dominant position not only allows the party to position itself as the advocate of these states but also grants substantial strategic advantages within Austria's federalist political system. A third important aspect of the ÖVP's strategic resources lies in its well-documented close ties to economic elites, businesses, and pro-business organizations. These connections, however, have frequently placed the Party at the center of corruption scandals and investigations (Stadler 2022; Thaler 2024). While it can be assumed that the Party's proximity to businesses and wealthy individuals has helped their campaigns, these scandals and inquiries likely have contributed to an erosion of the Austrian public's trust in the political system (European Commission 2024). This erosion is reflected in historically low polling results for the Party ahead of the 2024 national election (IFDD et al. 2024). Here, ÖVP came in second behind the far-right FPÖ.

4.1.2 Green Party (Die Grünen)

Historically, climate change was one issue among the Green Party's set of environmental concerns, many of which – such as the rejection of nuclear energy or the preservation of Austrian forests – can realistically be tackled locally. As climate change is a distinctly global phenomenon, its increasing centrality in the Greens' programs fits in with their evolution from a Eurosceptic party fearing for European integration to dilute ecological standards in Austria towards a decidedly pro-European position (Dolezal 2016, 26). Today, the Austrian Greens stress the importance of European and global CCM efforts, embrace multilateral agreements,

and strongly endorse the PA, calling for Austria to take a leading role in its realization (Die Grünen 2019). For the Green Party, the adherence to the PA's targets requires interventionist measures such as a restructuring of global trade agreements, a binding CO₂-budget and a coordinated decarbonization of the economy. In the past, the Greens have thus been considered to be among the political actors most interested in ambitious climate protection measures (Abstiens et al. 2021) and programmatically most aligned with the PA's targets (CCCA 2019). While the Greens emphasize the need for government intervention in the economic sphere to mitigate climate change, they also stress the importance of technological innovation enhanced by a moderated and innovation-friendly market economy (Die Grünen 2019, 45).

The evolution of the Green Party's *strategic goals* is reflected in Dolezal's (2016, 25) analysis of policy area saliency in the Party's past election manifestos. This analysis highlights that the issue areas particularly salient compared to other parties' programs are the environment, welfare, culture and education, and Europe. In contrast, the economy ranked markedly less salient in Green programs, although it has become more central over time. The Party advocates socio-politically progressive positions including support for abortion rights and calls for a better financing of education from kindergarten to university, which it also sees as a prerequisite of successful climate protection (Die Grünen 2019, 71, 26ff). Economically, the Greens envision a rather progressive redistribution of income and wealth and depict the decarbonization of the Austrian economy as a chance to safeguard employment and prosperity in the future. To this end, the party calls for comprehensive public investments in the form of a "Green New Deal" fostering a "just transition" to an ecologically sustainable economy (ibid., 41). Due to the Party's historically close ties to environmental movements, the Greens' perceived shift towards the political mainstream has sparked internal controversies over the past decade. For instance, in the wake of the 2017 presidential campaign, which saw Green candidate Alexander van der Bellen defeat the far-right FPÖ candidate Norbert Hofer, considerable factions criticized the Party's demands in policy fields like migration and the environment as too moderate (Buzogány/Scherhauser 2018, 567). After a subsequent exodus of party youth and high indebtedness ahead of the 2017 national election had contributed to the Greens' first failure to achieve parliamentary representation – a set back over 30 years of continuous representation (Eberl et al. 2020). However, in the 2019 snap election, the Greens made a strong comeback, returning to the National Council and entering their first federal government coalition. While the coalition agreement with the Conservatives was intensely debated due to concessions related to the ÖVP's restrictive migration policies. Nevertheless, the Green Party pushed for a set of climate protection measures that have become central to their conflictual strategies over the past years.

In the sphere of climate politics, the Green Party's *conflictual strategy* has been characterized by a focus to use the opportunities their first federal government participation granted them. Not unlike with their conservative coalition partner, the Green Party's strategic behavior since 2019 has shown considerable variability depending on the issue area or policy and the strategic options at the Party's hands in the respective context. While some of the Party's initiatives – like the approval of the NRL and the halt of the Lobau Tunnel – have manifested in the form of concrete policies, others – most importantly the CPA – have been impeded or renegotiated. Similarly, some of the political projects promoted by the Green-led Climate Ministry were faced with the ÖVP's resistance, while others – such as the Reform of the "Energy Efficiency Law" (EEffG) (Prager 2023) or the EGG (APA/Standard 2024) – were diluted in negotiations with

the Social Democrats, whose support would have been necessary to achieve the required two-third majority. Despite these impediments in the legislative process and their negative effects for Austria's energy transition, the Green Party also managed to push through several important policy projects. A common feature of several of these policies is their relatively high discursive visibility and public support. This is true for both the Climate Ticket and the eco-social tax-reform, which entails an annual Climate Bonus for all residents of Austria (Parlament Österreich 2021; 2022a), as well as the approval of the NRL, which was supported by large parts of the public (WWF 2024). The 2024 renewal of the NECP further introduces several ambitious measures, including the phase-out of some carbon-intensive subsidies or the continuation of the EWG's funding of renewable heating systems (BMK 2024b). The Plan does, however, also bear the trademarks of the ÖVP in its optimistic outlook on technological innovation – in the form of both CCS and hydrogen (ibid.) – as a key to successful CCM. While the Green Party did manage to effectively use some of their political power to promote CCM measures since 2019, it is worth noting that their capacity to do so has been variegated, depending on the issue area. This points to the limitations of the strategic resources at the Party's disposal.

Since the onset of the legislative period in 2019, the Green Party's *strategic resources* include considerable influence on key state apparatuses like the federal ministries for climate, health, justice, and culture as well as the vice presidency. At the state level, the Party is represented in all parliaments except Carinthian's. However, their strategic position has taken considerable damage in many Austrian states due to internal turmoil and an overall dip in public support during their time in federal government. While the Greens were part of six state governments in 2017, they lost their last participation in a state government in the fall of 2024 following the state elections in Vorarlberg, where they formerly held the ministry for climate and environment. The enormous strategic value of the federal climate ministry was exemplified in the context of the NRL and the Lobau Tunnel, where the Greens managed to initiate substantial CCM measures at different levels. However, their failure to implement transformative policies – most importantly the CPA – also points to a limited assertiveness in conflicts with their conservative coalition partners. The Party's dependency on the SPÖ for several policies – including the NRL (Kern/Leibetseder 2024) – further underscores their constraints in climate policymaking. While the Green Party's general association with climate protection is believed to have contributed to their exceptionally high share of votes in the 2019 election (Eberl et al. 2020, 1355), several environmental movements have expressed their frustration with the shortcomings of the government coalition and the Green Party over the past years (FFF n.d.-a; Stegmaier 2023). Since the 2024 national election led to substantial losses for the Greens, it seems likely that the considerable strategic resources currently at the Party's hands will be seriously diminished in the future.

4.1.3 Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ)

While the Social Democrats' climate politics generally shows a fair number of inconsistencies, the Party's *situation analysis* – as it is laid out in their 2018 manifesto – suggests a strong commitment to ambitious climate protection. Here, the SPÖ emphasizes that climate protection requires a restructuring of economy and society, modes of production and consumption (SPÖ 2018, 10) and interprets climate change as an aspect of the wider social question, e.g., by calling for strengthening affordable public transport and common property in Austria (ibid., 42ff). The potential synergies between climate protection and other major

political targets, such as wealth distribution, are thus accentuated. The SPÖ has supported the PA's ratification and generally shows a positive stance towards multilateralism in climate politics. However, the party also states that "global responsibility requires local action" (ibid., 45) and stresses the necessity to implement multilateral agreements at national and regional level. In their 2024 European election manifesto, the SPÖ expresses their support for the European Green Deal, calling for a "*just transition*" fostering job security (SPÖ 2024a, 17). Here, the connection drawn between economic inequality and the climate crisis is noticeably closer than it had been in the past, with the party centering the concept of climate justice as well as the class disparities in both responsibility for and vulnerability to climate change (ibid., 16f).

The SPÖ's *strategic goals* have historically – or at least after 1945 – revolved around promoting social equity within the framework of representative democracy and a market economy hedged in by a strong neo-corporatist social partnership (4.3). Strategically, this has often implicated a strong commitment to fostering economic growth, stability and job security to increase the leverage at organized labor's disposal. To what extent the Party's relationship with economic growth is challenged by CCM very much remains contested. While the SPÖ, as laid out above, emphasizes potential synergies between strengthening job security and climate protection, their position on immediate clashes of interest in carbon-intensive sectors continues to be a highly divisive issue. Accordingly, the CCCA (2019) described the Party's adherence to Austria's 2019 NECP to be "unclear". When compared to the other parties' set of political priorities, however, the SPÖ's position becomes more evident. In terms of fiscal policy, for instance, the SPÖ does not share the ÖVP's commitment to austerity budgets. Instead, they call for an "end of austerity politics" and the relaxation of the EU's fiscal rules, allowing for the implementation of an "EU transformation fund" (SPÖ 2024a, 22) as well as a "climate transformation fund" of 20 billion Euros at national level (SPÖ 2024b). This ability to invest in large decarbonization and infrastructure projects can be considered part and parcel of the SPÖ's climate strategy, as it potentially allows to navigate trade-offs between CCM measures and fostering job security. The SPÖ's proposed national Climate Transformation Fund (CTF) builds upon plans developed in 2022 in cooperation with representatives of the electric industries, trade unions, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), as well as, notably, the IV (SPÖ Parlamentsklub 2022; Ungerboeck 2024). Like the original program, the CTF envisions a restructuring of the state-owned holding company ÖBAG to allow for a more active role of the state in decarbonization without posing a threat to the overall Austrian economy. The fund's design thus points to the party's compromise-oriented strategy and was introduced by SPÖ-chair Andreas Babler as "location policy oriented towards the shared interests of workers and industry" (SPÖ 2024b).

National or European transformation funds have thus been established as an important element in the SPÖ's climate politics. However, the party's *conflictual strategy* in the context of several contentious policies is, in many cases, still marked by inconsistency and internal dissent. For instance, one policy area identified as particularly deficient by the CCCA (2019) is spatial planning. An infamous example of the SPÖ's hesitations in this field is the Lobau Tunnel, which has been frozen since climate minister Gewessler reacted to protest with a construction halt in 2021 (4.1.1). The Tunnel does not only represent the SPÖ's reluctance to abandon car-centered mobility concepts, it is also emblematic of how climate-related issues are still a very contentious issue within the Party. While Viennese mayor Michael Ludwig firmly supports the

project, others in the Party, including federal chair Andreas Babler and the party youth, have at least intermittently opposed it (Toumi/O'Brien 2021; Kubrak 2023; APA/Der Standard 2023b). In the field of transportation, the Lobau Tunnel thus illustrates the disparities between the SPÖ's purported focus on public transport and common property and its adherence to transportation policies tailored to the needs of motorized commuters.

Meanwhile, the SPÖ's positioning on energy matters seems equally opaque. For instance, in the context of the EEffG, the SPÖ's parliamentary group voted against the bill to pressure the government into making a stronger commitment to inflation reduction (Prager 2023). While the coalition's majority allowed the bill to pass without social democratic votes, it failed to reach the two-thirds majority required for it to be binding at state level (Parlament Österreich 2023). While the curtailment of inflation is understandably a political priority for the SPÖ and directly relates to some of their fundamental strategic goals, their opposition to energy policy projects is not a one-off. Like the EEffG, the EGG failed to reach a two-thirds majority in the NC due to the Social Democrats' objections, which were justified by concerns over potential increases in gas prices (APA/Der Standard 2024c). Pointing out that end-consumers only use up a fifth of the Austrian gas supply and the larger share of the costs would be borne by the industry, Geyer and Kriechbaum (2024) suggested that SPÖ's opposition may have been motivated by the state-owned Viennese energy provider *Wien Energie*. While Wien Energie did indeed strongly object to the EGG (Wien Energie n.d.) and entertains famously close relations to the Viennese SPÖ, the exact reasons behind the vote remain unclear. Although two policy projects from the energy sector were obstructed by the SPÖ, the climate minister's approval of the NRL was made possible by the Social Democrats' cooperation. As obstruction of the bill required unanimous opposition from state governments (Kern/Leibetseder 2024), the decision of Carinthia's and Vienna's SPÖ-led governments to give up their blockade cleared the way for the NRL's adoption – and sparked intraparty criticism from other states (Knittelfelder 2024).

The SPÖ's political position is strengthened by a wide range of relevant *strategic resources*. At the federal level, the party has maintained a continuous presence in the NC since the post-war era and led the government between 1970 and 2000 as well as between 2007 and 2017. Since the 1980s, however, the SPÖ's share of votes has continuously declined. This trend led Abstiens et al. (2021, 13ff) to assess the Social Democrats' influence in key policy areas like energy and transportation, as limited – especially when compared to the governing ÖVP. At state level, the SPÖ is currently leading three governments in Vienna, Carinthia and Burgenland. As the Viennese branch of the SPÖ has been continuously governing in the most populous state since the end of WW2, the Capital is considered the political heartland of the SPÖ. By contrast, the Party's influence in other states, particularly in rural areas, is far more limited. An important aspect of the Social Democrats' style of politics is their strong network of affiliated institutions, including but not limited to youth organizations, interest groups (e.g., for tenants), and widely respected social institutions, particularly in education and charity work. Additionally, the SPÖ has strong ties to unions and a strong presence within the Austrian Chamber of Labor (AK), holding clear majorities in most states' chambers (ÖGB 2024b). These connections to civil society and organized labor contrast with the Party's ties to important industries. Especially in Vienna, the SPÖ is frequently criticized for allegations of corruption (Schmid 2021; Ellensohn 2023). While the political efficacy and strategic value of the SPÖ's institutional network is

difficult to assess, it remains as essential a component of their strategic resources as their presence in state governments.

4.1.4 Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)

Historically, the right-wing FPÖ has demonstrated a record of promoting environmental issues, including wildlife protection, strengthening renewables, and opposing both nuclear plants and the construction of a third runway at Vienna Airport (Voss 2019). Ideologically, the FPÖ's environmental concerns are rooted in a nationally charged anti-anthropocentrism. This perspective underpins both the environmental programs of other right-wing parties in Europe (Ćetković/Hagemann 2020) as well as the natural protection policies historically associated with the Nazi regime (Voss 2019). Consequently, rather than focusing CCM, the Party's efforts have thus largely been directed at the protection of the immediate environment in Austria. Pointing to potential economic disadvantages for Austria, the FPÖ opposes European and transnational efforts in climate politics and was the only party in the NC voting against the ratification of the PA (Parlament Österreich 2016). Instead, the FPÖ criticizes "climate hysteria" and calls for environmental measures at regional and national level (FPÖ 2019b). While the FPÖ's 2019 program acknowledges climate change as a "reality that cannot be denied" (FPÖ 2019a), former chair Heinz-Christian Strache and other party officials have repeatedly cast doubt on scientific evidence proving it to be caused by human GHG emissions (Strache 2018). Ruser and Machin (2019) link these positions with the influence of climate-sceptic think tanks, such as Austria's Friedrich Hayek Institute and the US-based Heartland Institute. However, they also note a decline in climate-sceptic statements within the FPÖ since Strache resigned in the wake of a 2019 "Ibiza Affair" corruption scandal. While human responsibility for climate change may have become more accepted in the Party, Austrian responsibility for CCM efforts has not. Instead, the FPÖ increasingly questions the efficacy of European and global efforts and expresses concerns over regulations that might overburden Austria's economy (FPÖ 2019a, 8; 2024b, 13).

Despite the environment historically being an important issue, the Party's *strategic goals* revolve around other areas, most notably immigration. In this domain, the right-wing FPÖ typically argues for more restrictive policies, calling for a "fortress Europe" and promoting "remigration", a euphemism for mass deportations used by the European alt-right (FPÖ 2024b, 7). Economically, the party is committed to a relatively unregulated form of neoliberal capitalism. The government's role in the economic sphere identified as "guaranteeing the ideal conditions for corporations to settle in Austria" (FPÖ 2019a, 7). Accordingly, European regulations or multilateral agreements are often criticized for undermining Austria's position as a business location. Thus, the FPÖ's nationalist Euroscepticism and anti-multilateralism also entails a significant economic component. In terms of identity politics, the FPÖ argues for an Austrian "Leitkultur" ("core culture"), a binary conception of gender and strict assimilation of immigrants. The party also emphasizes individual freedom – understood in a negative way as "freedom from" government intervention. This is reflected in the party's climate stance, where it positions itself as the champion of commuters and car-dependent communities, advocating for their right to own internal combustion engine (ICE) cars.

This self-proclaimed role as an advocate of drivers highlights the complicated and, at times, contradictory ways in which the FPÖ's climate politics are tied to their nationalist and populist rhetoric. In this context, Selk and Kemmerzell (2022, 766f) show that the Party employs

arguments both against *and* in favor of CCM policies. The FPÖ opposes multilateral climate politics and a more profound decarbonization of transportation, arguing that such measures would impose an economic burden on drivers and the Austrian economy. The transformation to renewables, however, is embraced as a way to protect the local environment and strengthen national sovereignty through an independent energy supply. While the Party's affirmative stance towards renewables likely relates to the scarcity of fossil resources in Austria and strong public opposition to nuclear plants, it does set the FPÖ apart from many other right-wing forces in countries with a stronger economic dependence on fossil energy sources, including the German *AfD* (ibid., 763). Despite this notable peculiarity within the European far-right, the FPÖ's vision is not aligned with GHG reduction targets. In fact, the CCCA (2019, 4) identified the Party's program to be strongly deficient across all areas of climate policy and every sector of the broader economy. The FPÖ's commitment to energy sovereignty is further undermined by their relationship to the Russian state and its energy sector, which is reflected in several specific energy-related conflicts.

The FPÖ's *conflictual strategy* will be outlined here with two focal points: energy and transportation. In recent years, the FPÖ's position on energy seems to have shifted from a fairly affirmative stance on decarbonization towards a more "pragmatic" position, which highlights the need of cheap energy for people and industry. Possible explanations for this shift include the presence of the Greens in government, which made opposing their decarbonization trajectory a politically attractive option. Another factor could be the shift in public discourse on energy from a focus on emissions and climate effects to energy costs, especially in the wake of price hikes following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The proximity of FPÖ politicians to Russian political and economic elites is well documented and has manifested in various ways, such as former chair Strache's recognition of Crimea as Russian territory (Dox 2019) as well as the Party's support for the Baltic gas-pipeline "Northstream" (Thalhammer 2019). While the pro-Russian rhetoric has been toned down since the invasion of Ukraine, the FPÖ's political and economic ties to Russia have not disappeared and continued to be a subject of discussion (Vilimsky 2024). In terms of specific policies, Russian gas imports played a crucial role in the FPÖ's disapproval of the Renewables Extension Bill (EAG). The Party's spokesman on economic policy, for instance, criticized the government's decarbonization trajectory as too hasty and argued that disregarding gas as an important bridge technology was economically unwise (FPÖ 2024a). Meanwhile, the FPÖ's disapproval of the EEffG was motivated by worries about Austria's competitiveness on energy prices and a reluctance to curtail national energy sovereignty to European competencies (FPÖ Parlamentsklub 2023; Kleine Zeitung 2023). While the Party's euroscepticism and the emphasis on competitiveness are reflected in their energy politics, their commitment to energy sovereignty fostered by a transition to renewables was thus abandoned in favor of cheap energy derived from Russian gas imports.

While the FPÖ has long been presenting itself as the champion of drivers, other forms of transportation have not been entirely neglected in the Party's programs. In fact, the FPÖ has called for an expansion of transportation infrastructure "on the road, on tracks, in the air and on water" (FPÖ 2017, 46) and acknowledged the importance of improving public transport in rural areas (FPÖ 2019a, 5). The primary focus of the Party's transportation politics, however, lies in a clear affirmation of private transport, ideologically rooted in the "human liberty to individual mobility" (FPÖ 2011, 11). Following his 2017 appointment as transportation minister, Norbert Hofer, among other initiatives, conformed to the Party's focus on private

transport by launching pilot projects to raise the speed limit on Austrian highways (ORF 2019a). After leaving office in the wake of the Ibiza Affair, however, Hofer presented climate protection as a top priority of the FPÖ (ORF 2019b; Zaunbauer/Arends 2019), pointing to the FPÖ's instrumental approach to the issue of climate protection.

Under the coalition of ÖVP and the Green Party, attempts to present the FPÖ as a "green" party were gradually abandoned in favor of a more aggressive rhetoric. One conflict where this shift is evident is the Lobau Tunnel, which the FPÖ considers necessary infrastructure. Not only has the Green Party been heavily criticized by obstructing the project (Schmitzberger 2022; Stepan 2023), but the FPÖ also tried to sue minister Gewessler, criticizing the abandonment of the Tunnel as an "excess of ideology" (Parlament Österreich 2022b). The aggressive rhetoric employed by the FPÖ in transportation debates has peaked in their response to climate protest, particularly from the *Letzte Generation* (LG) and their activist strategy of blocking roads by gluing their hands to the pavement. In response, FPÖ officials called for stricter criminal prosecution (FPÖ 2024c) – a task typically assigned to the judiciary. An FPÖ politician from Salzburg even faced legal consequences for repeatedly calling the activist group "terrorists" (APA/Der Standard 2023d). It is thus fair to state that the FPÖ has rhetorically and politically shifted towards a more aggressive and unapologetic stance against climate protection measures in recent years. Despite certain ambiguities, the FPÖ, like other parties of the radical right, presents itself as rampant defenders of an energy- and resource-intensive imperial mode of production (Eversberg 2018).

The FPÖ's *strategic resources* notably differ from the ones of other parties. While the FPÖ has been part of federal governments in the past, the latest coalition ended abruptly following the Ibiza Affair in 2019. As of late 2024, the FPÖ is governing in the Austrian states of Salzburg, Lower Austria, Upper Austria and Vorarlberg. At the regional level, the party has direct institutional access to relevant state apparatuses, as it holds the ministries for transportation and for protection of nature in three states. While the Party's proximity to Russian elites has been discussed, it is also important to note that the FPÖ is very well-connected within the European extreme right. Due to different positions in key policy areas, particularly foreign policy, the durability of some of these alliances remains unclear (Holesch/Zagórski 2023). However, both the 2024 European elections as well as the national elections in Austria, in which the FPÖ emerged as the clear winner with a vote share of 28.85 percent, suggest that these quarrels over foreign policy do not significantly impede the Party's electoral success.

Looking at the FPÖ's political and institutional resources highlights an important distinction between their own political strategy and the respective strategies and power bases of other parties, especially ÖVP and SPÖ. While the latter have managed to convert their political support into a strong presence across a range of institutions – such as the AK or ÖGB for the SPÖ and LKO or WKO for the ÖVP – the FPÖ's position in the institutional landscape of the Austrian social partnership and civil society is considerably weaker (ÖGB 2024b; WKO 2020a). However, their electoral success suggests that these traditionally Austrian forms of institutional power may have lost some of their political relevance. Instead, the FPÖ prioritizes discursive visibility and popular support, relying on their symbolic resources as a champion of the Austrian nation, internal security, and a set of individual liberties – many of which relate to resource-intensive consumption patterns and are thus central to debates on CCM. The FPÖ's

increasing influence has been documented by several electoral successes in 2024, including coming in first at both the European and the national elections as well as in some regions.

4.1.5 New Austria and Liberal Forum (NEOS)

The NEOS party, founded in 2013 through a merger of *The New Austria* and the *Liberal Forum* has since been part of the NC. NEOS strongly supports the PA, the European Green Deal, and the overall idea of transnational and multilateral climate action, while also demanding Austria to lead by example at national and regional level (NEOS 2019, 49). As a socially and economically liberal party, NEOS argues that effective climate protection can best be achieved within an ecologically modernized market economy. A key belief is that technological innovation can be fostered by targeted stimulation of investments in key sectors like EVs, H₂, or synthetic fuels (ibid., 48). Here, the EU's financial capacities are seen as a chance to either strengthen investments in sectors that exceed most single states' budget – notably AI and CCS (NEOS 2024a, 17, 26) – or measures that can be implemented in a more economical way at European level, like the harmonization of energy markets (ibid., 26). While the Party generally believes regulation to be hampering economic development, CCM measures form a notable exception. For NEOS, the decarbonization of the market economy does require regulatory action at all levels of the state. Nationally, this includes a restructuring of state subsidies, by which the state's funding is redirected from fossil industries or unsustainable agriculture to less resource-intensive sectors (NEOS 2019, 51f). At EU-level, joint efforts to ensure a level playing field both within the EU (e.g., harmonized CO₂-taxation) and globally (e.g., CO₂-tariffs) are believed to minimize risk on technology investments (NEOS 2024a, 25). Importantly, these regulatory efforts do not imply an overall increase in the state's capacity to intervene economically. Instead, climate protection measures are envisioned to be „revenue-neutral“ (ibid., 47), i.e., accompanied by deregulation measures that equalize extra costs for businesses, for instance by curtailing bureaucracy (NEOS 2024a, 17).

Several of the *strategic goals* central for NEOS are reflected in the party's overall idea of CCM. NEOS envision an ecologically modernized and socially moderated market economy within a deeply integrated European Union, explicitly referencing a “United States of Europe” (NEOS 2019, 106). For NEOS, preparing Austria and Europe for the challenges of the coming decades requires a shift towards an economy centered around seminal, innovative and less carbon-intensive sectors like EV, technology, and finance. As these industries generally rely on a formally well-educated workforce, NEOS calls for substantial investments in education (ibid., 62) as well as a European immigration policy targeted at the prioritization of highly skilled migrants (NEOS 2024a, 33). Fiscally, these innovative sectors are to be strengthened through a restructuring of state subsidies beneficial to less resource-intensive sectors. NEOS' revenue-neutral idea of restructuring state regulation thus suggests a horizontal redistribution from traditionally carbon-intensive sectors like automotive manufacturing and large-scale agriculture to more carbon-neutral industries.

NEOS' complex relationship with various fractions of the Austrian economy is also reflected in the Party's *conflictual strategy*. While generally suspicious of restrictive forms of government intervention, often pointing to its potential to hinder economic growth, NEOS, appear willing to expose carbon-intensive sectors of the Austrian economy, like agriculture and automotive, to stronger regulation. They also advocate for reducing these sectors' privileges, including subsidies or tax cuts. Instead, government support is supposed to be redirected towards less

carbon-intensive sectors, like technology start-ups or finance, which typically feature a more urban and formally educated workforce. In transportation, NEOS have positioned against the Lobau Tunnel, calling for an extension of public transport capacities in the area instead (NEOS Parlamentsklub 2021b). In energy matters, the party has repeatedly supported government initiatives despite their assertion of them being too unambitious. For instance, NEOS supported the EAG while also pointing out that the bill should only mark the first step in an energy transition, while also calling for a reduction of bureaucracy (NEOS Parlamentsklub 2021a). This way, the Party aims to enhance planning security in the energy sector and make it easier for new competitors to enter the market (NEOS 2019, 48). Generally, NEOS rarely chooses to engage in confrontational strategies or exhibit aggressive rhetoric in climate politics. Instead, the government's initiatives in this field are either supported – like most of the coalitions energy policies – or the government's incapacity to follow through on some of their announced programs – like the renewal of CPA and NECP (NEOS 2023; 2024b) – is criticized.

As a relatively young party, the *strategic resources* of NEOS are considerably more limited than those of other parties represented in the NC. However, after their first successful national election campaign in 2013, NEOS has maintained a continuous presence in the NC as well as in six out of the nine state parliaments. Since 2020, NEOS has been the SPÖ's partner in the Viennese government coalition, holding a single ministry for education and transparency. Being around for slightly more than a decade only, the Party's presence within the institutional landscape of the Austrian social partnership and civil society is relatively weak. Regarding the social partnership, this might be amplified by NEOS' criticism of the compulsory membership in the three chambers – AK, LKO and WKO – as bureaucratic and obsolete (NEOS 2019, 62). Despite these weaker institutional ties, NEOS enjoys considerable support in some sectors of the Austrian economy, including the construction sector in which one of the Party's founders and key financial backers, Hans Peter Haselsteiner, built his fortune (APA/Der Standard 2023a). At the discursive level, the Party's association with prioritizing education and – at least in some milieus – also with European integration are among its most valuable symbolic resources. Additionally, NEOS' reputation as a business-friendly party that credibly takes an anti-corruption stance represents a unique selling point within Austria's party system. After the 2024 elections, NEOS entered talks with both the ÖVP and the SPÖ, with the aim to sound out the possibility of a three-party coalition, which would lead to the Party's first representation in federal government.

4.2 Movements and Civil Society

Due to the scope of this paper, the wide array of social movements and civil society organizations cooperating on and engaging in climate politics in Austria cannot be entirely represented. This section will thus focus on four key actors: the *Popular Petition on Climate* (KVB), the *Climate Council of Austria* (CCA) as well as the respective Austrian branches of both *FridaysForFuture* (FFF) and the protest movement *Letzte Generation* (LG). In a phase of heightened civil society engagement with climate change, these movements and organizations are believed to allow for a sufficient overview over the landscape of the Austrian civil society engaged in climate protection. This selection spans a broad spectrum of approaches, ranging from formal procedures and policy counselling (KVB and CCA) to protest (FFF) and civil disobedience (LG).

Unlike political parties, these civil society actors are characterized by their distinct focus on climate change as their primary issue. This narrower focus results in a different set of strategic priorities and interests. More precisely, movements are structurally less inclined to moderate between various, partially contradictory targets and compromise on their climate-related demands. Compared to parties and especially organized interest groups, they emphasize discursive strategies and are less influenced by political or material interests in shaping their demands, programs, or strategies. The availability of sources and literature is considerably lower, especially compared to political parties. While some civil society actors regularly engage in extensive social media coverage or even publish scientific papers on climate-related issues, such efforts are often isolated. The relatively small body of source material is likely also due to interest from both media and researchers – if there was considerable interest – focusing on their form of protest rather than their demands. Nevertheless, the movements and organizations analyzed here provide valuable insights into and help to complete the picture of civil society engagement in CCM in Austria after 2019.

4.2.1 Popular Petition on Climate (KVB)

The Popular Petition on Climate (“*Klimavolksbegehren*” or KVB) was a popular petition initiated in 2018 and supported by various actors including Green Party politicians, FFF and Greenpeace activists, and the Viennese Chamber of Labor (KVB 2019). By the end of June 2020, the KVB had managed to gather 380.000 signatures and thus easily exceeded the threshold of 100.000 signatures necessary to force a discussion of a popular petition’s demands in parliament (ORF 2020). The KVB sees climate change as an enormous threat to the Austrian and global population who are already suffering from its effects (KVB 2018, 33). Moreover, its supporters believe that successful CCM not only requires efforts at global, national and regional level, but also binding rules by which policymakers are tied to climate targets (ibid.). Lacking such a binding legal framework, the Austrian polity is considered unsuitable to ensure that political decisions are in line with climate targets and thus in need of reform.

The KVB’s *strategic goals* are clearly defined as they are reflected in the Petition’s demands. For one thing, the Petition aimed to initiate specific CCM policies such as an eco-social tax reform or public investments into the transition towards renewables, and a low-emission transport infrastructure (KVB 2018, 36ff). Secondly, the KVB called for reforming the polity in a way that ties policymakers to adhere to the PA’s targets, strengthens transparency and popular control in the political process, and promotes citizen participation. To this end, the petition demanded a constitutional amendment codifying the public’s right to climate protection as well as scientifically substantiated, legally binding, and sector-specific CO₂-budgets in a new CPA. To ensure political adherence to these budgets, the KVB called for the creation of a new and independent climate audit court overseeing the alignment of both existing and future policies with the emissions targets (ibid., 33ff). Thirdly, the further development of policies is then envisioned to foster public participation, in order to promote public acceptance of and support for political efforts to mitigate climate change. Here, the KVB suggested the establishment of citizens’ councils (ibid., 39).

The *conflictual strategy* employed by the KVB is characterized by the various involved activists’ and politicians’ decision to join forces in raising public awareness and collecting the required signatures. In Austria, the popular petition is a direct-democratic instrument, by which citizens can force parliament to discuss a specific issue after collecting 100.000 signatures. It does,

however, not have a binding character and therefore does not directly influence the decisions made in the NC. Recognizing this, the activists formulated their criticism and their demands in a way that does not stop at pointing out climate related shortcomings of the Austrian government's policies. Instead, they were also geared towards a lack of transparency and popular control in climate politics and make suggestions for reforming the political process to increase government accountability and popular participation, e.g. through the new audit court and citizens' councils. Ironically, the lack of accountability and popular control criticized in the petition is reflected in the ways the initiative was taken up by parliament and the government.

As is often the case with initiatives from the civil society, the KVB's *strategic resources* were fairly limited. On the one hand, the popular petition raised public awareness for the deficits in Austrian climate politics and forced their demands onto the agenda of the NC. Once in parliament, however, there is no obligation for MPs to further consider or even implement the petition's demands (Parlament Österreich n.d.). Thus, policymakers were effectively given the opportunity to selectively adopt demands and strategies catering to their own strategic interests. While a binding and sector-specific CO₂-budget in the CPA was taken up as a demand by the Green Party, it has not been implemented or credibly pursued by the federal government so far. Likewise, the constitutional amendment guaranteeing climate protection was never initiated. While an eco-social tax reform was adopted (4.1.2), the KVB's supporters most likely had envisioned a more profound reform. Arguably, the only demand taken up by the climate ministry and the federal government – the CCA (4.2.2) – is the one most unlikely to reform the Austrian polity in a way that significantly enhances accountability and popular control in climate politics.

4.2.2 Climate Citizens' Assembly (CCA)

The NC's decision to initiate the *Climate Citizens' Assembly* (CCA) in early 2021 was a political reaction to the successful campaign of the KVB. The CCA was designed to compile 100 people who are demographically representative of the Austrian population. Their task was to "discuss and devise concrete suggestions for the attainment of necessary climate protection measures to achieve climate neutrality by 2040" in a participatory process (BMK n.d.). The process was supported by scientists and representatives of the social partners. The results would be presented to the federal government as non-binding suggestions. Here, the CCA emphasizes the necessity for Austria to adhere to multilateral agreements and strengthen global alliances in order to effectively mitigate climate change. For the CCA, this requires an inclusive approach to climate protection on national as well as international level. Nationally, climate policies should always be flanked by social policies ensuring the costs of climate mitigation do not overstrain the poor. Internationally, Austria should be keen on supporting the climate protection measures in the Global South financially as well as by providing expertise (CCA 2022, 57). In its fundamental suggestions, the KVB's original demands are still reflected. For instance, the CCA calls for a constitutional right to climate protection, increasing transparency, as well as a phase-out of subsidies of carbon-intensive industries (ibid., 59). Going beyond the KVB's demands, however, the CCA's suggestions contain specific measures in five issue areas: energy, consumption and production, nutrition and land use, housing, and mobility.

The fact that the CCA is compiled from randomly selected people all over Austria makes it seem unlikely that they all share a common strategic goal. However, there are some aspects

of the assembly's suggestions pointing to their priorities in the field of climate protection. One such priority consists in a fair distribution of the burdens and challenges arising from the economic and social reconfigurations a decarbonization may entail. This is exemplified by the redistribution of the revenue from CO₂-taxation or providing professional retraining for workers in carbon-intensive sectors (CCA 2022, 59). Another notable aspect concerns the suggestions' granular character. On the one hand, the CCA's demands are very detail-oriented, calling for an improvement of heat recovery in office buildings' server rooms (ibid., 80), on the other hand, these small elements are considered as part of a comprehensive and transformative climate protection strategy. A third aspect reflects the KVB's demand to improve the Austrian polity. For the CCA, this includes making climate protection a constitutional right, fostering citizen participation, and strengthening multilateral alliances (ibid., 57f).

As the CCA's role of deliberating and presenting policy suggestions to the federal government was largely determined in advance, its *conflictual strategy* developed in a fairly narrow corridor. However, the CCA's final recommendations suggest that strategic decisions were made in favor of a fairly ambitious transition whilst pointing out sector-specific targets and detailed measures in the five issue areas mentioned above. The make-up of the assembly as a group broadly representative of the Austrian population thus speaks for the public being relatively supportive of ambitious climate protection not only in the form of abstract targets but also in the form of manifest policies. This is reinforced by the fact that, while a small number of recommendations sparked objections by participants, the overwhelming majority of the CCA's demands were made unanimously (ibid., 91).

The fact that the CCA's demands are called "recommendations" already points to their non-binding character. The assembly's *strategic resources* are thus largely limited to voicing suggestions to policymakers, who themselves are free to take them up or not. Symbolically, the representative character of the CCA was called into question by the exclusion of non-vaccinated people, a group overrepresented among supporters of the FPÖ (Novak 2020). In fact, the CCA was associated with party politics and the federal climate ministry and the minister Leonore Gewessler of the Green Party (Buzogány et al. 2022, 7). While the CCA's legitimacy and impartiality were thus called into question by relevant parts of the public, the assembly did manage to gain media attention and raise public awareness. It also led to the foundation of the "Association of the Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly" who represent a new actor in the institutional landscape of the Austrian civil society (Verein des österreichischen Klimarats der Bürger:innen n.d.).

4.2.3 FridaysForFuture (FFF)

The Austrian branch of FridaysForFuture (FFF) was initiated by university students in early 2019 and has quickly become an important progressive force within the branch of the Austrian civil society engaged in climate protection. The group's situation analysis is characterized by a sense of urgency, an emphasis on the incontestability of the scientific evidence for human-induced climate change, as well as a specific form of strategic pragmatism. FFF's list of demands, for instance, is headed by the assertion that "To ensure survival on this planet, global warming must stay below 1.5°C and closes stating that "If these demands cannot be met within the current system, system change is needed!" (FFF n.d.-c). The current political system of liberal democracy and a socially moderated market economy is thus not presented as contradictory

to more ambitious climate protection. Instead, government representatives and, more generally speaking, politicians are the main addressees of FFF's demands. Accordingly, "putting pressure on politicians to make things change" was the most frequent motive for participation in a 2019 FFF demonstration (Daniel/Deutschmann 2019, 60). A majority of participants did, however, also state their distrust in the government's capability to solve environmental problems (ibid., 65).

Fundamentally, the movement's *strategic goals* are oriented towards the adherence to the PA and its target to limit global heating to 1.5°C. On a political level, FFF has i.a. called for declaring a state of climate emergency, a constitutional amendment guaranteeing climate protection, as well as the phase-out of oil, coal and gas by 2030 and a reduction of GHG-emissions by 50% by 2025 and down to net-zero by 2030 (FFF n.d.-c). These scientifically informed yet fairly abstract demands are then connected to more concrete projects and policies. This can either be in a negative way, like with the Lobau Tunnel or a proposed third runway at the Viennese airport (ibid.), or in a positive way, seen in the movement's call for an extension of wind energy farms in the Lower Austrian *Waldviertel* region (FFF 2023). The movement's wider demands for politicians to find a way to adhere to the PA are thus accompanied by manifest policy proposals, many of which are regional in scale and hence correspond to FFF's decentralized structure.

FFF's dominant *conflictual strategy* has evolved over the past years. After school strikes had initially been employed to provoke a debate and capture the public's attention, this approach has largely made way for mass demonstrations as the central strategic element. The highest attendance at an Austrian FFF demonstration was achieved in 2019 when 150.000 people – the police spoke of half as many – joined the protest (Der Standard 2019). In the wake of the Covid-19-pandemic, these numbers plummeted and have not fully recovered since, even though protests in Vienna attracted as many as 25.000 participants in 2023 (Kurier 2023). In Austria and elsewhere, the movement has also strengthened its ties to other social movements and associated "ForFuture" groups representing a particular group or sector – e.g. ScientistsForFuture or ParentsForFuture – have become increasingly present. Moreover, the movement started to form alliances beyond the realm of environmentalism. Notably, FFF was among the initiators of mass demonstrations reacting to protagonists of the German and Austrian extreme right plotting deportations of migrants and people with an immigrant background along with German politicians in early 2024 (Wohlgenannt 2024b). In another instance, the movement joint forces with the transportation workers' trade union *vida* to start the campaign *Wir fahren gemeinsam* ("We ride together"). The campaign demands pay raises and an improvement of working conditions for bus drivers in Austria, putting emphasis on the centrality of public transport workers for sustainable mobility (Wir fahren gemeinsam 2024).

Measuring an actor's *strategic resources* is especially hard for decentralized movements like FFF. However, it can be assumed that the movement's strategic resources are largely of a discursive or symbolic nature. While FFF has, for instance, been consulted along with other stakeholders in the development of the CMS (BMK 2024a), the degree to which the movement can exert any direct influence on the decision-making in climate politics is limited. The buzz generated and public awareness raised by the school strikes and mass demonstrations, however, is likely to have influenced political agenda-setting, especially in the early phase of FFF in Austria. Regarding the run-up to the 2019 national election, Eberl et al. (2020, 1355f)

show that the issue of climate change and its mitigation surpassed immigration to be the most salient issue for all parties' voters apart from the FPÖ. Daniel et al. (2020, 381) further suggest that the movements' capacity to draw attention to the climate crisis during this period had an influence on the Greens' remarkably high result, leading to their first participation in federal government. However, while the Green Party is commonly associated with climate protection, their increased vote tally and government participation do, of course, not equal effective climate mitigation. This is also reflected in FFF's criticism of the Greens' climate politics in government (FFF Austria n.d.-a). While the publicity-oriented approach of FFF is likely to have contributed to a strong discursive presence, the government's inaction in important issue areas – such as the CPA – also lays bare the limitations of such strategy.

4.2.4 *Letzte Generation (LG)*

The Austrian branch of the protest movement *Letzte Generation* (“Last Generation” or LG) was formed in 2022 in the context of the Lobau Tunnel protests (Fink/Krutzler 2024). Like the German namesake group or the British movement “Just Stop Oil”, they are best known for their activist strategies rooted in civil disobedience, especially the blockade of transport infrastructure like roads or airports. Regarding their *situation analysis*, the LG does show strong similarities to FFF. While the group's perspective on climate change is thus strongly guided by scientific facts, their communication tends to be particularly alarmist. Besides its name – which refers to being the last generation before environmental collapse – this is also reflected in their emphasis on the destructive consequences of climate change for nature and society. An important aspect of the LG's messaging also lies in the assertion that there is strong scientific evidence for both the causes of climate change and the effectiveness of strategies to mitigate it (LG n.d.-a). Starting from this insight, the LG frequently criticizes the Austrian government's inaction in key policy areas and points out the local and global injustices of the climate crisis.

The *strategic goals* of the LG range from legal demands like a constitutional right to climate protection to more specific policies, such as lowering the speed limit on Austrian highways or the halt to fracking projects in Lower Austria (LG 2022; Peterlik 2022). The group further demands an implementation of the CCA's policy recommendations (4.2.2), including an effective CO₂-taxation, an expansion of transnational climate alliances and a restructuring of the labor market oriented to suit CCM targets (ibid.). The LG thus fully endorses the CCA's recommendations and sees them as evidence for the possibility to achieve socially just solutions and mitigation strategies to climate change by fostering engagement and citizen participation. The LG thus describes their strategic target as “in Austria, in which these solutions are implemented, their cost is distributed fairly and the exploitation or destruction of livelihoods is ended” (LG n.d.-b). While the demands of the LG largely fall in line with the ones raised by FFF, the CCA, and the KVB, one of their fundamental goals being the disruption and agitation of the public still sets them apart from most other climate movements. Citing scientific evidence for the efficacy of civil disobedience (Stephan/Chenoweth 2008), the group is convinced that the confrontation of people in their everyday life will generate public attention and help enforce more ambitious climate protection measures (LG n.d.-c). From this perspective, drawing attention to the climate crisis is not merely a strategic element for the LG, but rather itself constitutes one of the group's strategic goals and is reflected in their strategic choices accordingly.

The LG's *conflictual strategy* has largely been rooted in their goal to capture and maintain the public's attention and draw it to both the climate crisis itself as well as political shortcomings in its mitigation. Their focus on blockades and other forms of civil disobedience has been explained with both their efficacy and their immediate character. While, for instance, petitions and mass demonstrations were neglected by the LG as too easily ignorable, the formation of a political party was considered too lengthy and costly to do the acuteness of the climate crisis any justice (LG n.d.-c). Similarly, forms of direct action towards large-scale polluters or political institutions were disregarded, as they were believed to not attract the same amount of public attention as covering famous artworks in paint or the infamous practice of blocking roads by gluing their hands onto the pavement (ibid.). While the latter has been the LG's most divisive and discursively visible form of protest, the movement chose to diversify their tactics. In early 2024, the German branch of the LG announced that they will stop road blockades in favor of other forms of action targeting political elites and fossil infrastructure (Hensel 2024). While the Austrian LG did not choose to fully abandon blocking roads, they followed their German sister organization in announcing a diversification of strategies and an intensification of protest in the run-up to the 2024 national election (Welebil 2024). In August 2024, however, the Austrian LG issued a statement in which the movement publicly announced the end of their protests. Emphasizing the financial and psychological burden of criminalization, government repression and death threats, the group stated that it "no longer sees a perspective for success" and wants to "make room for something new to emerge" (LG 2024).

Another aspect of the LG's strategy worthy of being discussed here concerns the widely perceived contrast between their fairly moderate, almost humble demands and their forms of protest, which are often associated with radicality and criticism of the system at large. Looking at the German branch, Rucht (2023, 189) points out that, like FFF but unlike many activist groups engaged in strategies of direct action, the LG hardly raised these systemic questions and instead chose to focus on specific climate-related policy demands and a citizens' council on climate protection. Against this background, the perceived radicality of the LG's protests can, in Germany and Austria alike, hardly be seen as an expression of their desire to systemic political change, but rather of their frustration with the inertia of policymakers and the political system in Austria. In the Interpretation below (5.1), it will be discussed how this relates to the larger developments of climate politics in Austria in the years after 2019.

As a protest movement, the LG's *strategic resources* have largely been located at the discursive or symbolic level, as the group did not command larger material resources or have privileged access to institutions and other political levers. However, it is important to note that the LG did not strive to gather public support but instead tried to capture the public's attention and draw it to the climate crisis. The extensive media coverage and heated discussion on the group's practices speak to their success in attracting attention. To what extent this has helped the LG – and climate activism in general – to enforce more ambitious and scientifically guided climate protection measures, is subject to debate. While the German branch of FFF publicly criticized their national LG group's strategy as too divisive (dpa/ZDF heute 2023), FFF Austria has expressed their solidarity with the LG, especially concerning the rampant criminalization of climate protest politically justified with the group's activist strategies (FFF n.d.-b). This is remarkable, as the public trust and support – which is central to FFF's own strategy – has been in heavy decline for both movements since the formation of the LG's Austrian branch (OGM/APA 2023b). The LG's organization in the *A22 Network* – an international alliance of

climate movements engaged in similar forms of protest – further speaks to some organizational resources at the Group’s hands. The ongoing protraction of the CPA and the reluctance to implement the CCA’s demands, however, point to the lack of leverage characteristic for civil society actors engaged in climate protection. The termination of their activities in August 2024 must be seen against the background of multiple factors: the unresponsive character of Austrian policymaking on climate, the criminalization and intensification of repressive measures against climate activists and the LG in particular, and the Group’s lack of strategic resources to withstand these repressions in the long run. While the end of the LG does, of course, also raise questions of a strategic nature, as of Summer 2024, it is too early to assess the Group’s legacy in a substantiated way.

4.3 Organized Interest Groups

With the exception of the Federation of Austrian Industries (*Industriellenvereinigung* or IV), the organized interest groups discussed in this section are formally part of the neo-corporatist structure of the Austrian social partnership. The social partners are institutions tasked with mediating between the diverging economic interests inscribed in the capitalist economic structure. They are responsible for functions like the negotiation of collective agreements, which have a very high prevalence throughout the Austrian economy, and have a set of privileges allowing them to intervene in the legislative process. The social partners, for instance, have the right to review and initiate draft bills or to be represented in various bodies of the governing authorities (Talos/Hinterseer 2019). The Austrian Trade Union Federation (*Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund* or ÖGB) and the Chamber of Labor (*Arbeiterkammer* or AK), broadly speaking, represent the interest of workers, whereas the Austrian Economic Chamber (*Wirtschaftskammer* or WKO) and the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture (*Landwirtschaftskammer* or LKO) represent the respective interests of businesses in the overall Austrian economy or the agricultural sector. While membership in the three chambers – AK, WKO and LKO – is compulsory, ÖGB and IV have voluntary membership.

Overall, the Austrian political economy is known for its neo-corporatist character and the relatively large influence of organized interest groups, making them a factor in many issue areas, including climate politics. Unlike both parties and movements, organized interest groups are tasked with serving the direct material interests of their members (Bischof 1996). Both their considerable influence on policymakers as well as the more immediate relationship between their strategic priorities and manifest material interests of classes and class fractions make their analysis especially insightful. Importantly, however, the high degree of centralization throughout the Austrian social partnership has the potential to obscure the policy quarrels among class fractions and potential clashes of interest between different economic sectors and their representatives. While sectoral unions or branch associations elsewhere may regularly engage in public debates over policies, this is rarely the case in Austria. Instead, intersectoral organizations like ÖGB or WKO often take positions that mediate between the partially diverging interests of their respective members. Of course, this does not eliminate sectoral differences. In some cases, these will be considered in the analysis below. In most cases, however, the extensive character of this analysis did not allow for the in-depth research necessary to lay bare the differences among various economic sectors and the organizations representing them.

4.3.1 Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB)

Finding a single, somewhat coherent and meaningful *situation analysis* shared by the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) and all its sectoral trade unions is simply impossible. As Soder et al. (2018) point out, the stance towards environmental questions has historically been a conflictive issue within Austrian unions. In fact, Austrian trade unions have repeatedly been important adversaries of environmental movements in the past (Brand/Niedermoser 2019). This became evident, for instance, when unions joined forces with energy producers to secure cheap energy prices believed to enhance job security and thus increase workers' bargaining power (ibid., 523). In recent years, however, environmental issues and particularly the climate crisis have become increasingly central within the statements of Austrian trade unions. While the ÖGB's 2013 program did include a four-page section on „ecologization“, the 2023 program starts with fourteen pages laying out the concept of a „just transition“ (ÖGB 2013; 2023). Here, the ÖGB argues for an active role of trade unions in the decarbonization of the Austrian economy and calls for an approach reconciling climate protection with employment, decent wages and equality (ÖGB 2023a, 10). In other words, the ÖGB acknowledges the relevance of CCM for the material interests of workers in the future. While the strategic focus on economic growth has long complicated the Federation's relationship with climate protection, the ÖGB seems to have come to terms with the inevitability of climate change as a historic challenge. Accordingly, they increasingly emphasize the need to advance workers' interests within the project of climate protection, rather than against it.

That being said, the fundamental *strategic goal* of trade unions is to organize workers and collectively fight for better wages, working conditions and job security. To what extent this goal conflicts with environmentalism and climate protection strongly depends on both the economic sector and the historical context. It is fair to say that the ÖGB has become increasingly aware of the degree to which climate change affects the Austrian economy and the world of work. This is exemplified by the federation's positive reference to concepts like “socio-ecological transformation” or “just transition”, which emphasize the potential synergies between industrial action and climate protection (ÖGB 2023a, 10ff). Moreover, the climate crisis is presented as a security hazard for workers forced to work in high heat more regularly (ibid., 15). Acknowledging these potential synergies, however, it is important to bear in mind that, especially in resource-intensive sectors, the immediate interest of workers may very well still contradict many CCM measures. In the context of feed-in-tariffs, for instance, Brand and Pawloff (2014) describe how the ÖGB strategically joined forces with the other social partners to obstruct a bill designed to attract investments into renewables. Understanding to what extent the shift in the unions' rhetoric is rooted in a profound strategic re-orientation within the field of climate politics thus requires a look at the Federation's positioning in more recent climate-related conflicts. While the Austrian system of trade unions and organized labor is fairly centralized, it is also important to consider the differences between various economic sectors. As the sectoral unions are – legally and financially – highly dependent on the ÖGB, their individual and sector-specific scope is limited. In some conflicts, however, the differences in sectors' interests do materialize in different strategies, as a look at the trade unions' conflictual strategies will show.

The *conflictual strategies* employed by the ÖGB show that organized labor's stance towards climate protection strongly depends on the specifics of individual CCM measures. While the ÖGB's (2023a, 116) demand for shorter working hours, for instance, is considered beneficial

to an overall reduction of GHG emissions (Liebig 2019), the president of the construction sector's union (GBH) criticized the abandonment of the Lobau Tunnel as weakening transport infrastructure and leading to longer commutes for workers (ÖGB 2021). Contrasted with the joint initiative of vda and FFF (4.2.3), this underscores the complex relationship between environmentalism and organized labor. While a new and sector-specific CPA has been called for by some trade unionists at joint demonstrations with environmental groups (ÖGB 2023b), union support for the bill may ultimately depend on its details. In 2015, for instance, a draft amendment was criticized for its particularly ambitious reduction targets in the housing and construction sector (ÖGB 2015). In this resource-intensive sector, the inconsistencies of the unions' relationship with climate protection are easily recognized. In 2023, ÖGB and GBH, the sectoral union for construction, joined FFF in demanding higher subsidies for housing refurbishment (Frei 2023) and started a campaign criticizing exposure to heat in the workplace (GBH 2023). In early 2024, however, GBH sided with the WKO in calling for a stimulus in the construction branch and expressing their support for the government's bill (Szigetvari 2024; Hehemann 2024), which had been criticized for being unambitious in restraining soil sealing and subsidizing resource-intensive stand-alone houses (Wohlgenannt 2024a).

In energy policy, a field where the ÖGB had opposed several CCM measures in the past, the Federation seems to have adopted a more nuanced but coherent position. In a 2020 statement reacting to a draft of the EAG, the ÖGB generally expressed their support for the bill, while also pointing out potential improvements. The proposed alterations are supposed to mitigate potential burdens the bill might entail for workers, ranging from a proposed program offering advanced training in renewable energy technologies to an energy price-cap for low-income households (ÖGB 2020). Another aspect is an urge to consider the development of energy-intensive sectors like steel and transportation in the conception of future energy infrastructure (ibid., 2). While the tensions between specific CCM measures and the Federation's interest in the economic development of energy-intensive industries is acknowledged here, the ÖGB's positioning on the EAG documents a shift towards a more positive stance on the decarbonization of the energy sector.

The *strategic resources* commanded by the ÖGB must not be underestimated. In his comparative analysis of 24 industrial democracies of the Global North, Siaroff (1999) has shown that Austria is not only the most corporatist country of all, the Austrian social partnership as a specific neo-corporatist structure is also centered around a small number of powerful labor confederations. Austria's society and economy have undergone considerable changes over the last 25 years. When the study was published, the economic effects of the 1995 accession to the EU were still developing and the Global Financial Crisis along austerity measures it sparked was yet to come. More recent analyzes, however, have found the Austrian social partnership to be institutionally resilient (Pernicka/Hefler 2015). It is thus fair to describe the ÖGB and the Austrian trade unions as powerful institutions with considerable influence. The leverage at the disposal of trade unions is manifold. First and foremost, unions can organize collective bargaining and pay disputes, believably threatening employers with strikes or other forms of industrial action. While union membership numbers differ by economic sector, the overall collective bargaining coverage of 98 percent is exceptionally high in Austria (OECD 2024). While striking is the most effective strategic resource in disputes with employers, it is not typically used to apply pressure on policymakers. Here, however, the Federation's status as a social partner grants them considerable access to the legislative process, including

the right to review draft bills and even issue some of their own. As mentioned above (4.1.3), the ÖGB's relationship with the SPÖ is particularly close. Accordingly, their influence is heightened under a social democratic government. Still, their institutional strength and their privileges as a social partner make the Austrian unions powerful actors whose strategic resources exceed those at the hands of organized labor in many other countries. Whether the Federation's strategic re-orientation towards a more supportive stance on climate protection will solidify may thus prove to be decisive for future policymaking on CCM in Austria.

4.3.2 Chamber of Labor (AK)

The Chamber of Labor (AK) complements trade unions as the second institution representing workers within the Austrian social partnership. Unlike with unions, membership in the AK is compulsory for all employees in Austria. In 2024, the AK thus represented more than 4 million workers (BAK n.d.). The Chamber has a regional branch in each of the 9 Austrian federal states, but it is not divided by economic sector. Tasked with representing all workers' interests, the AK's remit includes consulting and other services for workers, issuing studies and reports, or exerting their influence in the legislative process. An important distinction from the ÖGB is that the AK is not responsible for the collective bargaining of wages. As a result, the AK's perspective on societal questions is typically wider and tends to go further beyond the immediate sphere of wage labor, especially when compared to the sectoral unions within the ÖGB. With regard to climate protection, however, their history of impeding CCM measures is a common feature. Like the ÖGB, the AK opposed the introduction of feed-in-tariffs for renewables in 2004. Along with the other social partners, it was argued that such tariffs would lead to an increase in energy prices and ultimately undermine the competitiveness of Austrian businesses (Brand/Pawloff 2014, 786f). Calling i.e., for comprehensive investments in decarbonization and more protection for people working in high heat (Anderl et al. 2024), the AK's communication suggests that the Chamber has since adopted a more progressive stance in climate-related conflicts. This is also documented by the 2022 launch of the AK's own Academy for Social Ecological Transformation (Akademie für sozialen und ökologischen Umbau 2024). Bearing in mind the complicated positioning in past conflicts, however, it will be instructive to take a closer look at the AK's strategic goals and their actual strategic behavior in recent policy conflicts.

The social partner's 2004 alliance against feed-in-tariffs illustrates the complexities of the AK's positioning on climate protection, as it points to an overlap in the *strategic goals* of the otherwise often antagonistic institutions within the Austrian social partnership. Both capital (represented by WKO and IV) and labor (represented by ÖGB and AK) have frequently opposed regulation-based approaches to climate protection in fear of it undermining competitiveness and profitability as well as – in the case of labor – job security and workers' collective bargaining power. On the other hand, social partners regularly express their support for public investment programs in future technologies or infrastructure, expecting it to be more beneficial to the overall economic development and hence their respective fundamental targets of strengthening the position of workers. In the case of the AK, this is exemplified by their call to extend the federal investment volume in energy and transportation by up to 86.5 billion Euros before 2030 (Plank/Miess 2023). Specific demands include a restructuring of the EU's fiscal rules, an intensification of efforts in employment and advanced vocational training as well as enhancing predictability for businesses willing to invest in decarbonization and future technologies (ibid., 4ff). The Chamber calling for an investment program of this

unprecedented magnitude suggests that the AK seeks to reconcile climate change mitigation and the material interests of workers in Austria. Instead of hampering economic development and thus undermining the bargaining power of workers by introducing further regulation, the AK's preferred strategy can be understood as a stimulus designed to foster economic growth and job security in an ambitious decarbonization program. The AK does therefore not generally oppose CCM efforts, but instead calls for policymakers to overcome austerity budgets in order to safeguard employment in the course of these efforts.

The AK's *conflictual strategy* generally differs from the one employed by trade unions in that it has a wider focus, typically going beyond the immediate realm of wage labor and industrial action. For instance, the AK offers various kinds of advisory services for their members and is very active in funding studies or issuing other publications. By their role as a social partner, the AK also has the right to review draft bills and propose bills of their own. Depending on the specific policy at stake, the AK's strategic behavior in recent conflicts has been variegated. With regard to the Lobau Tunnel, the Chamber supported the project from its outset. In a joint press conference with the chair of the WKO, former AK president Rudolf Kaske justified the social partners' support for the tunnel with the creation of 25.000 jobs and the economic development in Vienna's exurbs (ORF 2017). While project's politicization and the 2021 freeze did spark internal debate in the AK, the Chamber's support for the project and its swift realization was confirmed in a 2021 general assembly of its Viennese branch (FCG-ÖAAB 2021). In the field of transportation, the AK's positioning in recent conflicts has thus been characterized by internal debate and trade-offs between CCM and job security, in which – at least this was the case with the Lobau Tunnel – the priority of the latter was asserted.

Importantly, however, this does not seem to be the case in many other conflicts – even those around regulation measures. The NRL, for instance, was identified as an opportunity for Austria to meaningfully promote climate protection. In AK publications, the Länder were called upon to give up their blockade of the bill (Mayr 2024) – a step later appreciated by the AK after two SPÖ-governed states had done so (AK Wien 2024). Similarly, the AK expressed their support for the EEffG and even criticized the preliminary version sent out for review as too unambitious. Specifically, the AK took issue with the possibility of financial penalties in the billions, if European targets were not met. The bill's focus on increasing energy efficiency by a combination of voluntary and fiscal measures was further criticized as running a high risk of missing the EU's marks (BAK 2023, 2). The Chamber's positioning in these two legislative processes points to a shift in strategy concerning regulation-based approaches to climate protection. While the AK still calls for investment programs as an important element of decarbonization, its opposition to ecological regulation seems to have been moderated in recent years. As we will see below, this sets the AK apart from the other social partners in a meaningful way.

While the AK's *strategic resources* are manifold, several of them directly relate to its status as a social partner. Its membership figure of over 4 million people, for instance, would have hardly been possible without compulsory membership. As its funding largely rests on membership fees, this also concerns the Chamber's financial capability. The right to review and issue draft bills constitutes a third important strategic advantage stemming from the AK's role in the institutional landscape of Austrian neo-corporatism. At a discursive level, the AK enjoys an excellent reputation as a highly trustworthy institution, exceeding the Austrian population's

trust towards political institutions as well as the other social partners by far (OGM/APA 2023a). As the AK traditionally entertains close relations to the SPÖ – the party still holds a clear majority in most states’ plenary assemblies (ÖGB 2024b) – their knowledge of and strategic influence on decision-making in government may well depend on whether the social democrats are in charge. As we will see below, this is especially true in terms of the AK’s relative influence, considering that the political influence of the other chambers is increased under a conservative government.

4.3.3 Austrian Chamber of Agriculture (LKO)

In a joint program for biodiversity and climate protection issued with the ÖVP-affiliated *Bauernbund*, the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture (*Landwirtschaftskammer* or LKO) states that climate protection is “one of the greatest challenges on our planet” and calls for a drastic reduction of GHG emissions and a decarbonization of the Austrian economy and energy system (LKO/Bauernbund 2021, 4). While the LKO endorses the PA and multilateral efforts in climate politics, EU-regulations are criticized as an excessive burden for European farmers hampering their global competitiveness. Notably, however, the LKO does not present the dilution of European standards as the only viable option, but also sees the establishment of these regulations beyond the European single market as a way to avoid carbon leakage and strengthen overall climate protection (ibid., 8). Nevertheless, specific European regulations are disapproved of by the Chamber in most cases. In reaction to the European Green Deal, for instance, the LKO expressed their concern for overregulation and stressed that Austrian regulatory standards in agriculture are relatively high already. The signing organizations thus object to measures like the abandonment of a portion of farmland to foster biodiversity and instead call for measures like the public funding of research and digitalization efforts in agriculture to enhance sustainability in the sector (LKO et al. 2020). Generally, the LKO opposes stricter regulation and argues for the innovative potential of market-based approaches and incentives. In this context, LKO and *Bauernbund* (2021, 5f) call for the retention of the “tried and tested eco-social market economy” – a wording frequently used by the ÖVP to argue for a market-oriented approach to climate change (4.1.1).

As the social partner representing the agricultural sector, the primary *strategic goal* of the LKO is to protect the business interests in farming and forestry. Due to this narrower focus, the LKO is a small organization, especially in comparison to both AK and WKO. In the context of climate politics, however, it is still important to acknowledge both the relevance of agriculture as well as the complexity of the LKO’s interests in the context of CCM. In fact, the LKO was described as the chamber with the most progressive stance on environmental questions in the past (Tobin 2017, 41; Brand/Pawloff 2014, 785f). This status is still reflected in the energy sector, where the LKO supports a complete decarbonization of electricity by 2030 and the overall Austrian economy by 2040. Such a decarbonization, however, is considered possible only under an “intensive integration of and optimal cooperation with forestry and agriculture” (LKO/Bauernbund 2021, 24f). As agricultural operations own a lot of Austria’s effective surface, they may very well end up profiting from the type of market-based energy transition trajectory envisioned here. The LKO’s support of transformative approaches in the field of energy is thus not representative of their general position on CCM. Looking at the agricultural sector itself, this becomes particularly clear. Here, the LKO argues that the natural production of methane in cattle farming cannot be decarbonized the same way energy production can and compares Austrian milk and beef to the more resource-intensive equivalent products of other countries

(ibid., 29). Again, the higher regulatory standards in Austria are identified as a disadvantage in international competition rather than an achievement or a sign of quality. As the LKO's position seems to vary greatly between some of the most important policy areas, a closer look at its positioning in specific conflicts will be instructive.

Both the LKO's approval of a (market-based) decarbonization of the Austrian energy sector and its opposition to European and national regulation in agriculture and land use are reflected in some of the Chamber's recent *conflictual strategies*. In energy matters, the EEffG and the EAG are both welcomed by the LKO. While the EEffG is seen as an important step in the Austrian decarbonization trajectory (LKO 2023a), the Burgenland Chamber even presents the EAG as a chance to foster local creation of value, from which forestry and agriculture businesses can profit (Hettlinger 2021). While the LKO's affirmative stance on the political projects relating to the decarbonization of the energy system can thus easily be recognized in their respective positioning, an equally clear position on transportation policies cannot be found. Regarding the Lobau Tunnel, part of the reason for this may well be that the Chamber's most important political ally – the ÖVP – strongly supports the project, while many local farmers oppose it fearing harvest losses (Mauch 2023).

In contrast, the LKO's opposition European regulations and their implementation in Austria is especially vocal. In a statement regarding amendments of the Austrian NECP, the Chamber expressed their frustration over the social partners' exclusion from the legislative process in the making of both the 2019 and, more recently, the 2024 renewal. Here, the LKO argues that a reduction of GHG emissions is particularly hard and costly to achieve in the agricultural sector. The measures proposed in the draft NECP amendment are thus criticized for undermining the competitiveness of Austrian and European farming operations and leading to loss in livestock, damage to the production site, and a decrease in food security (LKO 2023b). In a similar way, the Chamber's opposition to European regulation is at the core of their disapproval of the NRL. Reacting to minister Gewessler's controversial approval of the bill in June 2024, the LKO's president cast doubt on its ecological efficacy (LKO 2024). The Chamber's Lower Austrian branches called for "more voluntariness instead of arbitrary regulation" (LKN 2024) and the Upper Austrian Chamber's head questioned the constitutionality of the minister's vote (LKOÖ 2024). The LKO's strategic positioning in several recent CCM policy conflicts thus points to a variegated set of strategic priorities. Being harmless or potentially even profitable for farming operations, policies aimed at a decarbonization of the energy system receive much higher acceptance than regulations in land use or GHG emissions in the agricultural sector itself. In the context of the Austrian CMS, the Chamber has argued in favor of CCS but emphasized the potentials of a stronger integration of CCS and its combination with biomass energy production to reach negative emissions (Brad et al. 2024, 7).

The *strategic resources* of the LKO largely stem from its status as a social partner. Like the other chambers, the LKO has the right to issue and review draft bills. Its funding largely comes from owners of farming or forestry land, who are obliged to be organized in the Chamber and pay membership fees. Unlike the AK's budget, however, it is supplemented with state and federal funding. With around 150.000 operations in 2020, the LKO represents a considerably smaller membership than the AK. Due to the consolidation of small units in favor of larger operations, their membership has been in steady decline for decades, while the average size of farming operations in Austria has gone up (Statistik Austria 2024). Politically, the LKO is traditionally

close to the Conservatives, with the Chamber's president continuously having been a member of the ÖVP since 1945. The LKO's close cooperation with the ÖVP-affiliated *Bauernbund* is another aspect of its institutional proximity to the Conservatives and, by extension, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, which has itself been headed by ÖVP-politicians for most of its history. Accordingly, the LKO's influence highly depends on the ÖVP's access to key state apparatuses like ministries. Beyond this proximity to the Conservatives, the Chamber's influence is limited. The discursive presence of the LKO lies at a much lower level than, for instance, the AK's and the public's trust in the institution is rather low (OGM/APA 2023a), which further underscores the Chamber's dependence on the ÖVP to exert political influence.

4.3.4 Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO)

The Austrian Economic Chamber (*Wirtschaftskammer* or WKO) acknowledges CCM as a political priority and emphasizes the need for global alliances in climate politics. European and national efforts to decarbonization, on the other hand, are often criticized by the Chamber as ineffective and harmful for the economic development in Austria and Europe (WKO 2024). Unlike the LKO, which called for the establishment of European standards beyond the single market (LKO/Bauernbund 2021, 8), the WKO more unapologetically aims at the curtailment of Austrian targets to align with the less ambitious regulatory frameworks of other states. The practice of "gold plating", i.e., the overfulfil of European or transnational requirements is explicitly criticized as a hazard to Austrian competitiveness (WKO 2023b, 2). Regulation-based efforts in climate protection are thus only supported if they are backed by all leading economies globally – which is hardly the case for ambitious CCM measures. Instead of further regulation, public funding and the attraction of private investments are demanded for both the most carbon-intensive industrial sectors as well as new markets for climate-friendly products (WKO 2020d, 3). Like with the AK, this preference for investment programs over regulation can be directly related to the fundamental goals of the WKO.

The WKO's primary *strategic goal* is to serve the interests of Austrian businesses. As membership is compulsory for all Austrian companies, the chamber represents a wide variety of economic sectors. Accordingly, the relationship between the interests represented by WKO and climate protection is a broad spectrum. Generally, however, the WKO's countless efforts to undermine ambitious CCM policies is well-documented (Abstiens et al. 2021, 13; Clar/Scherhauser 2021). This holds especially true for regulatory approaches, as they are seen as a threat to profitability and competitiveness of Austrian businesses. While the WKO's rejection of regulation and its preference for investment program constitute a similarity with the other social partners (4.3.2 and 4.3.3), it is important to note that the WKO's opposition is both more general and more profound. It is more general than the LKO's disapproval of regulation-based approaches, since the latter is more sector-specific and does not, for instance, entail a rejection of most regulations in the energy sector. The WKO's disapproval of regulation is also more profound than the one expressed by AK or ÖGB. As was discussed above, both these organizations oppose environmental regulation as they expect a decrease in businesses' profitability to undermine their position in the pursuit of their fundamental strategic goals – wage increases, job security etc. For the WKO, however, profitability of Austrian businesses is not a strategic variable in the pursuit of their goals, but its most fundamental strategic goal itself. Opposing environmental regulation believed to undermine the profitability of Austrian businesses is thus not a bug in the WKO's strategical behavior on climate protection, but very much a feature. Starting from this insight, it will thus be instructive

to analyze how the Chamber's positioning in recent climate-related policy conflicts has been guided by their priorities and fundamental strategic aims.

The WKO's strong opposition to regulation is reflected in the *conflictual strategies* the Chamber has employed in various policy fields. The basic line of argument presenting climate protection measures as competitive disadvantages for the Austrian economy is very common with the WKO and particularly in the field of energy. In response to a proposed amendment of the Austrian NECP, for instance, the WKO argued that the Austrian NECP exceeds some of the EU's targets and thus undermines Austrian competitiveness. The Chamber expresses their frustration with the marginal role location policy plays in the Climate Ministry's draft. While the WKO appreciates the public consultations of social partners in the legislative process, the Chamber also demands that these consultations are followed up by a revision of the draft (WKO 2023b, 4). While the delay of the NECP's 2024 renewal, which even caused the European Commission to start infringement proceedings (APA/Der Standard 2024b), may have well been amplified by the social partners' discontent with the Plan, its contents do not fully align with the Chamber's interests. While the WKO has supported CCS measures that are part of the Plan, the NECP's abandonment of several climate-damaging subsidies in energy and transportation suggests that the Chamber's influence was limited here (BMK 2024b; Dworak et al. 2024). In the context of EEffG and EAG, this does not seem to be the case. In a statement on the EAG, the Chamber does suggest some minor alterations – including a stronger focus on hydrogen (WKO 2020c, 3). The general tone, however, is remarkably positive and some specific measures – including the use of “green gas” (ibid., 2) – are explicitly welcomed. Similarly, the 2023 reform of the EEffG was commended by the Chamber as a necessary measure (WKO 2023a). Generally, the WKO's variegated stance on decisions in the field of energy policy suggests that the Chamber's influence depends on the specifics of the respective bill and especially whether it is a national or a European project.

As the automotive branch is an important economic sector in Austria, its relative weight within the Chamber makes the industry's interests a political priority. In the field of transportation, this materializes, for instance, in the WKO's vocal support for expanding automotive infrastructure. In Styria, the Chamber strongly positioned in favor of a proposed highway expansion (WK Steiermark 2023). In the context of the Lobau Tunnel, the WKO has even taken legal steps to challenge the constitutionality of the project's suspension (Rachbauer 2022). Beyond these local conflicts around specific infrastructure projects, the WKO employs various strategies to serve the business interests of the automotive sector. A notable and innovative approach involves the think tank *OEcolution*, which is financed by the Chamber along with the IV (Kordik 2022). Presenting itself as a civil society organization of moderate climate activists, *OEcolution* has been criticized for greenwashing and posing as a grassroots movement by activist groups (Greenpeace 2023). Ahead of a 2024 automotive summit, for instance, the think tank called for subsidies in the automotive sector to protect Austria's role as a technological leader in the industry (OEcolution Austria 2024a). The strategies used by the WKO thus vary by economic sector.

Furthermore, the WKO has also heavily lobbied against the proposed renewal of the CPA and its binding and sector-specific emissions targets. After a draft became public in 2021, the WKO's secretary general made the Chamber's position quite clear by calling it a “punishment fantasy driven by ideology” (Laufer 2021). Hoffelt (2023, 62f) analyzed 15 press statements of

WKO and IV published between March 2021 and November 2022, in which the two organizations position themselves against the renewed CPA. Here, WKO and IV call for a prioritization of the development of Austria as a business location. Some of the draft's policies most heavily criticized in their demands include an ambitious CO2 budget, tax increases in the event of noncompliance, elevating climate protection to constitutional status, and making an adherence to these policies legally actionable. This focus on legal aspects points to the strategic importance of the ways in which an updated CPA would potentially transform the polity of Austrian climate politics. To be precise, the constitutional status and suability of climate protection would enable civil society actors and the general public to legally challenge policies on the grounds of their compatibility with the CPA's targets. Their influence in the process of policymaking would thus increase considerably, diluting the relative weight of the privileges held by WKO and the other social partners. However, the Chamber's strong opposition to the bill is not only strategically plausible, but also effective. While the law was agreed upon in the 2020 government program, the ÖVP has been criticized for delaying the project since (Laufer 2024b).

The effective protraction of the CPA points to the WKO's various *strategic resources*. Like the other social partners, the Chamber has a privileged role in the policymaking process and is entitled to review or suggest draft bills. It further receives fees from all businesses in Austria, as membership in the Chamber is compulsory. The WKO's most important strategic asset, however, consists in its close institutional ties to the ÖVP and the state apparatuses traditionally controlled by the Conservatives. Having been chaired by an ÖVP-politician since 1945, there are still numerous people holding important offices in WKO and ÖVP at once. Meanwhile, the ÖVP's fraction within the Chamber, the *Wirtschaftsbund* (ÖWB), received 69.6 per cent of the votes in the 2020 election (WKO 2020a). Under an ÖVP-led government, the WKO's influence is thus particularly great. While their public approval is considerably lower than that of many other organizations (OGM/APA 2023a), the Chamber's direct ties to the most important centers of power is at the core of their often-ascribed status as the single most potent organization engaged in obstructing or diluting climate protection efforts in Austria (Abstiens et al. 2021; Bayer 2024).

4.3.5 Federation of Austrian Industries (IV)

The Federation of Austrian Industries (*Industriellenvereinigung* or IV) is an interest group representing 4,200 businesses in Austria. Unlike with the WKO, the IV's members join the organization voluntarily. Formally not part of the social partnership, the IV's institutional role thus differs from the chambers discussed above. In its situation analysis concerning climate politics, however, the Association's institutional, ideological and strategic proximity to WKO and ÖVP is clearly reflected. While the IV generally acknowledges the necessity of climate protection, it frequently criticizes specific measures as potential hazards to the economic development in Austria and Europe. The Association's opposition to ambitious climate protection measures, particularly the ones aimed at further or continuous regulation in the economic sphere, points to an understanding of climate protection as a competitive disadvantage (APA/Der Standard 2022a). Accordingly, the IV calls for the curtailment of these disadvantages – e.g., by the introduction of European tariffs – and emphasizes the potential of technological innovation in the advancement of CCM efforts (IV n.d.-b). While some of the IV's demands target a reconciliation of climate protection and economic growth, the safeguarding

of the latter is clearly a priority and is thus frequently at the center of the Association's opposition to various climate protection measures (Kleine Zeitung 2022; Bayer 2024).

This points to the IV's *strategic goals*, which are largely aligned with its members' business interests. Like with the WKO, the IV thus prioritizes economic growth and strives for a market economy with little regulation. In the sphere of climate politics, this means that government intervention in the form of subsidies and funding is welcomed (IV 2021; 2023a), regulation-based approaches, on the other hand, are often criticized for hampering economic development. Often considered one of the most influential objectors of more ambitious climate protection efforts (Abstiens et al. 2021), the IV's strategic goals strongly overlap with the WKO's (4.3.4), their most frequent political ally in the field of climate politics. A closer look at the IV's strategic behavior in specific conflicts will show the intensity of the two organizations' strategic cooperation.

The *conflictual strategy* of IV and WKO are largely aligned, as their strong and effective opposition to the CPA illustrates. This goes for the harsh rhetoric – the IV's secretary general implied the bill would “curtail democracy and turn Austria into a dictatorship state” (Neumayer 2021) – as well as the strategic demands by which both organizations reacted to the draft bills (Hoffelt 2023). The ongoing protraction of the CPA, as of July 2024, documents the success of their strategic alliance. In the field of energy policy, a similar pattern of strategic cooperation can be observed. In the context of the Renewable Heat Act (EWG), for instance, both IV and WKO demanded an open and strategic approach to new technologies like hydrogen and E-fuels, while also strongly positioning against a total phase-out of fossil heating systems (Hoffelt 2023, 67), which was adopted as part of the 2020 government program. After the bill had been stalled for several years, however, the ÖVP successfully blocked a phase-out and a revised version was pronounced, from which existing heating systems are exempt (Wohlgenannt 2023). Similarly, the IV's criticism of a 2020 ministerial draft of the Renewables Expansion Act (EAG) – the Association had called for a legally binding cap on the bill's potential costs for businesses (IV 2020) – preceded a revision in which these demands were considered (IV n.d.-a). Like the WKO, the Association has been criticizing Austrian NECP as overly ambitious (IV 2023b). While the IV's demands are only partially reflected in the Plan, especially considering its scheduled phase-out of subsidies for carbon-intensive goods like diesel (BMK 2024b; Dworak et al. 2024), it has strongly endorsed the adoption of a CMS potentially allowing for CCS technology to be used in Austria. Unlike some sectoral associations from branches associated with hard-to-abate emissions, both IV and WKO have lobbied for a rather unrestricted rollout of CCS (Brad et al. 2024, 6).

Not formally part of the Austrian social partnership, the IV's *strategic resources* differ from those of the chambers in some respects. Without compulsory membership, the Association's number of members is much lower than that of the WKO. The lack of status as a social partner further keeps the IV out of some of the committees in which the social partners formally exert their influence (Hoffelt 2023, 23f). Nevertheless, the IV's influence on policymaking in Austria has grown considerably over the past decades for two major reasons. For one thing, the 1995 accession of Austria to the EU has granted the Association the opportunity to join the European employers' organization BusinessEurope (formerly known as UNICE), which only allows organizations with voluntary membership (ibid., 24). The IV's presence at the European stage thus complements the strategic resources of the WKO, contributing to the Association's

new relevance in the role as a lobby organization rather than a social partner. The second aspect of the Association's influence constitutes a similarity to the WKO, as the IV's institutional proximity to the ÖVP and the state apparatuses in the Party's control is often considered to be its single most crucial strategic asset (Hoffelt 2023, 83f). The Conservatives' continuous control over key ministries like finance, economy, or agriculture speaks to why these ties have been particularly valuable over the past decades.

5 Discussion

Circling back to the notion of the years since 2019 as a fifth phase in the development of climate politics in Austria (outlined in Section 2), this section reflects on the insights gained from the actor analysis against the background of some of this historical conjuncture's defining developments. Following both MST and HMPA, historical situations or "conjunctures" are understood as complex constellations of circumstances navigated by different actors according to their own interpretations of these situations. On the one hand, these circumstances, which are partly attributable to previous conflicts and their – more or less – precarious results, structure the arena in which political contention takes place. The outcomes of earlier struggles, relations of forces, and their materialization in the form of policies, institutions et cetera shape the historical situation in a way that strengthens particular positions in future conflicts while weakening others. These path dependencies and strategic selectivities form a unique "corridor" of policymaking. Deviating from this corridor can be challenging, risky, or costly for actors. On the other hand, this corridor and the broader historical situation are not fixed. The continuous struggle over diverging positions and material interests inevitably produces new policies or institutions. These ongoing conflicts transform the political arena, are reshaping the circumstances and pathways available for future struggles in the field (Jessop 1990).

From this perspective, it is instructive to view the findings from the actor analysis in light of the dialectical relationship between structure and action. The fourteen parties, civil society organizations, and organized interest groups were examined with a focus on their respective outlooks on CCM, their strategic goals and behavior in this field, as well as the shifting power dynamics among them. This discussion interprets these insights gained on these matters in the light of both their correspondence to the materialized outcomes of earlier struggles on CCM and their potential effects on the evolving political terrain where climate-related conflicts will continue to play. Due to the extensive character of the analysis, this discussion does not delve into every actor or conflict individually. Instead, it aims to trace some of the broader developments that have shaped the field of Austrian climate politics during its most recent phase, beginning in 2019. These developments, which have shaped the broader trajectory of Austrian climate politics in recent years, are thus examined through their manifestations in the conflicts, strategies and policies analyzed above. While they are clearly intertwined in reality, three key developments will be discussed individually for reasons of clarity: the politicization of climate politics in Austria, the inertia of the Austrian political economy and political system, and the development of Austria's role in the EU's climate politics.

5.1 Politicization and Intensified Contention

Following Nash and Steurer (2022, 510), the onset of a new fifth phase in the history of climate politics in Austria is closely associated with the global spike in climate protests, especially those led by FFF and similar school strike movements. These movements significantly contributed to

an increased discursive presence of climate change and garnered widespread public support for various CCM measures in the years following 2019 (Hampl et al. 2021; Glantschnigg 2024). While similar developments unfolded in many countries across the world, in Austria, the increased saliency of climate protection as a political issue has quickly materialized into both its political system and civil society. Beside the unprecedented levels of mobilization for climate protest achieved by FFF, other forms of materialization include widespread support for the KVB, the initiation of the CCA, and an overall spike in the political relevance ascribed to climate change as a political issue by Austrian voters (Eberl et al. 2020, 1356). As Daniel et al. (2020, 380f) argue, the centrality of climate change and its mitigation also contributed to the Green Party's return to the NC with its highest-ever vote tally, ultimately securing its first representation in government. The shift in public support for and engagement in climate protection thus quickly moved beyond the sphere of civil society and began to influence the political arena significantly. Within Austria's political system, this development is exemplified by the 2020 establishment of the Federal Ministry for Climate Protection (BMK), which also holds responsibility in issue areas like the environment, energy, and mobility. With regard to policies, this granted the Green Party the opportunity to push through several notable reforms relatively early in the term, including the Climate Ticket, the eco-social tax reform, and the EAG. However, while the latest phase of CCM policymaking in Austria has been characterized by a newfound centrality of climate issues and the initiation of several progressive reforms, the Government's climate politics has in many issue areas also been marked by disagreement and inaction. Notably policy conflicts documenting these disagreements and their thwarting effect on CCM in Austria include the Lobau Tunnel, the renewal of the CPA, the Climate Minister's support for the NRL, and the adoption of a new NECP. The latter, in particular, highlighted coalition tensions, as internal quarrels delayed submission to Brussels until after the deadline had passed (APA/Der Standard 2024b).

The reasons behind this inaction will be discussed in more detail below. For now, it is important to understand that the 2019 formation of the Coalition between the ÖVP and the Greens created an entirely new political situation and has likely contributed to a series of strategic reorientations by various actors ever since. Two of these actors are the governing parties themselves. At the beginning of the term, both the Green Party and the ÖVP appeared willing to accept concessions in some key policy areas – the Greens on migration and economic matters, and the ÖVP on climate politics (4.1.1 and 4.1.2). However, after implementing some of their agreement's policies, the possibilities for further compromises on CCM were exhausted. Fearing electoral consequences, the Greens have still adhered to the Coalition, despite their frustration over the CPA and corruption scandals. Meanwhile, the ÖVP has shifted its strategy towards a more unapologetic stance against the intensification of CCM, calling for climate protection to be guided by “common sense” rather than scientific findings and emphasize the primacy of economic development in Austria (ÖVP 2024, 45). With these attempts to distance themselves from the Green Party's position on climate, the ÖVP may well have reacted to the levelling out of climate protection's political saliency in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and later the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While climate protection was both one of the most debated issues during the 2019 election campaign (APA-DeFacto 2019) and a top priority for several parties' voters (ORF 2019c), by 2024, only 38% Austrian stated climate protection especially important. The issue ranked third, and clearly behind social security and migration (Kronen Zeitung/IFDD 2024). Another possible factor influencing the ÖVP's repositioning could be the mounting political pressure from the right. Here, the FPÖ –

after they had attempted to appear “green” during and after their two years in government between 2017 and 2019 (ORF 2019b; Zaunbauer/Arends 2019) – has adopted a stronger stance against many climate protection efforts. They have intensified their aggressive rhetoric towards the Green Party and climate activists, likely aiming to consolidate their position among voters critical of CCM (4.1.4). Meanwhile, many activists and climate movements grew increasingly frustrated with the government’s shortcomings in CCM. Although some reforms had been adopted, many measures envisioned by these groups, including lower speed limits or binding and sector-specific targets in the CPA, remained unrealized. This frustration likely contributed to a strategic shift away from the focus on achieving broad public support – a strategy that can be associated with FFF – towards attempts to capture the public’s attention and draw it to the climate crisis by disrupting public life. The forms of protest employed by the LG are emblematic of this change of strategy (4.2.4). While these strategies were relatively successful in generating media coverage and capturing the public’s attention to the climate crisis, they likely contributed to a decrease of public trust in and support for climate movements in Austria (OGM/APA 2023b). However, considering that broad support was never a strategic priority for the LG, a more convincing document of ever more unfavorable historical circumstances is that the new strategy did not lead to the adoption of more ambitious CCM measures. Instead, conservative media outlets, government officials, and other policymakers took an increasingly hostile position toward climate activists. In a discursive environment where activists were defamed as “terrorists” (APA/Der Standard 2023d), numerous actors called for more repression. In their “Future Plan 2030”, the ÖVP had envisioned harsher punishments for climate protests, with some prominent policymakers calling for the imprisonment of activists for up to three months (APA/Die Presse 2023). Interior Minister Karner later stated he was “grateful” about the tough sanctions imposed by the judiciary (APA/Der Standard 2024a). While the LG announced the retirement of its campaign in 2024 (LG 2024), the introduction of additional repressive measures against activists may well end up damaging the right to engage in political protest in Austria in the long run.

Starting in 2019, the fifth phase of Austrian climate politics had initially been characterized by higher discursive visibility and political saliency of climate change as well as broad support for CCM policies. These dynamics also materialized at the political level. Over the course of the next years, however, support for CCM measures stagnated, while the priority given to the issue declined. For one thing, the public seems to have prioritized other issues, including energy safety, social security, and migration. Meanwhile, political parties, especially those on the right, adopted a more unapologetic stance against various CCM policies. This marked a departure from their earlier positioning, when many had appeared – or at least presented themselves – as supporters of climate protection. While the governing parties’ political positions on CCM did not diverge in a meaningful way, the range of mutually agreeable policies was exhausted quite early in the term. Accordingly, political contention around climate issues intensified both within the coalition and across the broader political landscape. This reorientation towards a more combative strategy was specific to political parties and did not occur with movements or organized interest groups. Nevertheless, these shifts at the level of party politics significantly affected the strategic opportunities available to all actors engaged in climate politics. While policymakers’ responsiveness to the demands raised by climate activists started to fade after peaking in 2019, the institutionalized influence of the social partners remained relatively stable. Under a government led by the ÖVP, this was especially

true for LKO, WKO and IV. The strategic consequences this development for their efforts to protract or obstruct CCM legislation is discussed in the following subsection.

5.2 Inaction and Inertia

While the fifth phase in Austrian climate politics had initially been marked by high levels of political saliency and public support for an ambitious CCM trajectory, the political contention of climate protection became increasingly confrontational over time. After the adoption of some meaningful reform projects like the EAG, the eco-social tax reform, and the Climate Ticket, the political priority of climate protection faded. Many subsequent CCM policies were effectively halted or diluted. The most prominent example for this stagnation is the protraction of a renewed CPA and reinstating its binding and sector-specific GHG reduction targets. Other policies, including the NECP and the NRL were finally passed, but only after causing a lot of dissent and internal quarrels within the governing coalition. Notably, for the NECP, arriving at an agreement can be attributed to the external pressure from the EU (5.3), while the submission of the NRL even required for the climate minister to breach the coalition agreement (4.1.2). To systematically examine the inertia in Austria CCM policymaking, three key aspects are considered. The first is the different positions and strategies of the governing parties regarding climate protection. The other two aspects – the Austrian form of federalism and the social partnership – are two of the most characteristic features of the Austrian political system, which will be discussed individually.

Despite their substantial programmatic and strategic differences in the sphere of climate politics (4.1.1 and 4.1.2), the ÖVP and the Green Party managed to agree on a government program in 2019. Here, the Conservatives made considerable concessions in climate politics, while the Greens conceded in many other policy areas, including economics, internal security and especially migration (Eberl et al. 2020, 1359). As discussed above, this arrangement allowed for a set of reforms to be initiated right at the beginning of the term. After the common ground between Greens and ÖVP was exhausted in the course of these reforms, the stark differences in the two parties' perspectives and priorities relating to CCM resurfaced. Increasingly, the Coalition's cooperative and remarkably compromise-oriented approach that had characterized the start of their term made way for dissent and internal quarrels. In other words, both parties resorted to pursue their own strategic goals relating to CCM.

To be precise, the ÖVP chose to serve the business interests of various key sectors in the Austrian economy and enhance their conservative profile. For example, in their efforts to delay or dilute the European phase-out of ICE-cars, the automotive sector's interests were a central motivating factor (Hell/Die Presse 2024). While the same may well be true for the Party's emphatic support of the Lobau Tunnel, in this context, reiterating their role as a champion of drivers likely served as an additional motive. In the case of the NRL, the agricultural sector and their representatives from the LKO have likely been an important influence (4.3.3), while the EWG sparked the resistance in sectors like housing or energy. Other policies, including the renewed CPA, stretch across various economic sectors and can thus hardly be attributed to any single industry. Here, it seems likely that the Party's protraction efforts (4.1.1) correlate to their close relationship with both WKO and IV.

Meanwhile, the Green Party has become increasingly frustrated with the CPA's protraction and the numerous corruption inquiries of their coalition partner (4.1.1). Ironically, their decision

to remain in the Coalition despite both the ÖVP's well-documented corruption schemes and their repressive migration policy had contributed to low polling, which made a withdrawal from the Government a politically costly option. As a result, the Greens decided to adhere to the Coalition and identify strategic windows of opportunity to push for specific CCM measures. In this context, Climate Minister Gewessler played a particularly important role. Heading the Climate Ministry, Gewessler holds substantial decision-making power in the field of climate politics. In instances like the Lobau Tunnel and the NRL, she did not hesitate to assert her influence (4.1.2). While the reasoning behind each party's strategic choices cannot be fully traced here, it is fair to say that, after an initial phase of harmonious reforms, the governing parties' substantial programmatic differences reemerged. These differences have since contributed to both the protraction or dilution of some policies, and the increasingly combative contention of others.

While these strategic shifts and the Coalition's internal quarrels are clearly consequential here, it would be too simplistic to attribute the shortcomings in CCM solely to the governing parties and their diverging priorities. A second, more long-standing and systemic reason for the inertia of policymakers has been identified in the Austrian federalism and the opportunities it provides to state governments to block or protract policies in the sphere of climate protection. As Steurer et al. (2023, 396f) point out, state governments have resisted regulations relating related to space heating and energy efficiency in housing and construction, infer that "in the context of national or global challenges like climate protection, federalism tends to prevent or delay" progress in policymaking. Throughout the period examined here, numerous examples of this deferring effect have been evident. Due to their dominance at state level, the actors most frequently engaged in protraction or prevention strategies like these are ÖVP and SPÖ. While the legal reasons for the respective competencies of policymakers at state and federal level play an important role in this context, they are too complicated to be discussed here.² However, it is important to recognize that state governments hold significant power in key policy areas relevant to climate protection, including construction, spatial planning, and natural preservation. A prominent example of this decentralizing effect occurred in the conflict surrounding the NRL, where a unanimous blockade of all nine state governments ended when two SPÖ-governed states changed their position, effectively allowing for the climate minister to vote in favor of the directive (Kern/Leibetseder 2024). Generally, climate protection is a policy field in which the competencies are distributed in a particularly unclear manner. While some legal reforms have since been considered to provide more clarity (Hauer/Mayrhofer 2015, 86), the fundamental division of competences continues to complicate policymaking in many areas closely related to CCM.

A third aspect relevant to the inertia of Austrian climate politics concerns the role of the social partnership in the Austrian political system. In the past, all the social partners discussed above have been criticized for their attempts to obstruct or dilute ambitious CCM measures (Brand/Pawloff 2014; Clar/Scherhauser 2021; Nash/Steurer 2022, 499). More recently, however, several scholars have found the social partners representing labor interests, AK and ÖGB, are undergoing strategic shifts in favor of a more progressive position on climate protection (Niedermoser 2017; Soder et al. 2018; Brand/Niedermoser 2019). As the findings

² A legal discussion of state and federal competencies in the context of renewable energy in Austria is conducted in the diploma thesis put forward by Schmidinger (2021).

of the actor analysis above substantiate these claims (4.3.1 and 4.3.2), it seems necessary to differentiate between the organizations in the social partnership. With AK and ÖGB, the two major representatives of organized labor in Austria have largely move away from obstructing CCM policies in the name of job security, thereby departing from the “jobs versus environment dilemma” (Räthzel/Uzzell 2011). Instead, both organizations seem to have accepted the necessity of a profound restructuring of the Austrian economy in the course of decarbonization. Rather than trying to defend workers’ interests against a large-scale decarbonization program, they have thus increasingly shifted to promote these interests within the context of the decarbonization of the economy. This is, for instance, reflected in their support of both large-scale public investment programs in the decarbonization of economy and infrastructure as well as their calls for reskilling and retraining programs (Plank/Miess 2023; Eurofound 2023, 18). While in some carbon-intensive sectors like construction, AK and ÖGB have continued to oppose specific CCM policies (FCG-ÖAAB 2021; Szigetvari 2024), their departure from a generally skeptical outlook on decarbonization measures constitutes a substantial strategic shift. This shift is also reflected in their categorization as “neutral” actors in societal conflicts related to the decarbonization of mobility and energy by Abstiens et al. (2021, 13ff). The perspective of overcoming this neutrality in favor of a more active and progressive role of unions in Austrian policy conflicts on CCM was discussed by Brand and Niedermoser (2019, 178f). Here, the authors emphasize the importance of a broader understanding of labor and labor representation and, despite the profound changes necessary, point out “social-ecological entry points” for organized labor. With a focus on the automotive sector, Pichler et al. (2021) identify social unionism, enhancing workers’ confidence in their qualification, and alliances with climate movements as strategic entry points to involve organized labor in the social-ecological transformation.

Unsurprisingly, the remaining social partners LKO and WKO, and the IV stand in sharp contrast to this role as a neutral and potentially progressive actor played by the AK and ÖGB in climate politics. While the agrarian LKO has shown a slightly more variegated position and endorsed some progressive energy policies, bills introducing new regulations or interfering with the profitability of Austrian farming operations otherwise are generally met with resistance (4.3.3). Meanwhile, the long-standing role of WKO and IV as some of the forces most effectively obstructing and protracting CCM measures in Austria is well-documented (Pesendorfer 2007; Abstiens et al. 2021; Steurer et al. 2023). Although CCM has become a more prominent issue for all social partners, WKO and IV have not undergone a strategic reorientation in favor of a more progressive position. While some policies were supported by WKO and IV, this has largely been the case with policies that either focus on public investment programs or that had already been moderated prior to their adoption. On the other hand, policies introducing new regulations or setting ambitious reduction targets, like CPA or NRL, were met with a particularly high level of resistance (4.3.4). This points to a strategy of selective endorsement, in which pro-business actors concede on measures reconcilable with their own strategic interests, while taking a strong stance against those policies that undermine them. The intent to push a business-friendly and moderate form of climate protection rather than neglecting climate change as a political issue is also expressed in the support of both WKO and IV for the climate think tank *OEcolution*. Due to the close institutional ties all three organizations have to the ÖVP, their influence on conservatives-led governments is especially high (Steurer et al. 2023, 390). Notably, the privileged role of the social partners in Austria also entails a stronger and more direct influence at national or regional level, whereas EU-directives do not offer a similar

opportunity to intervene in the process of policymaking. The pro-business social partners' criticism of several climate-related EU-directives, including the NECP and the Green Deal, as overly ambitious or economically unwise thus point to the relative weakness of Austrian CCM efforts. While this is clearly not entirely attributable to the social partners' strategic interventions, their efforts and, importantly, their capacity to obstruct or dilute CCM policies in Austria likely plays a part here.

5.3 Austria in the European Union

As mentioned in the literature review (Section 2), Austria once enjoyed an excellent and long-standing reputation as a role model in environmental protection. In fact, many actors concerned with environmental protection, including the Green Party (4.1.2), had initially worried about national standards being diluted in the process of Austria becoming an EU member state and competing in the European Single Market (Dolezal 2016, 26). Over the past decades, however, this status as an example of effective and ambitious environmental protection has faded. More recently, Austria regularly ranks at the lower end of various performance indices on climate protection (Tobin 2017, 34; Nash/Steurer 2022, 511). To understand this shift of Austria's role in within the EU, it is important to distinguish between different issue areas relating to the protection of the environment, especially between climate change mitigation and the protection of the local environment in Austria. For one thing, the relatively high national standards in the protection of the natural environment (Tobin 2017, 42) and, for instance, the ban of nuclear plants as an energy source are supported by most Austrians (APA/Der Standard 2022b). Importantly, these measures also do not fundamentally interfere with the economic interests of most businesses in Austria and may even be beneficial to some, including some forms of tourism. With climate change mitigation and decarbonization efforts, this is different. As was discussed above (5.1), these have become an increasingly contentious issue and are hardly reconcilable with the immediate interests of many businesses in some of Austria's most relevant sectors. With more than 14% for metals and over 6% for minerals in 2022, several key industries rank among the main contributors to GHG emissions in Austria (Klimadashboard Österreich n.d.). Accordingly, the resistance of Austrian businesses and their interest groups is particularly resolute in the context of climate protection and decarbonization.

As climate change adopted an increasingly central and prominent position within the field of environmental protection, resistances from key economic sectors become pivotal to Austria's changing role in European environmental and climate politics. Once feared to be an impediment to national environmental protection, the EU's influence has arguably even become a progressive impact on CCM policymaking in Austria. EU-directives and the introduction of infringement proceedings started to function as wake-up calls for Austrian policymakers at federal and state level since the early 2000s (Niedertscheider et al. 2018, 12f). In the late 2000s and the early 2010s, pressure from binding EU-regulations have also been identified as key drivers of some of Austria's most important climate protection policies of the period. These include sector-specific strategies and regulations in fields like energy and construction as well as the first CPA of 2011, which has since expired in 2020 (Nash/Steurer 2022, 509). The fact that these policies have proven insufficient to adhere to climate targets and have led to an increase in total GHG emissions between 1990 and 2017 (ibid., 511), while also being the result of external pressure from the EU – rather than political initiative at national level – underscores Austria's new role as a laggard in European climate politics.

After 2019, Austria's laggard status in European climate politics largely continued. The institutional and historical shifts in climate politics were insufficient to transform Austria's position within the EU. Instead, several influential actors – including ÖVP, FPÖ, LKO, WKO, and IV – have repeatedly positioned against CCM measures introduced at EU-level on the grounds of them being overly ambitious and harmful to the Austrian economy. This is true for various sector-specific policies as well as overarching projects like the European Green Deal (LKO 2020; WKO 2020d). Conservative and right-wing policymakers have explicitly argued that the Green Deal imposes excessive regulatory burdens on Austria's economy (ÖVP 2024, 22; FPÖ 2024b). For pro-business social partners, especially LKO and WKO, the extent to which policymaking can be influenced in Brussels is much lower than it is at regional and national level, since their compulsive membership does not allow them to join some EU-wide employer organizations and, more importantly, they do not enjoy the same privileges in the policymaking process. While the IV is represented in organizations like *BusinessEurope* (4.3.5), expecting their influence to be at a similar level as in Austria seems unreasonable, especially since other, possibly stronger national associations may prioritize the interests of their respective key industries, rather than those specific to Austrian businesses. Against this background, it appears plausible that pro-business interest groups being more successful in the obstruction or dilution of policies at national stage contributes to Austria falling behind in EU-wide performance on CCM.

The extent of Austria's role as a laggard became evident in the context of three different policy conflicts in 2024 alone. Firstly, the ÖVP vehemently positioned against a phase-out of ICE-cars by 2035 during the European Election campaign of 2024, with the Chancellor stating that "Austria is a car country" and calling for a moratorium on regulation in the industry (Hell/Die Presse 2024). As these demands have also been interpreted as part of a broader "culture war" strategy (Gaul 2024), it remains unclear whether the ÖVP acted primarily to protect its political interests or on the pressure from industry sectors. In any case, the strategy is emblematic of Austria's role in the EU. Secondly, with the NRL, one of the most consequential decisions of CCM policymaking in Austria was only submitted due to the Climate Ministers breach of the coalition agreement and caused a major coalition crisis (APA/Die Presse 2024). Thirdly, the NECP was only submitted with a substantial delay and under the pressure of a binding EU-directive and under the looming threat of EU sanctions for non-compliance with binding directives. Here, the government's difficulties to agree upon a GHG reduction path highlight the fact that, for Austria, taking a path in line with the EU's targets requires a substantial intensification of CCM measures. Thus, all these developments point to a historical situation, in which the historical conditions and strategic selectivities at the European level are much more favorable to ambitious CCM policies than those at national level in Austria. Meanwhile, the results of both the European as well as the national elections of 2024 suggest a grim perspective for progressive policymaking in numerous issue areas, including CCM. In this light, it seems unlikely that Austria is going to reattain its old role as a leader in European environmental politics. Instead, recent studies point to strong networks of business actors and policymakers dedicated to the obstruction or delay of CCM policies at EU level (Plehwe et al. 2024). The perspective of substantial backsliding on CCM policymaking in the years to come is thus by no means confined to Austria and must be considered as a European and global phenomenon.

6 Conclusion

In 2019, when FFF achieved unprecedented levels of mass support and mobilization for climate protest, Austria entered a new historical phase of climate politics. This period was initially characterized by a new centrality of climate change as a political problem and heightened civil society engagement with the issue. At the political level, this shift was reflected in the Green Party's return to the NC, the Party's first participation in government, and the establishment of the BMK as a new ministry responsible for the coordination and implementation of CCM efforts in Austria. Early success also included reforms such as the Climate Ticket, the eco-social tax reform, and the EAG. However, the reservoir of policies agreeable for both the Greens and their senior coalition partner, the ÖVP, quickly became exhausted, leading to CCM efforts being slowed down and even coming to a halt in many cases.

In climate activism, this development sparked a shift away from strategies directed at public awareness and support, as employed by FFF, towards more radical forms of protest, for which the LG has come to stand. These strategic reorientations reflect growing frustration among activists with the limited political outcomes achieved in the course of mass demonstrations and a Green's participation in government. The dissatisfaction of many activists is rooted in their assertion that the Government's policies are not sufficient to mitigate climate change successfully. For one thing, it is unclear whether the policies passed during this period restructure the Austrian economy and its carbon-intensive key sectors in a way profound enough for Austria to adhere to its climate targets and, at best, contribute to their incremental ecological modernization. Secondly, the new phase in Austria's climate politics has not brought about any substantial reform of the country's political system, leaving the structural conditions that shape climate policy conflicts largely unaltered.

Meanwhile, conservative and right-wing political actors, notably the ÖVP and FPÖ, started to adopt an increasingly unapologetic stance against CCM measures, resulting in a more politicized and confrontational contention of CCM. The recent electoral success of the far-right FPÖ has continued to show that this open position against climate protection efforts did not deter voters and may have even contributed to the Party's appeal, allowing it to come in first in both the national and the European election in 2024. Looking beyond Austria, recent developments point to the conclusion that Austrian climate politics has been subjected to a broader, European or global reconfiguration of forces that Guerra (2024) calls an "authoritarian conjuncture". This new situation seems to be characterized by a slowdown in climate movement activity and an intensified opposition from right-wing actors and fossil capital factions, which have become increasingly successful in the obstruction of CCM policies in the EU (Plehwe et al. 2024). Against this background, it seems likely that the fifth phase of CCM politics in Austria has – or will have – preceded a sixth period marked by a decreased centrality of climate change, an increasingly outright prioritization of fossil industries' business interests over climate concerns and substantial backsliding in the field of climate protection. While it is too early to credibly describe the specifics of this sixth phase, it seems instructive to learn from the ways in which the adoption of a more ambitious CCM trajectory has been slowed down or obstructed since 2019.

A key example of Austria's unfavorable conditions for advising ambitious climate protection measures is the ongoing delay in renewing the Climate Protection Act (CPA). While the CPA remains technically in place, sector-specific and binding emissions reduction targets, which are

at the core of its political efficacy, expired in 2020. Since then, a draft renewal initiated by the Greens-led Climate Ministry has reportedly ended up in a drawer of the ÖVP, who are frequently criticized for the obstruction of the bill (Laufer 2024a). For several years, Austria has thus been without an overarching legal framework that requires policymakers to adhere to sector-specific targets for GHG reduction in spatial heating, industry, or transportation. In comparison to other European countries and EU institutions, Austria's absence of binding regulations underscores the unfavorable historical conditions for ambitious climate policymaking. While the absence of a CPA and its binding regulations is an important aspect of the historical conditions for CCM policymaking, it is important to also view its protraction as the result of the selectivities and structures underlying political contention in the field.

A *first* central reason why the heightened political saliency of climate change has not been translated into a more ambitious policy program is the ÖVP's dominance over crucial state apparatuses, including the Chancellorship and the Economics and Finance Ministries. Importantly, the momentousness of the Conservatives' position does not merely a result of coalition compromise but also relates to the Party's long standing and well-documented political and institutional proximity to pro-business interest groups, especially LKO, WKO and IV. These organizations are also central to the *second* impediment to more rapid and profound changes at the level of policy: the social partners' role in Austria's policymaking process. While the benefits of the Austrian social partnership are numerous, it has frequently been identified as an important hurdle for CCM efforts. Despite some recent progress among pro-labor social partners, the LKO, WKO and IV have continued to use their close relationship with the ÖVP to obstruct or dilute climate protection policies. A *third* barrier lies in Austria's federalist structure, which allows regional government to intervene in national policymaking. This dynamic has proven particularly challenging for climate policy, not only climate change requires globally coordinated action but also due to unclear responsibilities for climate protection within Austria's legal framework of federalism. The *fourth* and final reason for the nonappearance of more ambitious climate protection measures is a more contingent one. Since the arrival of Covid-19 in Austria in 2020 and later also the Russian invasion of Ukraine, climate change has ceased to be the single most relevant political issue it had briefly become in 2019. Thus, both the public's attention as well as the Government's priorities started to shift, substantially easing the pressure on policymakers.

The period since 2019 in Austrian climate politics has thus shown how considerable shifts at the discursive level can fail to materialize at the level of institutionalized politics. Despite several actors associated with climate protection – including FFF and the Green Party – generating new levels of support and influence, the policies adopted during this time are hardly sufficient to adhere to climate targets. Both the resistance of LKO, WKO and IV as well as the ÖVP against a more uncompromising and robust approach to CCM and the relatively inert structures of the Austrian political system proved an obstacle for the materialization of discursive and political shifts in the form of policies or even polity reforms. Whereas some CCM measures of this period – like the Climate Ticket or the NRL – are likely to persist, other meaningful agreements – including those of the NECP – may well be diluted or abandoned in the absence of a legally binding commitment to climate protection that ties future policymakers to climate targets regardless of shifting majorities. In this context, it is important to note that not all CCM experts are alarmed by the ongoing protraction of the CPA, with some emphasizing the potential of the measures envisioned by the NECP (Dworak et al. 2024). While

the CPA does, of course, not guarantee ambitious enough CCM efforts, its legal characteristics set it apart from both the adoption of new policies as well as the non-binding schedule submitted to Brussels in the form of the NECP. With regard to the changing circumstances of CCM policymaking in Austria illustrated above (2.2), the abandonment of binding regulations established in the fourth historical phase (2007 to 2018) for non-binding plans and strategies is likely among the most consequential developments since 2019 and constitutes a considerable backslide for climate protection in Austria. The absence of binding and sector-specific targets is particularly concerning in the light of the 2024 national election results, which make the formation of a government more committed to CCM than its predecessors highly unlikely.

7 Literature

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