The Far-Right, Climate Change, and the Future of (Climate) Politics

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Abstract: Accelerating anthropogenic climate change is set to transform the entirety of the social and natural world in the ongoing century. Predictions about the degree of global warming are wide-ranging, which is due to the array of direct and indirect factors that will determine the actual pace and intensity of climate change. Yet, it seems likely that the impact on life on earth will be located somewhere in the range of drastic to truly apocalyptic. While catastrophe looms large, comprehensive mitigation strategies are lacking across all world regions and political systems. In the political sphere, the last decade or so has seen the proliferation and growth of movements on the far right of the political spectrum, which was accentuated by breakthrough electoral successes in some nation states. While many of these nationally organized movements discredit human made climate change as irrelevant or non-existent altogether, they are nevertheless poised to become one of its main profiteers. This is due to the economic, social, and natural destabilization that climate change will most likely cause in the coming decades. This article seeks to offer an analysis of how these two phenomena, far-right political mobilization and human made climate change, might come to interact with one another.

Diffuse Risks, Diffuse Responsibility, and "Economic Imperatives"

Modern societies are, as Ulrich Beck points out, inherently shaped by risk (1986). Through the exploitation of natural resources, ever increasing pollution, and the systemic interdependence of almost all world regions, climate change comes to pose a crucial, yet essentially diffuse risk. Following Beck's argument, risk is both omnipresent and at the same time removed, invisible, and beyond any individual's, governing body's or agency's specific capacity and responsibility (43). Moreover, the generation of wealth in modern societies, is, according to Beck, sooner or later, eclipsed by the production of risk (27-28), which essentially becomes unmanageable due to ever multiplying risk factors and the diffuse or non-existent organization of responsibility for said risks (58). Potential unmitigated catastrophe is hence the result. This is especially true for the unfolding acceleration of climate change, which is acknowledged by most politically relevant actors locally, nationally, and internationally, but without any specific recognition of responsibility or ability to halt or alter this process. The risk, while acutely concrete, is at the same time diffuse both in its actual scope – as it is global and therefore everywhere and nowhere at once – and regarding the agency necessary for addressing it, which does not lie with any actor in particular.

This opens environmental threats up for widely disparaging assessments and generates both risk experts and risk deniers alike (29), who compete for legitimacy in how to deal (or not to deal) with emerging risks. Furthermore, risk assessment in modern societies is relegated to the specialized fields of medicine, science, the economy, and technology, hiding and emptying it of the deeply social implications it carries (33-34). Beck's risk society, which initially was a work on the dangers of environmental destruction and pollution rather than on climate change itself, has become a very useful tool for understanding present-day climate change inaction.

While engaging the topic from different perspectives, numerous authors come to similar conclusions regarding the current (non-)governability of climate change and its fallout. In this context, Ingolfur Blühdorn proposes to re-examine the notion of "symbolic" or "simulative politics", which refers to a strand of politics that can be categorized as the opposite of "truthful politics" and hence functions through simulating a political response to threats and challenges, while maintaining the status quo (2007, 253). He argues that present-day politics does not, as is often assumed, partake in simulative politics, because the electorate and the governing bodies are both in tacit agreement about not actually wanting to implement effective measures to tackle climate change (264), but rather because symbolic politics are needed to stabilize a destabilized system, and real action is impossible within the current systemic framework (266). Here, simulative politics thus no longer function as simulacrum and deceit, but is the only available response to the ongoing loss of control over climate change, its adverse effects, and the omnipresent risks they pose. If this analysis is taken seriously, it would mean nothing less than the wholesale capitulation of liberal-democratic politics vis-à-vis climate change, as politics seem to understand that within the rules of the game of representative electoral politics coupled with a market liberal economic dispensation, there is essentially nothing that politics in its established form could do to halt climate change. This is due to the historicity of the liberal-democratic order.

While Ulrich Beck's argument illustrates one side of the problem, the reasons for climate change inaction are far from limited to diffuse risk assessments, unclear responsibilities, and the pervasiveness of simulative politics. These rather are second order phenomena stemming from structural conditions of the present-day global order. Organizationally, the political make-up of the world is one of nation states coupled with an economic system of neoliberal deregulation (Rehbein 2021, 117; Streeck 2011, 1-2). This is fundamental when looking at attempts at climate change mitigation, as counter strategies are bound to remain within the structure conditioned by this dispensation. The incapability of adequately responding to climate change is hence largely due to the make-up of present-day nation states and the economic practices they prioritize. The Westphalian State of today simply does not possess the necessary response abilities for a phenomenon that is vague and concrete at once and that lies both inside and outside of its national borders.

To explain why nation states are structurally poorly equipped to make a transition to "true" sustainability, Daniel Hausknost analyzes the historical development of the state and its changing capacities; arguing that all nation states are shaped by imperatives that dictate the state's role and function in relation to its population (2019). The classical state imperatives are the maintaining of the internal order, external protection, and the necessity to procure the resources to fund the first two. These three are intrinsic to basically all state forms. The liberal-democratic state of today came into existence through the addition of two further imperatives. The bourgeoisie first added the imperative of growth, and worker movements later that of democratic legitimacy (3). By adding these two imperatives, the current state configuration known as liberal democracy was cemented. All imperatives that are to eventually be added in the future, cannot fundamentally

contradict any of these existing imperatives (5), and they, moreover, would have to be especially aligned with the notion of legitimacy, as it subsumes all other possible demands (8). According to Hausknost, the state as we know it, therefore simply has no space for a sustainability imperative, as it would contradict the accumulation and, at least momentarily, also the democratic representation paradigm, as a sustainable transformation would strongly interfere in realms that are today considered private (7). By imposing mandatory reductions on carbon emissions such as those entailed in production, consumption, or dietary habits, and which arguably would be indispensable in order to reduce the intensity of climate change, the state would be perceived to overreach into the private realm, both of industry and of individuals. The decarbonization of most nation states' economies would, moreover, necessarily include at least a temporary and potentially a definite suspension of economic growth. Capital accumulation would thus be extensively hindered or made impossible altogether. Welfare state institutions, on the other hand, strongly rely on state income through taxation, which would be further diminished through sustained economic de-growth and in turn would jeopardize parts of the state's electoral base (Streeck 2011, 11). Hence, since welfare mechanisms and state spending capabilities in liberal democracies are in part linked to revenue generated by economic growth, it would be politically hardly maneuverable to enforce policies that stifle growth, while maintaining ample support networks for its citizens. For these reasons, the modern, democratic state of today is fundamentally incapable of transforming itself in regard to climate change and its mitigation. Hausknost describes this as "the glass ceiling of transformation" (2) and goes on to state: "*The glass ceiling should thus be understood as a system boundary that may be shifted within certain dynamic parameters but not transgressed without first changing the underlying structure and identity of the system itself*" (3). A true political shift towards sustainability on a state level is thus not to be expected any time soon.

In line with the accumulation imperative, predominant interpretations of sustainability are furthermore often coupled with the notion of "development"; with development both referring to the economic category of profitability, but also to linear and moral categories of historicity and progress that are often employed when looking at the differences between the Global North and South (Lang 2019, 85). Counter measures to climate change are therefore often evaluated in accordance with their compatibility with economic accumulation, not their general effectiveness. The moral-economic connotation of "development" furthermore leads to the contradictory mechanism of knowledge and expertise about climate change being sought in the Global North, despite the Global North being directly and indirectly responsible for much of global pollution. Through its own emissions, but also by having outsourced much of its former industrial production to other parts of the world, the Global North is hence a main cause of climate change, yet it has managed to shift the discourse towards its own, "market-based solutions", and its economic model is still propagated through notions of "development", which are meant to serve as templates for the rest of the world. It is from this constellation, that "managerial" and other, short term and business informed solutions to climate change emerge (Blühdorn 2007, 262). Profitability, "development", and growth imperatives hence hamper all effective counter measures to climate change, as these would necessarily include degrees of de-growth and subsequently de-industrialization. Yet this process would, in economic terms, be nothing short of a continuous recession (Wiedmann et al. 2020, 4). A state unimaginable within the accumulation driven dispensation of the global economy. "Development", "green capitalism", and other such "market-based solutions" come to fill the market niche of addressing climate change while being encased within the very system that mainly drives human made climate change.

Generally, practices of consumption, standards of living, and middle-class lifestyles and the aspiration to them, are central components of accelerating climate change. Population is only insofar a concern, as the global middle-class is growing; increasing the number of people who live unsustainably. In absolute numbers, the top 10% of global income earners generate around a third of global environmental impact. The lowest 10% generate about 3-5% (3). This is not to say that only extreme austerity of much of the global population can halt climate change. Wiedmann et al. rather propose a "floor-and-ceiling approach", which meets all basic needs, but curbs over-consumption (4). Yet they themselves concede that consumption patterns, and with them carbon emission patterns, are not generated in a vacuum, but within the capitalist dispensation, which structures material and non-material culture (5). These practices and the desires that generate them are all but illegitimate within the current global order. They are much rather the norm, as an ever-increasing expansion of prosperity is one of the main tenets of liberal ideology (Fukuyama 1992), which sees economic growth as concomitant with overall well-being. Even without the structural restrictions posed by state imperatives as outlined above, it would hence be very difficult to effectuate a global shift to sustainability, as it would require nothing short of a sort of cultural, epistemological revolution on a world scale (Gallopin et al. 2001, 6).

On another note, it also needs to be mentioned that apart from the private lifestyles of the individuals that make up the world's population, there are other crucial drivers of carbon emissions, such as the militaries of some nation states. The US military alone emits more greenhouse gases than most countries (Claußen 2022). Even if most people on earth adopted sustainable lifestyles, other sources of emissions would persist, potentially emitting enough CO_2 to still trigger the so-called climate tipping point chain reaction. To locate the cause for climate change solely within modes of capitalist production and consumption, would therefore be incomplete (ibid.). The full picture only emerges when nation state containers, "national interest", and other geopolitical considerations and rivalries are analyzed in combination with capital accumulation.

The various factors at play generate a situation in which urgent and far-reaching political intervention would be needed to alter the trajectory of human made climate change (Biermann 2020, 10). The destabilization of the earth system is slowly, but noticeably increasing, and following current climatological estimates it is most likely to accelerate from here onwards (Wiedmann et al. 2020, 2-3; Wallace-Wells 2019), yet no actor or set of actors with the capacity to impact the progression of climate change seems likely to emerge due to the overall composition of the existing global dispensation. Much rather, it is even to be assumed that the emergence of a coordinated alternative would actively be hindered and repressed by most, if not all nation states, as it would undermine various state imperatives. Structurally, a credible effort to thoroughly address climate change would most likely have to include the antagonization of the state apparatus, which, due to its make-up, is both unwilling and unable to let go of some of its historically grown functions, since doing so might put the state at risk of disintegration. Instead of states becoming agents of climate policies, attempts at real climate change mitigation might thus rather generate open conflicts with the state and its various institutions. The demonization of climate activism in many Northern countries already points in that direction. By policing forms of activism, these protests are meant to be brought back into the fold of "democratically legitimate" forms of dissent. The limits of which are once again in line with those delineated by the accumulation and legitimacy imperatives. This is usually expressed by a general sympathy for standing up for one's beliefs (in this case the necessity for climate change action) but coupled with a condemnation of the methods chosen (which need to conform to established avenues of addressing grievances). In this way, climate groups and movements are either de-radicalized as they try to conform to the established procedures of dissent, discussion, and eventually consensus, or they are criminalized,

both legally and morally. In Germany, such attempts at reigning in climate protest can currently be observed in the way climate activists that block roads to make their demands heard are portrayed in tabloid and public broadcasting media (see for example BILD 2023 and Anne Will 2022).

While the (neo-)liberal state dispensation would put itself at risk by questioning its imperatives, it also does so by its own inaction towards climate change (Dryzek and Stevenson 2011, 1). Projections of climate change induced future migratory movements; desertification; sea level rise; changes in soil fertility; overheating of marine ecosystems and their subsequent disappearance; general loss of biodiversity; and political instability culminating in armed conflict amongst others; are factors that will seriously undermine the neoliberal-democratic order of today (Wallace-Wells 2019, 131-133). Dryzek and Stevenson argue that a whole new form of democracy, which they title *deliberative democracy* and whose core characteristic would be that of constant reflexive deliberation of all parties (3-4), would have to emerge in order to effectively tackle climate change. The authors imagine this form of democracy as being characterized by a deep and continuous dialogue between a diverse set of actors, which bring their positionalities or even their specific cosmologies to the proverbial table. Through an honest and egalitarian dialogue, something resembling a workable consensus could potentially emerge (ibid.). They themselves conclude that even in spaces that could theoretically develop these deliberative capacities, such as UN bodies or other international institutions, they remain chronically underdeveloped (9). The existing democratic framework of cyclical competitive elections is a "non-starter" (1) in addressing anthropogenic climate change.

The neoliberal state hence remains trapped in a position in which it seems unable to change course in the present, potentially forcing it to change course much more drastically in the future. The nature of this coming change is disputed, but current political developments point towards some outcomes more than others. Mann and Wainwright (2018) for example argue that there are essentially four possible avenues for the future of politics, which they characterize as follows: *Climate Leviathan* (globally organized capitalist dispensation), *Climate Mao* (global authoritarian dispensation), *Climate Behemoth* (various nationalist dispensations), and *Climate X* (emancipatory, but yet to be defined global climate governance). To them, a *Climate Leviathan* type of dispensation potentially headed by the United States and China, seems most likely (109-110). Whichever way the coming change will play out, it seems likely that its magnitude will be unprecedented in modern times. According to Adrian Beling, a civilizational change of the order described by Karl Polanyi is imminent in the next few decades (2019, 283), and Naomi Klein directly postulates that the future will be radical (2014) – one way or another. So what could the future of politics look like in the age of advancing climate change?

The Rise of the Far-Right

From the second half of the 2010s onwards, global politics has been marked by the emergence of far-right political movements able to capture electoral majorities. The newness of the phenomenon does not so much lie in the political extremism of these groups, but rather in their capacity to generate political majorities. While this is not a linear process and "moderate" politics have regained governments in some countries, the trend seems far from over. The general development is attributed to a range of interconnected factors such as a backlash against the proliferation of so called "identity politics"; shifts in social power relations (e.g., "the decline of the white man"); anti-establishment sentiments; rekindled xenophobia; a general sense of polarization; or the accentuation of social inequality amongst others. Yet central to most analyses of the far-right and

its success, is the constatation of a destabilization of the current democratic, neoliberal system as a whole (Worth 2019, 13; Koppetsch 2020, 16-19; Traverso 2019, 9).

The mostly US-American, liberal establishment view on the underlying causes of growing far-right popularity is exemplified by authors such as historian Anne Applebaum. Applebaum attributes the far-right's newfound popularity to the cacophony of public disagreement that many Western democracies have witnessed in the last years (2020, 109), and which run counter to some people's need for simple and unitarian narratives that the far-right willingly provides (117). To her, the main culpability for polarization of democratic societies lies with modern intellectual *clercs*, a term she borrows from French essayist Julien Benda, who used it to describe the French intellectual elites that stoked communist, nationalist, and fascist sentiment among the general population in the period before WWII (17-18). Applebaum sees this process repeating today, bolstered by frustrated intellectuals, who find the relevance and public esteem they had hitherto lacked by attaching themselves to the far-right cause (20).

While these decidedly centrist analyses are not necessarily wrong altogether; they usually tend to linger on ideological aspects of liberalism: checks and balances, institutions, the disinterested and dispassionate pursuit of truth, intellectual opinion forging, and gradual change through the open political process of negotiation (188-189); they fail to account for the macro-economic, discursive, and social transformations that have set in in the last decades. They are moreover reductionist in the sense that they seem to ascribe all agency to people from inside the intellectual and political establishment, and very little to people outside it. Rogue clercs hijack the political process by wrestling control from the "good", liberal establishment. The success of far-right movements thus comes to be seen as solely reliant on misguiding a passive electorate that is coaxed with fear, false promises, and incendiary rhetoric (20-21). That the people who do the voting might actually weigh the odds and choose candidates for reasons other than having been "mislead", does here not seem to be a possibility. This view offers a simple and convenient explanation that allows the analysis to remain on a superficial level, as it does not need to engage with potential underlying causes for far-right proliferation – there simply are none. Yet the popularity of the far-right might well be the expression of a desire for more authenticity and proximity than is currently on offer in elite level liberal politics (Pelfini 2016, 60), rather than an elaborate and orchestrated betrayal of voters. While this is not to say that information guerrilla tactics such as the spread of fake news, incessant fearmongering, and the deliberate creation of so-called echo chambers are without effect – they certainly are impactful, but their role in creating the far-right in the first place might be overestimated.

Historically we find ourselves in a time still informed by the dissolution of the two-block world of the Cold War and much of liberal self-understanding reflects the assumptions generated during this period of global bi-polarity (Mishra 2021, 84-85). The juxtaposition of two systems with global and total aspirations, out of which the US-backed system of liberal-capitalist democracy momentarily seemed to have emerged victorious, shapes liberal thought until this day (107). Liberal democracy seemed to have proven its superior morality and efficiency, yet Fukuyama's end of history (1992) never materialized, and the world is today again perceived to be highly complicated and ambiguous. Just like Applebaum's analysis, much of liberal academic and journalistic writing has failed to truly come to terms with this ambiguity and the historic contingencies that shape the current moment, as they usually remain trapped in a state of ideological certainty, in which (US-American) liberal democracy is still imagined as the only valid template for social organization (Mishra 2021, 90). Accordingly, in this framework, the rise of the far-right cannot be understood as anything but the resurgence of the old, totalitarian enemy but with a different political couleur.

That it might constitute a wholly new phenomenon conditioned by the liberal democratic order itself seems unthinkable, yet it might be more promising to try to understand the far-right from within liberal-capitalist society than to once again apply an external lens engendered by (Soviet) totalitarianism.

The Post-WWII boom, which allowed for a capable and generous welfare state in most Western countries, is long over. Slowing growth rates result in noticeable pressure on salaries and standards of living (Streeck 2011, 9-10), while the profitability within financial markets is as high as ever (Rehbein 2021, 105-106), and levels of economic inequality are slowly but steadily re-approaching that of the *Gilded Age* (Piketty 2014). The political legitimacy of most of the established actors, which had hitherto been structured around notions of equal representation and upward mobility, is hence dwindling, as neoliberal accumulation practices and citizen rights are juxtaposed in a field of tension that seems to be on the brink of rupture (Streeck 2011, 18). As the social contract of the Bretton Woods world, in which the ideological legitimization of capitalism was tied to the possibility for upward mobility for all sectors of the population, was displaced by the neo-liberalization of the economy, many social security mechanisms found themselves in a process of erosion and disintegration. For the first time since the 1950s, living standards have stagnated and sometimes even decreased in the Global North (Koppetsch 2020, 27), while growth rates in so called "emerging markets" have remained uneven and erratic. The hyperbolic growth projections of both India and China turned out to be far too optimistic, in part due to the pandemic fallout. Even though both China, and to a lesser degree also India, are in the process of (re-)claiming positions on the global political stage, it seems unlikely that they will be able to lift their whole populations into relative prosperity any time soon (Wallace-Wells 2019, 54).

It thus seems that one of the reasons for present-day far right success is to be found in the fact that the discrepancies between proclaimed values and goals of liberal (state) systems, and the actual life realities many people face within them, have grown too wide to be logically integrated with one another (Davidson and Saull 2016, 2). While personal freedom, equal representation, and equal access to life's opportunities are central tenets of liberalism, these values and their implementation have, to a considerable degree, remained unfulfilled in many countries. In others yet, where these ideals had been partly implemented, the dismantling of welfare state institutions and other social democratic mechanisms, created instability where none, or considerably less, had existed before (Littler 2018, 52-53). These gradual political shifts have aided in bringing to light the inherent contradictions of what Jodhka, Rehbein, and Souza call *symbolic liberalism* (2018, 126); namely that the symbolic claims of liberalism are ultimately always negated by real and expanding inequality. Despite most countries being nominally, legally, and formally equal societies, inequality persists or expands. This is due to the irreconcilability of self-deregulating global capitalism with egalitarian and emancipatory ideals.

The interface that mediates, sanctions, and writes neoliberal practices into law, is the liberal democratic state. It provides the overall framework – legal, technical, bio-political – of operation for globalized capitalism. This gives rise to a highly complex situation: while the democratic state in principle upholds the emancipatory ideals of Enlightenment philosophy, it also sanctions a dispensation that fundamentally undermines said ideals (Lasalle 2021, 36). The dispensation that this engenders, here called *capitalist dispensation*, is therefore one marked by deep tensions and stark juxtapositions that result from a social-economic order that simultaneously tries to maximize profit, while, at least ideologically, also being obliged to safeguard individual rights and mechanisms of equal representation. Deficits and inequalities generated by the global capitalist dispensation are therefore, in part rightfully so, projected onto liberal democracy (Hartmann

2018, 27) and liberal democratic ideals find themselves in the position of having to answer to the discontent created by economic practices sanctioned by nominally democratic state formations (Worth 2019, 11).

This constant tension generates a stark cognitive dissonance, which in turn results in a deep resentment of liberal institutions and ideology (Hochschild 2016, 139-142). Far-right movements around the world have learned to garner and direct this resentment and they use it to both discredit liberal democratic institutions, while simultaneously aiming to capture them through the electoral process (Miller-Idriss 2020, 18). Even though far-right politicians are usually not opposed to capitalism per se and often are themselves supporters of economic deregulation, they have nevertheless been able to effectively mobilize the anger and fear that the neoliberal re-structuring of the last few decades has brought about (Koppetsch 2020, 115; 126; Reckwitz 2021).

Even without the potential dislocation and destabilization of climate change, which arguably has not deeply affected the Global North yet, it is to be observed that the neoliberal democratic dispensation has reached a conjuncture that is characterized by regressive tendencies (Nachtwey 2018), instability (Streeck 2011; Blühdorn 2007), and attempts at various forms of closure (Mudde 2007, 64-65, 187). Some authors liken this current state to the "morbid symptoms" first identified by Gramsci in his analysis of Italian fascism, in which he states that a change of political epoch is accompanied by a variety of disintegrative characteristics, resulting from deep tectonic shifts in the political landscape (Worth 2019, 8; Koppetsch 2020, 16). The internal ruptures of liberal democracy, for which the ideological cushioning is becoming continuously weaker as life chances deteriorate and inequality soars, will soon be accompanied by the pressure of climate change related transformations of life on earth.

The Far-Right and the Future of (Climate) Politics

If projections about the intensity of climate change are taken seriously, and scientific consensus is that they are to be taken seriously (Gallopin et al. 2002, 1-2; Wallace-Wells 2019), the world will be faced with a continuous stream of low to high intensity disruptive events, all unfurling at once. According to the more pessimistic predictions, large sways of the earth could become inhabitable by the end of the century (Vince 2009). The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report tentatively mentioned the possibility, even if slight, of a 7-degree warming by 2100 (IPCC AR6 2023, 33;43). This would most likely mean the end of life on earth as we know it (ibid.). Yet also the social, economic, geopolitical, and natural consequences of the more realistic range of warming of 2,5 to 5 or even 6 degrees are drastic, to put it mildly (McSweeney 2018). Even the more optimistic estimates that still see containment of global warming in the 1,5-to-2-degree range as achievable, would constitute a deeply altered natural and social world (Wallace-Wells 2019, 13). The coming state of constant crisis will undermine state institutions and political processes, which, as detailed above, are already strained. This process of political erosion will be accelerated by the lack of comprehensive climate fallout containment strategies of most if not all states. Anti-establishment sentiments and the deepening suspicion towards neoliberal democracy will be only accentuated by the consequences of human made climate change, even if the disruptions are not directly attributed to climate change. Ways of life, which are already threatened by the current modes of wealth allocation, will most likely become untenable.

This is especially true for the so-called *imperial mode of living* (Brand and Wissen 2021) of much of the Global North and sections of the Global South, especially its elites and middle classes,

as the externalization of the cost of production relies on cheap labor and the cheap extraction of raw materials (Lang 2019, 82). Resource scarcity prompted by climate change fallout, might provoke countries that momentarily still export natural goods, to severely limit or altogether halt trade targeted at external consumption. In return, electorates in import-relying countries might favor a forceful reinstatement of these lopsided extractive and productive relations in order to maintain standards of living that over the course of the last decades have come to be seen as normal, justified, and deserved (Wiedmann et al. 2020, 5). The momentary global order thus seems precarious and re-alignments of power relations along the lines of natural and geological characteristics and advantages seem possible. In many liberal democracies, far-right politics could become the instrument of choice to forcefully try to cling to current positions of privilege and relative material comfort. In this situation, subjugation and the continuation of unequal global power relations seem more likely than cooperation and mutual aid (Daggett 2018, 27). If attempts at salvaging neo-imperial power relations fail, falling living standards, decreased or negative economic growth, decreasing consumption, and downward pressure on salaries and pensions, might lead to re-feudalizing tendencies and heightened population control in countries that were formerly on the winning side of the imperial mode of living. In either of the two cases, the authoritarian characteristics of the far-right make it a well-positioned contender to enforce the necessary politics. This is in line with Adloff and Neckel's observation that imaginaries of social control are emerging alongside the threats of climate change (2019, 7-8).

Some other countries residing within what today is called the Global South, are momentarily in an upward trajectory, with growing economies and expanding middle classes, chiefly India, and China. Yet the aspirations and projections of these countries could quickly be undone by worsening climate change, with India poised to be hit the worst of all countries in relation to its overall, historic, and present carbon footprint (Wallace-Wells 2019, 194). The political consequences of whole generations being stripped of the prosperity they had imagined that they would grow into are hard to fathom. The right-wing BJP government, which currently rides on an electoral wave of developmental and growth discourses (Chatterji et al. 2019, 9), might switch to scapegoating and blaming if economic strategies flounder. The targets for this are readily at hand: India's minorities such as Muslims, Christians, "Naxalites" and other Leftists, and lower caste, and non-conforming Hindus (4). India's indigenous communities, which are often referred to under the umbrella term *Adivasi*, are already bearing the brunt of extractive development as their ancestral homelands make way for mines, dams, and highways, and they will be hit hardest when climate change forever alters the natural landscape of the Indian subcontinent (for a detailed account of Adivasi struggles for land and livelihoods see Roy 2011). In China, a tightening authoritarian grip, as could already be observed during the Covid-19 pandemic, might be used to quieten civic discontent and open protests once economic prospects darken.

While the above-mentioned scenarios are far from certain and internal and external power relations of nation states could play out differently, it seems certain that instability and risk will increase substantially. Potentially more relevant than the Giddens Paradox (Dryzek and Stevenson 2011, 1), which states that politics will ignore climate change as long as possible and thereby miss the point by which its course could still have been altered, is thus the paradox that the climate inaction of the political establishment might not favor radical solutions to climate change, but the exact opposite: climate change denial. By holding on to the state imperatives delineated by Hausknost (2019), liberal democratic systems neither address climate change as needed, nor allow for other actors to do so as this would undermine the state's authority.

This opens the field to actors that do not seek to address climate change and hence do not immediately threaten state imperatives, but who thrive on instability. The far-right therefore seems poised to profit significantly from the overall destabilization caused by intensifying climate change, since it is neither opposed to the accumulation imperative, nor necessarily to the representation imperative, even though it is here strictly limited to "one's own", *national* population (Mudde 2007, 189). In this way, the far-right might come to act as symbolically revolutionary force that breaks with the political establishment and its norms, all the while keeping structural arrangements intact. Actively undermining climate change mitigation efforts, such as the unilateral abandonment of the Paris Agreement by the United States under Trump or Bolsonaro's active encouragement of large-scale logging in the Amazon, are therefore not opposed to far-right aspirations at long term political influence. They might reversely even be conducive to them. The more unstable the world is perceived, the stronger far-right support might grow. This does not mean that anti-climate politics are conscious far-right endeavors to further destabilize fraught social, political, and economic arrangements, and it is to be assumed that large parts of the far-right truly do either not believe climate change is real or simply do not care if it is (Mayer 2016, 219), and the 20th century assumption that the environment is irrelevant to human history (Chakrabarty 2009, 204), still informs much of today's far-right. Jane Mayer has shown to which lengths libertarian billionaires, especially the Koch donor network, have gone to spread skepticism among the US-American public, in politics, media, and academia (210). A non-partisan fact until the 1990s, the belief in climate change is now heavily conditioned by party adherence (198). Nevertheless, it seems possible that the political force that most rotundly denies climate change, emerges as its largest benefactor.

This is due to the magnitude of disruption and insecurity that climate change is expected to cause. When the effects of climate change begin impacting everyday life and the risks that in Beck's analysis (1986, 28) are still diffuse become palpable, most liberal democratic states will involuntarily reveal their inability to manage the plethora of climate change repercussions. For its success, the far-right would not even have to concede that this new type of "morbid symptoms" is environmental in nature, as the far-right has proven apt at superimposing its own narratives on any given event (Worth 2019, 175). By recurring to their well-practiced "post-truth" discursive strategies (Sismondo 2017; Perini-Santos 2021), far-right politicians will find it sufficiently easy to put climate change related events and disruptions to their own use. Donald Trump, who in 2009 had still signed a full-page advert in the New York Times urging Obama to take comprehensive climate change action (Cheung 2020), then went on to claim that "The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive" (cited in ibid.) a few years later, showing how readily stand-points are switched and statements inverted. Reversely, the far-right could also (once again) acknowledge climate change at any given point and argue that the liberal political elites failed to curb it on time. An analysis that paradoxically, even if coming from the far-right, is not in itself wrong. The far-right therefore might come into a position where it can simultaneously uphold the image of radical change and disruption, while putting the established state institutions to its own use.

The calls for a return to a (fictive) natural order, established hierarchies, and a world with less ambiguities, which the far-right has made one of its core rallying points (Applebaum 2020, 95; Koppetsch 2020, 48-53), will thus most likely increase further. The return to simpler times and simpler truths also applies to desires generated in the matrix of climate change. Cara Daggett's analysis of what she terms "petro-masculinity", is illuminating when it comes to the link between established (male) identity formations and the use of fossil fuels. In her short essay, she traces how enthusiasm for fossil fuels is increasingly being linked to (male) forms of protest against the

imposition of climate norms that many feel are in juxtaposition with notions of manliness and prowess (2018). The adherence to climate change mitigation strategies so comes to be seen as synonymous with the dethroning of old gendered hierarchies and male privilege is defended by doing things the way they had always been done – burning fossil fuels (31). The far-right can thus not only draw strength from the political implications of climate change, but also from the underlying cultural shifts and friction points.

In Wainwright and Mann's categorization of the possible political outcomes of climate change that have been discussed earlier, the estimate here proposed partly coincides with what they title Climate Behemoth, which describes a hyper-nationalistic inward turn of most states (2018, 28). While they suggest that the most likely outcome is not this, but rather a global capitalist dispensation, potentially but not necessarily headed by the US and China (109-110), the structural restrictions and tensions within liberal democracy rather point towards a more profound rupture than a mere elevation of the capitalist dispensation from national levels to a unified global level. Here, it becomes important to note that a prolonged hyper-nationalist turn would not necessarily have to be limited to the individual nation state containers, as far-right governed polities might perceivably link nationalistic inward policies with deep alliances to like-minded dispensations. A far-right global block could hence be a possibility (see Worth 2019, 165). Yet, it is here necessary to likewise point to the tension that underpins far-right ideology and the complete interdependence of life on a planet that is soon-to-be ravaged by climate change. While a global level political alliance on some issues is already a reality regarding certain far-right issues (Applebaum 2020, 132), it is at this point hard to imagine, how the approaching global crisis will be fully integrated into hyper-nationalist, inward looking narratives. The simple fact of interdependence of human life – and all other life for that matter – which the coming decades will make evident (Chakrabarty 2009, 222) might hence pose the most direct challenge to long-term far-right cooperation.

As outlined before, the future of climate governance is a disputed topic, yet it seems clear that the impending earth system transformation will profoundly shake up not only the natural, but also the political world. This work tried to show why the far-right is well positioned to take advantage of these upcoming changes. The two main reasons for this are the far-right's ability to channel much of the growing discontent with capitalist democracy and its shortcomings on the one hand, and its structural political orientation that does not openly contradict state imperatives on the other, making it a prime contender for leadership roles in a system that is increasingly marked by the destabilization of old political truths and their representatives, but which also seems incapable of far-reaching structural change. Once the destabilization of the natural world caused by anthropogenic climate change comes into full effect, this appeal will be further amplified. That the far-right in large parts rejects the veracity of global warming, must not necessarily be an obstacle for it to profit from the climate crisis, as it has already shown to be very capable of adjusting both strategy and narrative according to the opportunities it is presented. Of course, this analysis represents only one possible development among many. Far-right movements could easily squander this current advantage by turning public opinion against them. Its indecisive stand on the Russian invasion of Ukraine was an example of this, albeit not a pivotal one, but other such instances could materialize at any time. Alternatively, powerful radical climate movements might still emerge, despite the high systemic hurdles posed to them.

This article aims to point to a gap. While much has been written about climate change and the far-right independently, little theorization has been done regarding their possible future interplay. The initial exploration outlined here hopes to serve as a point of departure for subsequent analyses.

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Notes

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