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**When Words Matter for the Climate: A Discourse Analysis of the European Parliament's Plenary Debates on the European Climate Law**  
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When Words Matter for the Climate:  
A Discourse Analysis of the European Parliament's Plenary Debates on the European  
Climate Law

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## Abstract

The European Parliament's vote on the European Climate Law was a controversial and pivotal battle ground for the climate politics, with the Greens and The Left joining the far-right Identity & Democracy Group in a vote against the law, while the Socialists and European People's Party voted in favor. Expert analyses judge the Climate Law as insufficiently ambitious in light of the European Union's targets set out in the Paris Agreement. This thesis, using Habermas' theory on deliberative democracy as a framework, focuses on the European Parliament's plenary debates on the European Climate Law to investigate whether democratic deliberation has a connection with climate policymaking. By conducting a discourse analysis of plenary debates using the Discourse Quality Index, this thesis explores the connection between deliberation and climate policy. The debates on the European Climate Law are analyzed, including a total of 141 speeches. As political groups have a high level of internal cohesion, the results are broken down according to political groups and their respective votes on the EU's Climate Law. The results show that the political groups which voted against the climate law - due to its *lack of* ambition – had the highest quality of deliberation in the debates. The group which voted against the law - due to it being *too* ambitious – had the lowest quality of deliberation. These results suggest that a higher quality of deliberation is associated with more ambitious climate policy. The findings of this thesis thereby support the idea that strengthening deliberative democracy has the potential of making climate policymaking more aligned with the ambition of the Paris Agreement.

Topic key words: *European Climate Law + Jürgen Habermas + deliberative discourse + European Parliament + political groups + plenary debate + discourse quality index + deliberative democracy + climate governance*

### Acknowledgements

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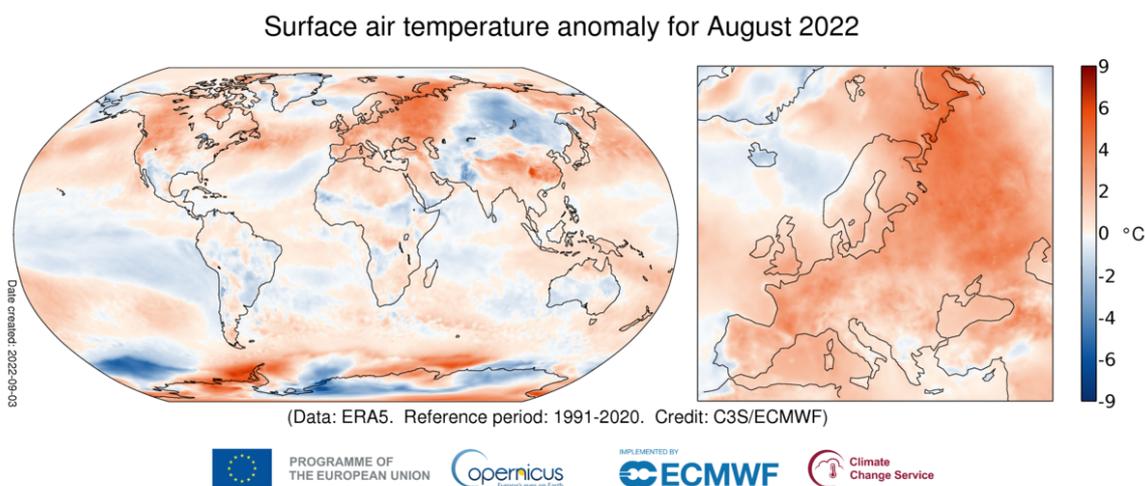
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## Abbreviations:

CoFoEU	Conference on the Future of the European Union
ECL	European Climate Law
ECR	Group of the European Conservatives and Reformists
EP	European Parliament
EPP	Group of the European People's Party
EU	European Union
Greens/EFA	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left
ID	Identity and Democracy Group
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
S&D	Group of the Socialists and Democrats
UN	United Nations

## 1. Introduction

During the summer of 2022, temperatures reached record highs (see *Image 1*) and the front pages of newspapers across the world featured apocalyptic photos of droughts, floods, fires, and storms (Noor, 2022). The world has reached 1.1 degrees Celsius of warming since pre-industrial times, and as the problem becomes more tangible and acute, so does the need for action (Patel, 2022). Climate change presents our democracies with perhaps the most complex and far-reaching of problems, competing with many issues for a high spot on the political agenda. While inaction plagues governments across the globe, the urgency of the matter is exponentially increasing as described by the most recent United Nations (UN) climate change report: “This report is a dire warning about the consequences of inaction. It shows that climate change is a grave and mounting threat to our wellbeing and a healthy planet” (IPCC, 2022).



*Image 1:* Surface air temperature anomaly for August 2022 relative to the August average for the period 1991-2020. Data source: ERA5. Credit: Copernicus Climate Change Service/ECMWF (Copernicus, 2022).

To address climate change, the majority of countries have gathered at climate conferences across the decades, which have resulted in agreements such as the Paris Climate

Accord<sup>1</sup> (Paris Agreement, 2015). This legally binding treaty includes pledges and volunteer actions, to which countries could choose to commit themselves. The overarching goal of the agreement is to keep global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. To that end, the European Union (EU) has recently created several key pieces of legislation under the umbrella of the European Green Deal, which was launched in 2019. The Green Deal sets out the overarching goal for the EU's economy and society to become climate neutral by 2050 (European Commission, 2021). To write the goals of the Green Deal into EU law, the European Climate Law (ECL) was formally adopted in 2021. Besides the goal of climate neutrality, the ECL additionally “sets the intermediate target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels” (European Commission, 2021). To achieve these objectives, the EU is currently in the process of revising key pieces of previously created legislation on energy, emissions, forestry, agriculture, and more (Lapierre & McDougall, 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has 154 parties and laid the foundation for the annual climate change conferences (also known as Conference of the Parties, or COP). These assess the developments in climate change and provide the opportunity for member countries to negotiate agreements on climate action (UNFCCC, n.d.). The Paris Agreement, signed in 2016, is a landmark treaty on climate mitigation and adaptation (Paris Agreement, 2015).

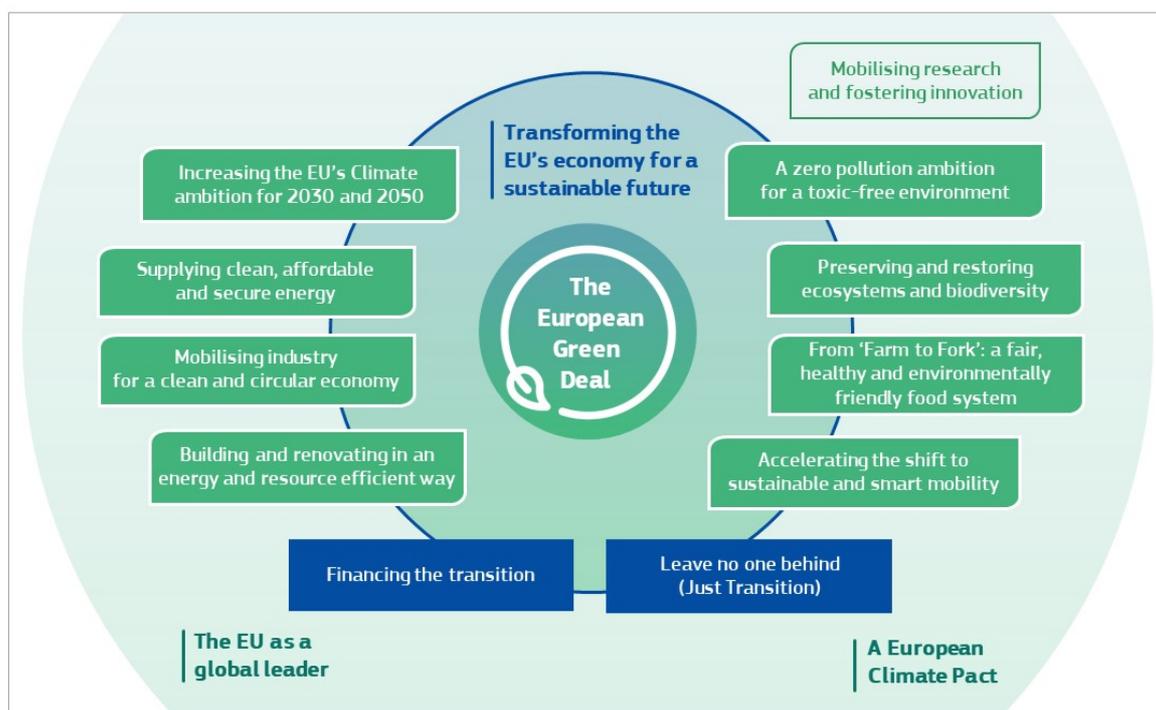


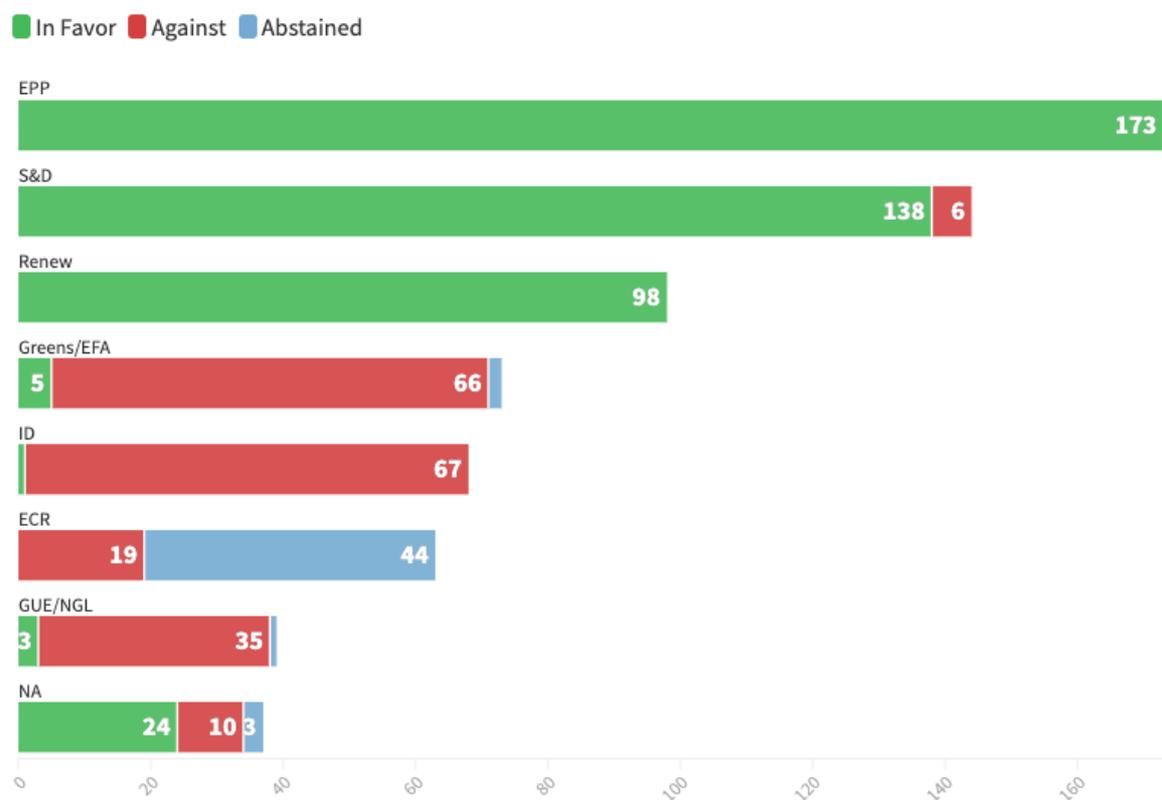
Figure 1: A roadmap of the European Commission's Green Deal (European Commission, 2019b).

Despite the EU's ambitions and efforts, expert organizations such as the UN Environment Programme and Climate Action Tracker have judged the ECL as insufficient to adequately address climate change (Climate Action Tracker, 2021; UN Environment Programme, 2019). The judgement of insufficiency is made by considering that the EU is party to the Paris Climate Agreement, which sets targets to keep the planet to a manageable level of warming that is "well below 2 degrees," but the current ECL framework does not set the EU on a path to stick to its Paris commitments<sup>2</sup> (Paris Agreement, 2015; Climate Action Tracker, 2021; Mathiesen & Oroschakoff, 2020). In fact, "no major countries, democratic or otherwise, currently have a national climate plan compatible with their Paris pledges" (Willis

<sup>2</sup> While not providing an outright assessment of the EU's Climate Law, "the U.N. report suggests the EU should cut [emissions] by even more than 65 percent, especially if taking into account the bloc's responsibility for driving up emissions in the past, said Oliver Geden, a senior fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs" (Mathiesen & Oroschakoff, 2020). By cutting emission by only 55%, the ECL is not aligned with that target.

et al., 2022, p. 2). Consequently, the earth is currently on a path for 2.7 degrees of warming by 2100 (Climate Action Tracker, 2022).

The majority of the European Parliament (EP) voted in favor of the ECL, but there was a clear split among the political groups (see *Figure 2*). Following two debates on the ECL, in which more than 80 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) participated, a vote on the final proposed law took place (see *Figure 2*).



*Figure 2:* Visual representation of the vote on the ECL, divided per political group on the y-axis and with the numbers of MEPs indicated by the x-axis. The colors indicate the way in which the MEPs voted (Greens/EFA, 2021a; Hix et al., 2022).

Perhaps counter-intuitively (see *Image 2*) the left-wing Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) and The Left (GUE/NGL) groups were joined by the extreme-right Identity & Democracy (ID) Group in a vote against the law, while the centrist Social Democrats (S&D), Renew, and European People's Party (EPP) groups voted in favor, and the right-wing European Conservatives & Reformists (ECR) Group abstained (Taylor & Kurmayer, 2021).

This vote was a high-profile, controversial, and pivotal battle ground for climate politics, but the EP-approved law is ultimately not in line with the EU's Paris Agreement commitments (Climate Action Tracker, 2021; Oroschakoff & Hernandez-Morales, 2020).



*Image 2:* An example of how controversial the vote was framed, as reported by the outlet EURACTIV, featuring a photo of Michael Bloss, MEP from the Greens/EFA Group (Taylor & Kurmayer, 2021).

The question of how to successfully create climate policy in line with the Paris Agreement remains open, and there is disagreement as to what type of government is best for climate policy, which will be explored in Section 3.5. When looking to improve the EU's current democratic approach to climate governance, it is questionable whether more democracy leads to better or worse climate policy. If the ECL does not set the EU on a path to sufficiently combat climate change, but the EP overwhelmingly voted in favor of it, democracy did not result in successful climate policy in this case. For the future of climate

governance, it is worth investigating how the political groups of the EP, representing a broad political spectrum, differed in the deliberative quality of their debate contributions. This thesis looks at the possible association between the deliberative quality of a political group's plenary debate contributions on the ECL, focusing on qualities of a democratic speech, and the group's position on the ECL. Specifically, this thesis asks whether the quality of an EP political group's deliberation is associated with its position on the ECL. Thereby, this research seeks to explore the connection between deliberative democracy and climate policy. This research can contribute to the discussion on deliberative democracy in the context of climate governance. It can also contribute to a discussion on the quality of deliberation in the EP plenary debates and the EU's climate policy.

This thesis starts with a discussion on the research's academic and societal relevance, both in the political sphere of climate governance and in the academic sphere of deliberative democracy and discourse analysis. Section 3 dives into the relevant background, explaining relevant aspects of democracy, deliberation, the EP, and climate governance. This background section also acts as the theoretical framework, as Habermas' theory on deliberative democracy is the foundation for the methodology. The section on Research Design, which lays out the research plan, is followed by the Results, which reports on the findings of the data analysis. The Analysis Section contextualizes and discusses the meaning of the results and is followed by the Conclusion.

## 2. Academic and Societal Relevance

The first point of this research's relevance is in the discussion on safeguarding and strengthening democracy in the modern world. Increasing populism, authoritarianism, and post-truth politics all stand in opposition to deliberative democracy, as they incapacitate, suppress, and invalidate political deliberation (Bächtiger et al., 2018). Strengthening

deliberative democracy could constitute “the best response to authoritarian populism and post-truth politics,” especially in the context of climate change which relies largely on fact-based evidence and understanding of complex interdependencies (p. 2). Research found that two out of three right-wing populists in the EP “regularly vote against climate and energy policy measures” because, “for most right-wing populists, climate change is either not an important issue, or they do not believe it exists, or they believe it is not man-made” (Bierbach, 2019). Bolstering deliberative democracy therefore has the potential to be an effective way of improving politics’ handling of climate change by counter-acting populism and post-truth politics, and research on the topic can help guide climate governance. In addition, researchers are observing a “deliberative turn” wherein there is an increased emphasis on debate and discussion in the policy-making process (Steiner et al., 2005). Consequently, scholarly work on deliberative democracy in the modern context can be valuable to the understanding and implementation of deliberative politics.

Thus far, there has been very limited empirical research on deliberative politics, as political scientists have maintained a strong focus on social choice theory wherein preferences are given and decision-making is a vote-centric process of preference aggregation (Steenbergen et al., 2003, p. 22). The methodology applied in this research paper, namely, the Discourse Quality Index (DQI), has thus far only been applied to the European Parliament plenary debates in one study, which looked at an array of debate topics during the legislative period of 2004-2009 and investigated a variety of variables (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013). That study did not explore the differences between political groups, nor did it look at a specific topic of deliberation. Instead, its focus was on the factors which lead to MEPs displaying varying degrees of quality in their deliberation and it therefore used the DQI as a causal mechanism. This paper, in contrast, looks at the differences between political groups in their deliberative quality (using the DQI as a measurement of deliberative quality) and considers

that in light of the groups' respective position on the ECL, thus focusing the research on the specific field of climate governance.

This research thesis is also on the forefront of research on EU climate policy, since the ECL came into effect only last year, in 2021. The ECL is described as a "landmark" law, which, "will guide EU regulations in the coming decades," (Abnett, 2021). This research helps in the understanding of how this climate law came to be, and how democratic deliberation might be connected to current-day climate policy. It can also serve as a reference for future research on the upcoming proposals under the Green Deal.

### 3. Background

This thesis relies heavily on the political theories of Jürgen Habermas, a 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher who, alongside John Rawls and G. A. Cohen, belonged to the first generation of thinkers on deliberative democracy, which is considered "one of the major strains of contemporary democratic theory" (Young, 2001, p. 670). These thinkers shared a common basic understanding of deliberation as an exchange of reasons for ones' positions on an issue, and they combined this with "ideals of high-quality argumentation or rational-critical debate" (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 4). Second-generation thinkers later developed these foundational ideas to account for nuance found in different styles of communication (including those which are less rational) and considerations for context. The following subsections will delve into the connection between democracy and discourse, which prepares for a deeper elaboration of deliberative democracy. The theory of Jürgen Habermas lay the foundation for this thesis' methodology and its application to the EP's ECL debates.

### 3.1. Democracy and Discourse

The basic idea of democracy is for politics “to allow people to organize their lives together and decide what common rules they will live by” (Olson, 2011, p. 140). To do so, there must be the opportunity to discuss and come to conclusions on the will of the people and the rules. In the context of democracy, this discussion - or discourse - is essentially communicative action with the result being the creation of and agreement on rules or norms. With this action, “public opinion is processed through public argumentation to produce norms to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses” (Olson, 2011, p. 147). Participants in the discussion “give and criticize reasons for holding or rejecting particular validity claims, so that universally valid norms can be discovered through reason” (Steenbergen et al., 2003, p. 25). The will of the people is thereby developed, communicated, and decided upon.

Academia defines discourse as “the capacity of meaning-making resources to constitute social reality, forms of knowledge and identity within specific contexts and power relates” (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 674). Foucault further conceptualized discourse as “a productive technology of social practice” with a constant tension between power and meaning (p. 675). With its ability to develop a dynamic and historically sensitive mode of investigation that accounts for the relations of power that shape and constrain, discourse analysis is clearly post-structuralist (p. 681).

True democratic discourse is an ideal, since in practice, political deliberation results in some misunderstandings and is plagued by power or inequality. Nonetheless, for the legitimacy of decision-making, it is essential that participants continue to attempt to “clarify their intentions and communicate across differences of power and inequality” (Olson, 2011, p. 143). Democratic decision-making is also not without a form of coercion, as a decision supported by the majority will be imposed upon the minority, which is “a harsh discipline

that many of us are only prepared to accept where reasons are available for why we have been out-voted” (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 29). Habermas makes the point that a liberal democratic society, in fact, *requires* such justification to the extent that citizens can accept laws on account of their own beliefs, thereby legitimizing the coercion (Lord, 2013). He argues that democratic legitimacy can only stem from “what citizens would agree to under discursive conditions” (Blockmans & Russack, 2020a, p. 13). This does not per se require the legislative process itself to be discursive, but in this framework, democratic claims to legitimacy must be understood in discourse-theoretic terms.

Basic rights and freedoms, such as the right to speak and right to access public information, can all be “understood as a legally constituted discursive process of legislation (Blockmans & Russack, 2020a, p. 13). Deliberation furthermore protects from a tyranny of the majority, wherein the will of the minority would not be represented (Council of Europe, n.d.). Thus, the need for deliberation is further spotlighted from the perspective of legitimacy (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013). Deliberation in the form of collective choices, reached via public reasoning among equal citizens, can be seen as a basis for legitimacy, and public institutions can be described as legitimate if they provide the framework for this deliberation (Cohen, 2002).

### 3.2. Deliberative Democracy

The modern debate on deliberative politics, wherein Habermas’ theories are situated, explores the relationship between the principles of deliberation, political equality, and non-tyranny. Deliberative democracy provides a complementary lens to look at liberal democratic states, for which the default indicator of democracy was, for a long time, aggregated democracy in the form of voting. The term ‘deliberative democracy’ refers to “the effort [...] to reconcile the value of deliberation with other core democratic principles” (Simon, 2008, p.

221). Put most simply, deliberative democracy is the exchange of reasonable arguments between equal participants, resulting in legitimate decision-making (Crespy, 2014). This discussion can be traced back to Athenian democracy, in the sense of its emphasis on political equality between the members the Athenian Council or the commissions, which consisted of no more than 500 citizens and allowed for public deliberation and legislative decision-making (Simon, 2008).

Habermas developed his theory of discourse ethics as part of his ideas on communicative action (Chouliaraki, 2008). Therein, similarly to Foucault, he views discourse as a practice because it formulates knowledge, especially in the public sphere. This practice is inseparable from power as part of culture, but he nonetheless views the ideal culture as one without power, which theoretically allows for the ideal speech situation (p. 681). The ideal speech situation produces a flow of knowledge between citizens and public discourse, and to make that possible, the ideal citizen brings private matters to the public sphere for deliberation (Chouliaraki, 2008).

These ethics of discourse, as theorized by Habermas, entail two aims, the first being the specification of the conditions that are ideal for discourse, and the second being the grounding of ethics in the norms and rules agreed on in the course of the discourse (Habermas, 2003). In practice, this means that if discussion occurs in circumstances which satisfy the conditions (which are elaborated in Section 3.3.), then the collective decisions taken by the participants of the discussion are assumed as just, fair, and legitimate.

In Habermas' idea of democracy, deliberation has a central place. He defines deliberation as "mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values and interests regarding matters of common concern" (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 3). Other authors have described it as a joint effort and process to clarify and elaborate, with the goal of first defining and then addressing problems, wherein "people come together, based on

the equal status and mutual respect, to discuss the political issues they face, and based on those discussions, decide on policies that will affect their lives” (Rosenberg, 2007; Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 18). This ideal can serve as an objective to strive for, as it describes, “political interactions that are egalitarian, uncoerced, competent, and free from delusion, deception, power, and strategy” (Dryzek, 1990, p. 202). Consequently, the decisions produced via the process of deliberation are more likely to be socially just while also bringing moral and intellection benefits to participants (Crespy, 2014). This perspective does not dispute the importance of studying the way citizens or representatives vote, but rather allows for a complementary study of the democratic process. Furthermore, giving the opportunity and space for deliberation to occur alongside voting has the potential for better-informed decision-making (Steenbergen et al., 2003).

### 3.3. Habermas’ Deliberative Politics and Discourse Ethics: Conditions and Practice

For discourse to qualify as deliberative, the discussion must be absent of coercive power, meaning that participants must be able to speak of their own will. An essential part of this practice is mutual respect, which means “listening actively and trying to understand the meaning to the speaker of any statement” (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 7). This effort must be made with the knowledge that it is impossible to fully understand or identify with the experiences of others, especially if there is a significant divergence in backgrounds (p. 7). Participants must also see one another as having equal status in the deliberation, meaning, in practice, that anyone must be able to take part in the discussion and anyone can introduce and challenge claims (Olson, 2011, p. 140).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The precise conditions for deliberative discourse are laid out by Habermas are as follows: “(1) Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse; (2a) Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever; (2b) Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse; (2c) Everyone is allowed to express his (or her) attitudes, desires, and needs; and (3) No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his (or her) rights as laid down in (1) and (2)” (Habermas, 1990, p. 86).

Habermas emphasizes that decision-making is not simply the translation of fixed preferences into votes. Rather, it is a living process, “in which political actors listen to each other, reasonably justify their positions, show mutual respect, and are willing to re-evaluate and eventually revise their initial preferences through a process of discourse about competing validity claims” (Steenbergen et al., 2003, p. 21). This process occurs in two spheres: the periphery and the core (Olson, 2011). The former concerns the discourse occurring in everyday life between ordinary citizens, in the informal and unregulated conversations people have with one another. These conversations are important for public sovereignty, although they do not have a strong direct effect on actual policy, as they do not “coalesce into binding legal decisions” (p. 149). This informal discourse does, however, allow for the flexible exchange of viewpoints and the consideration of a wide variety of ideas. The latter sphere, the core, concerns the domain of official lawmaking in parliamentary settings and will be further discussed in the Section 3.3.2. on Deliberative Democracy in Institutions (p. 148).

In practice, deliberative democracy constitutes citizens and representatives discussing an issue and then either coming to a consensus or, if conflict remains, deciding on the issue by voting. The element of deliberation helps participants better understand the issue in addition to the interests and perspectives of others. This follows along the idea that democracy is a form of public control, like all other political models, but with the requirements of political equality and justification (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013). Deliberation is needed to flesh out the aggregation, thereby rescuing democratic aggregation from indeterminacy and arbitrariness (p. 30).

### 3.3.1. Critique of Habermas and Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy is an aspirational ideal, as it is impossible to achieve it fully. In fact, as pointed out by critical theorists like Nancy Fraser, if all participants in deliberative

democracy are to have an “equal opportunity of political influence,” complete societal equality is a necessary pre-condition for true democracy (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 8). There is, subsequently, an inevitable gap between theory and practice, which has been the target of heavy critique and calls into question the real-world usefulness of this unachievable ideal.

The main pitfall of deliberative democracy is its focus on rationality. In Habermas’ theory, the core element of deliberation is reason-giving, which is a rational and argumentative act (Crespy, 2014; Olson, 2011). This leaves out other less-rational elements, such as emotion and empathy, that play an important role in human communication, in addition to personal greetings, which are part of the relationships between participants, and anecdotal storytelling, which can illuminate personal experiences rather than just abstract argument (Bächtiger et al., 2018). Relying on rational communication has the advantage of being relatively simple to measure and judge, but adopting this lens leaves a blind spot for the irrational human forces at play. Contemporary deliberative theorists try to account for that criticism by expanding the understanding of ‘reason’ to the vague concept of “relevant considerations,” but this development does not fully close the gap (p. 10).

To that regard, feminist theorists, such as Nancy Fraser, critique the male-centric approach of deliberative theorists for their lack of consideration for the roles that gender, race, and class play in the way that theories on deliberative democracy have developed (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Mansbridge, 2017). In practice, this bias means that “groups that are less likely to use the argumentative and rational forms of communication are disqualified” from this framework (Crespy, 2014). While agreeing with Fraser’s feminist critique, Iris Young also comments on the narrow approach of deliberative theory in that it excludes the role of activism. Typical acts of activism, such as marches and boycotts, try to achieve change via confrontation rather than discussion (Young, 2001). These acts, or any others that occur outside of the established system, are excluded from deliberative democracy, and this

spotlights the fact that deliberative democracy operates within a given structure and only accepts contributions and participation within that structure. Subsequently, it presupposes certain power structures, such as political institutions, which inevitably exclude “the ability for grassroots movements to raise conflicts and express dissent” (Crespy, 2014, p. 84).

A final critical consideration to note is that Habermas, and deliberative democracy more broadly, has been developed and applied largely in the Western context, meaning that contexts in African, Asian, and South American countries are excluded. Consequently, this theory is thus far limited in its applicability and generalizability.

### 3.3.2. Deliberative Democracy in Institutions

Institutions are an integral part of deliberative democracy. The aforementioned ‘core’ sphere of deliberative democracy is the one, “of official lawmaking, a parliamentary body structured around ideals of public argumentation” which draws “the themes and contents of weak publics together into forms of communicative power” (Olson, 2011, p. 148). A great deal of academic and practical work is being done on developing democratic innovations by designing institutions “to increase and deepen participation in political decision making” (Willis et al., 2022, p. 4). Such a parliamentary body or institution must be procedurally regulated to require “forms of justification along the lines of the principle of democracy” (Olson, 2011, p. 148). Habermas claims that these discursive processes of lawmaking lie at the heart of modern politics, as “they create legal norms by allowing each person affected by a given norm to agree to the norm itself” (p. 141). In short, parliamentary argumentation is responsible for interpreting public opinion and expressing it – into debate and then into law – as the unified will of the people. For this to be possible, parliaments must be built to be conducive to deliberation.

Some democratic theorists argue that a “deliberative turn” is taking place, wherein an observed increase in effective deliberation will result in broader support for political outcomes, better responses to the interests of participants, and more rational policies (Steiner et al., 2005, p. 17). A parliament may be summarized, in the words of John Stuart Mill, as a “Congress of Opinions,” wherein representatives lay out the justifications for their actions before their constituents (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 29). Thus, in deliberative democracies, a parliament is a particularly important institution. In fact, it is argued that society “currently [uses] the institutions of Western liberal democracy to coordinate [its] cooperative behavior” (Olson, 2011, p. 146). In the context of the EU’s ongoing legitimacy crisis, evidenced by low voter turnout and increased Euroscepticism, this point is especially important (Crespy, 2014).

If the EU’s legitimacy is to be assessed by the input, meaning, the representation and accountability towards its citizens, then deliberative democracy has a lot to offer. Deliberation can empower in the course of participation. The core principles of deliberative democracy, like equal respect for and recognition of other participants and arguments, allows for the expression of disagreement, from which alternatives for public policy can arise (Crespy, 2014). These elements can, at least in theory, counteract the negative attitudes towards the EU’s democratic legitimacy, as it creates a more open and accountable democratic arena.

Some political scientists argue that, “parliamentary speech rarely has persuasive effects on policymaking,” as politicians may speak without any intention of convincing colleagues of their position (Finlayson, 2017). This does not, however, reduce the value of deliberation to nothing, as a parliamentary debate can serve the public by justifying a politician’s position and explaining the arguments on a matter. This gives civil society the opportunity to have their elected representatives justify their opinions and voting behavior. Besides voting, “speaking up for others’, ‘arguing on behalf of others’, and, above all,

‘justifying opinions to others’ are important aspects of representation” (Lord, 2013, pp. 243–244). Thus, it is not essential for debate participants to be open to being persuaded to another position for the deliberation to contribute positively to democracy.

### 3.4. The European Parliament

As the nation-state still holds center-stage in many analyses, and especially studies of the emergence of an international climate regime have “continued to focus on the development of international co-operation” between heads of state, parliamentary bodies have been sidelined (Stripple & Bulkeley, 2013, p. 4). Parliamentary assemblies allow for “the ‘practice of politics’ where both the means and the ends of government are held to critique” via debate (Bulkeley, 2015b, p. 137). Parliaments are therefore a crucial part of discussions on climate governance, and the EP has recently come to center-stage.

Since 1979, MEPs are elected for five-year terms via direct universal suffrage (European Parliament, n.d.-a). 705 MEPs are elected by proportional representation from all 27 EU Member States. MEPs are grouped by political affinity rather than nationality, and consequently, political parties – which originate from national contexts – have grouped themselves according to common ground. Usually, following an election, a sort of political shuffling takes place wherein MEPs form political alliances and arrange themselves in political groups, which is discussed in Section 3.4.1.

There are 12 (four-day) plenary sessions per year, which take place in Strasbourg, France (European Parliament, n.d.-b). These are accompanied by part-sessions, which last only two days and take place in Brussels, Belgium. The agenda for plenary sessions, as decided on by the political groups in the Conference of Presidents (meaning, the presidents and secretary generals of the political groups), mainly consists of debates and votes on EP reports, plus dialog sessions with the European Commission and European Council.

Legislative proposals from the European Commission each receive an EP rapporteur, which is an MEP from the most-relevant parliamentary committee whose “key task is to analyze the project, consult with specialists in the particular field and with those who could be affected, discuss with other members within the committee and recommend a political line to be followed” (European Parliament, 2006). The outcome is a rapporteurship is a report declaring the EP’s position on the proposal. The rapporteurship is typically a highly influential and highly coveted political role, and the rapporteur both starts and ends the plenary debates on their report with a long speech. Before a report is put to a vote, it is often first debated between representatives from the Council, Commission, and MEPs. The speaking time per MEP depends on the number of speakers who have requested the floor, and the time is divided according to specific criteria, such as the size of a political group and the MEPs who have been most closely involved in the creation of the report in question. The time allocated per speaker usually ranges between 1 and 5 minutes (European Parliament, n.d.-b).

#### 3.4.1. Political Groups in the European Parliament

Most MEPs are member of a political group. A political group is essentially a way for MEPs to organize themselves, and this contributes “to the European Parliament’s operational capability and efficiency by preventing fragmentation and by facilitating the decision-making process” (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020). Political groups are distinct from political parties, as parties are typically at country-level, while political groups are pan-European. After the 2019 European elections, a total of seven political groups exist with each one composed of at least 25 MEPs, listed here in order from largest to smallest: European People’s Party/Christian Democrats, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats,

Renew Europe, Greens/EFA, Identity and Democracy, European Conservatives and Reformists, and The Left (European Parliament, n.d.-a).

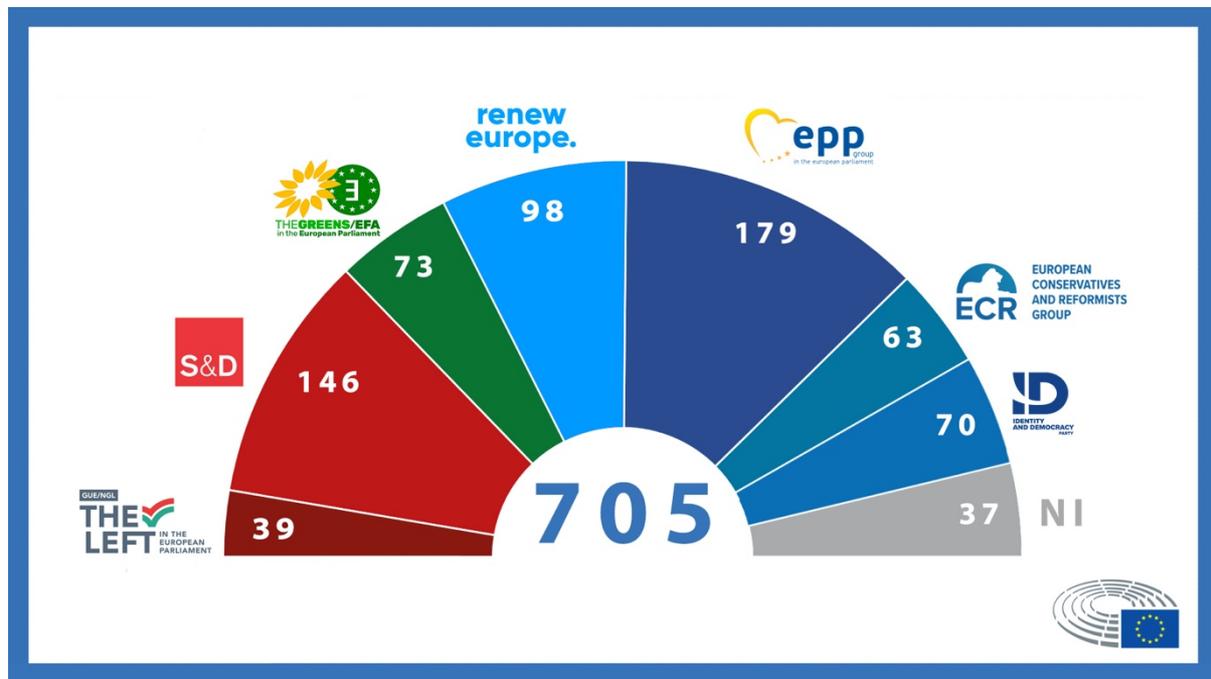


Figure 3: The political groups of the European Parliament, with number of MEPs indicated, in 2021. NI represents MEPs known as non-inscripts, meaning, they are not member of any group (European Parliament, 2021c).

Political groups require that their members sign a declaration of similar political affinity, as the political groups are formed largely on shared values and agendas (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020). Although two-dimensional political spectrums usually require the sacrifice of some nuance and detail, scholarly research has found it nonetheless helpful and sufficiently accurate to roughly describe the groups as follows (Bressanelli, 2022; Hix et al., 2007):

Extreme left	Left	Center-left	Center	Center-right	Right	Extreme right

Figure 4: The EP political group spectrum. Image sources: (GUE/NGL, n.d.) (European Green Party, n.d.) (S&D, n.d.) (Renew Europe, 2021) (EPP, n.d.) (ECR, n.d.) (ID, n.d.)

Political groups are a powerful way in which MEPs structure themselves, both for institutional reasons and for political reasons (European Parliament, n.d.-c). The EP's political groups have a high level of cohesion, meaning that MEPs in these groups vote the same way at a high rate (Hix et al., 2022). As the EP as an institution has amassed power over the years, this group cohesion has increased. Subsequently, for the purpose of this research, it is interesting to view the political groups as cohesive and to investigate the groups' positioning, rather than looking at MEPs as individuals.

Political groups tend to form a group position on an issue, following internal discussion and consideration. Members are recommended, but not officially required, to follow that group position. On the European Climate Law, the political groups formed a position which was explicitly expressed on 24 June 2021, the day of the final vote, either on Twitter or via a press release:

<b>Political Group</b>	<b>Vote on ECL</b>	<b>Reason</b>
EPP	For	ECL is the right level of ambition (European People's Party, 2021).
S&D	For	ECL is not ambitious enough, but represents a step in the right direction (Socialists & Democrats, 2021).
Renew	For	ECL is the right level of ambition (Renew Europe, 2021).
Greens/EFA	Against	The ECL is incompatible with the Paris Agreement and therefore not ambitious enough (Greens/EFA, 2021b).
ID	Against	The ECL is too ambitious and thereby damages economic competitiveness and reduces both social freedoms Member State sovereignty (Identity & Democracy, 2021).
ECR	Abstention	ECL goes too far, has too many "bureaucratic embellishments," and the impact assessment is "dubious" (European Conservatives and Reformists, 2021).
The Left	Against	The ECL violates the EU's obligations under the Paris Agreement because it's not ambitious enough (The Left, 2021).

*Table 1:* The political groups, their vote on the ECL, and the public reason for the vote.

It is noteworthy here that the S&D Group was in the lead on the ECL; their MEP Jytte Guteland was the rapporteur for the file, meaning, she was the main person responsible for the Parliament's political positioning on the proposed law or the plenary debate. This means that the S&D Group was allocated relatively more speaking time and, due to group cohesion, fellow MEPs from the group are more likely to vote in favor of the ECL.

### 3.4.2. Deliberative Democracy in the European Parliament

In recent years, national parliaments have been studied from the perspective of deliberative democracy, but the EP has thus far received limited attention, despite it being “particularly interesting due to its multi-lingual and pluri-national character” (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 28). The EP has given itself the ambitious task of deliberating along the strictest lines of equality, reciprocity, and generality, thereby illustrating an example of Habermas' deliberative arena.

The aforementioned ‘deliberative turn’ comes with a shift of focus away from mere voting behavior and towards more qualitative and mixed methods analyses (Kantola & Miller, 2021). This is exemplified not only academic research, such as the Center for European Policy Studies' recent book on the topic, titled *Deliberative Democracy in the EU*, and the EP's recently reformed plenary debates, but also in the recent Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) project (Blockmans & Russack, 2020b; Nicolas, 2021; Agence Europe, 2021).

The CoFoE project, “is a deliberative democracy experiment where 800 citizens... deliberate recommendations to discuss and vote on with lawmakers” (Vasques, 2021). This project is motivated by the desire to counter populism and the legitimacy crisis via direct participation and debate (Blockmans & Russack, 2020a). The recent reforms to the EP's plenary debates, carried out after the COVID-19 pandemic, were based on focus groups with

MEPs, the outcomes of which recommended making the debates more dynamic, focusing on aspects like speaking time, possibilities for interventions, and voting schedules (Nicolas, 2021). The goal is to improve the liveliness and deliberativeness of the debates.

On particularly controversial and zero-sum issues, the debates have had a tendency to be especially polarized, with the MEPs more likely to be in a minority feeling, “less need to justify outcomes for which they have little responsibility, or to show respect for the views of other groups” as they expect that the other groups will form winning coalitions that make a policy decision (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 35). This tendency lowers the deliberative quality and willingness to cooperate. With longer speaking times, more options for dialog, and the “more opportunities to hold the European Commission to account in plenary,” the EP hopes to reduce this polarization and encourage genuine exchange of perspectives (Eder & Baume, 2021; Nicolas, 2021).

### 3.5. Climate Governance and Democracy

Climate change has increasingly plagued every corner of the world since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet modern political systems still struggle to address it. (Bulkeley, 2015a). Some now call the current global environmental problem a ‘super’ wicked problem due to the combination of so many factors making it seemingly impossible to address (Levin et al., 2007; Stony Brook University, n.d.). Winston Churchill said that “democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others” (*PARLIAMENT BILL (Hansard)*, 1947). Because climate action requires systemic change that challenges many aspects of modern society, it is necessary to be critical of the system itself (Knittel, 2019).

### 3.5.1. Tackling Climate Change

In the discussion on how to best tackle climate change from a political perspective, two main camps have formed: those who believe democracy is the key to climate action and those who believe that the public must be circumvented via something like eco-authoritarianism. The anti-democracy camp essentially argues, in the words of earth scientist James Lovelock, that “it may be necessary to put democracy on hold for a while” (Willis et al., 2022, p. 4). Whether this means advocating for eco-authoritarianism or technocracy, they point out some characteristics of modern-day representative democracy which make it ill-equipped to prompt climate action. Prominent figures in academia, science, and activism describe democracy as ‘failing’ in the climate arena, and now call for a radical dismantlement of liberal democracy (Stehr, 2015).

The problems with democracy’s confrontation with climate change are manifold. First, climate change is a problem with a very long-term horizon, which stands in opposition with most short-term election cycles. This results in democracy’s “incapacity to act in the face of longer-term threats” (Willis et al., 2022, p. 4). The threats posed by climate change may seem far away and often intangible (Stehr, 2015). Second, there is the argument that climate change, as a wicked problem, is impossible to understand fully, meaning that many voters and politicians may have difficulty making decisions on it (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2019). Next, political decisions in a democracy are impossible to intertwine from “questions of power, and the influence of entrenched interests”, especially with powerful lobbies such as the fossil fuel industry (Stehr, 2015; Willis et al., 2022, p. 2). This affects the way that “scientific or technical information is used in decision-making,” especially if political decisions are made behind closed doors and without transparency as to the reasons for a particular choice (p. 4).

However, before abandoning the current political system, it is worth asking if deliberative innovations have the potential to transform the nature of climate politics and thus realize the full potential of democratic polities (Niemeyer, 2013, p. 431). The pro-democracy camp, while also taking issue with our modern democratic systems, argue that strengthening democracy, rather than abandoning it, can actually outperform any sort of alternative regime (Willis et al., 2022). The essential argument is that “greater democratic engagement is a crucial ingredient in climate action” (p. 3). This requires, “building more effective democratic mechanisms and practices to rise to the challenge of climate change and other systemic, long-term issues” (p. 4). This camp argues that deliberative democracy is the solution to the problems pointed out by critics of democracy, which is discussed in the following section.

### 3.5.2. Deliberative Democracy and Climate Governance

Deliberative democracy can strengthen current democratic models to the point where the weaknesses in addressing climate change could be diminished. First, the psychology behind deliberation has the potential to activate what psychologist Daniel Kahneman calls System 2 thinking<sup>4</sup>, which allows for the evaluation of long-term cause and effect in addition to a greater diversity of perspectives (Kahneman, 2011). This is well-suited to decision-making on climate change, as participants of deliberation have a greater capacity to consider the common good in addition to complex interests, goals, and objectives other than their own (Willis et al., 2022). This includes the potential to give voice to those who are marginalized, “including those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change” (Niemeyer, 2013, p. 412). To effectively debate, participants are induced to lay aside “partial material interests, as arguments couched in collective interest terms are more persuasive” (p. 411). Likewise, the

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<sup>4</sup> System 2 Thinking, as part of Kahneman’s theory on decision-making, refers to the brain’s so-called operating system which is slower, deliberate, rational, and effortful, in contrast to System 1 Thinking which is faster, automatic, and without self-awareness or control (Kahneman, 2011). The relevance of this theory pertains to political decision-making often requiring System 2 Thinking in order for complex choices to be understood.

more rational and reasoned way of thinking opens the mind to consider interests besides those which are individual and short-term, meaning that the implications of climate change for future generations – of humans and other organisms – may be contemplated (p. 412).

Next, while scientific and technical evidence in the context of climate change can be highly complex and difficult to understand, deliberative democracy gives the space needed to consider evidence. Science can “offer options on how to respond, but it cannot make decisions on behalf of society,” and thus, deliberation is required to take into account various sources and forms of evidence, moral positions, and the “value of knowledge of differently situated actors” (Willis et al., 2022, p. 5). Deliberation offers the opportunity to, “integrate different perspectives on complex issues, including different kinds of expertise” (Niemeyer, 2013, p. 411). These factors all combine to make deliberative debates apt to be part of climate governance.

### 3.6. The European Climate Law

By signing the Paris Agreement in 2016, the EU agreed to develop its own long-term strategy laying out the steps it will take to contribute to the global efforts of limiting the earth’s warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels (European Climate Foundation, 2018). To this end, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen presented the European Green Deal in 2019, which encompasses several initiatives including investments into climate change research and preservation of the environment (European Commission, 2019a). The ECL, which entered into force two years later, in 2021, was created with two functions working in tandem, the first being to enshrine the European Green Deal’s main goal of climate neutrality<sup>5</sup> into law, and the other being the establishment of a

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<sup>5</sup> Climate-neutrality is defined by the EU as a reduction in greenhouse gases, while compensating for any remaining emissions, thereby achieving a net-zero emissions balance (European Council, n.d.).

framework for climate mainstreaming and progress control (Bechtel, 2021). The ambition function of the ECL lays out the path to achieving climate goals, including the “intermediate target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels” (European Commission, 2021). The governance function includes climate mainstreaming assessments, spearheaded by the European Commission, which aim to ensure that decision-making on both EU and Member State level takes the climate into account. The law also includes the establishment of an EU-level scientific advisory board, similar to the IPCC, a process for setting a 2040 target, and “clarity on the contribution of emissions reductions and removals,” such as carbon sinks (European Commission, 2021).

The ECL has been assessed according to its ability to set the EU on a path to achieve its climate targets, including the 2030 emissions goal and the long-term goal of climate-neutrality in 2050. Assessments by experts indicate that equitable<sup>6</sup> climate change mitigation efforts in line with the Paris Agreement would require the EU to reduce its emissions by at least 62% by 2030 and to reach climate neutrality by 2040 (Climate Action Tracker, 2021; UN Environment Programme, 2019). Currently, the EU’s policies and actions are not even sufficient to meet the lesser 55% by 2030 target, as policies implemented thus far will result in a mere 36-47% reduction by 2030<sup>7</sup> (Climate Action Tracker, 2021). Consequently, from a climate perspective, the ECL has been the subject of heavy critique.

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<sup>6</sup> Equitable climate change mitigation requires efforts to account for varying level of impact across society, with the people and groups most affected by climate change tending to be those who are already disadvantaged, “because of their age, health or socio-economic status” or geographic location. Climate change measures must consider equity in order to avoid reinforcing or creating new inequalities (European Environment Agency, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy here that since the adoption of the ECL, the European Commission has taken steps to close the gap between the ECL’s 55% target and the reality of the current path the EU is on, which is far short of that target. These measures include the recent REPower EU Plan, presented in April 2022, which are not part of this paper’s analysis but could be effective in pushing the EU towards its ECL target (Climate Action Tracker, 2021).

### 3.7. The Discourse Quality Index

The method employed by this thesis is Discourse Quality Index (DQI), which was pioneered by Steiner et al. (2012) and adapted to be applied to the European Parliament's context by Lord and Tamvaki (2013). Habermas had long called for empirical research to ground and extend his theories in practice, and the DQI aims to do exactly that (Cukier et al., 2009). A discourse analysis starts with the question of how to understand a culture from within, with the object of investigation being text (Chouliaraki, 2008). For the DQI, the unit of analysis is a speech, that is, "the public discourse by a particular individual delivered at a particular point in a debate" (Steenbergen et al., 2003, p. 27).

The scholars who developed the DQI grounded it in Habermas' discourse ethics, essentially seeking "to combine normatively derived indicators with empirical measurement," thereby operationalizing the theoretical indicators of what makes a discussion democratic (Lord, 2013, p. 245). The relevant ethics rules include: open participation, justification of assertions, consideration of the common good, respect for participants (specifically the persons, perspectives, and arguments), and the aim for consensus (Steenbergen et al., 2003, p. 25)<sup>8</sup>.

The DQI was created to allow for the analysis of discourse in the parliamentary context with the purpose of determining the extent to which the discourse is democratic in quality (Steenbergen et al., 2003). It "opens up deliberation for empirical research, allowing this research to interface with political theory" (p. 22). It can be applied at different levels of complexity, such as the simple comparison of speeches or the aggregation of speech quality scores and correlating these scores with attributes of the speakers (p. 42).

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<sup>8</sup> The rules of authenticity, meaning, the absence of deception, is an important one, but had to be excluded from the DQI methodology due to possible systemic measurement error (Steenbergen et al., 2003).

This thesis uses the version of the DQI which was adapted to the EP by asking the question of, ‘how well the EP deliberates’ (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 28). The original study on the EP’s DQI was carried out due to an interest in the EP’s unique characteristics and the fact that it is, “moreover, freer than most national parliaments to deliberate in the absence of executive domination or rigid party disciplines” (p. 28). The DQI in the EP’s context served a two-fold purpose for Lord and Tamvaki (2013). First, the authors were interested in assessing the quality of deliberation. Second, they wanted to determine causal mechanisms responsible for variation in the quality of deliberation.

Lord and Tamvaki (2013) noted that, while the complex deliberative process mainly takes place within the EP’s committees, and not the plenary hall, the indicators listed below (*Table 2*) concern themselves with the public face of deliberation, wherein MEPs stand before the citizens they represent<sup>9</sup> and justify their views (p. 37). This process of argumentation and justification is an essential element of democratic deliberation. The six indicators of the adapted DQI are laid out below (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 30):

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>
Respect	How far do representatives show respect for other participants?
Recognition	How far do representatives show respect for the arguments of other participants?
Reason-giving/justification level	How far do representatives justify their statements with reasons?
Inclusiveness	How far do representatives justify their views with reference to some notion of the common good, and, if so, whose common good, that of (a) their own national public, (b) their own national public and other national publics, (c) the European public, and (d) all affected individuals in the world?

<sup>9</sup> European Parliament plenary debates are livestreamed online, with translation into all EU languages and accompanying transcripts, and the debates can also be observed in-person (European Parliament, n.d.-b)

Completeness	How far do representatives include interests, values, and rights in their justifications?
Accountability	How far do representatives explicitly give and demand accounts (responsibility) of themselves and other actors?

*Table 2:* author's own elaboration on Lord and Tamvaki's method (2013, p. 30). The six indicators of the DQI are named and briefly described.

Herewith, the DQI, “seeks to devise indicators of discourse quality that correspond to reasons for valuing parliamentary discourse quality in the first place... [and] on the other hand, the DQI identifies ways in which its indicators can be observed and scored by researchers” (Lord, 2013, p. 245). These elements make the DQI an effective method to empirically apply Habermas' theory on deliberation.

#### 4. Research Design

This thesis conducts a discourse analysis, using the DQI, of the EP's plenary debates on the ECL. With this analysis, speeches by MEPs are assessed for their deliberative quality, which, when contextualized with the votes on the ECL, allows for a discussion on the quality of deliberation and climate policy. By employing the DQI, with Lord & Tamvaki's (2013) adjustments for EP-context, this thesis looks at how the EP deliberates specifically on the ECL, thereby contributing to research on the connection between democracy and climate governance. The DQI will not be used as a predictor, but rather as a score for comparison, wherein individual speeches are analyzed, scored, and compared to one another. Thereby, the focus of the data analysis is on the difference between the DQI scores of the EP's political groups, and considering these scores in the context of the group's vote on the ECL. The literature review revealed that this method of comparison has not been applied to the EP's plenary dates before.

#### 4.1. Data Collection

In choosing the debate topics to analyze, the DQI requires a strategy of selection wherein, “a key selection criterion for the debates is that they should focus on critical decision cases as opposed to minor issues” (Steiner et al., 2005, p. 104). Previous research on the EP found that in climate legislation, “it should at least be theoretically possible to identify pareto-improving solutions,” in contrast to something such as a constitutional zero-sum issue. This lack of win-or-lose stakes can make participants less polarized and more compromise-seeking, thereby having a positive effect on deliberation (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 38). At the time of this research, the majority of files under the umbrella of the ECL have not yet been debated, and for this thesis, only the debates on the ECL itself are within the scope.

There were two plenary debates on the ECL, with the second being split due to a midday pause in the plenary proceedings (see *Table 3*). This thesis analyzes both debates on the ECL, meaning that all possible data is included. The debates are comprised of a total of 141 speeches, considering the exclusion criteria explained at the end of this Section.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Debate Topic</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Number of Speeches</b>
06-10-2020	European Climate Law	(European Parliament, 2020)	60
24-06-2021	European Climate Law	(European Parliament, 2021b)	16
	European Climate Law (continuation of debate)	(European Parliament, 2021a)	65

*Table 3:* overview of the debates selected for the analysis, with a total of 141 speeches.

The data for this thesis consists of speech transcripts performed by MEPs in these EP plenary debates. The transcripts are collected from the EP’s public database of plenary debate transcripts. Despite having simultaneous interpretation of the speeches available in all EU languages, this interpretation is under strict usage rules, and therefore, the speeches which were transcribed in their original non-English language had to be translated for the purpose of

this thesis. The translation service utilized is DeepL, which is a widely used translation provider that uses artificial intelligence. Translated text will always contain a degree of subjectivity in the translation, and thus, presents a limitation of this analysis.

The main interest of this research is how the average DQI score varies per political group and, subsequently, per group vote on the ECL. This guides the research in setting exclusion criteria for the speeches; the speeches of interest are those performed by MEPs who have requested speaking time on behalf of their political group. Therefore, the 141 speeches analyzed are those performed by MEPs who participated in the debate and who are member of a political group. Speeches by other figures, specifically 1) European Commissioners; 2) European Council Representatives; 3) EP (Vice-)Presidents acting in their role as (vice-)president; and 4) MEPs who are not members of a political group (called ‘non-inscripts’, NI, or ‘non-affiliates’, NA) are excluded from the data collection.

#### 4.2. Method of Data Analysis

The methodology takes the form of a discourse analysis operationalized by the DQI and is comprised of two steps. The first step is the measurement of the quality of the deliberation by MEPs across the selected debates. Each contribution to a plenary debate, called a ‘speech’, is coded individually. The study by Lord and Tamvaki (2013) lays out the indicators, which are listed and described in detail in Section 4.2.1. Each of the six indicators in *Table 3* has an individual range of scores, moving in whole number increments. For each speech, the scores for the indicators are added together for a resulting DQI. The resulting DQI can range between 0 (if every indicator is scored at 0) and 17 (if every indicator is scored at the maximum):

$$Indicator_1 + Indicator_2 + Indicator_3 + Indicator_4 + Indicator_5 + Indicator_6 + Indicator_7 = DQI_{MEP}$$

The indicator scores are aggregated - rather than averaged – in order to allow for a broader range of scores, without having to extend the decimal placement past the hundredth place, thereby maintaining more accuracy and clarity in the reporting of results.

The second step is the assessment of a political group's average DQI and its vote on the European Climate Law. As explained in Step 1, the DQI total per speech is the sum of the indicator scores, with a minimum of 0 and maximum of 17.<sup>10</sup> The higher the DQI, the stronger the deliberative quality of the speech. For each political group, the DQI scores of that group's MEPs are averaged (by adding individual scores together and dividing by the number of total speakers from that political group  $n$ ) to give the political group an average discourse assessment on the ECL:

$$\frac{(DQI\_MEP_1 + DQI\_MEP_2 + \dots DQI\_MEP_n)}{n} = DQI\_PoliticalGroup$$

The DQI scores of all political groups are then also combined and averaged (by dividing by the total number of political groups, which is seven) to indicate an overall DQI for the EP's plenary debates on the European Climate Law. This DQI score is calculated with the purpose of being able to relativize the DQI scores of individual political groups as below average or above average:

$$\frac{(DQI\_PoliticalGroup_1 + DQI\_PoliticalGroup_2 + \dots DQI\_PoliticalGroup_7)}{7} = DQI\_EP$$

The scores per indicator are also averaged for each political group, to give an idea of how each political group scored on individual indicators of the DQI.

The average DQI per group is evaluated against the political group's majority vote on the European Climate Law. The reasons for a group's vote are assessed to determine if the political group perceived the European Climate Law as too ambitious, as satisfactory, or as

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<sup>10</sup> The maximum scores for each indicator (ranging between 1 and 4), are added together in order to arrive at the maximum possible score of 17. In other words, if a speech receives a perfect score for every indicator, the total DQI for that speech would be 17.

too weak. This assessment is made using each political group's public communications (press releases, Tweets, etc.) published around the time of the EP's vote on the law and summarized in *Table 4* (further details are provided in Section 3.4.1., *Table 1*):

Political Group	Vote on ECL	ECL is...
EPP	For	Satisfactory
S&D	For	Satisfactory
Renew	For	Satisfactory
Greens/EFA	Against	Too weak
ID	Against	Too ambitious
ECR	Abstention	Too ambitious
The Left	Against	Too weak

*Table 4: EP political group votes on the climate law and the reason for the vote.*

#### 4.2.1. Operationalization of Variables

The operationalization of variables is adopted from the study by Lord and Tamvaki (2013) and laid out below in *Table 5*:

Indicators	Scores	Descriptions/comments
A <i>Respect for other participants</i>	0. No respect 1. No reference 2. Implicit Respect 3. Explicit Respect	0. No respect: Personal or partisan attacks on other participants. 1. No reference: No reference to other participants 2. Implicit Respect: Neutral reference to other participants 3. Explicit Respect: Personal or partisan praises of other participants <b><i>The remark "Madam President" is ignored in the analysis due to this being the standard greeting in EP proceedings.</i></b>
B <i>Respect for other arguments</i>	0. No respect 1. No reference 2. Implicit Respect 3. Explicit Respect	0. No respect: Personal or partisan attacks on other participants' arguments/actions. 1. No reference: No reference to other participants' arguments/actions. 2. Implicit Respect: Neutral reference to other participants' arguments/actions (or reasoned opposition). 3. Explicit Respect: Personal or partisan praises of other participants' arguments/actions.

C <i>Justification Level</i>	0. No justification 1. Inferior justification 2. Qualified justification 3. Sophisticated justification	0. No Justification: A speaker only says that X should or should not be done, but no reason is given. 1. Inferior Justification: Here a reason Y is given why X should or should not be done, but no linkage is made between X and Y-the inference is incomplete. This code also applies if a conclusion is merely supported with illustration. 2. Qualified Justification: A linkage is made why one should expect that X contributes to or detracts from Y (the means through which X contributes to or detracts from Y is mentioned). A single such complete inference already qualifies for a score of 2. 3. Sophisticated Justification: Here at least two complete justifications are given, either two complete justifications for the same demand or complete justifications for two different demands.
D <i>Justification Inclusiveness</i>	0. Neutral 1. My country 2. My country and other Member States 3. Europe as a whole 4. Global	0. Neutral: No reference to common good. 1. My country: Reference to the national common good only. 2. My country and other Member states: Reference to the common good of my country plus other specific member states. 3. Europe as a whole: Reference to a European common good 4. Global: Reference to an international / global common good mentioning people and countries outside EU. <b><i>The argument can be both in favor and against the common good</i></b>
E <i>Justification Completeness</i>	0. Neutral 1. Interests 2. Values 3. Rights	0. Neutral: No reference to interests, values or rights. 1. Interests: Arguments refer to peoples' material needs and interests. 2. Values: Arguments refer to European and transnational values 3. Rights: Arguments refer to civic and human rights.
F <i>Accountability</i>	0. Speakers do not demand / give an account 1. Speakers demand and give an account	Do the speakers give an account to the addressees of their speech (do they assume responsibility)? Do they demand an account from the Commission-Council-other MEPs? <b><i>Can be observed as participants asking</i></b>

*for the reasons as to why representatives acted as they did in the lawmaking process.*

*Table 5:* The variables, values, and description/comments are adopted from Lord & Tamvaki (2013), and slightly adapted to suit the interests of this thesis.

To illustrate how the variables are operationalized in practice, the following excerpt from the data is included below (see *Table 6*), featuring three MEPs:

	<b>MEP</b>			
	ZDZISŁAW KRASNODĘBSKI	MICHAEL BLOSS	JOANNA KOPCIŃSKA	
<b>Indicator</b>	A	Score: 2 Reference to Guteland's view in the debate	Score: 3 Described working with colleagues like Guteland as an "honor"	Score: 3 Praise of the rapporteur and Commissioner
	B	Score: 2 Reasoned opposition to Guteland position on the ECL	Score: 2 References the emissions targets of the ECL and the Green opposition to it	Score: 3 Praise of the ECL
	C	Score: 2 Reference to climate objectives potentially causing rising prices for European citizens	Score: 3 Makes several complete justifications regarding coal and the combustion engine	Score: 2 Calls for "right investments" and a "fair transition", so that the poorest Europeans aren't burdens, and says the way to get there is taking into account the differences between Member States when making new commitments
	D	Score: 3 Reference to Europe's economy	Score: 4 Reference to Paris Climate Agreement	Score: 3 References Member States and EU policy
	E	Score: 1 Reference to Europe's industries and markets, and prices for consumers	Score: 3 Refers to the freedoms of generations	Score: 2 References fairness
	F	Score: 0 No reference to specific institutions or politicians	Score: 1 Refers to the failure of the ECL/EP as collective ("we failed")	Score: 1 References responsibility to mobilize investments

*Table 6:* three examples from this paper's data which illustrate how the DQI is applied to the MEP speeches.

### 4.3. Reflection on Reliability and Validity

The DQI, as a method, was rigorously tested for reliability by its creators (Steenbergen et al., 2003). The main source of reliability for the original DQI method was the high proportion of agreement between independent coders. Using intercoder agreement assessments,<sup>11</sup> each of the DQI's indicators was tested and it was found that “the DQI has outstanding measurement properties” (Steenbergen et al., 2003, p. 37). As this is a master's thesis, it was not within the capacity of this project for the data analysis to be conducted by more than one coder, but the method is nonetheless described by other researchers as “a well-known and uncontested instrument for assessing deliberative quality” (Roger & Schaal, 2013, p. 155). Therefore, this analysis was conducted with just one coder.

The literature review and research of this paper did not discover any other paper which used the DQI in exactly the same way, and the method is described as highly flexible, with dozens of opportunities for diverse applications to varying levels of complexity. The DQI has also been applied to a wide array of discourse contexts, ranging from marginalized communities to online forums to UN agencies (Fournier-Tombs & Di Marzo Serugendo, 2020; Ugarriza & Nussio, 2016; Aboudounya, 2021). To improve the reliability, the application of the DQI in this thesis was kept simple and straight-forward, as more complex applications require additional steps to ensure reliability (Steenbergen et al., 2003). The most similar application of the method is found in a paper by Roger & Schaal (2013), which studied the deliberative quality of debates within EP committees and aggregated indicator scores to assess the deliberative quality of the committee debates. In that study, the DQI proved to be a useful method for the assessment of the deliberative quality of these debates.

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<sup>11</sup> To demonstrate the reliability of the DQI, the original creators of the method used “four different indicators of intercoder agreement — the ratio of coding agreement (Holsti, 1969), Cohen's (1960)  $\kappa$  ('kappa') and, where appropriate, Spearman's rank correlation (Siegel, 1956) and the standardized  $\alpha$  (a reliability statistic, see Holsti, 1969)” (Steenbergen et al., 2003, p. 37).

The DQI, being a widely recognized method, also has a high validity. It has a clear structure and clear coding instructions, making its application easily replicable. To strengthen this replicability, this thesis includes specific explanations for indicator scores for a large amount of the data, included in the Appendix. This thesis also represents original research, as to date, the DQI has not yet been applied to topic-specific EP debates, and the relationship between deliberation quality and climate policy has thus far received little attention in political science.

## 5. Results

To explore this paper's research question, the speeches were analyzed according to the six DQI indicators. The study by Lord & Tamvaki (2013), which first applied the DQI to the EP's context, serves as a useful point of comparison, as those authors analyzed 32 EP debates on a broad range of topics and included a breakdown of the indicator scores for those debates.

The overall DQI score of the EP for the debates on the ECL is 10.22 out of 17,<sup>12</sup> the details of which are illustrated with *Table 7* and *Figure 5* below:

<b>Vote</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>DQI</b>	<b>Average DQI</b>
<b>In favor (satisfactory)</b>	EPP	10.35	10.82
	S&D	11.73	
	Renew	10.37	
<b>Against (too weak)</b>	Greens/EFA	11.53	11.68
	GUE/NGL	11.82	
<b>Against (too ambitious)</b>	ID	7.07	7.07
<b>Abstention</b>	ECR	8.69	8.69

*Table 7:* Results of the DQI analysis, with DQI scores per political group, grouped by the vote on the ECL and reason for that vote. While the ECR spoke out against the ECL, the group, on average, abstained in the official vote.

<sup>12</sup> The overall DQI score of this data analysis cannot be compared to that of Lord & Tamvaki (2013) due to a difference in the calculation method (Lord & Tamvaki performed a calculation method that transformed the DQI into a predictor variable, while this thesis aggregated indicator scores for a DQI score).

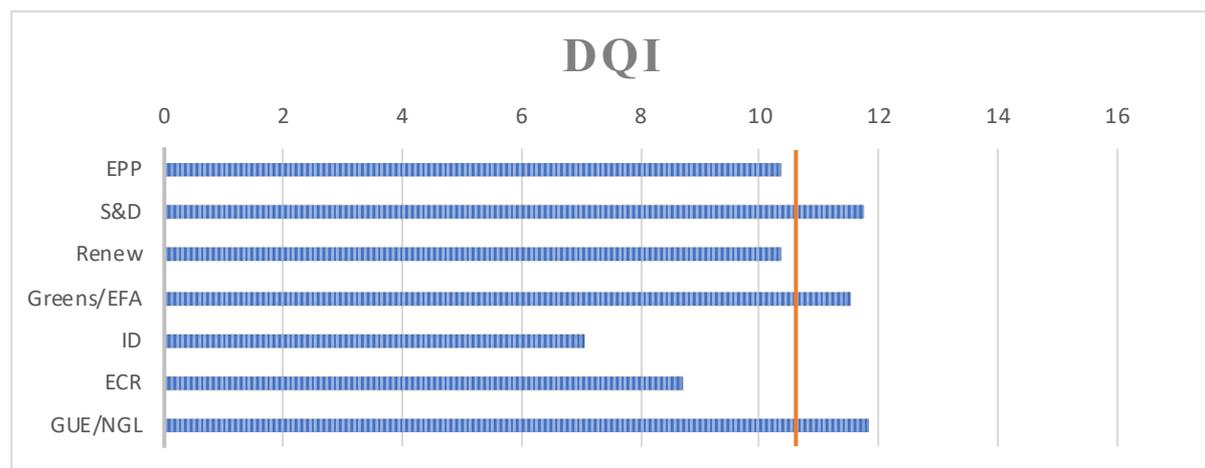


Figure 5: Bar graph visualizing the DQI score of each political group, listed from top to bottom in order of largest to smallest group. The orange line represents the EP average DQI score of 10.22.

The category of political groups that scored the *highest* is the category of groups that voted against the ECL because they judged it as *too weak*. The category of political groups that scored the *lowest* is the category of groups that voted against the ECL because they judged it as *too ambitious*. The ID and ECR groups, representing the right-wing, deviated the furthest from the average, scoring significantly lower than the other groups. The S&D, Greens/EFA, and GUE/NGL, representing the center-left and left-wing, scored above average.

The sic indicators serve as a breakdown of how the DQI score is determined and allow for comparison with the previous application of this method by Lord & Tamvaki (2013). This lends an opportunity for deeper analysis and is therefore also included in the findings of this thesis (see *Table 8*).

	<b>EPP</b>	<b>S&amp;D</b>	<b>Renew</b>	<b>Greens</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>ECR</b>	<b>GUE</b>	<b>EP</b>
<b>A</b>	1.19	1.87	1.3	1.14	0.79	1.49	1.09	1.27
<b>B</b>	1.23	1.58	1.35	1.49	0.62	1.23	1.55	1.3
<b>C</b>	1.63	1.74	1.62	1.96	0.94	0.84	1.98	1.53
<b>D</b>	3.54	3.58	3.24	3.61	2.63	2.79	3.8	3.31
<b>E</b>	2.13	2.55	2.29	2.54	1.79	1.79	2.52	2.23
<b>F</b>	0.58	0.4	0.57	0.79	0.31	0.56	0.88	0.59

Table 8: the average indicator scores (A through F) per political group and for the EP as whole.

The lowest scores for all indicators were observed for the ID and ECR groups. The ID and ECR groups consistently score below the EP average. The EPP and Renew groups fall into the middle of the average scores. None of the groups score consistently above average for all indicators. The following graph visualizes this data:

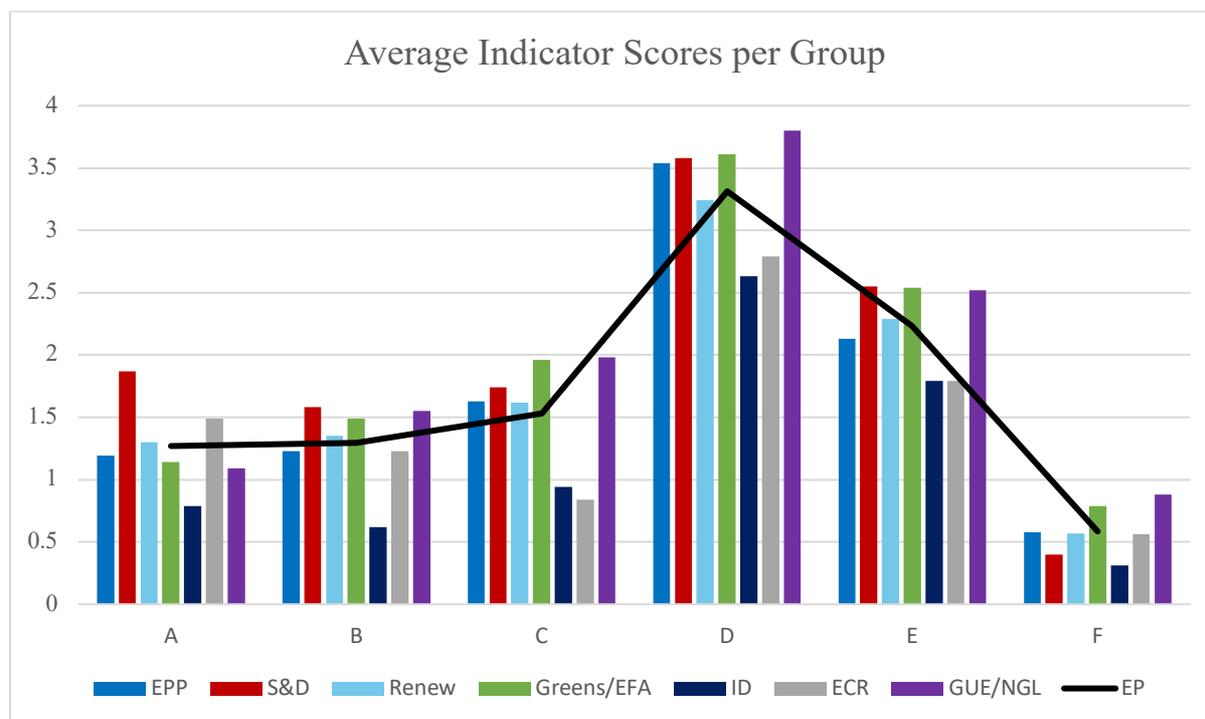
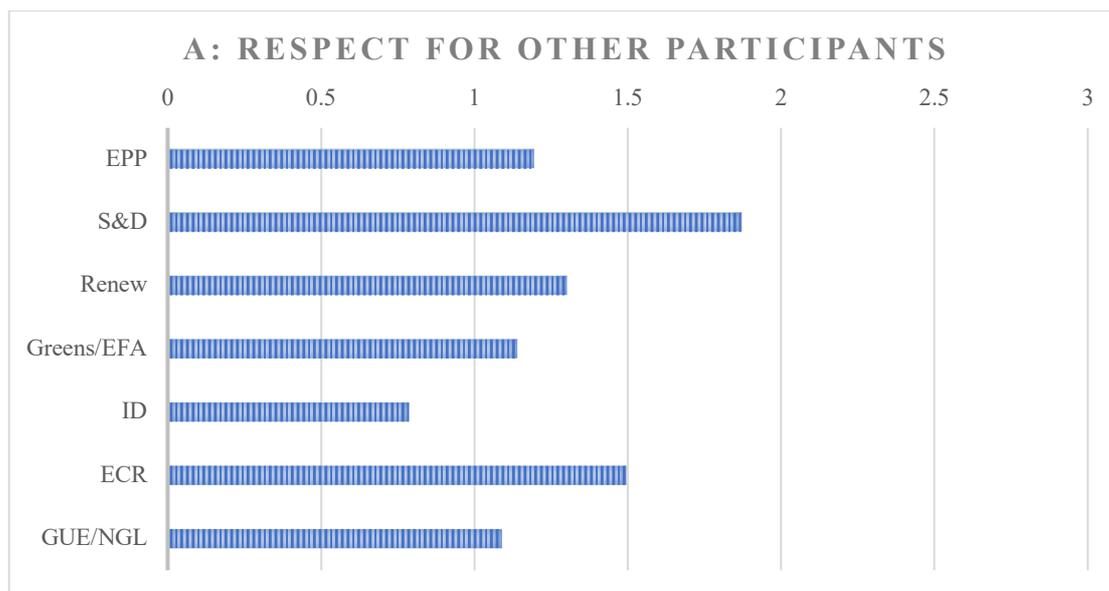


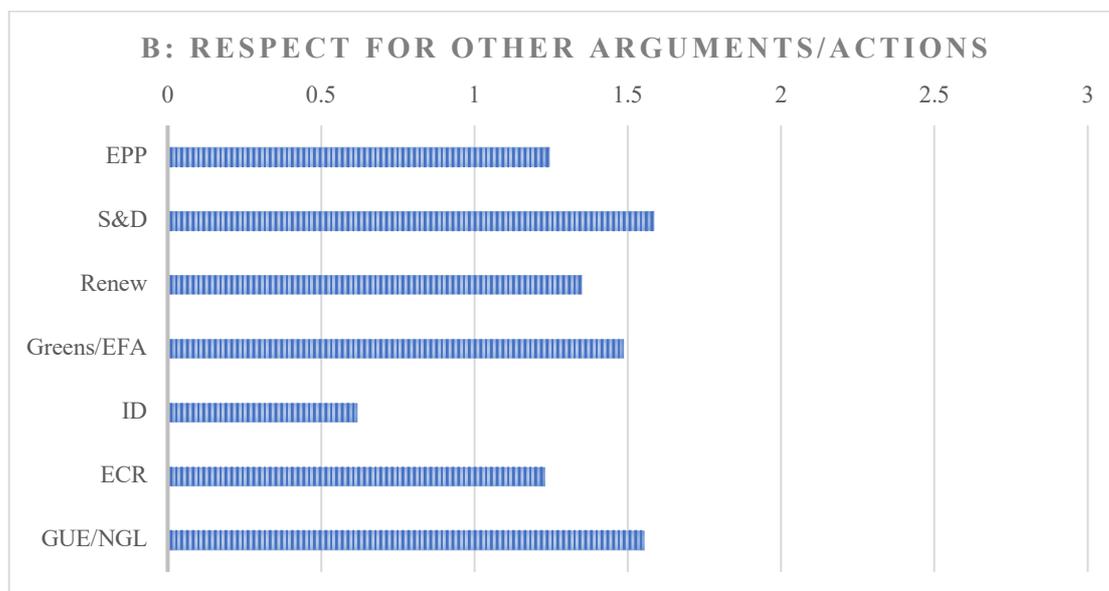
Figure 6: Graph displaying the average score of each political group per indicator, as listed in Table 8, and the average EP score per indicator as a black plot line.

Out of all the indicators, the indicators for respect for other participants and for other arguments had the lowest scores (1.27 and 1.3, respectively, out of 3). Compared to the previous application of this method, wherein more than half of participants showed explicit respect, this is a low score, as the average MEP here made either no reference to other participants or only showed implicit respect (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 42).



*Figure 7:* graph representing the average score per political group for Indicator A: Respect for other participants.

The S&D showed the highest level of respect for other participants, while the ID showed the lowest (see *Figure 7*). The ID group is the only one which showed, on average, disrespect for other participants. Most groups scored between 1 and 1.5, meaning that the average MEP in those groups made no reference to other participants.



*Figure 8:* graph representing the average score per political group for Indicator B: Respect for other arguments.

The S&D and GUE/NGL showed the highest level of respect for other participants' arguments and actions, while the ID showed the lowest (see *Figure 8*). The ID group is the only one which showed, on average, disrespect for other participants' arguments and actions. The other groups scored between 1 and 1.5, meaning that the average MEP in those groups made no reference to other participants' arguments and actions.



*Figure 9:* graph representing the average score per political group for Indicator C: Justification level.

The GUE/NGL and Greens/EFA approximately tied for the highest score for the justifications, with their arguments being the highest level (1.98 and 1.96, respectively), the most complete (3.8 and 3.61, respectively) and inclusive (2.52 and 2.54, respectively). For the justification level, this means that these two groups provided the most advanced justifications for their positions (see *Figure 9*). The ID and ECR groups, by scoring, on average, less than 1, provided little to no justifications for their positions. Compared to the previous application of this method, the score for justification level is similar, with most MEPs making an inferior or qualified justification (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 43).



Figure 10: graph representing the average score per political group for Indicator D: Justification inclusiveness.

On the inclusiveness of justifications (see *Figure 10*), all political groups had an average of at least 2, meaning that the average MEP included their country plus other member states, and most MEPs referred to Europe as a whole (therefore scoring a 3). This result is similar to that of the previous study, wherein the vast majority of MEPs referred to the common good of Europe (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 45). MEPs from the EPP, S&D, Greens/EFA, and GUE/NGL, by scoring more than 3.5 on average, even tended to refer to the global common good.



Figure 11: graph representing the average score per political group for Indicator E: Justification completeness.

On the completeness of justifications (see *Figure 11*), the average MEP referred to values such as environmentalism in their speech. Compared to the previous study, wherein the majority of MEPs only referred to interests, this is a high score (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 44). By scoring more than 2.5 on average, MEPs from the S&D, Greens/EFA, and GUE/NGL even tended to refer to rights, such as the right to life, in their justifications.

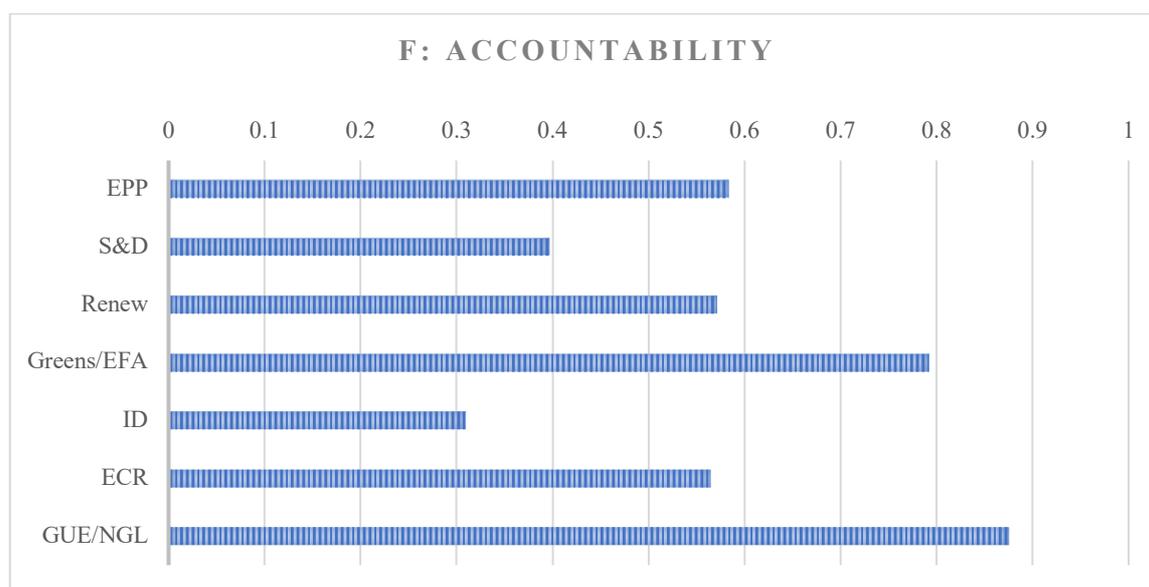


Figure 12: graph representing the average score per political group for Indicator F: Accountability.

The GUE/NGL group scored the highest (0.88) in the account category (see *Figure 12*), meaning MEPs from this group made the most references to the accountability of themselves, other MEPs, or the Commission. Compared to the previous study, wherein the majority of MEPs provided no account, the average score here (0.59 out of 1) is slightly higher (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013, p. 45). Only the S&D and ID groups scored less than 0.5, meaning that the majority of MEPs in those groups did not give or demand account. The low score for the S&D stands out, due to the group's relatively higher scores for other indicators of the DQI.

## 6. Analysis

The aim of this thesis is to look at the relationship between the deliberative quality of the EP's debates and the outcome of the ECL, and tying it back to the challenge of climate governance. To summarize and contextualize the main results, the political groups which pushed for more climate ambition (Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL) also had the highest quality of deliberation in the ECL debates. The groups which pushed against climate ambition (ID and ECR) also had the lowest quality of deliberation. Therein, the results reveal a left- versus right-wing divide. These results suggest that the groups which conducted themselves closest to Habermas' ideal of deliberative democracy are also those which saw the need for more climate action than that which is laid out in the ECL. This finding was suggested by the literature review (specifically by the authors Willis et al. and Niemeyer), which discussed how deliberative democracy, understood as a decision-making process based on Habermas' conditions for ethical discourse, can be an important driver for climate adaptation strategies.

The average DQI and average score per indicator for the EP as whole was calculated as a point of reference. The EP results from *Table 8* can be interpreted as meaning that the average MEP did not reference other participants or arguments, gave only an inferior justification for their position, referred to the common good of Europe, referred to values, and did not give or demand account from anyone. These results highlight a lack of justification for positions and a lack of account. Contextualized with the debate topic, this can be interpreted as meaning that the average MEP failed to give clear arguments and reasons for their opinion of the ECL and failed to demand responsibility or explanation from other participants for their actions in the context of the ECL's development. The results also indicate that the common good of the world is not considered as relevant as the common good of Europe, despite the global nature of climate change. The fact that the average MEP referred to the importance environmentalism rather than just business interests is a positive

sign. Nevertheless, in the context of climate change wherein human life is threatened, rights are arguably more relevant than values, but this was not acknowledged by the average MEP.

The Renew and EPP groups, representing the center and center-right points of the spectrum, scored slightly below average for the DQI, with most indicator scores hovering around the average line and none standing out relative to the other groups. Compared to the groups which voted against the ECL (with an average of 11.68), the Renew and EPP groups scored lower (with an average of 10.36 for the two groups). This indicates that an average deliberative quality is associated with a vote in favor of the ECL.

The right-wing groups (ECR and ID), representing the right and far-right points of the spectrum, consistently scored the lowest across all indicators. The low quality of deliberation was due to partisan attacks on other participants and arguments, poorly justified arguments and positions, narrow opinions on the common good, and a low sense of accountability. These observations align with general critiques of right-wing politics for their anti-pluralist and conflict-centered messaging (Thiele & Turnšek, 2022). The ECR and ID groups are also the only groups that judged the ECL as too ambitious, indicating that a low quality of discourse is associated with a lack of climate ambition in this context. Improving the deliberative quality of right-wing politicians can play an important role in improving the representation of right-leaning citizens and values, but that does not necessarily mean that the views held by far-right citizens are democratic in nature. Deliberation is only one driving factor, and that alone is insufficient to counter post-truth politics and anti-pluralism, both of which are at odds with effective climate policy (Bierbach, 2019).

Out of all indicators, the indicators for respect – for other participants and other arguments – had the lowest scores. An overall average score just barely higher than 1 indicates that most participants did not refer to any other participants or arguments in their speech. In practice, this result can be interpreted as meaning that the parliamentary debates

mostly served as a forum for MEPs to declare their positions and justify these with arguments. Evidence of an active dialogue, with, for example, questions for participants or rebuttals to others' arguments, was not observed. This finding appears negative for the EP's deliberation on the ECL, but it must be contextualized. The EP's plenary debates are structured in a way to guarantee a high level of respect, such as any MEP being allowed to request speaking time, speakers being held to conform time limits, and the prohibition of interruptions. Consequently, even a score of 1 or 2 (meaning neutral or implicit respect) already merits an acceptable level of respect in the conditions for discourse, per Habermas' theory on ethics. Furthermore, the majority of political exchange and discussion is said to take place in the EP's committees, before the plenary debates, and thus, it may be assumed that the dialogue-aspects of deliberation are no longer as relevant once a topic reaches the plenary hall (Lord & Tamvaki, 2013).

The S&D are an interesting group in this case, because they had the rapporteurship for the EP's position on the ECL, meaning, they had the most influence over the report's content. Therefore, the S&D cannot be evaluated in the same way as the other groups. Their rapporteur, Jytte Guteland, was praised by her fellow group members, and the influence of comradery and group cohesiveness cannot be excluded, which may have inflated the S&D's scores for the respect indicators (A and B). Furthermore, only a minority of MEPs in the S&D gave or demanded account (as shown by their score of only 0.4 for Indicator F, which stands out from the S&D's otherwise higher scores). The reasons for this observed lack of account can for now only be speculated. Further research on and analysis of the files under review of the Green Deal could correct for the effect of the rapporteurship, as the rapporteurship for the other files will be held by different groups, but this is not within the scope of this paper.

The Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL groups, representing the left-wing of the EP and those who advocate for more climate ambition, scored the highest on the indicators for justification. In practice, this means that their arguments and positions were the most grounded in logical arguments. As the complexity of climate change requires consideration and weighing of evidence, and the evidence substantiates the case that the ECL was not ambitious enough for the EU to counteract climate change sufficiently, this result of the DQI is supported by the literature.

Out of all indicators, the indicator for inclusiveness – looking at the extent to which a speech refers to the common good - had the highest scores. This finding is not only positive for the deliberative nature of the speeches in general, but also for the topic of climate change topic in particular, as climate protection is inherently transnational, and it requires international cooperation and the consideration of interests other than one's own. This finding suggests that, in the context of climate change, the majority of MEPs found that interests and perspectives of others are important to consider, which is a key element of deliberative democracy. By referring to a wider common good, and especially the many mentions of the Paris Agreement, MEPs not only acknowledge climate change's transnational nature, but also a sense of international solidarity and responsibility that extends past short-term private interests.

## 7. Conclusion

Using Habermas' theory on deliberative democracy as a framework, and by operationalizing this theory with the DQI, this thesis investigated the deliberative quality of the EP's debates on the ECL. Dozens of MEPs, stood at the plenary hall's podium and spoke to their peers and constituents about their opinion on the ECL. The key result of the discourse analysis shows that the political groups which voted against the climate law - due to its *lack*

*of* ambition – had the highest quality of deliberation in the debates. The group which voted against the law - due to it being *too* ambitious – had the lowest quality of deliberation.

The findings of this thesis suggest that a high quality of deliberation is associated with a more ambitious climate-policy stance, specifically one that is more closely aligned with the Paris Agreement's ambition. A low quality of deliberation is associated with a low ambition on climate policy. The average quality of deliberation was observed to be associated with a positive stance on the ECL, and thereby a level of ambition which is too low for a sustainable future on the planet. Improving the quality of deliberation can potentially also help to counter the anti-pluralist and conflict-centered discourse observed in the far-right political wing of the European Parliament. For the future of climate governance, democratic deliberation can play an increasingly important role.

An interesting opportunity lies in the use of the DQI as a predictor for policy outcomes. In light of the results of this thesis, further research can elevate the application of the DQI by investigating the possible existence of a causal link between an MEP's (or a political group's) DQI score and their position on a climate policy. This could potentially serve to predict a vote, on the basis of deliberation, before it officially takes place.

Given the numerous feminist critiques of Habermas' deliberative democracy framework, it would be interesting to investigate the role of gender and irrational modes of discourse in debates on climate policy. Furthermore, with the prominence of grassroots movements such as Fridays for Future which focus on protest, political influence outside of formal institutions and discussions should be considered.

The thesis has its limitations. For one, the DQI methodology does not include a measurement for Habermas' rule of authenticity (meaning, the absence of deception), as explained in Section 3.7. In the context of climate change, wherein the discussions are plagued by disinformation in the form of distorted evidence, greenwashing, and so on,

deception is an important aspect to consider (Klepper, 2022). However, with the DQI methodology, it was not possible to factor authenticity into the analysis. A second limitation is in the data's reliability, as a master's thesis project is constrained in its resources and it was therefore not possible to include several coders, an additional element which would have bolstered the reliability of the data.

The findings of this thesis are not widely generalizable, as they pertain specifically to recent European Parliament plenary debates, therewith the research problem and analysis is relevant to a specific procedure of a specific institution at a specific point in time. Nevertheless, studying climate policy debates in other parliaments throughout the world can help to potentially create a wider consensus on the connection between deliberative democracy and climate policy.

As the earth's temperatures continue to rise, the time to keep the warming within manageable levels is running out. One way to bolster climate policymaking may be to improve the deliberative quality of political debate on the topic. The idea of having discussions with participants on equal footing, exchanging thoughtful and open-minded arguments in a respectful manner, is not necessarily radical or monumental compared to many of the solutions proposed as part of climate adaptation strategies. However, for the future of democracy on a hot planet, it might be imperative.

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