

Performative Dissonance: Big Climate Words, Small Public Investments, and Democratic Erosion

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Abstract

This paper introduces the concept of *performative dissonance* to analyze the gap between governments' declared climate priorities and their actual public investment commitments, and its consequences for democratic legitimacy. While many European governments have elevated climate change to the status of an existential priority, public investments often fall short of the scale implied by their rhetoric - especially when compared to other political objectives. This gap risks eroding citizens' trust in democratic institutions, not only among those materially disadvantaged by climate policies, but also among supporters frustrated by the state's inability to deliver on its stated ambitions. The analysis proceeds in two parts. First, a qualitative case study of Greenpeace explores how performative dissonance influences tactical debates within climate activism, contributing to growing frustration and, in some cases, tactical radicalization. Second, a preregistered two-wave panel survey experiment tests whether exposure to vignettes portraying mismatches between climate rhetoric and policy action affects citizens' trust in democratic institutions. The study evaluates two distinct psychological mechanisms—perceived exaggeration of climate threats and perceived state incapacity—and examines how performative dissonance interacts with distributive positions in the green transition. The paper contributes to scholarship on climate politics, democratic legitimacy, and social movement radicalization by highlighting a novel mechanism of political backlash beyond material interest conflicts.

Introduction

In contemporary climate politics, governments increasingly declare the green transition to be an existential priority, using urgent and highly moralized rhetoric to signal their commitment to decisive action. Yet behind these declarations, the scale of public investment often remains limited relative to the transformative ambitions implied by such discourse. This gap between political rhetoric and material policy delivery raises fundamental questions not only about climate policy effectiveness, but also about the legitimacy of democratic institutions themselves. While existing research has examined distributive conflicts between winners and losers of the green transition, this paper shifts attention to a distinct political risk: *performative dissonance*—the inconsistency between declared priorities and actual fiscal commitments. When governments repeatedly invoke crisis language without delivering proportionate action, citizens and activists may begin to question the sincerity, capacity, and responsiveness of democratic institutions. This paper examines how such

dissonance erodes institutional trust, fosters frustration within climate movements, and contributes to democratic erosion even beyond traditional distributive cleavages.

In *Politics and the English Language*, George Orwell famously warned that political language, when detached from reality, becomes "designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." The coherence between political discourse and political action is not merely a normative ideal but a central foundation of democratic legitimacy. When democratic governments act in line with their stated objectives, institutional trust tends to remain stable—even among political opponents. Conversely, persistent gaps between rhetoric and action erode trust, including among a government's own supporters. This erosion of legitimacy can give rise to alternative channels of political expression, ranging from disruptive civil society activism to growing support for populist and anti-system parties (Hopkin, 2020; Norris, 2011; Mudde, 2007; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015).

Nowhere is this tension more visible than in the politics of climate change. Across Europe, both the EU and most of its member states have declared the fight against climate change to be the defining political priority of the 21st century. The green transition has thus become a highly salient policy arena in which governments signal urgent, transformative ambitions. A growing body of research has examined the distributive politics of the green transition, focusing on conflicts between its winners and losers (Bechtel et al., 2019; Mildenerberger, 2020; Stokes, 2020; Meckling et al., 2022; Ohlendorf et al., 2022). Social movements such as the Gilets Jaunes (González & King, 2021), coalition bargaining over green industrial policies (Meckling et al., 2022), and emerging patterns of electoral realignment (Huber & Papp, 2021; Baccini et al., 2023) have all been studied through this distributive lens.

Yet an important dimension remains underexplored: how does the consistency—or inconsistency—between governments' climate discourse and their actual policy implementation shape citizens' trust in democratic institutions? This question is especially salient given that the climate crisis is framed by political leaders as existential. When bold rhetoric is not followed by equally ambitious policy action, two problematic interpretations become possible: either the threat has been exaggerated, undermining the credibility of political discourse, or the state lacks the capacity or willingness to address what it claims is an existential threat, undermining confidence in political institutions. In both cases, the consequences for democratic legitimacy may be substantial.

This paper contributes to the literature on the politics of the green transition in two main ways. First, it provides a systematic assessment of the gap between governments' ambitious climate discourse and their actual public investment commitments. While prior research has focused on high-profile EU-level programs such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)—which

allocates up to EUR 723 billion with 37% earmarked for climate objectives (Verdun & Zeitlin, 2021; Thiemann & Zangl, 2022; Schramm & de la Porte, 2023)—such analyses often obscure the broader investment context. This paper adopts a holistic approach to mapping climate-related public spending across multiple national and EU-level channels. Also, rather than considering climate investment in isolation, the paper situates it within broader patterns of public expenditure. By comparing climate-related spending to other fiscal priorities, the paper evaluates whether governments’ declared prioritization of climate policy is reflected in actual resource allocation.

Second, and most centrally, this paper examines the political consequences of discourse-action gaps for democratic legitimacy. Existing scholarship on climate politics has primarily emphasized distributive conflicts between the “winners” and “losers” of the green transition, focusing on how individuals’ material interests shape support for or opposition to climate policies (Bechtel et al., 2019; Mildemberger, 2020; Stokes, 2020; Meckling et al., 2022). Citizens are often conceptualized as rational actors who assess climate policy through the lens of economic self-interest or compensation mechanisms (Fairbrother, 2022; Ohlendorf et al., 2022). This distributive lens has provided valuable insights into electoral realignments, coalition bargaining, and protest mobilization around climate policy (González & King, 2021; Huber & Papp, 2021).

However, distributive interests do not fully capture the political-psychological dimensions of democratic legitimacy, which depend not only on material outcomes but also on the perceived responsiveness, sincerity, and coherence of political institutions (Norris, 2011; Easton, 1975; Hetherington, 1998). When political leaders frame climate change as an existential crisis but repeatedly fail to match such rhetoric with commensurate policy action, citizens may interpret this gap — what I conceptualize as *performative dissonance* — as evidence of democratic dysfunction. This can erode trust in democratic institutions not only among those materially disadvantaged by climate policies, but also among supportive constituencies disillusioned by the state’s incapacity or unwillingness to deliver on declared priorities (Carlin & Singer, 2011; Lühiste & Kölln, 2023).

To investigate these dynamics, the analysis proceeds in two parts: first, a qualitative case study of the civil society organization Greenpeace, examining how performative dissonance shapes activists’ tactical repertoires; and second, a preregistered two-wave survey experiment testing how exposure to rhetoric–action gaps affects citizens’ institutional trust. By foregrounding the political consequences of *performative dissonance*—the gap between ambitious climate rhetoric and less ambitious policy delivery—this paper identifies a novel mechanism through which the green transition may generate political backlash not simply from material opposition, but from growing disillusionment with democratic governance itself.

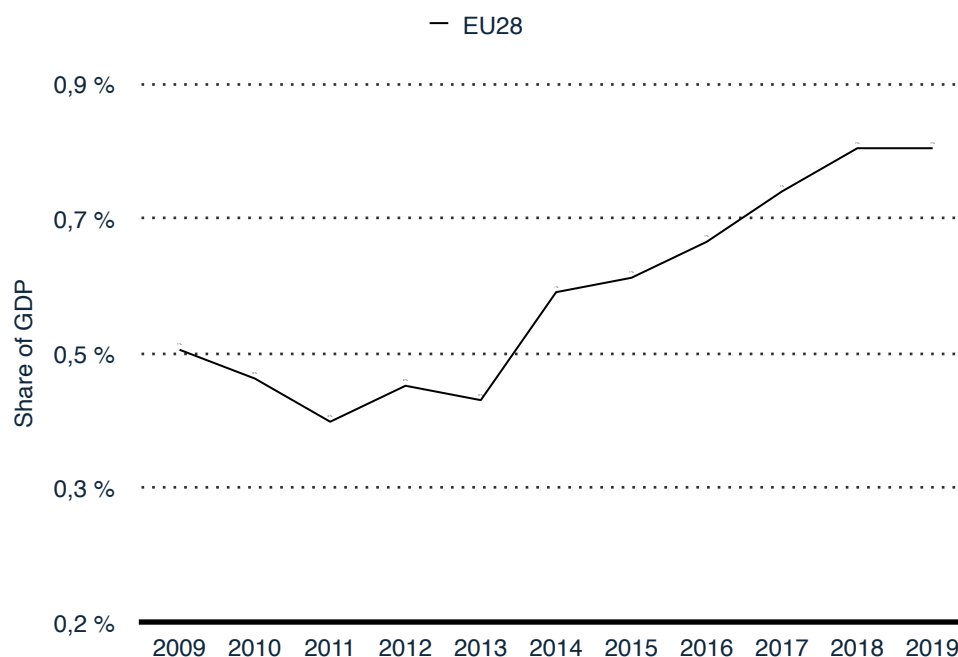
The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section documents the performative dissonance in terms of stated political priority versus the actual patterns of public climate investment in Europe. Then, I develop the concept of performative dissonance and its theorized effects on both social movement strategies and citizens' institutional trust. The next section presents the mixed methodology used in this paper: a qualitative case study of Greenpeace's tactical responses to performative dissonance, and a preregistered survey experiment assessing the causal effects of performative dissonance on citizens' trust in democratic institutions. The next two section presents the empirical results. The final section concludes by discussing the broader implications for democratic governance in the context of climate politics.

Performative Dissonance: A Holistic View on Green Public Investment

Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, climate change has been elevated to a top political priority in Europe. The European Green Deal has framed the green transition as an existential challenge, often described in highly urgent and moralistic terms. For instance, at COP28 in Dubai in December 2023, French President Emmanuel Macron declared: *"The top priority is for the most advanced countries to move away from fossil fuels."* Similarly, upon beginning his second presidential term, Macron emphasized: *"The second quinquennium will be ecological or it will not be."* This political discourse signals a strong rhetorical commitment to far-reaching climate action.

This ambitious framing naturally leads to expectations of a dramatic surge in public investment to match the urgency of the declared priority. However, institutions such as the Institute for Climate Economics (I4CE) estimate that the European green investment gap amounted to €403 billion in 2022 alone (I4CE, 2024). One widely discussed explanation for this persistent shortfall points to long-standing constraints rooted in fiscal austerity (Streeck & Mertens 2011; Draghi 2024). However, this narrative only partially captures the evolving fiscal landscape. In reality, European public investment has substantially increased over the past two decades, including significant discretionary spending by national governments. For example, Figure 1 illustrates the steady rise in EU state aid authorizations well before the COVID-19 pandemic. Other forms of public investment have also expanded (Evenett et al. 2024; Abdelsalam et al. 2022; Lepont and Thiemann 2024), suggesting that the limited scale of green investment is not primarily driven by resource scarcity, but rather by political decisions on the allocation of expanding fiscal capacities across competing priorities.

Figure 1: Evolution of state aids in the EU (share of GDP), source: Eurostat



A substantial body of scholarship has focused on high-profile EU-level instruments such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which allocates up to €723 billion, with 37% earmarked for climate objectives (Verdun & Zeitlin, 2021; Thiemann & Zangl, 2022; Schramm & de la Porte, 2023). The RRF, central to the broader NextGenerationEU (NGEU) program, has been rightly presented as a landmark in EU fiscal capacity-building, as it involved unprecedented EU-level borrowing to finance both grants (€338 billion) and loans (€385 billion) to member states. The funds are disbursed conditional on national governments implementing specified reforms and investments aligned with green and digital transitions. While these instruments mark a significant development in EU-level fiscal policy, the aggregated amounts involved remain modest when situated within the broader scale of national public finances.

Take France as a case in point: between 2021 and 2024, France received approximately €40.95 billion in RRF funding, of which around €20 billion (or nearly 50%) were allocated to green purposes. Yet, in comparison to France’s annual national budget—exceeding €800 billion—and an annual discretionary public investment budget of approximately €120.8 billion in 2023, these RRF transfers represent only a fraction of total public spending. While EU-level programs such as the RRF arguably play a crucial role in advancing European integration, strengthening EU fiscal capacity, and enhancing supranational coordination of investment priorities, their quantitative weight remains limited relative to national public investment capacities in shaping the overall scale of green investment.

A similarly striking pattern appears in the European Commission’s ‘Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework’ (TCTF), adopted in March 2023, partly to facilitate state aid in support of

the green transition. Since its introduction, the TCTF has authorized an extraordinary €218.36 billion in total state aid — yet only €2.38 billion of this amount, barely 1%, has been directed toward measures explicitly supporting the net-zero transition (EU Commission 2025). In other words, despite the central political framing of climate action as the defining existential challenge of our time, over 99% of this vast fiscal mobilization has been either not disbursed, or channeled into purposes other than decarbonization. The scale of this mismatch between proclaimed climate ambition and actual resource allocation underscores the extent of performative dissonance at the heart of contemporary climate governance.

Looking more broadly at national fiscal commitments, green public investment in France has indeed increased, rising from approximately €20 billion in 2011 to €36 billion in 2023 (I4CE 2024). Yet, this increase remains modest when situated within the broader fiscal envelope and relative to the scale of the climate challenge as framed by political discourse. Figure 2 contrasts the increase in climate public investment versus investment to support firms in France between 2011 and 2019. Other major fiscal levers, such as regulated savings, have been document to remain minimally mobilized for climate objectives: for example, only about 5% of such funds are directed towards green investments (Benoit and Massoc 2024).

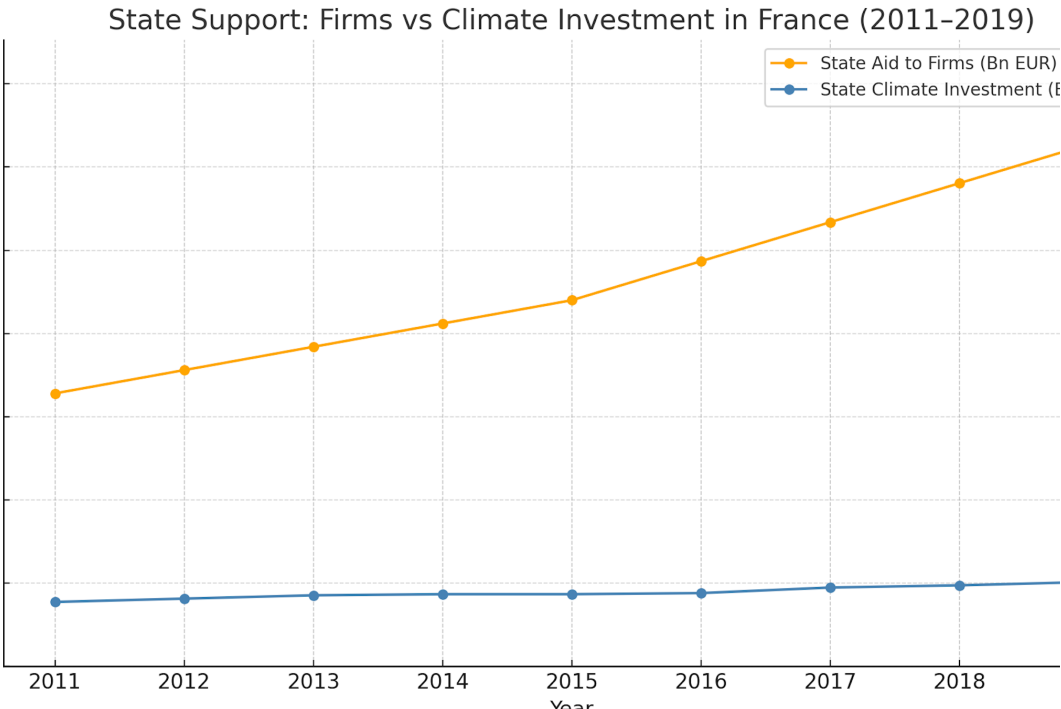


Figure 2: State support: Firms vs Climate Investment in France (2011-2019)

In sum, while there has been a measurable increase in green public investment across multiple channels, the scale of these investments radically falls far short of the rhetorical urgency that

characterizes contemporary climate discourse. This gap between the performative intensity of political language and the actual scale of fiscal commitment constitutes what I conceptualize as **performative dissonance**. The state's declared prioritization of climate action has not been matched by a commensurate reallocation of public resources, raising important questions about how such dissonance may affect citizens' trust in democratic governance.

Performative Dissonance: Democratic backlash in the context of the green transition

How does performative dissonance - the inconsistency between governments' climate discourse and their actual policy implementation shape citizens' trust in democratic institutions? This question is especially salient given that the climate crisis is framed by political leaders as existential. When bold rhetoric is not followed by equally ambitious policy action, two problematic interpretations become possible: either the threat has been exaggerated, undermining the credibility of political discourse, or the state lacks the capacity or willingness to address what it claims is an existential threat, undermining confidence in political institutions. In both cases, the consequences for democratic legitimacy may be substantial. This paper seeks to assess these consequences in the tactics and demands of pro-climate social movements as well as in the attitude towards democracy of citizens that are both perceived losers and winners of the climate transition.

The effects of performative dissonance on pro-climate social movements tactics

In recent years, climate activism has experienced a remarkable surge in both scale and diversity. Initiated by Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future movement in 2018, millions of young people have mobilized globally to demand stronger climate action and greater political urgency (De Moor et al., 2021). While united by the conviction that climate change is insufficiently addressed, these movements encompass a broad spectrum of demands — from stricter emissions targets and fossil fuel phase-outs to calls for deep transformations of political and economic systems (De Moor, 2022; Svensson & Wahlström, 2023).

Alongside the large, peaceful mass mobilizations of Fridays for Future, newer organizations such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil have adopted increasingly disruptive tactics, including road blockades, site occupations, and symbolic attacks on cultural heritage (Kinyon, Dolšák & Prakash, 2023). Although violence remains rare, growing segments within the climate movement have expressed support for more radical or even confrontational strategies, raising concerns about potential escalation (Gunderson & Charles, 2023; Malm, 2021; Sovacool & Dunlap, 2022; Fisher, 2024).

Existing scholarship on social movement tactics has largely framed such choices as strategic adaptations to political opportunity structures (McAdam, 1983; Tarrow, 2011; Kriesi, 2004). From this perspective, activists are rational actors weighing costs and benefits: disruptive actions may attract attention and pressure decision-makers but risk alienating public opinion (Wang & Piazza, 2016). This literature typically assumes that democratic institutions retain some degree of responsiveness—making tactical escalation a meaningful tool to influence policy (Gamson, 1990; Giugni, 1998).

However, such frameworks may not fully account for the deeper forms of disillusionment that emerge when governments publicly declare the climate crisis to be an existential emergency but consistently fail to implement policies that match this rhetoric. This *performative dissonance* may erode activists' trust not only in political elites but in the responsiveness of democratic institutions themselves. When activists begin to view conventional protest as ineffective not due to miscalculation, but because of declining confidence in democratic responsiveness, segments of the movement may radicalize their tactics out of frustration rather than instrumental strategy (Snow & McAdam, 2000; Bosi, Demetriou & Malthaner, 2014; De Moor & Bosi, 2022). This mechanism of tactical radicalization driven by democratic disillusionment remains underexplored, and constitutes a core contribution of this paper.

The effects of performative dissonance on citizens' attitude towards democratic institutions

A growing body of research has examined how the distributive consequences of climate policy shape public support for decarbonization efforts. Scholars have shown that individuals' material interests as actual or anticipated "winners" or "losers" of the green transition significantly influence their support for climate policies (Mildenberger & Stokes, 2020; Meckling et al., 2022; Fairbrother, 2022; Kupzok and Nahm 2024). Scholars such as Bechtel et al. (2019) argue that compensating those materially disadvantaged by climate policies can mitigate political opposition and sustain electoral coalitions for decarbonization. Despite important variations, these literatures largely share an underlying *winners versus losers* framework. Political backlash is often understood to arise from groups or regions bearing the economic costs of decarbonization, who then gravitate toward anti-climate or populist political actors.

Yet while distributive conflicts explain much of the variation in policy support, they do not fully capture how citizens evaluate the broader legitimacy of political institutions. As Norris (2011) and Easton (1975) have emphasized, democratic legitimacy depends not only on policy outputs but also on citizens' perception of the system's procedural integrity and responsiveness. When political elites publicly frame climate change as an existential crisis but fail to follow through with commensurate

policy action, citizens may interpret this gap as evidence of government insincerity, incompetence, or democratic dysfunction (Hetherington, 1998; Carlin & Singer, 2011). This may erode **diffuse support** for democratic institutions, regardless of individuals' material stake in specific climate policies. Such disillusionment may develop even among citizens who otherwise maintain normative commitment to democracy, but who grow skeptical of elected leaders' ability or willingness to credibly address existential policy challenges (Lühiste & Kölln, 2023). In this sense, performative dissonance represents a distinct and underexplored threat to democratic legitimacy that operates beyond the distributive logic of climate policy preferences.

Building on a more civic-centered understanding of democratic legitimacy, this paper thus argues that political backlash may emerge not only from material losses, but also from perceived *inconsistencies* between governments' public commitments and their actual policy delivery. When governments repeatedly frame the climate crisis as an existential emergency, yet fail to mobilize public investment at a scale proportionate to that framing, citizens—whether supportive or skeptical of climate policies—may lose confidence in the capacity of democratic institutions to deliver on their stated priorities. This *performative dissonance* between political discourse and policy action constitutes a distinct source of democratic erosion, one that transcends conventional material interest cleavages and contributes to broader institutional distrust.

Methods and Data

This paper employs a mixed-methods research design combining a qualitative case study of one of the world's most prominent environmental organizations — Greenpeace — with a preregistered survey experiment. Together, these two components provide complementary leverage to examine how performative dissonance in climate policy affects both the strategic responses of climate activists and broader patterns of institutional trust among citizens.

Case Study: Greenpeace's Response to Performative Dissonance

Greenpeace represents one of the most visible and influential environmental organizations operating on both national and international levels. While its activism often relies on disruptive tactics to attract media attention and raise public awareness, Greenpeace has traditionally avoided radical or violent repertoires, positioning itself as a highly professionalized organization that seeks to pressure political institutions while remaining committed to democratic norms.

The case study focuses on Greenpeace offices active in four European countries: France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom — all of which have declared climate change a central political

priority but differ in the scale and consistency of their policy implementation. The empirical analysis proceeds in two stages.

[NB: the empirical analysis is undergoing]

First, a comprehensive content analysis was conducted on Greenpeace's public statements and press releases issued between 2015 and 2023. A total of 3,256 documents were collected across national chapters. Computer-assisted text analysis was used to identify documents in which national governments were explicitly referenced. 356 documents remained. This automated filtering enabled a targeted qualitative coding of the subset of statements directly addressing governmental climate policies, rhetorical commitments, and perceived policy gaps. The analysis focuses on how Greenpeace frames government inaction, whether it invokes accusations of hypocrisy, incapacity, or systemic failure, and whether any shifts in tactical justification emerge in relation to performative dissonance.

Second, semi-structured interviews are conducted with Greenpeace executives, campaign managers, and activists across different organizational levels and national contexts. The interviews aim to probe how activists perceive the responsiveness of democratic institutions in the face of performative dissonance, how this shapes internal debates over tactical choices, and how activists justify their repertoire of action both internally and to external audiences. Interviews were anonymized, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic coding.

By combining discourse analysis with first-hand accounts from organizational insiders, the case study provides an in-depth examination of how performative dissonance may contribute to growing frustration within the climate movement and may influence debates over tactical escalation, even within organizations that remain formally committed to non-radical action.

Survey Experiment: The Effects of Performative Dissonance on Institutional Trust

[NB: I didn't get the funding I applied for this... SO this unfortunately remains hypothetical]

To complement the case study analysis, a preregistered two-wave panel survey experiment is designed to test the effects of performative dissonance on broader public trust in democratic institutions. Performative dissonance is conceptualized as the gap between governments' high-profile climate rhetoric and their comparatively limited policy action.

The experiment employs a 2x2 between-subjects factorial design, manipulating both the level of government climate rhetoric (high vs. low urgency framing) and the level of policy action (high vs. low investment and implementation). Participants are randomly assigned to read one of four short vignettes describing hypothetical but realistic government positions. The high-rhetoric conditions framed climate change as an existential threat demanding urgent state action, while the low-rhetoric

conditions presented climate change as one among several competing policy challenges. Similarly, the high-action conditions described substantial public investments in renewable energy, infrastructure, and fossil fuel phase-out, while the low-action conditions reported limited policy implementation.

The survey is fielded in two waves. In **Wave 1**, participants provided pre-treatment measures of institutional trust (government, parliament, political parties, and democracy as a system), political ideology, partisanship, climate concern, attitudes toward protest tactics, and socio-demographic characteristics. Approximately two weeks later, in **Wave 2**, participants are recontacted, randomly assigned to one of the vignette conditions, and completed post-treatment outcome measures, including institutional trust, perceptions of government credibility (exaggeration of climate threats), perceptions of state capacity, emotional reactions (anger, frustration, disillusionment), and attitudes toward protest repertoires.

The two-wave panel design allows for both between-subjects estimation of treatment effects and within-subject analyses of change in trust, improving statistical precision and strengthening causal inference. In addition to testing average treatment effects, the experimental design permits the empirical evaluation of two theoretical mechanisms: whether performative dissonance reduces trust through undermining discourse credibility (exaggeration mechanism) or through perceptions of state incapacity (capacity mechanism). The combination of experimental manipulation with rich pre-treatment covariates further allows for subgroup analysis, assessing whether distributive positions in the green transition ("winners" vs. "losers") moderate the relationship between performative dissonance and democratic trust.

All survey instruments, hypotheses, treatment materials, and statistical models are preregistered prior to data collection.

DEMOCRATIC BACKLASH I: THE IMPACT OF PERFORMATIVE DISSONANCE ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' ACTION STRATEGIES

TBC

DEMOCRATIC BACKLASH II: THE IMPACT OF PERFORMATIVE DISSONANCE ON CITIZENS' TRUST IN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

TBC

Experimental Structure

The experiment follows a 2x2 between-subjects factorial design, manipulating two dimensions:

- **Rhetoric Level:** High urgency climate rhetoric vs. low urgency rhetoric
- **Policy Action Level:** High level of climate policy action vs. low level of action

This yields four experimental conditions:

1. Low rhetoric, low action (control condition)
2. High rhetoric, low action (performative dissonance)
3. Low rhetoric, high action (silent competence)
4. High rhetoric, high action (policy consistency)

Participants are randomly assigned to one of these four conditions in Wave 2 of the study.

Two-Wave Panel Design

In **Wave 1**, all participants complete pre-treatment measures assessing:

- Institutional trust (trust in government, parliament, parties, democracy as a system)
- Political ideology and partisanship
- Climate concern (general salience and perceived threat)
- Political efficacy and political cynicism
- Demographics (age, gender, education, income)

Approximately 10–14 days later, in **Wave 2**, respondents are exposed to the randomly assigned vignette treatment, after which post-treatment outcomes are collected. These include:

- Institutional trust (same items as pre-treatment)
- Perceived credibility of climate discourse (exaggeration mechanism)
- Perceived state capacity (capacity/willingness mechanism)
- Emotional reactions (anger, frustration, disillusionment)
- Manipulation checks

The two-wave design allows for both between-subjects estimation of treatment effects and within-subject estimation of changes in institutional trust. This design improves statistical power, strengthens causal identification, and allows for analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects conditional on prior attitudes.

Sample Size and Power

To ensure sufficient power to detect medium-sized effects and to conduct moderated mediation analyses, we target a Wave 1 sample of approximately 2,000 respondents, anticipating 15-20% attrition to yield a Wave 2 sample of approximately 1,600 participants. This provides ~400 respondents per experimental cell.

Analytic Strategy

We will estimate average treatment effects (ATEs) for institutional trust outcomes, conduct mediation analyses to evaluate the proposed mechanisms, and explore heterogeneous effects across political subgroups. All hypotheses, measures, treatment materials, and statistical models will be preregistered prior to data collection.

Pre-Analysis Plan Overview

- **Hypotheses:**

H1: Exposure to performative dissonance (high rhetoric + low action) reduces institutional trust relative to policy consistency (high rhetoric + high action).

H2a (Exaggeration mechanism): The trust-reducing effect of performative dissonance is mediated by increased perceptions that the government exaggerates the climate threat.

H2b (Capacity mechanism): The trust-reducing effect of performative dissonance is mediated by reduced perceptions of state capacity and willingness to act.

- **Experimental Conditions:** 2x2 factorial: Rhetoric (high vs. low) × Action (high vs. low)

- **Outcome Measures:**

- Institutional trust (4 items)
- Perceived exaggeration (3 items)
- Perceived state capacity (3 items)
- Emotional responses (anger, cynicism)
- Manipulation checks

- **Main Estimation Approach:**

- OLS models estimating ATEs on post-treatment trust (both absolute levels and change scores)
- Mediation analysis (Imai et al. causal mediation framework)
- Subgroup analysis (by ideology, climate concern, partisanship)

- **Exclusion Criteria:**

- Failed manipulation checks
- Non-completion of both waves
- Straight-lining or inattentive responses

- **Power Calculation:**

- N = 400 per cell, sufficient to detect standardized effects of $d = 0.20$ – 0.30 with 80% power.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the politics of the green transition generate not only distributive conflicts between economic winners and losers, but also legitimacy challenges rooted in what I have conceptualized as *performative dissonance*: the gap between governments' declared climate priorities and their actual public investment commitments. While climate change is increasingly framed as an existential crisis, my analysis demonstrates that the scale of public fiscal mobilization often falls far short of the ambitions articulated in political discourse. This disconnect poses risks not only for policy effectiveness, but for democratic legitimacy itself.

Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, combining a qualitative case study of Greenpeace with a preregistered survey experiment, the paper has shown how performative dissonance can erode institutional trust among citizens across the political spectrum — including among those who might otherwise support strong climate action. Moreover, the case study suggests that such disillusionment may also influence the tactical evolution of pro-climate social movements, contributing to more radical repertoires of contention as activists lose confidence in the responsiveness of democratic institutions.

More broadly, these findings suggest that ambitious climate rhetoric, while politically attractive, carries substantial legitimacy risks if not matched by commensurate public investment and policy delivery. The politics of climate governance thus confront a paradox: the stronger the rhetorical framing of climate as an existential threat, the more politically costly unfulfilled action may become for democratic institutions. Future research should continue to explore how democratic states can reconcile the symbolic urgency of the climate crisis with the institutional capacities and political coalitions required to sustain long-term, credible decarbonization efforts.

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