

## Article

# Reflection of the EU Climate Policy Strategic Narrative in the Programmes of Latvian Political Parties—External Convergence and Influence on Shaping Public Opinion

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**Abstract:** Climate change, as well as the challenges that come with it, is one of the main issues in international and national politics today. Addressing the threats posed by climate change requires close cooperation at the international level and within each country, creating a dialogue between the political elite and society, thus promoting a common understanding and action across the European Union (EU). The aim of this research is to (1) identify what climate policy narratives are projected to the Latvian electorate (public) and (2) assess how these narratives are aligned with the EU-defined strategic climate policy narrative. The theoretical basis and methodological approach of the study is based on the concept of strategic narrative. It is assumed that the viability and impact of a strategic narrative is enhanced when there is coherence between all stages of the narrative life cycle (i.e., the EU level and the national policy level). The empirical basis of the study is based on the identification of the EU climate policy narrative in the sector's regulatory documents, as well as an analysis of the election programmes of Latvian political parties (the last European Parliament (2019) and parliamentary (2018) election programmes). The results show that the narrative that the Latvian public receives from its political elite through the European Parliament and the national pre-election programmes is significantly different from the EU strategic narrative on climate policy. Based on the theoretical concept of strategic narrative, it can be concluded that the observed dissimilarity of narratives does not stimulate the inclusion of the Latvian public in the common EU space of climate policy understanding and action.

**Keywords:** climate change; strategic narrative; narrative of political parties; climate policy; shaping public opinion



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## 1. Introduction

National security has always been one of the key issues in national and international politics. Traditionally, security has been understood as physical military security, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in the internal affairs of another state, integrity of national borders [1], and so on—a set of conditions aimed at preventing military aggression and thus preventing physical and economic threats to states.

Over recent decades (since the late 1960s), another major force threatening the future political, economic, and social development of countries has gradually emerged—climate change [2]. While it was initially perceived primarily as a threat to nature, the irreversible impact of this process on national economies and on human beings—their health, well-being, and, in the long term, their existence on this planet—is becoming increasingly clear, as in the case of military threats [3].

According to The EIB Climate Survey 2020–2021 [4], conducted by the European Investment Bank at the end of 2020, climate change is the fourth most important threat facing the European Union (EU), and 33% of EU citizens have categorised the problem as one of the three key challenges they face.

The perception is also similar in the US, where 27% of respondents ranked it among the top challenges facing society, while in China, 61% consider the problem to be very important. EU citizens identify the threat of natural disasters (64% of respondents), environmental risks (51%), and rising temperatures (34%) as the main negative impacts of climate change. Regarding the spectrum of negative impacts, people in the US and China add concerns about the spread of diseases. In addition, 75% of EU citizens believe that climate change affects and impacts everyone's daily life. It should be noted, however, that this attitude is more apparent in southern and south-eastern Europe, while it is less frequently identified in northern and north-eastern Europe (the proportion of positive responses ranges from 45% to 95%). Southern and south-eastern Europeans also have slightly lower levels of confidence that the EU, as well as each country in the region, can be seen as a leader in the fight against climate change, while northern Europeans have no doubts regarding the ability of the EU and their nation states to tackle climate challenges. More than half of respondents (57%) believe that EU governments and parliaments should reorientate economic system in a climate-friendly direction when rebuilding after the COVID-19 pandemic. The data also show that 70% of EU respondents would support stronger government action to change public behaviour to help tackle climate change. In addition, 72% of respondents would be willing to review their own habits to make them even more environmentally friendly, while 77% say they have already done so, for example, by changing their shopping and/or travel habits [4].

Before focusing on a description of the situation in Latvia, a little information about Latvia's geographical location and political system is provided. As shown on the map [5] (Figure 1), the Republic of Latvia [6] is a country in the Baltic region of Europe, covering an area of 64,589 km<sup>2</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Geographical location of Latvia.

Latvia is one of the three Baltic states with a population of 1.9 million people and the official language being Latvian. It borders Estonia on the north, Lithuania on the south, Russia on the east, and Belarus on the southeast. Latvia has a maritime border with Sweden on the west [7]. The capital and biggest city of Latvia is Riga. Latvia is a parliamentary republic with a parliament – Saeima - consisting of 100 members of the parliament elected every four years in general, equal and direct elections, based on proportional representation. The government—the council of ministers—is formed by the head of government—the prime minister, nominated by the head of state—the president. The president plays a ceremonial role [8]. Latvia is an EU member state since 1 May 2004, and joined the Schengen area in 2007, whereas the Euro area—in 2014.

As to awareness of climate change, in many of the sections described above (20% of cases), Latvia has the lowest or one of the lowest scores in the EU, while in 79% of cases, the scores are below the EU average. For example, only 10% of people in Latvia consider climate change to be a major problem that affects their daily lives (the lowest in the EU). At the same time, there is a strong belief that the EU is the main actor in the fight

against climate change, while national institutions (parliament and government) do not necessarily have to deal with the matter. The situation is similar when it comes to people's perception of their ability to contribute to the process of resolving climate change problems: only 44% of people think they can influence the process, and only 57% of people in Latvia have made some effort to limit climate change (the lowest scores in the EU). Of all EU citizens, Latvians are the least likely to change their shopping, eating, or travelling habits, while clearly recognising that changing habits is the most effective way to limit climate change (Latvia scored higher than the EU as a whole in this indicator). From the analysis of the research results, it can be concluded that the Latvian population is not aware of the significance of climate change and its impact on individual lives and is therefore not ready to participate in climate change mitigation. Climate change is identified as an issue to be addressed at the EU level, not at the national or individual level [4]. There is a significant gap between the EU's overall position on climate issues and the Latvian public's position and understanding. A question arises on potential causes for such a gap. Is it based on the message that Latvian society receives from its political elite—politicians? Is the message that reaches the Latvian citizens the opposite of the EU's existing collective opinion and start-up narrative?

In order to answer this question, the following research aim was set: to analyse the election programmes of political parties contesting the last parliamentary (Saeima) and European Parliament (EP) elections, in 2018 and 2019, respectively, in order to (1) identify which climate policy narratives are projected to the electorate (public) and (2) assess how these narratives are aligned with the EU-defined strategic climate policy narrative.

This study contributes to a broader understanding of the resonance of climate change in central and eastern Europe, a region which has been modestly covered in the scientific literature about the discursive environment regarding climate change. Illustrative studies on media coverage in the Czech Republic [9,10], Latvia [11], Lithuania [12], and Poland [13] show that climate-change-related issues either do not figure high on the media agenda or possess a low level of domestication, thus fostering the perception of climate change as a geographically distant phenomenon, or echo political agendas, prioritizing business interests rather than enhancing innovative climate and energy policies. A study on Estonian discourse reveals a predominantly top-down approach in approaching low-carbon future development, failing to provide agency to societal groups, which are directly affected by energy transformations [14]. Insufficient knowledge among young Poles has been highlighted as a crucial factor hindering more active involvement of society in climate change mitigation and adaptation activities [15]. This study aims to complement the research in the region by discovering how political parties foster (or not) an awareness of climate change through their pre-election programmes. As pre-election programmes demonstrate which issues political parties consider to be resonant for their voters, such an analysis uncovers not only the level of commitment of politicians to address climate change but also their perception of the expectations of society. This research illuminates the challenges that political parties confront when faced with global pressure to fight climate change, even as they respond to priorities other than climate change at the domestic level.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Literature Review

Studies show that political and societal awareness of environmental and climate-change-related issues in the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union is not high [16,17], even though several decades have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and many of these states have been the members of the EU for years already. Chaisty and Whitefield refers to this as a “post-communist effect” [16], which is explained both by the value systems of post-communist societies and negative experiences of post-communist transition, as well as weak links of environmental issues to issues of higher political and economic priority. As a result, there is no right/left division on environmental issues among political parties, and the environment is not seen as an important element of

political contestation [16]. This is reflected in inconsistent ideological identification with climate change in eastern European societies, reinforced by differing interpretations there of the right and the left in the spectrum of political parties [17]. Such a trend presents a juxtaposition to the West, especially the Anglo-Saxon countries, where environment and climate-change-related issues have caused partisan divisions and polarisation in public opinion [18,19]. It has been observed that political elites alongside their political parties play a more decisive role in influencing the climate change concerns of the citizens of the United States than objective scientific information. Partisan polarisation, however, is not without consequences: it has brought up contestation over the scientific consensus on climate change, manifesting itself in climate scepticism and denial.

The low salience of environmental and climate-change-related issues in the countries of central and eastern Europe is puzzling, given that ecological concerns paved the way for national independence movements there at the end of the 1980s, which eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. A study on Latvia, in particular, concludes that after the restoration of independence in 1991, ecological concerns lost their visibility, and altogether it has been observed that “a general ‘Green’ consciousness as seen through political debates, discourses and decision-making has been lacking in post-Soviet Latvia” ([20], p. 335). This is partly due to the priority of political and economic reforms aimed at Euro–Atlantic integration, and their side-effects, that is, rising inequality, which has hindered the salience of the environment and climate change among the wider public. However, environmentalism has been also discredited by political parties using green ideology to attract voters’ attention, yet acting controversially in policymaking. A study on the Latvian Green Party demonstrates the impact of funders’ interests on the image of this political party [21]. The Latvian Green Party has been in alliance with the conservative agrarian Latvian Farmers’ Union (Latvijas Zemnieku savienība) since 2002 and has been funded by the domestic oil and transit industry and local “oligarch” Aivars Lembergs, charged for corruption and money-laundering, whose political party “For Latvia and Ventspils!” (Latvijai un Ventspilij) later joined the alliance. It is considered that these factors might have discredited the Latvian Green Party, alienated young people “attracted to the more left-wing European vision of environmentalism”, and marginalized green policies in Latvia ([21], p. 523). This suggests that Latvia, as well as other central and eastern European states potentially, lacks a permanent and consistent political platform, which could raise and spread environmental and climate change concerns.

## *2.2. Developing and Transforming the EU’s Strategic Climate Policy Narrative*

Globally, climate change has been gradually emerging over the last decades (since the late 1960s) as another major force threatening the future political, economic, and social development of countries [22]. This has led international institutions, both non-governmental and national, to place the issue of controlling and regulating the climate change process on their agendas more and more, with the aim of minimising the possible negative consequences for the world [22].

The first strategic framework for the new approach is the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) [23], a multilateral intergovernmental agreement established by the United Nations to globally coordinate and organise the reduction of climate change emissions and the capacity of Member States to adapt to current and future climate change. The Convention defined the overall goals and objectives of climate policy, but the mechanisms for achieving them were specified in later UNFCCC-based documents.

The first internationally binding framework based on the UNFCCC was the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted in 1997 and entered into force in 2005 [24]. The Kyoto Protocol was an international treaty extending the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which instructs Member States to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions on the basis of the scientific consensus that global warming is occurring and that man-made CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are contributing to it. The 35 industrialised countries

that ratified the Kyoto Protocol and the European Community were required to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions by 6% below 1990 levels by 2012.

Similar to the UNFCCC, the Protocol provided a common and differentiated responsibilities principle: it acknowledges that individual countries have different capacities to combat climate change due to their economic development, and therefore prioritises the responsibility to reduce existing emissions of developed countries, which are identified as being primarily responsible for the historical levels of GHG in the atmosphere [23,24].

Studies on the environmental and economic impacts of the Kyoto Protocol have shown significant reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, beyond the previously projected reductions [25]. However, there are different interpretations of these results, with experts pointing out that it was the eastern European countries—members of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (hereinafter “USSR”)—that made a significant contribution to emissions reductions, as their industrial sectors shrank significantly after the collapse of the USSR, and this naturally had a significant impact on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions [26]. At the same time, this reduction has had a negative impact on the size of countries’ gross domestic product. It can therefore be seen that the benefits of CO<sub>2</sub> reductions only partially offset the damage to the economy [26]. This is particularly challenging for economically vulnerable countries, where relatively small reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> levels have a significantly larger negative impact on the economy.

The next turning point in global climate policy dynamics came in 2015, when the Paris Agreement was established at the 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, which sets out regulations to reduce the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from 2020 onwards. The long-term goal of the agreement is to prevent overall global warming above 2 °C (preferably 1.5 °C) and to achieve zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050 [3]. By November 2021, 194 countries had signed or ratified the Agreement, and the EU as a single actor ratified the Agreement on 5 October 2016, together accounting for more than 98% of global GHG emissions [27].

The period from 2015 on marks a new turning point in global climate policy, with the US, China, and the EU emerging as key partners in the fight against climate change. The following research focuses on the EU as the main factor shaping Latvia’s climate policy position.

In February 2015, the European Commission launched a new strategy for a sustainable Energy Union in the EU, based on ambitious climate change policies. The strategy lays out a vision on how safe, sustainable, competitive, and affordable energy will be ensured for EU households and businesses. For this, fundamental changes in Europe’s energy system will be necessary [28].

The legal basis for such transformation is provided by the “Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the governance of the Energy Union and climate action” [29], adopted on 11 December 2018 [29]. This Regulation “lays the necessary legislative foundation for the credible, inclusive, cost-effective, transparent and predictable governance of the Energy Union and climate action (governance mechanism) that will ensure the achievement of the 2030 and long-term goals and targets of the Energy Union” ([28], p. 1). The Energy Union involves five dimensions: enhanced energy security; integrated internal energy market; improved energy efficiency; further decarbonisation; and emphasis on research, innovation and competitiveness” ([28], p. 1) [29].

An additional cornerstone of EU climate policy development is the “Clean Energy for All Europeans” package, or the “Clean Energy Package” (CEP). This package includes eight legislative acts covering energy efficiency in buildings, renewable energy, energy efficiency, governance processes and electricity market design’ [30]. Being the fourth package of this type, the CEP follows the path set out in the previous packages and offers gradual transition towards carbon-neutrality. However, it does not provide any specific provisions for the gas sectors, as the previous packages did [30].

Finally, as a unifying document bringing together all the previous ideas and actions, the European Green Deal was launched in 2019. Its goal is “to transform the EU into a



modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy”, which “ends net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, decouples economic growth from resource use and leaves no one and no region behind” [31]. The European Commission has put forward a bunch of proposals to adapt the EU’s climate, energy, transport, and taxation policies to an aim of reduction of GHG emissions by at least 55% below 1990 levels by 2030. To achieve this, eight sub-action areas have been identified: “climate, energy, agriculture, industry, environment and oceans, transport, finance and regional development, research and innovation” [31].

To make the EU Green Deal binding for all EU Member States, Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 (the European Climate Law) was adopted in 2021 [32]. This Regulation provides a binding target to the EU to become climate neutral by 2050. In the meantime, an interim target is set of reducing GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030 [33]. This Regulation obliges the EU institutions, and each Member State, to create the necessary regulatory environment to meet the above-described climate targets [32,33]. The European Climate Law is defined as the baseline element of the European Green Deal. It serves as the foundation for further regulatory initiatives in the EU to implement the EU climate ambitions. As a move forward to adapt the EU climate, energy, land use, transport, and taxation policies to the European Green Deal—the European Commission presented the Fit for 55 [34] package of legislative proposals (14 June 2021).

To summarise, the climate policy narrative in the international environment has gone through several phases of development, gradually leading to the current EU strategic climate policy narrative. These phases are as follows:

- (1) 1992: Scientific consensus that climate change (global warming) is a real and genuine threat and a decision on the need to reduce climate change emissions/CO<sub>2</sub> emissions/GHG emissions. Understanding that humans are the main producers of CO<sub>2</sub>.
- (2) 1997: Every country has a responsibility to tackle climate change, but given the understanding that individual countries have different capacities to tackle climate change due to their economic development, the responsibility to reduce existing emissions is given to developed countries as a priority. The fight against climate change is effective, but it also has a negative economic impact, which is particularly dangerous for fragile countries.
- (3) 2015: A sustainable and ambitious EU climate change policy is based on secure, sustainable, competitive, and affordable energy.
- (4) 2018: EU climate policy action lines: building a gradual transition towards a carbon-neutral economy by facilitating energy efficiency in buildings, developing renewable energy, enhancing energy efficiency, making governance more efficient, and improving electricity market design—.
- (5) 2019: EU climate policy aims for a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy that “ends greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, decouples economic growth from resource use and leaves no one and no region behind” [31]. EU climate, energy, transport, and taxation policies must be ready “to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030. EU climate policy sub-actions: climate, energy, agriculture, industry, environment and oceans, transport, finance and regional development, research and innovation” [31].
- (6) 2021: It is the responsibility of each EU institution and Member State to create a regulatory environment that enables the above climate goals to be achieved.
- (7) 2021: EU climate, energy, land use, transport, and taxation policies must be suitable to meet the European Green Deal target of reducing net GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030.

In line with the aim of this research, this article analyses the pre-election programmes of Latvian political parties (the 2019 EP elections and the 2018 parliamentary elections) to find out whether the information that parties communicate to their voters through their pre-election programmes is in line with the EU strategic climate narrative.

### 2.3. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The theoretical basis and methodological approach of the study is based on the concept of strategic narrative. The theoretical framework of strategic narratives [35,36] is applied to analyse the formation and projection of the climate changes narrative in Latvia. Strategic narratives are defined as “a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of international politics, and to shape the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour of domestic and international actors” ([36], p. 2). In this research, the emphasis is placed on the “domestic” side, aiming to uncover the efforts of the Latvian political elite to construct a shared meaning on this issue of global importance—climate change mitigation—as projected in political parties’ pre-election programmes. Furthermore, the strategic narrative is enhanced when there is coherence between all stages of the narrative cycle (formation, projection, and reception): to achieve a change in the recipient’s attitude, all stages of the message need to be coherent with each other [36]. In particular, in order to promote the inclusion of Latvian citizens in the EU climate policy understanding space, any climate policy message constructed at the national level should be aligned with the EU’s strategic narrative, thus achieving so-called external convergence—the alignment of strategic narratives between different actors [37].

The empirical basis of the study is based on the identification of the international context and the EU climate policy narrative in the sector’s regulatory documents, as well as an analysis of the pre-election programmes of Latvian parties (the 2019 EP election and 2018 parliamentary (Saeima) election programmes), taking into account the fact that the pre-election programmes are among the most widely broadcasted information materials in the country. Applying a qualitative content analysis, all sources were coded using a common methodology developed within the project “From indifference to making difference in climate policy: improving the interaction between political narrative and societal perceptions in Latvia (CIINAP)” [38], a codebook, in which each political message was assessed according to well-defined parameters. For the purposes of this article, selected categories from the codebook are used (Table 1) demonstrating visibility, centrality, and emotional evaluation of climate change in political party programmes, as well as the context within which climate-change-related issues are addressed, and framing—the aspects the political parties choose to highlight when constructing their position on climate change.

**Table 1.** A codebook for the analysis of political party programmes.

Categories of Analysis	Values
	Keywords:
	1. Climate change, climate neutrality
	2. Global warming, global temperature, or planetary temperature
	3. Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG emissions, or CO2 emissions
	4. Carbon neutrality or carbon concentration
	5. Decarbonisation
	6. Green energy, green deal, green transition, or green transformation
Visibility	7. Environmental protection, environmentally friendly, environmental conservation, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster
	8. Nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster
	9. Biodiversity
	10. Paris (climate) agreement
	11. Other
Centrality	Major; secondary; minor

Table 1. Cont.

Categories of Analysis	Values
Evaluation	Positive; rather positive; neutral (no evaluation); rather negative; negative
Context	Agriculture and forestry; energy; manufacturing; natural processes; socio-political processes; transport; waste management
Thematic framework	An instrument for meeting non-climate goals; an international challenge; cost/loss to the economy; false alarm/imaginary (non-existent) problem; government/politician failure; inevitable reality (a phenomenon that happens); opportunity for economy/entrepreneurs/innovation; the issue of sustainability/corporate social responsibility; threat (or risk) to nature, human life, health, property, country, etc.; not framed; other

After the analysis of these categories, we conclude where Latvia stands with regard to the EU climate policy and what the determination of the political elite is towards climate change mitigation and adaptation, how Latvia frames climate change mitigation and energy saving and what narratives are created around them, as well as what implications such narratives may have on public opinion in Latvia.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Reflection of Climate Policy Priorities in the EP and Saeima Pre-Election Programmes—Identification and Analysis of Political Party Narratives

##### 3.1.1. Analysis of the Climate Narrative in the EP Pre-Election Programmes (2019)

For the 2019 EP elections, 16 political parties or their associations (hereafter referred to as “parties”) registered their participation, offering potential voters their pre-election programme or party vision on the most pressing issues to be addressed by the EP [39]. Seven of these parties are currently represented in the national parliament (13th Saeima): the Social Democratic Party “Harmony” (“Saskaņa” sociāldemokrātiskā partija), the New Conservative Party (Jaunā konservatīvā partija), the Political Party KPV LV (Politiskā partija “KPV LV”), National Alliance “All For Latvia!”—“For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK” (Nacionālā apvienība “Visu Latvijai!” “Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK”), Development/For! (Attīstībai/Par!), the Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība), and New Unity (Jaunā VIENOTĪBA). Nine are political forces that operate outside of parliament. These parties are the Latvian Russian Union (Latvijas Krievu savienība), the Latvian Nationalists (Latviešu Nacionālisti), the Latvian Association of Regions (Latvijas Reģionu Apvienība), the Progressives (PROGRESĪVIE), New Harmony (Jaunā Saskaņa), Latvian Social Democratic Labour Party (Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija, LSDSP), Action Party (Rīcības partija), Centre Party (Centra partija), and Awakening (Atmoda). Most of the non-parliamentary parties, except the Latvian Association of Regions (Latvijas Reģionu Apvienība) and the Progressives (PROGRESĪVIE), are small and marginal political formations.

Of all the parties listed above, 69% (11 parties) have chosen to include (i.e., at least briefly mention) climate issues in their programme, while 31% (5 parties) do not include climate issues in their programme at all. The parties that do not mention climate aspects at all are the Social Democratic Party “Harmony”, National Alliance “All For Latvia!”—“For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK”, Action Party, Centre Party, and Awakening. It is noteworthy that two of these parties are represented in the national parliament—the left-wing Social Democratic Party “Harmony” (23 seats out of 100, the largest faction in parliament, political opposition) and the right-wing National Alliance “All For Latvia!”—“For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK” (13 seats, a government-forming political force). These parties are seen as influential and visible forces on the political scene, with messages that reach a wide audience and contribute to shaping the opinion of a significant part of society.



It should also be noted that of the parties that have chosen to talk about climate issues, only two refer to any external authority to uphold the credibility of their position. One of them is the Progressives (using its political partners in the EP, the European Socialists and Greens, as an authority), and the other is New Harmony (referring to climate NGO activists and its potential partner in the EP, the European Left Party).

Generally, when assessing the importance of climate change in the EP pre-election programmes, it can be concluded that it is not a primary topic in any of the programmes, and this is similarly reflected in the attitudes of the Latvian population, with only 10% of the Latvian public considering it one of the most important challenges facing the country and society today. In just over half of the party programmes (55%, six parties), the topic is secondary; in 36% of cases (four parties), it can be identified as a minor topic; and in another 9% of cases (one party), it is not mentioned directly at all but is discussed in the context of other processes.

Further detailed attention will focus on those parties that have addressed climate issues in their programmes. As the table below (Table 2) shows, the keywords most frequently mentioned in the context of climate change are the following: (1) emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG emissions, or CO<sub>2</sub> emissions; and (2) climate change or climate neutrality. These keywords are used in 36% (4 parties) of all 11 party programmes that mention climate issues in any way. Keyword analysis reflects the inclusion of the climate issue in party programs, but it should be noted that this is very marginal in most cases.

**Table 2.** Keywords most frequently mentioned in the context of climate change in party programmes.

Keyword Categories	Number of Times Mentioned in Party Programmes
Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG emissions, or CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	4
Climate change, climate neutrality	4
Natural diversity, biodiversity, or biological diversity	3
Environmental protection, environmental preservation, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster	3
Organic farming	2
Nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster	2
Emissions, GHG emissions, CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	2
Alternative energy resources	1
Circular economy	1
Responsibility towards nature	1
Bioeconomics	1
Ecology	1
Energy-efficient Europe	1
Sustainable waste management	1
Climate disbalance	1
Good quality food	1
Clean energy	1
Clean water	1
Healthy living environment	1
Healthy living conditions	1
Green Europe	1
Green transport	1

The following table (Table 3) shows the ranking of the parties according to the share of climate-related keywords in the programme. The party not represented in parliament, the centre-left “Progressives”, paid the most attention to climate issues, using a total of six keyword groups or 17% of all identified keywords. The second position is held by the liberal-oriented parliamentary party “Development/For!”, whose programme contains five groups of keywords (1% of all identified keywords). The third position is shared by

two parties represented in parliament (the conservative Union of Greens and Farmers and the populist political party KPV LV) and two parties not represented in parliament (the extreme-left Latvian Russian Union and the extreme-right Latvian Nationalists), whose keywords account for 11% of the total number of keywords devoted to climate issues.

**Table 3.** Parties' ranking according to the share of climate-related keywords in the programme.

Name of the Party	Status of the Party	Number of Keyword Categories in the Programme
Progressives	Non-parliamentary	6
Development/For!	Parliamentary	5
Latvian Russian Union	Non-parliamentary	4
Latvian Nationalists	Non-parliamentary	4
Union of Greens and Farmers	Parliamentary	4
Political Party "KPV LV"	Parliamentary	4
New Harmony	Parliamentary	3
Latvian Social Democratic Labour Party	Non-parliamentary	2
New Conservative Party	Parliamentary	1
New Unity	Parliamentary	1
Latvian Association of Regions	Non-parliamentary	1

It should be noted that two of the parties in parliament—the conservative New Conservative Party and the centre-right New Unity—have been particularly laconic in their coverage of climate issues, each using only one keyword category. See Table 4 for more details on the keyword categories identified in each party's programme. This table shows the current topics or issues through which the party chooses to talk about climate issues.

**Table 4.** Keyword categories identified in each party's programme.

Name of the Party	Status of the Party	Keyword Categories Used by the Party
Progressives	Non-parliamentary	Climate change, climate neutrality Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG emissions, or CO2 emissions Environmental protection, preserving the environment, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster Nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster Natural diversity, biodiversity, or biological diversity
Development/For!	Parliamentary	Climate change, climate neutrality Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG emissions, or CO2 emissions Clean energy Circular economy Organic farming
Latvian Russian Union	Non-parliamentary	Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG emissions, or CO2 emissions Natural diversity, biodiversity, or biological diversity Climate disbalance Healthy living environment
Latvian Nationalists	Non-parliamentary	Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG emissions, or CO2 emissions Environmental protection, preserving the environment, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster Ecology Alternative energy resources

Table 4. Cont.

Name of the Party	Status of the Party	Keyword Categories Used by the Party
Union of Greens and Farmers	Parliamentary	Green Europe Energy-efficient Europe Green transport Bioeconomic
Political Party “KPV LV”	Parliamentary	Sustainable waste management Clean water Healthy living environment Good quality food
New Harmony	Parliamentary	Climate change, climate neutrality Environmental protection, preserving the environment, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster Natural diversity, biodiversity, or biological diversity
Latvian Social Democratic Labour Party	Non-parliamentary	Climate change, climate neutrality Environmental protection, preserving the environment, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster
New Conservative Party	Parliamentary	Organic farming
New Unity	Parliamentary	Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG emissions, or CO2 emissions
Latvian Association of Regions	Non-parliamentary	Responsibility towards nature

The non-parliamentary party “Progressives” is a convincing leader in the diversity of the chosen topics, as well as in the fulfilment of their content. Other parties have balanced the programmes between content-filled and very general formulations, referring to topics such as clean energy, climate imbalances, clean water, or responsibility for nature. Among the parties represented in parliament, the New Conservative Party has been particularly laconic in its choice of topics, choosing to mention organic farming as the only topic related to climate policy, while the core messages of climate policy (emissions, climate neutrality, etc.) have not been included in their programme, much like several other parliamentary parties, such as the Union of Greens and Peasants and KPV LV. On the contrary, two of the non-parliamentary parties—the Latvian Russian Union and the Latvian Nationalists—have included these topics in their programmes.

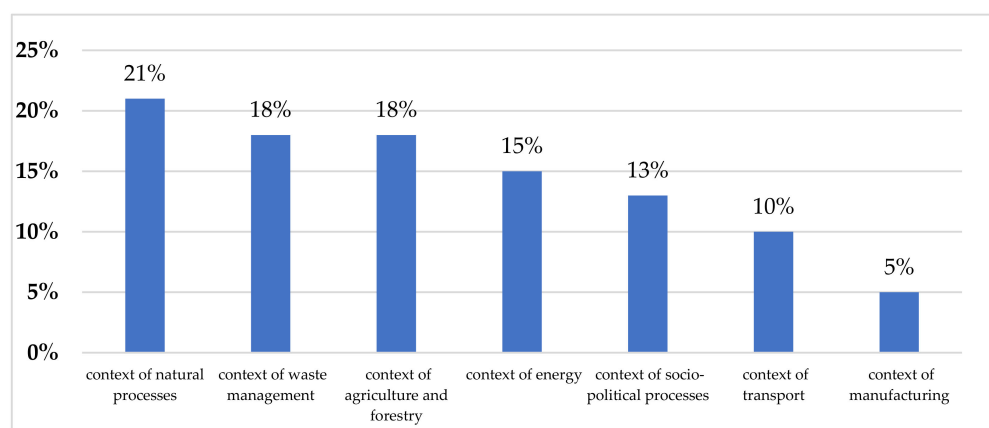
An analysis of the choice of keywords used in the context of climate issues in the party programmes shows that keyword choice is more likely to be very narrow in content, referring to one specific area, such as food or agriculture, while the party programmes are relatively less likely to talk about conceptual and global tools or methods for tackling climate issues. It is also noticeable that the parliamentary parties, which are more visible and whose messages reach wider segments of society, do not talk about the above conceptual and global solutions to climate problems either. In light of this conclusion, the remainder of the article will not separately identify and analyse the positions of the parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties but will consider them as a whole and draw conclusions about the programmes of all parties together.

In the following paragraphs, the context in which the parties mention climate change in their pre-election programmes is addressed. The study identified seven possible context groups: natural processes, waste management, agriculture and forestry, energy, socio-political developments, transport, and manufacturing. The percentage of parliament party programmes that use each context at all was identified, and then, all of the contexts were ranked according to their frequency of use. The results are presented in the Table 5 below.

**Table 5.** Climate change context in parties' pre-election programmes.

Context	YES, %
Natural processes	73
Waste management	64
Agriculture and forestry	64
Energy	55
Socio-political processes	46
Transport	36
Manufacturing	18

Climate change is most often discussed in the context of natural processes, with 21% of all contexts referring to climate change in this way. As can be seen in Figure 2, the next most frequently used contexts are waste management, and agriculture and forestry (each representing 18% of contexts). Climate is also discussed in the context of energy (15% of the total). It is particularly notable that the context of manufacturing is the least discussed in the party programmes (only 5%), despite the fact that it is one of the main drivers of climate change in the world. Transport (10%) and socio-political developments (13%) are also less relevant contexts for the parties.

**Figure 2.** Context of reflection on climate change in EP pre-election programmes.

A more detailed analysis of the mentions of climate change in the context of natural processes allows one to see two sub-themes: (1) the impact of climate change on nature (biodiversity decline, threats to the Baltic Sea and rivers) and (2) the impact of climate change on people (health impacts, impacts on homes, property, threats to life). However, there is no mention of natural disasters (storms, floods, fires, etc.). In addition, it should be noted that, of the two themes mentioned above, the impact of climate change on nature leads the way in terms of frequency of use. This is the topic most frequently mentioned in the parties' EP election agendas when talking about climate change.

Similar to the results of opinion polls in Latvia, party programmes also take the position that climate change primarily affects plants and animals, and the diversity of flora and fauna, and only secondarily relates to human well-being and everyday life. In addition, these effects do not take catastrophic forms, but are controlled by humans and manageable.

The second most popular context for climate change is waste management, which consists of five sub-themes: (1) prevention—no waste/pollution, zero-waste movement (zero-packaging shops, home-made products, etc.); (2) sustainable waste management in landfills that comply with environmental standards; (3) reuse/repair, reusable goods; (4) infrastructure—the specific risk indicated here is the disposal and recycling of waste in Latvia, using Latvia as a landfill for other countries' waste; and (5) state support/involvement—increase in excise duty on plastic products, ban on the production of single-use plastics, restrictions on the import of certain waste (e.g., tyres) into Latvia. It is interesting that

a topic of public interest such as waste sorting is not used as a context. The topic of wastewater management is also neglected. The most frequently mentioned sub-theme under this heading is waste prevention, or the concept that society should be waste-free, living without waste.

Returning to the Latvian public's position on personal participation in climate policy, one can recall that 56% of the public expressed a negative attitude towards it, although at the same time, 43% were aware that changing individual habits would be the main instrument for limiting climate change. The parties' programmes offer a rethink of this approach and send the message that citizens are the key players addressing the climate challenge.

Agriculture is also used as a context for climate issues as often as waste management. There are four sub-themes highlighted here: (1) crop production—organic farms, pesticide control, crop residue management, no depletion of land; (2) animal husbandry—animal welfare, reducing animal suffering; (3) food consumption habits—reducing food waste, consuming quality food; and (4) state support—increased excise duty on agricultural chemicals, state support for farmers who want to work in an environmentally friendly way. It is interesting to note here that despite Latvia's abundant forest resources, the topic of forestry and its impact on climate change is not addressed in party programmes. Among these sub-themes, crop production is the most common, highlighting the significant positive impact of organic farming and pesticide-free agriculture on the environment, and thus on limiting climate change. This (agricultural) context correlates very closely with the first type of context (natural processes). Again, the primary focus is on the impact of agriculture on the environment and animals, and only secondarily on human consumption patterns and their possible transformation.

The next context that can be identified in the parties' programmes is energy. Here five sub-themes are identified: (1) energy resources (new energy sources)—RES production in Latvia, zero-emission energy; (2) energy efficiency—insulation of buildings, energy-efficient Europe; (3) energy resources (existing energy sources)—electricity production (transition from fossil to renewable energy); (4) digitalisation—smart energy technologies; and (5) public support for the energy sector—in particular public support programmes for manufacturers. In the range of sub-themes listed, the most popular context is by far the need to create new energy sources so that Latvia can produce renewable/non-emission electricity. It is proposed as the central climate-change-limiting instrument, with relatively less emphasis on the need to use existing sources of electricity in the most efficient and controlled way. In this context, the issue of access to electricity is not considered at all, that is, physical and financial access to the energy source, which is certainly an even more pressing issue when considering the transition to the relatively more expensive RES.

From the above, it can be concluded that the narrative of energy's role in tackling climate change in party programmes is primarily based on the creation of new energy sources, very radical changes, rather than on the ability of society and the state to gradually make existing energy sources greener, while protecting the climate and people's financial and physical abilities. This approach does not send a signal to the public that everyone can make some, even small, environmental improvements in the field of energy and thus move towards a common goal.

Continuing to analyse the context in which climate issues are being addressed, we have reached the next socio-political context. Here, three contextual sub-themes can be identified: (1) policy activities—regional (EU action) and national climate action; (2) public activities—engagement of climate/environmental activists on climate issues; (3) scientific activities—new scientific findings on how to limit climate change. Of these three sub-themes, political action at both the EU and national level is most frequently mentioned as a tool for addressing climate challenges, and the involvement of society or experts is much less of a focus in this process.

This distribution of priorities is in line with the view of society itself, which believes that individuals do not have the ability to have a significant impact on climate change (56% of Latvians think so) and that the most significant influencing agent is the EU (70% of



Latvians think so). This does not send a signal to citizens that they also share responsibility and involvement in the fight against climate change and that climate change mitigation is not only an EU priority, but also a national policy priority for each Member State (currently only 34% of the Latvian population support the active involvement of national governments in addressing climate issues).

The next context for reflecting climate policy priorities is transport, which includes five sub-themes: (1) light transport—switching to electric cars, regulating carpooling; (2) public transport—developing urban, inter-city transport systems; (3) micro-mobility—motivating cycling; (4) infrastructure—bike lanes, sharing/renting as a service; and (5) public support to the transport sector—support programmes for municipalities (development of public transport and transition to AER). Here, as with the context of energy, there is a strong emphasis on very radical change, with the main idea being for people to switch from conventional cars to electric cars. You can also switch from your private car to public transport or bicycle. At the same time, there is no discussion of the possibilities of improving conventional road transport, nor of the environmental impact of freight transport or the environmental impact of any other transport.

This approach can lead to concerns among citizens about their ability to influence climate action in the road transport sector, if they are not prepared to significantly change their daily commuting habits (which is considered a significant problem not only in Latvia but also in other EU countries); thus, no signal is given about alternative options for action to achieve the overall climate policy objective. In addition, in this context, the key priority is based directly on citizens' action—the choice in favour of electric cars—rather than national action, which contradicts the earlier messages about the role of society in tackling climate challenges.

To conclude the analysis of the parties' programmes and the climate policy context, the least used context is manufacturing. Climate change in the context of industrial production is hardly mentioned at all; neither specific industries nor planned activities are mentioned, and no sub-topic can be identified that would fit into this segment. Given that, according to EU guidelines, manufacturing is one of the most important catalysts of climate change, this exclusion does not ensure a coherent message to the Latvian public.

The study reveals that 55% of the programmes that talk about climate issues do not assess them. It is not clear whether or how the process will affect Latvia's nature, state, and society; the process is described in a distant way and not connected to real life or the geographical region. However, 45% of cases show negative positioning. In general, climate policy is framed in the EP election programmes in eight ways, as shown in the table below.

The most common framing is to talk about *climate change as a threat*—a threat or risk, primarily to nature, in some cases compounded by threats to human health, property, life, and even the country as a whole. In parallel, the second most frequent framing identifies *climate change as an inevitable reality*—a phenomenon that is happening and cannot be avoided. At the same time, it points out that *climate change is an international (not a national) problem*, so it is primarily the responsibility of the EU, not individual countries. Some programmes also question the relevance of *climate change, defining it as a tool for achieving non-climate objectives*. However, there is also a locally attached framing that says that the *climate problem is a failure of past governments/politicians—the ruling elite*, and that if we want to think about the future and the sustainability of the country, these problems need to be addressed. There is ambivalence in the framing of the economic impacts of climate change. Climate change is cited as both a threat and an opportunity for a country's economic growth.

At the end of the analysis of the EP pre-election programmes, summarising all the information included in the study, it is possible to conclude that two narratives dominate the parties' programmes: (1) *Climate change is primarily a threat to nature and only secondarily to health, housing, or life*; and (2) *The European Union must be ambitious and pursue an active climate policy*. Both dominant narratives are consistent with the Latvian public opinion survey, which showed that people in Latvia do not identify climate change as a real threat

to them (humans). Similarly, the second narrative, that the EU should be active in climate policy and climate solutions, is fully in line with the Latvian public's perception that this is a matter for the EU, not at the level of national policy. There are significant differences if we compare these narratives with the EU's core climate policy messages. EU documents see climate change as a real threat to individuals, and state that the fight against climate change must involve every country and every citizen, with the EU playing a coordinating and monitoring role.

### 3.1.2. Analysis of the Climate Narrative in the Saeima Pre-Election Programmes (2018)

Sixteen political parties or their associations (hereafter, all of them will be referred to as "parties") registered their participation in the 13th Saeima elections, offering potential voters their pre-election programme or party's vision on the most topical issues to be addressed by the 13th Saeima [40].

These parties were the Latvian Russian Union (Latvijas Krievu savienība), the Latvian Nationalists (Latviešu Nacionālisti), Latvian Association of Regions (Latvijas Reģionu Apvienība, LRA), Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība), Political Party "KPV LV" (Politiskā partija "KPV LV"), the Progressives (PROGRESĪVIE), New Conservative Party (Jaunā konservatīvā partija), Development/For! (Attīstībai/Par!), New Unity (Jaunā VIENOTĪBA), National Alliance "All For Latvia!"—"For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK" (Nacionālā apvienība "Visu Latvijai!"—"Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK"), For an Alternative (Par Alternatīvu), the Social Democratic Party "Harmony" ("Saskaņa" sociāldemokrātiskā partija), Action Party (Rīcības partija), Latvian Centrist Party (Latvijas centriskā partija), LSDSP/KDS/GKL, and For Latvia from the Heart (No sirds Latvijai).

Seven of these parties were represented in the Saeima after the election—the Social Democratic Party "Harmony" ("Saskaņa" sociāldemokrātiskā partija), the New Conservative Party (Jaunā konservatīvā partija), the Political Party KPV LV (Politiskā partija "KPV LV"), National Alliance "All For Latvia!"—"For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK" (Nacionālā apvienība "Visu Latvijai!"—"Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK"), Development/For! (Attīstībai/Par!), the Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība), and New Unity (Jaunā VIENOTĪBA).

Six of these parties (Latvian Association of Regions, Union of Greens and Farmers, New Unity, National Alliance "All For Latvia!"—"For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK", the Social Democratic Party "Harmony", and For Latvia from the Heart) were also active in the previous (12th) Saeima and can therefore be seen as influential political actors. Several parties are newly established but already visible political forces aiming to offer voters political alternatives (Political Party "KPV LV", the Progressives, New Conservative Party, Development/For!). Six other parties (Latvian Russian Union, Latvian Nationalists, For an Alternative, Action Party, Latvian Centrist Party, LSDSP/KDS/GKL) can be classified as small parties operating outside Parliament, which have not managed to attract a sufficient number of supporters.

Of all the parties listed above, 75% (12 parties) have chosen to include, and at least briefly mention, climate issues in their programme, while 25% (4 parties) do not include climate issues in their programme at all. Parties that do not mention climate issues at all are the Action Party, Latvian Centrist Party, LSDSP/KDS/GKL, and For Latvia from the Heart. It should be noted that one of these parties (For Latvia from the Heart) was also represented in the previous parliament (the 12th Saeima). The other parties, however, represent the non-parliament segment and are not connected with the current political agenda. All other parliamentary parties, as well as the newly established ones, have chosen to raise the climate issue in their electoral programmes.

It should also be noted that of the parties that have chosen to talk about climate issues, only three refer to any external authority to justify the credibility of their position. One of them is the Progressives party (which uses scientists and scientific research as an authority), and the other is the Latvian Association of Regions party (which refers to the public, regional residents, as experts), while the political party "KPV LV" refers to specialists in the

field. All references are very general, without specifically identifying the expert's identity, professional competences, or any other quality indicators, and there are no references to any binding EU documents.

In general, assessing the importance of climate change in the 13th Saeima pre-election programmes, it can be concluded that it is not a primary topic in any of the programmes, and this is similarly reflected in the attitude of the Latvian population; only 10% of Latvian society consider it one of the most important challenges facing the country and society today. In less than half of the party programmes (41%), the topic is secondary; while in 42% of cases, it can be identified as a minor topic; and in another 17%, it is not mentioned directly at all, but is discussed in the context of other processes.

In the following, the focus will be on a detailed analysis of the programmes of the parties that have chosen to raise climate issues in their programmes. As the table below (Table 6) shows, the keywords most frequently mentioned in the context of climate change in party programmes are the following: (1) environmental protection, environmental preservation, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster; and (2) nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster. They appear in 31% (five cases) and 25% (four cases) of the party programmes that mention the climate issue in any way.

**Table 6.** Keywords most frequently mentioned in the context of climate change in the party programmes.

Keyword Categories	Number of Times Mentioned in Party Programmes
Environmental protection, environmental preservation, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster	5
Nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster	4
Green energy, green course, green transition, or green transformation	3
Natural diversity, biodiversity, or biological diversity	2
Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG or CO2 emissions	2
Deposit return systems for collecting drink containers	2
Organic farming	2
Decarbonisation	1
Global warming, global temperature, or planetary temperature	1
Sustainable energy supply	1
Climate change, climate neutrality, or climate neutrality	1
Latvian land	1
Plastic packaging	1
Environmental development	1
Circular economy	1
Bioeconomy	1
Energy efficiency	1
Organic food	1
Electric transport/electric charging stations	1

The third most frequently mentioned keyword category includes green energy, green course, green transition, or green transformation, mentioned in 19% of programmes.

On the other hand, the following keyword categories are mentioned in 13% of programmes: (1) natural diversity, biodiversity, or biological diversity; (2) emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG emissions, or CO2 emissions; (3) deposit return systems for collecting drink containers; and (4) organic farming.

The other keywords are only used in the programme of one (single) party and are not repeated in the content of several programmes.

The following table (Table 7) shows the ranking of the parties according to the share of climate-related keywords in the programme. The parliamentary party New Unity has paid the most attention to climate issues, using a total of six keyword groups or 19% of all identified keywords. The second position is represented by the newly established parties the Progressives and Development/For!, as well as the parliamentary opposition party "Harmony", the social democratic party, whose programmes contain four keyword groups (13% of all identified keywords), while the third position is occupied by the parliamentary

party Union of Greens and Farmers, whose keywords account for 9% of the total amount of keywords devoted to climate issues.

**Table 7.** Parties' ranking according to the share of climate-related keywords in the programmes.

Name of the Party	Status of the Party	Number of Keyword Categories in the Programme
New Unity	Parliamentary party/elected	6
Progressives	A newly formed party/unelected	4
Development/For!	A newly formed party/elected	4
Social Democratic Party "Harmony"	Parliamentary party/elected	4
Union of Greens and Farmers	Parliamentary party/elected	3
Latvian Russian Union	Non-parliamentary party/unelected	2
Latvian Nationalists	Non-parliamentary party/unelected	2
Latvian Association of Regions	Parliamentary party/unelected	2
National Alliance "All For Latvia!"—"For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK"	Parliamentary party/elected	2
Political Party "KPV LV"	A newly formed party/elected	1
New Conservative Party	Non-parliamentary party/elected	1
For an Alternative	Non-parliamentary party	1

It should be noted that more than half of all parties that talk about climate issues have only used one or two groups of keywords. This category includes parliamentary parties (Latvian Association of Regions and National Alliance "All For Latvia!"—"For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK"), newly established parties (KPV LV and the New Conservative Party), as well as the Latvian Russian Union, For the Alternative, and Latvian Nationalist parties operating outside of Parliament. The categories of keywords identified in each party's programme can be found in more detail in the table below (Table 8). This table shows the topical themes or issues through which the party chooses to talk about climate issues.

**Table 8.** Keyword categories identified in each party's programme.

Name of the Party	The Keyword Categories Used by the Party
New Unity	Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG or CO2 emissions
	Decarbonisation
	Green energy, green course, green transition, or green transformation
	Environmental protection, environmental preservation, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster
	Circular economy
	Deposit return schemes for collecting drink containers

Table 8. Cont.

Name of the Party	The Keyword Categories Used by the Party
Progressives	Climate change, climate neutrality, or climate neutrality Green energy, green course, green transition, or green transformation Environmental protection, environmental preservation, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster Nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster
Development/For!	Emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, GHG or CO2 emissions Green energy, green course, green transition, or green transformation Environmental protection, environmental preservation, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster Nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster
Social Democratic Party “Harmony”	Global warming, global temperature, or planetary temperature Bioeconomy Organic farming Energy efficiency
Union of Greens and Farmers	Environmental protection, environmental preservation, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster Natural diversity, biodiversity, or biological diversity Sustainable energy supply
“Latvian Russian Union”	Plastic packaging Deposit return systems for collecting drink containers
“Latvian Nationalists”	Nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster Electric transport/electric charging stations
Latvian Association of Regions	Nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster Organic food
National Alliance “All For Latvia!”—“For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK”	Environmental protection, environmental preservation, environmental pollution, or environmental disaster Nature protection, nature preservation, pollution of nature, or natural disaster
Political Party “KPV LV”	Environmental development
New Conservative Party	Organic farming
For an Alternative	Latvian land

The leaders in the variety of topics chosen, as well as in the broadness of the content, are New Unity, the Progressives, and Development/For!. These parties have chosen to



talk about conceptually relevant topics that have a comprehensive impact on climate change (emissions, decarbonisation, green energy, circular economy, etc). Furthermore, the themes chosen by the other parties are specific to a particular segment of climate change. It is also noticeable that the keywords chosen by these parties are simpler and more in line with the perception of non-specialists (voters) on environmental issues (e.g., organic farming, organic food, electric transport, environmental development, nature, and environmental protection).

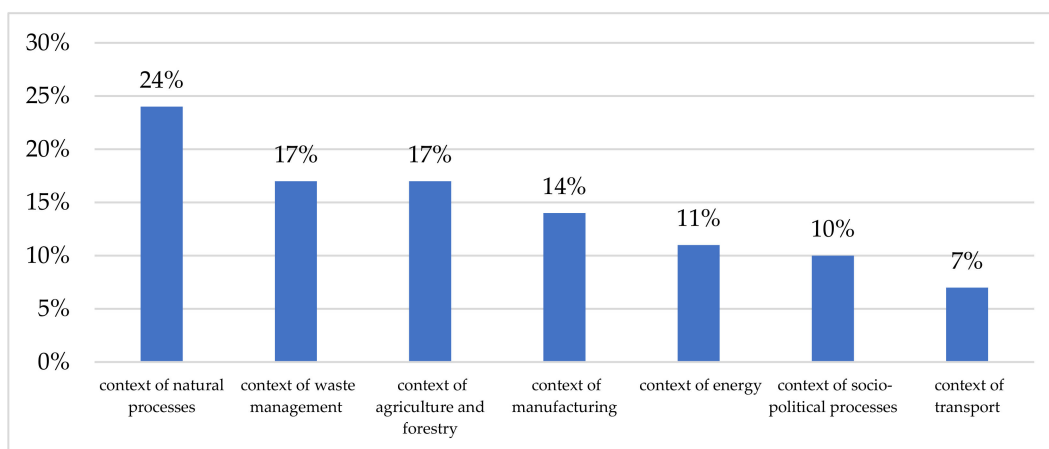
When analysing the keywords used by specific parties, it is not possible to identify any trend that the parties previously represented in parliament are more focused on climate issues or, on the contrary, that newly established parties are leaders in raising climate issues. In the situation analysed, the choice of topics cannot be linked to party status, as there are very large differences in the topics chosen between parties of the same status.

The next aspect in the analysis of EP pre-election programmes is the context in which the parties mention climate issues. The study identified seven possible context groups: natural processes, waste management, agriculture and forestry, energy, socio-political developments, transport, and manufacturing. The first step identifies what percentage of party programmes use the context at all, and then all the above contexts are ranked according to their frequency of use. The results are presented in the table below (Table 9).

**Table 9.** Climate change context in parties' pre-election programmes.

Context	YES %
Natural processes	58.3
Waste management	41.7
Agriculture and forestry	41.7
Manufacturing	33.3
Socio-political processes	25
Energy	25
Transport	16.7

As shown in the Figure 3, climate change is most often discussed in the context of natural processes, with 24% of all contexts referring to climate change in this way. The next most frequently used contexts are waste management, agriculture, and forestry (17% of contexts). Climate is also discussed in the context of production (14%), as well as in the context of energy (11%), and in the context of socio-political developments (10%). It should be noted that climate change is least discussed in the context of transport (only 7%).



**Figure 3.** Context of reflection on climate change in parliamentary pre-election programmes.

A more detailed analysis of climate change in the context of natural processes shows that one sub-theme is predominant: climate change's impacts on nature (changes in

nature—flooding, desertification, loss of biodiversity, loss of natural assets, impacts on the countryside). Three other themes are mentioned with much less intensity: (1) the impact of climate change on people (impact on health, homes, property, living environment, and well-being); (2) a healthy environment and wise use of resources; and (3) natural disasters (floods, storms, fires, etc.). Scientific advice for tackling climate change and other environmental disasters should always be taken into account in political decision-making.

An analysis of the Saeima's pre-election programmes reveals a tendency, which has already been observed in the EP pre-election programmes, to view climate change primarily as a threat to nature, animals, and the environment in general, and only secondarily as a threat to people (their health, living environment, and well-being). Another interesting trend in party rhetoric is the reference to scientists, whose advice should be taken into account in political decision-making.

The second most popular context for climate change is waste management, within which four sub-themes can be identified: (1) prevention—no waste/no pollution; (2) waste sorting and recycling—sorting packaging and all waste; (3) re-use—circular economy; (4) public support/involvement—support for investments in green technologies, advantages in public procurement for environmentally friendly businesses. It should be noted that the parties' programmes do not address issues such as waste management infrastructure at all. Nor is there any mention of wastewater management as a specific and important type of waste.

To sum up, similarly to the EP election programmes, waste management is primarily a matter for citizens, that is, the emphasis is not on generating waste, but on sorting existing waste and reusing it as much as possible. The government offers support solutions—support for the introduction of green technologies and advantages for businesses using environmentally friendly technologies.

As often as waste management, agriculture and forestry are used as a context for climate issues in political parties' election manifestos. There are five sub-themes: (1) crop production—organic farms, pesticide use, national branding of organic farming; (2) livestock production—organic livestock farming; (3) food consumption habits—children should get organic food in schools; (4) public support—farmers, organic food producers; and (5) forestry—preserving forest wealth and biodiversity. Crop production is the most popular of these areas, with an emphasis on the important contribution of organic farms (farms that do not use pesticides harmful to the environment) to limiting climate change. There is also a proposal to make the concept of organic farming a Latvian brand and mark of international recognition. However, it should be noted that the party programmes make very limited reference to support mechanisms from the state to help promote the development of organic crop and livestock farming. In a few cases, public support for organic farmers and organic food producers is mentioned, but these offers lack any specificity. The party programmes also mention aspects such as preserving forest biodiversity and changing food consumption habits of schoolchildren by providing them with organic food, but these proposals are also only identifiable in individual programmes and cannot be seen as an overall trend.

The next most frequently used context that can be identified in the parliamentary election programmes is production. However, a very particular trend is immediately apparent: production is mentioned as an aspect that has an impact on the climate, but nothing more is said about it. No specific industry sector or national role is mentioned to mitigate the environmental risks posed by production, nor is there any mention of business involvement in climate change mitigation. The analysis of all party programmes identified only one phrase referring to production: "preference for environmentally and animal-friendly producers in public purchases". However, this proposal is also not primarily aimed at reducing the risks posed by production.

Overall, it can be concluded that production is a very problematic aspect of parties' communication with voters. Despite the fact that this segment is one of the most important aspects of the EU climate policy narrative, at the national level, in party election agendas, it

is treated very superficially, and the specific scale of the problem and options for solutions are not addressed.

Further analysing the context in which climate issues are addressed, it is necessary to address the next two equally popular contextual units of socio-political developments and energy. Two sub-themes emerge in terms of socio-political developments: (1) political action (national climate action, branding as an organic country), and (2) societal action (individual action to mitigate climate change). The contradiction identified here is that the country, on the one hand, positions itself as a key player in the climate change mitigation process and, on the other hand, does not offer any concrete solutions. At the same time, a wide range of solutions that are expected of citizens, or that are the responsibility of society, feature strongly in the parties' programmes. It should also be mentioned here that when talking about climate in the context of socio-political developments, there is virtually no mention of scientific activities (i.e., that the potential of scientists could be used to solve various pressing climate problems). Scientists are not identified as a potential support mechanism for an effective and rational fight against climate change.

As mentioned, an equally popular context for discussing climate issues is energy. Here, seven sub-themes were identified: (1) energy efficiency—insulation of buildings; (2) public funding to the energy sector—support programmes for citizens; (3) existing energy sources—electricity generation (transition from fossil to renewable energy); (4) renewable electricity technologies, exports; (5) new energy sources; (6) digitalisation—developing energy efficiency and renewable technologies; and (7) energy affordability—sustainable and reliable energy supply at affordable costs for the user. Among the sub-themes listed, energy efficiency, meaning the insulation of buildings, and public support for the energy sector, meaning support programmes for citizens, stand out as the most popular themes. From the analysis of the programmes, it can be concluded that the main climate threat is the energy sector, and the solution to the problem is the insulation of buildings to make them as energy efficient as possible. Much less is said about the climate change aspects, such as the transition to renewable energy or the creation of new energy sources, that are key elements of the EU climate policy narrative. There is also very minimal focus on energy access and solutions to the problems.

From the above, it can be concluded that in the parties' pre-election programmes, the story about the role of energy in limiting climate change is primarily based on the issue of insulation of buildings and state support for citizens in solving problems related to the energy sector. Citizens are given the impression that insulating buildings is sufficient to mitigate climate change.

The final climate policy context in the parliamentary election programmes is transport. The analysis process identified five sub-themes: (1) personal transport—electric cars; (2) public transport—urban, inter-city, and international buses' and trains' accessibility, convenience, routes, prices, and times; (3) other transport—water, air; (4) infrastructure—need for new electric charging stations; (5) public support for the sector—excessive emissions are penalised by taxes. Of these sub-themes, the only one regularly mentioned is light transport. This is mentioned in the party programmes in the context of the need for citizens to start choosing and using more electric cars, as this would reduce the environmental impact of transport. At the same time, there is no mention of the essential aspect of freight transport and micro-mobility, which includes cycling.

The dominant narrative of the need for electric cars, which is identifiable in the programmes, also puts the main concern for preserving the environment in the hands of society—the citizens—and offers a very radical and expensive solution to the problem in the transport sector. Much less attention is paid to what public authorities could do to reduce the negative impact of transport on climate change (so that people choose to travel more by public transport or bicycle), and there is no mention of the involvement and responsibility of business operators and truck users.

In the course of the research, another instructive observation emerged: 75% of the pre-election programmes of the Saeima that talk about climate issues do not assess them—it

is not clearly stated whether or how this process will affect the Latvian nature, state, and society, and the process is described in a distant way, without being connected to real life. Only 17% of cases show a clear negative positioning, while 8% can be classified as rather negative. In general, climate policy is framed in the Saeima election programmes in seven ways, as shown in the table below (Table 10).

**Table 10.** Saeima election programmes' framing of climate change.

Framing of Climate Change	Number of Times the Following Framing has Been Used
Threat (or risk) (to nature, human life, health, property, state, etc.)	6
Opportunity for the economy/entrepreneurs/innovation	6
Sustainability/corporate social responsibility	4
Inevitable reality (a phenomenon that happens)	2
Instrument for non-climate objectives	2
Failure of government/politicians	1
Cost/loss to the economy	1

Two seemingly contrasting reframing approaches are most often used when talking about climate change: (1) *climate change as a threat*—a threat or risk primarily to nature and ecosystems, with occasional references to threats to human health and housing; and (2) *climate change as an economic/business/innovation opportunity*. Therefore, despite the negative impacts of climate change, it is also an opportunity to develop new, modern ways of farming, while taking responsibility for preserving the environment and implementing *sustainable/corporately responsible* farming. Two programmes frame climate change as an *inevitable reality* (a phenomenon that is happening) and cannot be avoided. Two programmes also question the relevance of climate change, defining it *as a tool for achieving completely different, non-climate objectives*. Less often, but still, there is also a framing approach that talks about climate change as a consequence of *government and political failure* and as a *cost/loss to the economy*.

At the end of the analysis of the Saeima pre-election programmes, summarising all the information included in the study, it is possible to conclude that these party programmes are dominated by one most frequently used narrative, common to most of the parties—*climate change threatens Latvia*. However, this threat primarily affects nature and only secondarily, and to a much lesser extent, human life, health, property, and the country as a whole. This narrative is consistent with the Latvian public opinion survey mentioned above, which shows that people do not identify climate change as a real threat to them. When this narrative is compared with the EU's core climate policy messages, there are important narrative differences: the EU climate policy narrative includes the belief that climate change is as much of a threat to the environment as it is to the individual.

In addition to the dominant narrative mentioned above, several other narratives can be identified. These are as follows: Latvia should finally join the ranks of developed European countries; we are ready to fight climate change; Latvia should be ambitious and pursue an active climate policy; the climate issue should balance environmental and societal interests (secure and sustainable energy supply at affordable electricity prices); Latvia is a northern European country and aspires to its level of prosperity and responsibility; rural environmental development is a tool to prevent the extinction of society; modern Latvia tackles and eliminates environmental problems; organic farms must be systematically supported in order to boost the Latvian economy.

Looking at the narratives listed, it can be concluded that they are very different, but all of them show a readiness to act, while outlining significantly different options and motivations—to join the ranks of Europe's developed countries, to aspire to the prosperity of northern Europe, to be a modern Latvia, to ambitiously pursue an active climate policy, to address climate issues in a balanced way (respecting both environmental and social interests equally), and to develop rural environments and organic farming, thus promoting economic development and preventing the extinction of society.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

This part provides the assessment and conclusions on the external convergence of EU and national climate policy narratives.

By comparing the coherence of the EU strategic climate narratives with the messages expressed in the pre-election programmes of Latvian political parties, it can be concluded that there are significant differences.

- (1) In some of the parties' programmes, climate change has not been addressed at all; it is not recognised as a problem.
- (2) No party's programme mentions climate as an acute, primary problem to be solved; it is marked as a secondary or minor problem. Both of these findings echo observations on the low resonance of climate change in the ideological orientation of central and eastern European political elites [16].
- (3) Parties mentioning one or another aspect of climate policy do not base their policy on any reference to objective authorities within the EU regulatory framework.
- (4) A comparison of the most frequently used climate keywords in the EP and national election manifestations shows differences. Keywords used in EP programmes are more in line with the EU's strategic narrative—several party programmes mention GHG emissions, climate change, and climate neutrality. However, in the national parliamentary pre-election programmes, the key words used refer to the environment and nature protection (conservation, pollution reduction).
- (5) There is no correlation between the party's status (parliamentary, non-parliamentary, newly formed party) and the content of the keywords it uses: in each category there are parties that do not talk about climate change at all, parties whose choice of keywords is very different from the EU strategic narrative, and parties that base their choice of keywords on the EU strategic narrative. This finding is in line with previous observations [16] that ideological divisions of left and right do not influence the parties' attitudes towards climate change in central and eastern European countries. Further research would be instructive on the factors other than ideology that determine the appearance of climate change in political party programmes.
- (6) Regardless of the content of the keywords, they are most often used in the context of natural processes (i.e., we should or should not make a change in climate policy because it negatively affects natural processes and the need to take care of nature). Both the EP and the Saeima election programmes take the position that climate change primarily affects plants and animals, and the diversity of flora and fauna, and only secondarily relates to human well-being and everyday life.

The second most frequent context for party programmes is waste. Waste management is put first and foremost into the hands of citizens: the emphasis is not on generating waste, but on sorting existing waste and reusing it wherever possible.

The third most discussed context is agriculture, highlighting the important contribution of agriculture, or farms that do not use environmentally harmful pesticides. This (agricultural) context correlates very closely with the first context mentioned (natural processes). Again, the primary focus is on the impact of agriculture on the environment and animals, and only secondarily on human consumption patterns and their possible transformation.

- (7) It should be noted that energy as a context for climate policy issues—secure, sustainable, competitive, and affordable energy—is relatively less popular in party programmes. Insulation of buildings and state support for citizens in tackling energy-related problems are the main issues mentioned in the party's national pre-election programmes combatting climate change in the context of energy. On the other hand, in the EP election programmes, the narrative on the role of energy in limiting climate change is primarily based on the creation of new energy sources.
- (8) Despite the fact that climate change is not identified as a priority in party programmes, it is most often framed as a threat (or risk) (to nature, human life, health, property, the



- state, etc.). Moreover, it is just as often framed in parliamentary election manifestos as an opportunity for the economy/business/innovation. In contrast, in the EP programmes, it appears as an inevitable reality. The framing of climate policy differs greatly and is contradictory, giving an unclear message about the current situation.
- (9) The research identified a dominant narrative among both the Saeima (Parliament) and EP pre-election programmes: climate change is a threat to Latvia, but it is primarily a threat to nature, and only secondarily a threat to human health, home, or life.
  - (10) The mainstream narrative identifies the problem while downplaying its significance (i.e., it gives the impression that the problem is not a threat to people). An analysis of the party programmes shows that they do not provide equally inclusive problem-solving scenarios for all sectors. In many cases, the proposed solutions have either been entirely placed under public responsibility (e.g., waste management, pollution reduction, etc.), or they are completely vague and do not include specific actions to be taken (e.g., preserve Latvia's land, ensure clean water).

In conclusion, the narratives identified in Latvia's pre-election programmes are more in line with the international climate policy narrative of the late twentieth century—awareness that climate change is a problem, while fearing the negative consequences of limiting it for the national economy and so on, as well as uncertainty about the options for resolving the problem. The party programmes do not display the proactive stance currently characteristic of the EU climate policy narrative: (1) unquestionable priority status for climate action; (2) proactively addressing these challenges (complex concrete solutions in all relevant sectors: climate, energy, agriculture, manufacturing, environment and oceans, transport, finance and regional development, research and innovation), regardless of any extraneous factors; (3) the state as the leading (dominant) actor in addressing climate change in the country, which, through its example, also promotes greater public involvement and participation.

The study shows that the message (narrative) that the Latvian public receives from its political elite through pre-election programmes is substantially different from the EU's current strategic narrative on climate policy, and only a minor external convergence can be observed. Based on the theoretical concept of the strategic narrative, it can be argued that the observed disparity of narratives does not promote the inclusion of Latvian society in the common space of understanding of EU climate policy.

This has far-reaching implications for implementation of the European Green Deal: a discursive environment that insufficiently addresses the input necessary for reduction of GHG emissions, neglects political leadership, and avoids providing a concrete action plan may facilitate a misconception of the EU climate policy in Latvia even further. At the same time, Latvia will have to meet EU climate targets, set for each member state, thus potentially confusing the public. Alignment of Latvian and EU strategic narratives is therefore crucially important both for embedding the responsibility to reach climate neutrality in the political elite and providing clear guidance to the public on the steps Latvia will be taking to meet the ambitious targets.

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