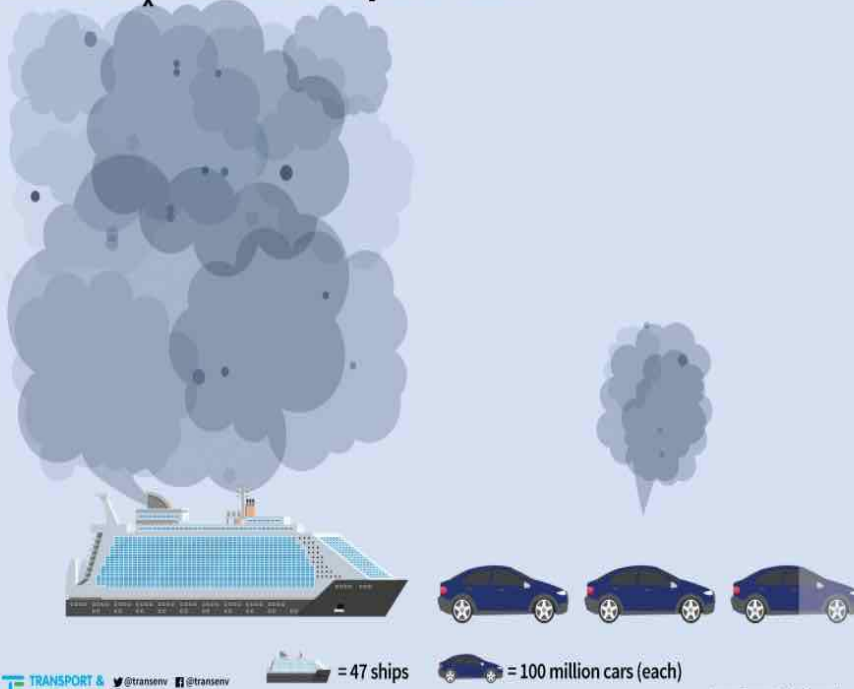# The Politics of Climate Change in Europe:
From Protest to Effective Policy (…or rather not)?

Lars Rensmann

Cruising: A case study

Ships owned by Carnival corporation emit 10 times more SO$_x$ than all European cars

= 47 ships   = 100 million cars (each)

TRANSPORT &   @transenv   @transenv

Emitting four times more CO2 than flying per passenger (0,40 vs. 0,11kg per kilometer)

Emitting at least 150 tonnes of fuel a day

CO2 of 1 large cruise ship = 83,678 cars

Yet cruise ship industry's growth is enormous every year: the largest growing industry in Europe

➔ **Cruise ships**: An **unregulated emissions industry in European harbours and seas**, producing vast amounts of sulphur dioxide, carbon dioxide and other particulars

Source: John Vidal, "The world's largest cruise ship and its supersized pollution problem," *The Guardian,* 21 May 2016
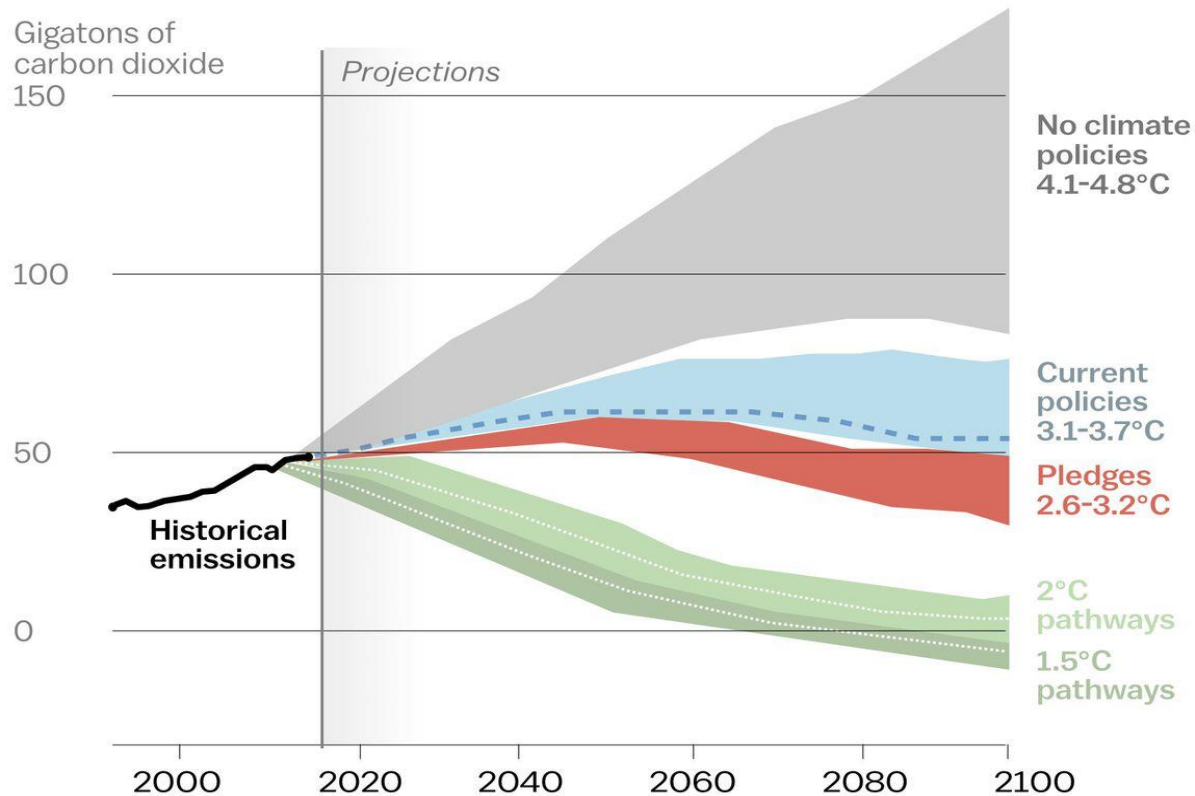
A (well-known) problem

Climate change is real.

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted in May 1992 (EU following suit), yet…

Earth Overshoot Day:
1970: 29 December
2019: 29 July

Effect of current pledges and policies

Global greenhouse gas emissions

Gigatons of carbon dioxide

Projections

150

100

50

0

No climate policies
4.1-4.8°C

Current policies
3.1-3.7°C

Pledges
2.6-3.2°C

2°C pathways

1.5°C pathways

Historical emissions

2000   2020   2040   2060   2080   2100

Source: Climate Action Tracker

Vox

Political protest and the law

It's the law (at least in the Netherlands): The **government must cut carbon emissions faster** or breach its duty of care [a victory of 886 citizens and the NGO "Urgenda" who sued the Dutch government in 2015, confirmed in appeals court in 2018], yet policies are still lagging behind…

The Puzzle

- ## Why

    is the difference between scientific knowledge about climate change/public awareness and actual (local, national, European, global) policies *against* climate change **so vast**?

The Argument

It's not primarily about the economy, not about technological capacities, not even about a change of life-styles...*political factors are key to explain the gap.*

The Political Playing Field

Demand Side
Emerging climate consensus in public opinion faces mixed policy prioritizing among voters

Political-Economic Actors
Economic stakeholders, organized business interests, lobby groups ➜ deregulation, globalization and growth paradigms

Supply Side
Parties act as reluctant political agents in the policy-making process

Demand: Emerging Consensus

No longer a polarizing issue in polarized times?

93% of Europeans see **climate change** as a serious problem.

93% of Europeans have taken at least one **action** to tackle climate change.
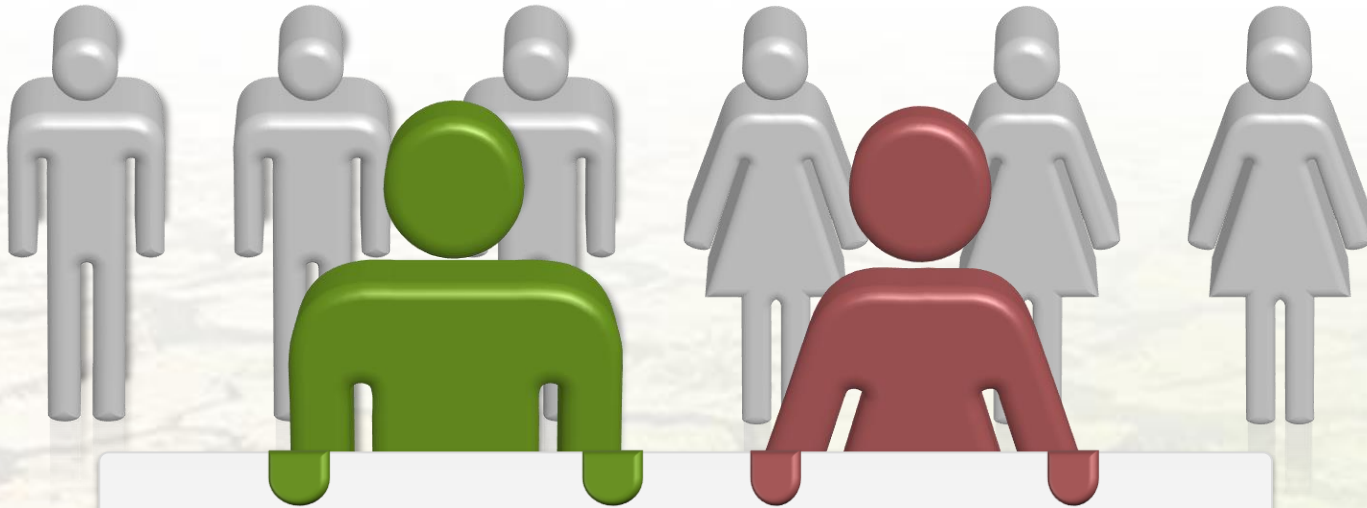
92% of Europeans agree that greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced to a minimum in order to make the **EU economy climate neutral by 2050.**
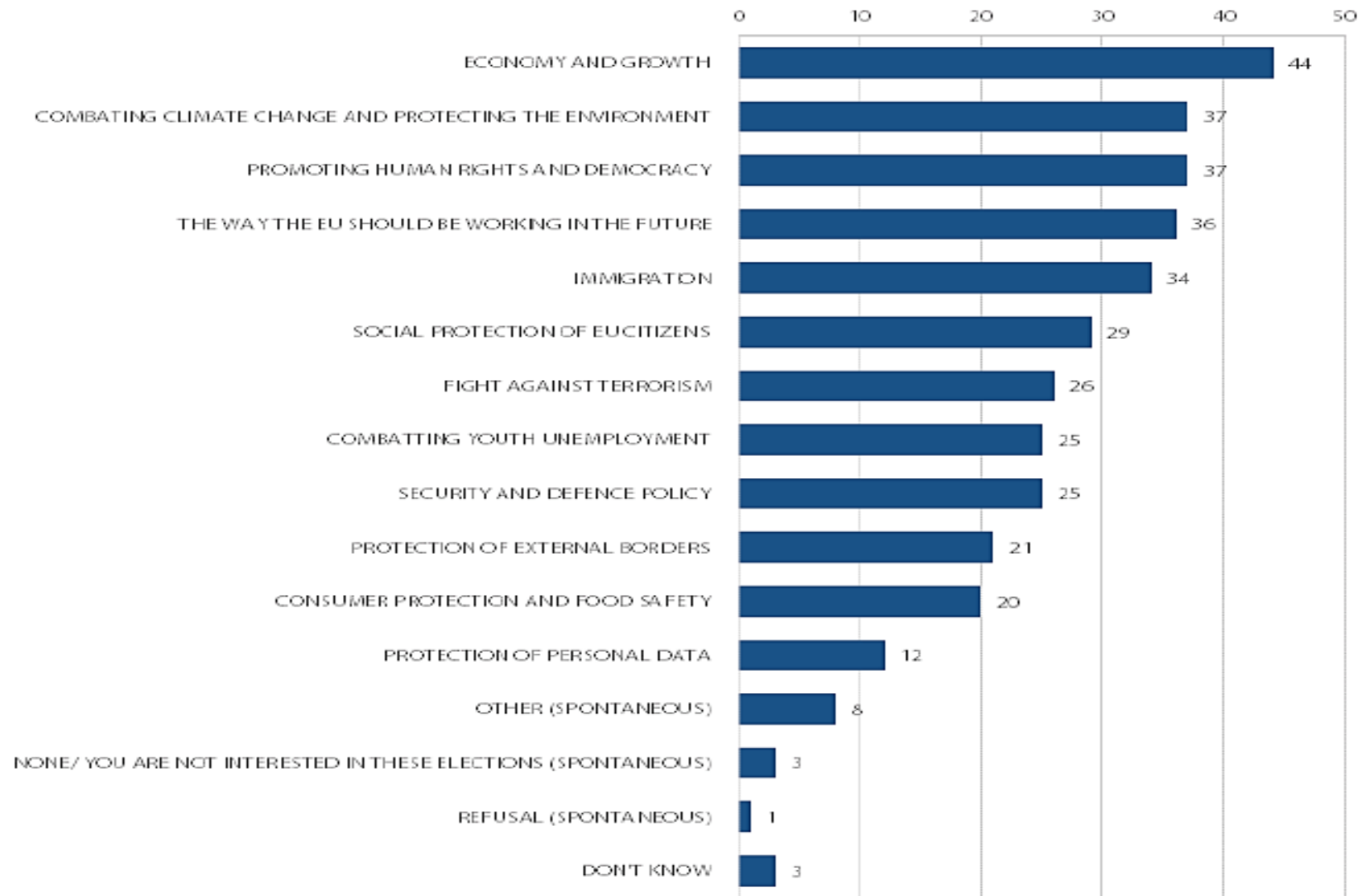
Source: European Commission 2019

Demand: Gender and Climate Change

No significant gender divide on climate change
Policy preference: "Regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant"?
79% of women say "yes"
73% of men say "yes"

(Ballew, Marlon, Leiserowtiz, Malbach 2018)

QG7T What are the issues which made you vote in the recent European Parliament elections? Firstly? And then? (% – EU)

Issue	%
ECONOMY AND GROWTH	44
COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT	37
PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY	37
THE WAY THE EU SHOULD BE WORKING IN THE FUTURE	36
IMMIGRATION	34
SOCIAL PROTECTION OF EU CITIZENS	29
FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM	26
COMBATTING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT	25
SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY	25
PROTECTION OF EXTERNAL BORDERS	21
CONSUMER PROTECTION AND FOOD SAFETY	20
PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA	12
OTHER (SPONTANEOUS)	8
NONE/ YOU ARE NOT INTERESTED IN THESE ELECTIONS (SPONTANEOUS)	3
REFUSAL (SPONTANEOUS)	1
DON'T KNOW	3

Source: Eurobarometer Post-European Election Survey 2019

Political-Economic Actors

- Powerful **political-economic actors**, organized business interests and their lobby groups have limited incentives to "green the economy"

- Narratives about "*our economy is at risk*" if regulations become strict vs. "*a climate-neutral economy is possible*" (Schnabel 2019)

➔ **Globalization, deregulation** & **growth paradigms**

Supply Side: Reluctant Agents

European party platforms reflect slow policy change and second-order priorities among relevant parties catering to heterogeneous constituencies

Rightist populist   **Center right**   **Center left**   **Green**
.   .

Climate change scepticism

Very moderate policy against climate change

Moderate policy against climate change

Least modest policy against climate change

Source: CPM, 2019

From Protest to Policy Change?

1 Can the political playing field be adjusted to create more effective climate policies?

2 Is climate policy forced to change slowly in a representative democracy?