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Explaining radical policy change: Norwegian climate policy and the ban on cultivating peatlands

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ABSTRACT

For decades Norwegian climate policy has largely ignored the agricultural sector and focused on cost-effective emission reductions abroad. Yet in June 2020, Norway decided to ban the cultivation of peatlands to protect critical carbon sinks, and the issue became 'high politics'. We explain this radical policy change by combining an adapted version of the Multiple Streams framework with the Punctuated Equilibrium model of agenda-setting. We argue that the two models combined can provide a holistic explanatory framework, albeit with two revisions. Firstly, the window of opportunity or punctuation was in our case of a longer duration than both models anticipate. Secondly, we find that multiple complete couplings can take place within the opening of a policy (or more specifically, a decision) window. Both findings can be explained by party competition, thus underlining the need to revise agenda-setting models to better account for party politics.

1. Introduction

Norway has long been considered a climate leader (Eckersley, 2016; Farstad, 2019). A carbon tax was introduced in 1991, the price of which doubled in 2012. An emissions trading scheme was introduced in 2005 and was incorporated into the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) in 2008. In 2020, the country submitted its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, committing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) by at least 50 per cent and towards 55 per cent compared to 1990 levels by 2030. Norway also aims for climate neutrality by 2050.

Yet despite the grand goals, Norwegian domestic emissions have only reduced by 4,2 per cent between 1990 and 2020 (SSB, 2021). Much of this can be explained by the fact that Norwegian electricity supply is essentially already decarbonised due to the prominence of hydropower (Boasson and Jevnaker, 2019). The country can therefore only cut emissions in sectors such as petroleum, industry, transport and agriculture, which already operate at relatively high levels of efficiency. As such, Norwegian climate policy has been dominated by a logic of cost-efficiency, leading to emission reductions abroad (Ćetković and Skjærseth, 2019), an approach championed by the economist Labour Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (2005–2013). The country has therefore largely met its climate targets by purchasing UN-approved credits generated by projects under the Clean Development Mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol (Tellmann, 2012) and the EU ETS.

However, 2019 saw a radical shift in Norwegian climate policy, with the government committing to reduce domestic emissions not covered by the ETS by 40 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, in cooperation with the EU. Moreover, for the first time, the government targeted the agricultural sector, which had so far been exempt from both the carbon tax and most other climate regulations. In April 2019, parliament voted to ban the cultivation of peatlands with the aim of protecting critical carbon sinks. These ecosystems store vast amounts of carbon, have flood-reducing properties and are of high importance for biodiversity protection. Subsequently, in June 2019, the government signed a voluntary agreement with the main agricultural organisations, the Norwegian Farmers Union and the Norwegian Farmers and Smallholders Union, to reduce emissions and increase uptake of GHGs by a total of 5 million tonnes of CO_2-equivalents in the period 2021–2030. The agreement sets an emission reduction goal and awards the

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agricultural sector freedom to choose the means to achieve it. The ban on cultivating peatlands proved highly controversial, though, as it infringed upon farmers' rights to manage their own properties and restricts their opportunities to expand production in peatland areas. The ban was also a selection of a policy tool to reduce agricultural emissions, which according to the voluntary agreement was to be the choice of farmers as a matter of principle. We therefore use this ban on the cultivation of peatlands as a case study of radical policy change and ask why this change occurred when it did. A deeper understanding of such processes, especially in intractable sectors such as agriculture, helps shed light on pathways to decarbonisation.

Mirroring the innovative framework in Carter and Jacobs (2014), we combine the 'multiple streams' (MS) (Kingdon, 1995) and 'punctuated equilibrium' (PE) (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009) models of agenda-setting to explain why this major policy change occurred when it did. These models are generally presented as alternative approaches, yet in this article we demonstrate how they can also combine to provide a holistic explanatory framework. Our case exhibits a good fit with key elements of both models. Moreover, we adapt the original MS framework in line with Herweg et al. (2015) to explain why the policy turned out as it did. This adaptation entails analytically separating the agenda-setting and decision-making stages, which is better suited to analyse policymaking in parliamentary democracies.

Similar to Carter and Jacobs (2014), we find that the policy window or punctuation lasted longer than the models anticipate and that an oft-ignored explanation for this was competition between political parties. Likewise, in line with recent research separating the agenda-setting and decision-making stages in climate politics (e.g. Nash and Steurer, 2021), we find that party politics was significant in shaping particularly the latter stage. In fact, we find that there were two coupling processes during the decision-making phase as a result of party politics. This finding underlines the utility of Herweg et al.'s adapted MS framework, but also points to the need to revise it to allow for numerous (decision) couplings. We therefore make a significant contribution to the field by adding empirical evidence to debates on climate policy development and change, and especially to the relevance of party politics in such processes (Carter and Jacobs, 2014; Farstad, 2019; Nash and Steurer, 2021; Ryan and Micozzi, 2021), as well as contributing to theoretical development within the agenda-setting literature. The first part of the article outlines the MS and PE frameworks and sets out our research questions. The subsequent section describes our methodology before the third and fourth sections review how the MS and PE frameworks respectively help explain the Norwegian case. The final section discusses the findings and concludes.

2. Multiple streams and punctuated equilibrium

The multiple streams (MS) (Kingdon, 1995) and punctuated equilibrium (PE) (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009) models are agenda-setting frameworks used to explain major policy shifts. In contrast to works emphasising the incremental or linear process of policymaking, MS and PE seek to explain how long periods of policy stability are disrupted by rapid and significant shifts or punctuations. In other words, why does an issue suddenly rise up the political agenda and result in policy change?

According to Kingdon (1995), radical policy change occurs when the three 'streams' of problems, policies and politics converge to open a 'window of opportunity' for change. Under the *problem stream*, attention towards an issue increases and comes to be defined as a policy problem that demands attention from policymakers. The *policy stream* consists of the available solutions to the problem, developed by politicians, bureaucrats, NGOs or businesses. Under the *politics stream*, policymakers have the motive and opportunity to address the issue. This last stream has three key elements, namely the *national mood*, *legislative turnover* and *pressure group campaigns* (Kingdon, 1995, p. 146). The three streams operate independently of one another until such a time when compelling political events or problems lead to their convergence, opening up a 'window of opportunity' for change. This window is exploited by *policy entrepreneurs* who couple the streams together to push their pet solution or to increase attention to a problem (Ibid., p. 165). Such agents of change can be both from inside and outside government, such as politicians or NGOs. Zaharidis (2003) distinguishes between *consequential* and *doctrinal* coupling. The former describes a more linear process whereby a problem emerges, political pressure builds, and this incentivises government to find policy solutions. The latter describes a more anachronistic process whereby the window of opportunity opens in the politics stream, allowing actors to search for a problem that fits their pre-existing (often ideological) solution.

However, the MS model was initially developed to describe political processes in the USA, and it is not necessarily straightforward to apply it to "political systems and stages of the policy cycle other than those for which it was originally developed" (Zohlnhöfer et al., 2015, p. 415). Herweg et al. (2015) consequently propose a refinement to the MS model which entails an analytical separation of the agenda-setting and decision-making stages, whereby a coupling of the three streams is made at each stage in line with Kingdon's model. The first stage, dubbed '*agenda coupling*', is identical to Kingdon's original MS model and results in 'a worked-out proposal ready for decision' (Herweg et al., 2015, p. 444). The second stage, dubbed '*decision coupling*', focuses on the decision-making stage such as bargaining about the concrete design of the policy and legitimisation. If this latter stage is successful, the policy is adopted. Herweg et al. (Ibid.) therefore also refer to an '*agenda window*' for the former stage and a '*decision window*' for the latter. The analytical separation of the two coupling processes allows us to better analyse how a policy changes at each stage and why, which is particularly useful for parliamentary democracies where governments frequently govern through coalitions and compromise. To assess the explanatory power of the (adapted) MS model to our case, our first research question is therefore:

Research Question 1: Are the three streams identifiable, did they combine to create an 'agenda window' and a 'decision window', who were the policy entrepreneurs and what kind of coupling (if any) took place?

Whereas the MS model is focused on the potential for radical policy change, the PE model (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009) is equally interested in the surrounding period of policy stability. Policies tend to stay the same for long periods of time. Rapid and dramatic policy change can nonetheless occur. According to Baumgartner and Jones (Ibid.), this dynamic between stability and radical change can be explained by the fact that policymakers operate under conditions of *bounded rationality* – they cannot consider all issues at once and must therefore prioritise which to give their attention. The lack of attention that some issues receive therefore helps explain why most policies do not change. Moreover, during more stable periods, policymaking occurs within a sub-system dominated by institutions and actors sharing a common understanding of the core issues – a *policy monopoly*. Actors within the policy monopoly will try to maintain the status quo or their privileged position by minimizing attention to an issue and maintaining its current framing. Periods of equilibrium are therefore associated with a general acceptance within a policy sub-system of a single *policy image*, i.e., the way in which an issue is framed and understood, and the discourse around it constructed. Pressure to alter the policy image and reform policy receives *negative feedback* from the policy monopoly. However, a punctuation can start a cascade or self-reinforcing process which creates *positive feedback* for change, occasionally resulting in significant policy punctuations. The punctuation can result from precipitating events and changes in public opinion, or the increase in power of certain actors which transforms the policy image, thus disrupting the prevailing policy monopoly. Such 'tipping points' or periods of disequilibrium are brief, however, and after the radical policy change, policymakers' attention will shift elsewhere and a new equilibrium emerges. The punctuation can also result from a shift in *policy venue*, i.e. the "institutional locations where authoritative decisions are made" (Ibid., p. 32) or when "an issue can become the jurisdiction of more than one institution at the same

time" (Cairney, 2011, p.176). A venue shift can grant access to the policy process of new actors, thus undermining the dominant policy monopoly (True et al., 2007). As Norwegian climate policy has increasingly been shaped by global climate treaties and EU cooperation (Boasson and Lahn, 2016), it is conceivable that a shift in venue contributed to the radical policy change. Our second research question is therefore:

Research Question 2: Did a change of policy image or shift in venue occur, reducing negative feedback to radial policy change?

The use of the MS and PE models are now prolific in the academic literature, covering a multitude of countries and sectors (Jones and Baumgartner, 2012; Jones et al., 2016). However, there is limited research combining the two frameworks (for an exception, see Carter and Jacobs, 2014) and (to our knowledge) none combining them using Herweg et al.'s (2015) adapted MS model. Does this combination lead to improved analytical leverage and more refined explanations, or are the two models fundamentally distinct and incompatible? As we demonstrate below, our case exhibits a good fit with key elements of both models, and the two models can indeed combine to provide a holistic explanatory framework. However, one element of both the MS and PE models, namely the brevity of the window of opportunity or punctuation, does not bear out in our case. The proposal for a ban on cultivating peatlands maintained support and remained high on the political agenda from the government declaration to pass a ban in December 2016 to its passing in parliament in June 2020 – and continued to be debated, leading to a further change in policy in June 2021. As such, it is relevant to include a third research question, namely:

Research Question 3: Why did the window of opportunity or punctuation in this case last longer than anticipated by both models?

2.1. Methodology

To answer the above research questions, we draw on extensive document analysis and 19 semi-structured interviews with key actors involved in the climate policy process. Interviewees were selected based on having information on the three streams, i.e. helping to define the problem or 'problem brokering' (Knaggård, 2015; c.f. Hermansen, 2015), developing policy solutions, or being key political actors. Interviewees include politicians, civil servants, representatives from the agricultural sector, environmental non-governmental organisation (ENGO) representatives and representatives from particularly affected local authorities. As Norwegian policy communities are relatively small we have anonymised all interviewees, however Annex I includes a list of interviewees by role. Interviews were conducted during the autumn of 2020 and the first half of 2021. A list of core interview questions can be found in Annex II, though tailored questions were added depending on the specific role of the subject and prompts and follow-up questions were added when necessary. Based on the interview material and the reviewed documents (in addition to scientific publications we relied heavily on government and scientific reports, mapping and analysing consultation responses and following media coverage) we analysed key emerging themes in order to answer our research questions. In the following sections we therefore assess how well the (adapted) MS and PE models respectively help explain the Norwegian case.

3. Research question 1: The Multiple Streams Model

In line with Herweg et al. (2015), we here analytically separate between the agenda-setting and decision-making stages, and deal with each in turn.

3.1. Agenda-setting stage: Leading up to the government declaration in December 2016

3.1.1. The problem stream

Climate change saw a propelling to high politics in the mid-late 2000s following a series of events. The publication of the Stern Review, release of Al Gore's film 'An Inconvenient Truth' in 2006 and the fourth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2007 (and the IPCC and Al Gore being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize that same year) served to increase the salience of the issue (Amundsen and Hermansen, 2020). However, ensuing political events, most notably the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), led to a dip in attention. This changed again leading up to the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015. Under the bottom-up architecture of the Paris Agreement, with countries pledging Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the need for increased domestic action started to crystallise in Norwegian policy debates – especially given the stubbornly static emission reduction trend since 1990. The emissions trend in the agricultural sector was also a cause for concern as, following a general decline since 1990 and a steady decline since 2003, emissions started to increase rapidly post-2011 and peaked in 2016 (see Fig. 1). CO_2 and nitrous oxide from cultivating peatlands is the second largest emission source in the Norwegian agricultural sector after methane from livestock (NEA, 2020, p. 178). A growing number of scientific reports on the relationship between wetlands, such as peatlands and bogs, and climate change at the time (e.g., Erwin, 2009; Mitsch et al., 2013) also served to underline the importance of protecting these critical carbon sinks. In other words, both the public and policymakers now perceived climate change and domestic emissions as a problem that needed dealing with.

3.1.2. The policies stream

Avoiding the cultivation of peatlands was suggested as a potential climate policy measure as early as 2008. As shown above, a political momentum for domestic mitigation started building up from 2007 to 2008. On the basis of several reports (scientific and inter-agency) and white papers, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food opened a consultation on a ban on cultivating peatlands in 2010, though quickly backtracked due to strong resistance from the main agricultural organisations (supported by Interviews 1 and 15). The policy idea of a ban on cultivating peatlands made a brief comeback when Parliament re-negotiated the cross-party Climate Settlement ('*Klimaforlik*') in 2012 but was not followed up immediately. In 2015 the conservative coalition government under Prime Minister Solberg commissioned a synthesis report on the cultivation of peatlands and the consequences of various policy tools. The Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research delivered their report in 2016, and a follow-up report in 2017, concluding that restricting the cultivation of peatlands could reduce GHGs by 600 000 tonnes CO_2-equivalents by 2050 and would not significantly affect Norwegian food production. Although such restrictions would reduce the income and opportunities for growth for farms in peatland areas, restrictions could nonetheless be cost-efficient for society as a whole (NIBIO, 2016; NIBIO, 2017).

3.1.3. The politics stream

Kingdon argues that changes in the politics stream arise from "swings of national mood, vagaries of public opinion, election results, changes of administration, shifts in partisan ideological distributions [in Parliament] and interest group pressure campaigns" (Kingdon, 1995, p. 87). We deal with these changes consecutively.

National mood and public opinion: In line with the developments in the late 2000s and mid-2010s described above, following a dip in attention after the GFC, the Norwegian public became increasingly concerned about climate change. Whereas climate change had ranked as the sixth most important issue facing the country between 2010 and 2014, the Paris negotiations in 2015 gave the issue a boost, making it the second most important issue that year (Kantar, 2020). Although dipping slightly again the year after, it remained at its pre-GFC level (see Fig. 2).

Legislative turnover: The election of a minority conservative coalition government consisting of the Conservative and Progress parties in 2013 paved the way for a break with the long-standing logic of cost-efficiency and foreign emission reductions. The climate ambitious Liberal Party, which advocates for domestic mitigation, provided support for the

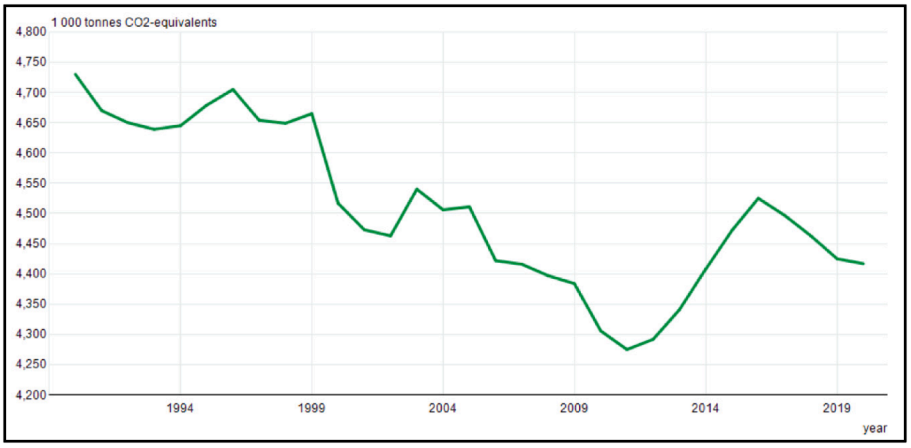

Fig. 1. Total greenhouse gas emissions by year from the Norwegian agricultural sector (Source: Statistics Norway).

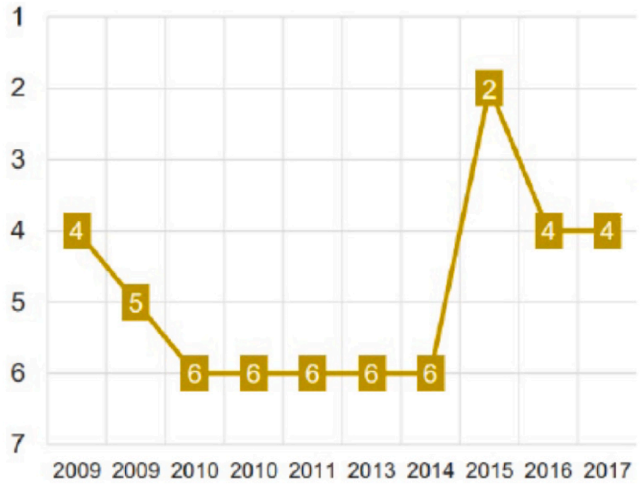

Fig. 2. The ranking of climate change in comparison to other issues 2009–2017 (Source: Kantar, 2020) Note: Survey run twice a year, in spring and autumn.

government in Parliament and thus managed to negotiate concessions on climate policies. Moreover, several interviewees noted that the Conservative and Progress parties generally had weaker ties to the main agricultural organisations than the previous red-green government, making it easier to develop climate policies relating to agriculture (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 8, 14 and 15).

Pressure group campaigns: Starting in 2014, the ENGO Sabima led a campaign called "Save the peatlands" which helped increase awareness about the importance of peatlands protection. Despite being a nature conservation ENGO, Sabima seized on the emerging climate-framing of the peatlands issue to mobilise support for action. In addition, a local branch of the Liberal Party in Ullensaker (a municipality north of Oslo) led an informal campaign to preserve peatlands. This started with community action to protect local peatlands in 2013, and through their increased knowledge about the importance of peatlands started pressuring national level politicians to act (Interviews 15, 17 and 18).

3.1.4. Policy entrepreneurship

Both Sabima and the Liberal Party were influential policy entrepreneurs. Several of the interviewees noted the importance of Sabima in increasing both the public and politicians' awareness of the importance of peatlands (Interview 5, 7, 14, 15, 17, 18 and 19). The Liberal Party, also receiving pressure from their local Ullensaker branch, were heavily influenced by the information coming from Sabima as well as scientific reports on the benefits of high-carbon ecosystems. In negotiating the 2017 national budget in December 2016, the Liberal Party therefore demanded a ban on peatlands cultivation in return for supporting the decision not to increase petrol taxes. Disagreements over petrol taxes had threatened to topple the government, thus one interviewee noted that it was "quite spectacular how central peatlands became in the budget negotiations and became the 'trump card' that saved the government" (Interview 15). Several interviewees pointed to the personal involvement of the Liberal Party member of Parliament Ola Elvestuen, who chaired the Standing Committee on Energy and Environment from 2013 to 2017, as being particularly influential in pushing for a ban (Interview 15, 17, 18 and 19).

Thus, Sabima and the Liberal Party exploited the window of opportunity that opened up in the politics stream as a result of the negotiations over the 2017 budget to achieve an agenda-coupling. The window had been opened by the aligning of the three streams, where agricultural emissions and public support for climate action had peaked concurrently, and this also coincided with a new government. The fact that a ban had by now been assessed in multiple government reports meant the policy entrepreneurs had a relatively well-worked out solution to propose. On 03 December 2016, the conservative block in parliament therefore agreed the following declaration: "*The Storting [Norwegian Parliament] asks the government to propose a ban on cultivating peatlands*". A public consultation on a ban was therefore launched in July 2017. However, it would take more than two years – until April 2019 – before a ban was finally passed in Parliament, and a further 14 months before the ban entered into force in June 2020.

3.2. Decision-making stage (2017–2021)

The decision-making stage can be divided into two separate phases – one leading up to the passing of the ban in June 2020, and another between then and a further adjustment of the ban in June 2021. We deal with each of these consecutively.

3.2.1. The problem stream 2017–2020

The budget declaration did not guarantee that a ban would pass successfully through Parliament. However, a succession of key reports in 2018 and 2019 elevated peatlands further up the political agenda and reinforced the ban's chances of success. The first report was the IPCC's *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 degrees*, published in 2018, which put significant pressure on governments to rapidly reduce emissions. The swift succession of the IPCC's *Special Report on Climate Change and Land* and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* in 2019 served to highlight two further and interlinked issues. The first issue was the relevance of land for mitigating and adapting to climate change, and particularly the importance of high-

carbon ecosystems such as peatlands. The second issue was the need to see climate change and threats to biodiversity in combination and adopt holistic policies. Preserving peatlands became the epitome of such 'win-win' solutions for both climate change and biodiversity, especially in Norway where peatlands constitute more than 5 per cent of land. For a sparsely populated country, land use conflicts had rarely been an issue in Norway. However, the IPCC and IPBES publications served to highlight several concerning trends around the gradual loss of untouched nature and peatlands in Norway, particularly related to onshore wind power development and the building of second homes. Several interviewees noted that the IPCC and IPBES reports had raised awareness about the importance of peatlands for climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity – both amongst the public and policymakers (Interviews 5, 7, 9, 15, 17, 18 and 19), thus highlighting peatlands protection as an important policy problem to address.

3.2.2. The policies stream 2017–2020

The mitigation potential and cost-effectiveness of a ban was reassessed in the inter-agency report "Climate Cure 2030" ('*Klimakur 2030*') published in January 2020. This report reviewed potential climate mitigation measures the government could implement in order to reach its 2030 target. According to a previous Minister for Climate and Environment (Interview 18), having a thoroughly researched policy proposal in "Climate Cure 2030" was important, as Parliament could push for an informed policy proposal without having to rely on the civil service or ENGOs for decision-support. In academic terms, the ban arguably met Kingdon's 'criteria for survival', i.e. the ban now seemed a feasible, acceptable and financially viable solution capable of gaining majority approval (1995, also see Herweg et al., 2018, pp. 23-24).

3.2.3. The politics stream 2017–2020

National mood and public opinion: Following the government declaration in 2016, public concern for climate change only grew – even ranking as the top issue in 2019 and 2020 (see Fig. 3). Most of the interviewees also noted that the national mood had changed significantly since the failed attempt at a ban in 2010, with people now being more receptive to domestic climate policy measures and demanding increased action from policymakers (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18 and 19). Moreover, even though the agricultural organisations denied that their opposition to a ban had waned since 2010, this was nonetheless perceived to be the case by policymakers (Interview 1).

Legislative turnover: The Liberal Party joined the government in 2018 and were joined by the Christian Democrats in 2019. The expansion of the government secured a majority in Parliament and thus made the passing of the ban more likely. However, the ban remained controversial, even within the supporting parties (Interviews 2, 3, 16 and 17), and affected local authorities and agricultural organisations were vocal in their opposition. Much of the time between 2017 and 2020 was therefore spent negotiating exemptions which would allow peatlands cultivation in 'exceptional circumstances'. The exemptions were a concession to aid the passing of the ban. Several interviewees questioned the efficacy of the ban given the nature of the exemptions made (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 5, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19). Critics argued that the exemptions were vague and could therefore be used to justify the continued cultivation of peatlands. The risks of this happening were particularly high in small local authorities, where there would be less knowledge about the properties of peatlands or capacity to conduct robust impact assessments, as well as the risk of local politicians or case workers having close-knit ties with those seeking dispensation. Overall, however, supporting parties and ENGOs were pleased that, for the first time, 'climate change' would be included in the Norwegian Land Act Section 11 as a reason for regulating the cultivation of peatlands, and that the ban would send a strong message that cultivating peatlands should as a rule be prohibited (Interviews 4, 5, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18).

3.2.4. Policy entrepreneurs 2017–2020

Sabima had continued its 2014 pressure group campaign and remained an important force in shaping the public debate and pushing for a ban. During the public consultation on the ban, Sabima also coordinated with other ENGOs, sharing information and their own consultation response, to create broad consensus and pressure. Similarly, the Liberal Party continued to be an important policy entrepreneur and pushing to keep exemptions from the ban as strict as possible. As one interviewee put it:

> *"The Liberal Party had ownership of the issue and put a lot of prestige in it. There was also a lot of grass roots interest in the topic, especially in Ola Elvestuen's constituency. But he was also personally concerned about the topic."* (Interview 15)

Thus, the significant attention to peatlands following the IPCC and IPBES reports coinciding with high public concern for climate change and an expanded government, provided a decision window and allowed Sabima and the Liberal Party to couple the three streams (decision coupling). The ban was passed in Parliament in April 2019 and came into force in June 2020, albeit with exemptions as a result of heavy negotiations. The new wording of Section 11 of the Land Act read as follows:

> *"To prevent harm to nature and cultural heritage or to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gasses the Ministry may lay down provisions relating to the cultivation of peatlands. Such provisions may prohibit new cultivation and determine that new cultivation may only take place in accordance with plans approved by the Ministry."*[2]

As Herweg et al. note: "The result of successful decision coupling is the adoption of a bill" (2018, p. 31). However, the adoption of the bill in June 2020 did not lead to the closing of the decision window. The passing of the ban did not mark the end of the debate. Although the problem and policy streams remained the same, changes in the politics stream prolonged the debate about the ban and opened up the opportunity for new policy entrepreneurs to shape it in 2021.

3.2.5. Politics 2021

National mood and pressure group campaigns: In spring 2021, the annual negotiations between the government and main agricultural organisations (used mainly to agree annual price rates for agricultural goods) broke down, with the agricultural organisations arguing that their wage growth was unacceptably low. The breakdown of the negotiations meant the decision moved to Parliament. Farmers and the main agricultural organisations had led a vocal campaign leading up to the negotiations, which ramped up further when the decision moved to Parliament. The agrarian Centre Party, building on the popular support for farmers and looking ahead to the autumn General Election, tabled a motion to revoke the ban on cultivating peatlands in April 2021.

Legislative turnover: The Progress Party had left the conservative coalition government in January 2020. Traditionally a populist protest party, they had lost a significant vote share from making too many compromises in government. Many voters had fled to the Centre Party, which was establishing itself as an anti-centralisation and more populist party under the leadership of Trygve Slagsvold Vedum. Seeking to gain a similar advantage as the Centre Party from the situation, and importantly to avoid losing more voters to them, the Progress Party supported the revocation of the ban, despite supporting it just a few months earlier while being part of the conservative coalition government.

3.2.6. Policy entrepreneurs 2021

The support of Labour, previously opposed to the ban, would have secured the revocation a majority in Parliament. Labour faced a

[2] Translated by the authors.

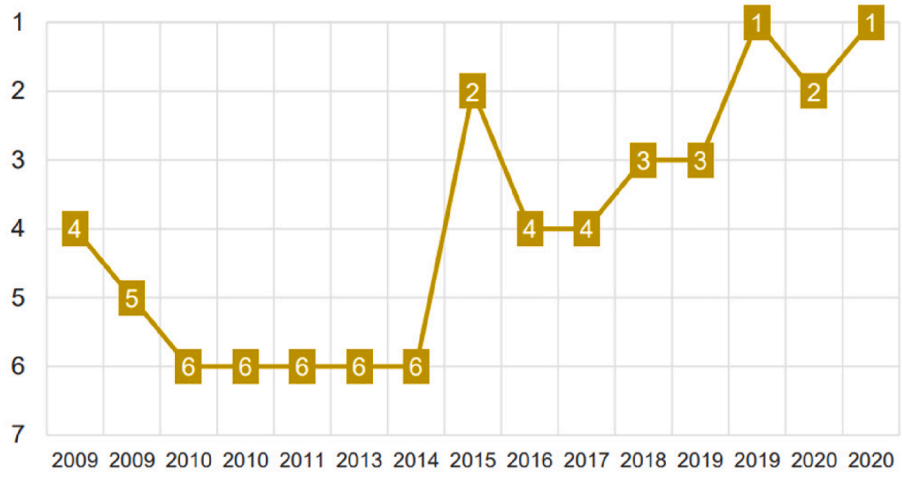

Fig. 3. The ranking of climate change in comparison to other issues 2009–2020 (Source: Kantar, 2020) Note: Survey run twice a year, in spring and autumn.

dilemma running up to the General Election – on the one hand they were also bleeding voters to the Centre Party and on the other had to demonstrate their green credentials to the left-wing of the party. After initially signalling they would support the Centre Party's motion, they did a spectacular U-turn and tabled an alternative motion:

> *"To prevent harm to nature and cultural heritage or to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gasses the Ministry may lay down provisions relating to the cultivation of peatlands. An application to cultivate or develop peatlands can only be approved if considerations relating to climate, nature or cultural heritage is protected through a holistic plan approved by the respective local authority."*[3]

Labour argued that this was in fact a strengthening of the ban. Firstly, whereas the previous wording of the Land Act delegated the regulation of peatlands to subsidiary provisions, their motion stated how peatlands should be regulated (via 'holistic plans') in the Act itself, awarding it stronger legal protection. Labour argued that subsidiary provisions, which '*may* prohibit new cultivation' (italics ours) and included vague exemptions, were too easy to change or circumvent. Secondly, their suggestion included the word 'develop', therefore also covering road, infrastructure, and housing development, and not just agricultural activities.

However, critics were quick to argue that this was a de-facto revocation of the ban as it removed the sentence that 'provisions may prohibit new cultivation'. Critics also pointed out that 'holistic' plans made by each local authority could pave the way for more peatlands cultivation, for example if business interests were given more weight than emissions reductions. A further complication was that the development of peatlands for road, infrastructure and housing purposes is also regulated under other laws which contradicted Labour's motion, making it unclear which set of laws should be given precedence and thus how effective Labour's inclusion of the word 'develop' would be. Interestingly, both the Centre and Progress parties supported Labour's motion, demonstrating that they saw a potential to weaken peatlands protection. Their support awarded it a majority in Parliament and Labour's motion was adopted in June 2021, changing the original law. As one interviewee complained: "This was a balancing act by Labour, where on the one hand they wanted to revoke the ban to avoid losing votes to the Centre Party in rural areas, and on the other hand added a rhetoric about climate and nature so as not to lose voters who care about those issues – it's a smokescreen" (Interview 18).

Despite the confusion as to whether Labour's motion strengthened or weakened the original ban, there was in reality (at least so far) no significant change in policy and/or practice. Both the initial formulation of the ban and Labour's motion have strengths and weaknesses. Both formulations include 'climate change' as a reason to regulate the cultivation of peatlands and both send strong signals that cultivation of peatlands should as a rule be prohibited. However, both formulations also include the risk that certain local authorities will still grant cultivation, either through dispensations or (imbalanced) 'holistic plans'.

The decision-making stage thus demonstrates that a ban on cultivating peatlands to reduce GHG emissions had firmly ascended the political agenda via the agenda window described in the previous section, though the specific wording and implementation was susceptible to significant discussion and bargaining due to party competition during the decision-making stage. As a previous Minister for Climate and Environment stated: "Labour would never have touched this if the Centre Party hadn't tabled their motion. Same with the Progress Party" (Interview 18). Even the Labour politician admitted as much: "It was not our intention to bring this [the ban] up again, but when it is on the table you reassess it properly" (Interview 19). Although the Centre Party initially took on the role of policy entrepreneur during the decision-making stage – seizing on the changed mood in light of the agricultural negotiations and upcoming elections, as well as the Progress Party's departure from government – they were ultimately outmanoeuvred by Labour who gained political advantage by changing the wording and implementation of the ban. See Fig. 4 for a summary of the agenda-setting and decision-making stages.

4. Research question 2: The Punctuated Equilibrium Model

Norway is in the somewhat paradoxical situation of being a major petroleum exporter with high climate policy ambitions, combined with almost fully renewable energy in the electricity sector. A way out of this dilemma for dominant parties on both sides of the political spectrum has been to argue for emission cuts abroad as opposed to expensive domestic action, pointing to cost-efficiency, a bearing principle in Norwegian mitigation policy. Already in the mid-1990s, international emissions trading emerged as a way to reconcile the dilemma of petroleum exports and high climate ambitions, simultaneously de-politicizing the petroleum sector, as mitigation action would take place abroad instead of domestically (Asdal, 2014; Boasson and Lahn, 2016). In the agricultural sector, the two main agricultural organisations constitute a well-organised and vocal lobby, enjoying a close relationship with government via the annual agricultural negotiations (Amundsen and Hermansen, 2020; Skagen, 2020) as a result of Norway's strong corporatist traditions (Farstad, 2019; Mildenberger, 2020). Both of these *policy*

[3] Translated by the authors.

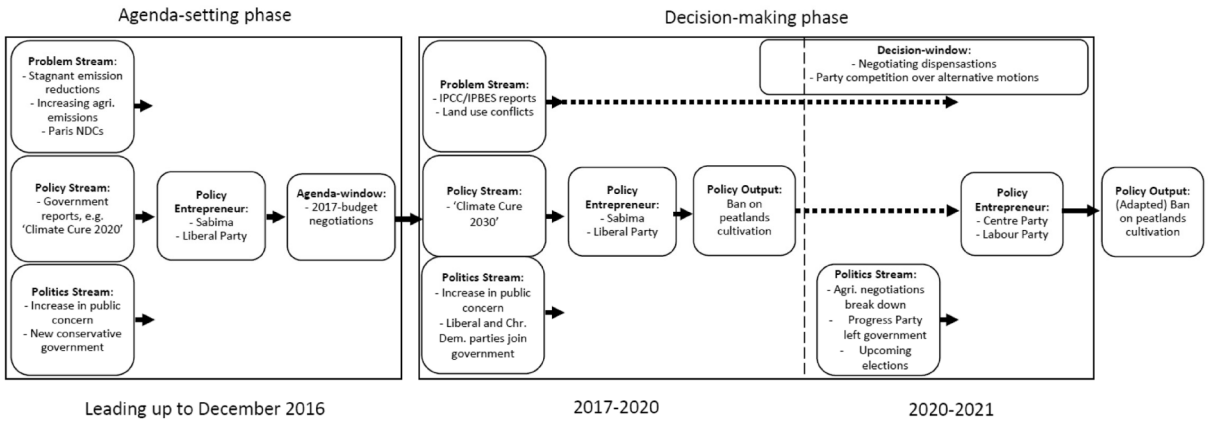

Fig. 4. Summary of the agenda-setting and decision-making stages.

monopolies have made it hard to argue for increased domestic climate action, and for agricultural measures in particular, pointing to other sectors instead.

That image however started to change with the bottom-up Paris Agreement from 2015, which has gradually increased the pressure to mitigate domestically in Norway. Still, the prevailing *policy image* before the publication of the IPCC and IPBES reports in 2018 and 2019 respectively was that climate politics was about cutting emissions rather than using land to store carbon or thinking about 'win-win'-solutions for climate and nature. Further, at that time, the dominant political parties still regarded emissions reductions as something that could just as well be achieved abroad via flexible mechanisms or the EU ETS, rather than domestically, if most cost-effective (Ćetković and Skjærseth, 2019; Tellmann, 2012). To the extent that domestic emissions reductions were proposed, agriculture was a more intractable sector to address than others (Skagen, 2020). Moreover, the key goals of agricultural policy had traditionally been value creation, food security and rural employment rather than climate change mitigation (Amundsen and Hermansen, 2020).

Calls for more domestic action, and particularly within the agricultural sector, therefore met with significant *negative feedback* from the prevailing policy monopoly. In particular, addressing peatlands was not considered a traditional climate mitigation measure. As one interviewee described it: "We were almost made fun of for suggesting we should address it [peatlands]" (Interview 18 – a similar statement was also made in Interview 17). The government consultation also revealed that 50 per cent of responses were opposed to a ban on cultivating peatlands (Farstad et al., 2020, p. 13). Most of the negative responses came from local authorities, chiefly from agricultural areas (Ibid., p. 12). In fact, a whole 25 per cent of Norway's local authorities had responded to the consultation, demonstrating that the ban became 'high politics' (Ibid.). The agricultural and forestry sectors were also vehemently opposed to the ban, arguing that landowner's property rights were being infringed and that reducing the opportunity for farmers to expand their productions into peatlands could threaten food security. They also lambasted the differential treatment of the agricultural sector, as activities other than cultivation (such as the building of roads, infrastructure and housing on peatlands) remained unregulated (Ibid., p. 15).

However, the shift in policymaking following the publication of the IPCC and IPBES reports was striking. The increased attention to land and 'win-win'-policies for climate and nature, both in popular media and government reports, started to create *positive feedback* for change. This was reinforced by increasing public concern for climate change, as well as coordinated efforts by ENGOs such as Sabima and political parties such as the Liberal Party to address peatlands.

Concurrently, and significantly, *shifts in policy venues* contributed to an opening of a policy window. The first was the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, which led to increased attention to the climate issue and emphasis on domestic emission reductions as a result of the bottom-up-approach to national target-setting (NDCs). The second and most influential venue shift was Norway signing a cooperation agreement with the EU in October 2019 on reducing emissions outside the EU ETS by at least 40 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. The agreement meant that Norway had to abide by EU climate laws, extending cooperation from the EU ETS to both the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) and Regulation on Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF). The agreement also awarded Norway annual carbon budgets and established reporting requirements on progress. This addition to Norway's European Economic Area Agreement had significant ramifications for domestic climate action, which now needed to see year-on-year progress within agriculture, transport, waste management and buildings, as well as obligations in the LULUCF sector. The requirements of the agreement had significant scope to destabilise the established patterns of authority over climate policymaking in Norway. The Liberal Party, in charge of the Ministry of Climate and Energy at the time, had pushed for the agreement as, frustrated by a lack of domestic action, were hoping that it would bind future governments to reducing domestic emissions (Interview 18). The agreement received broad political support, as parties either hoped that cooperation with the EU would prove more efficient or provide added flexibility. Several interviewees underlined how these two venue shifts forced the government to look for relatively quick and easy climate policies that did not adversely affect the lucrative oil and gas sector, and that the ban on cultivating peatlands became an 'excellent candidate' (Interviews 1, 4, 16, 18 and 19).

5. Understanding radical climate policy change

In response to our first research question, we can indeed identify Kingdon's (1995) three streams in the Norwegian case. In line with Herweg et al.'s (2015) adapted MS model, we have also seen how these streams combined across both the agenda-setting and decision-making stages, underlining the utility of their framework. In fact, we observed two couplings in the decision-making phase, meaning their framework could with benefit be revised to allow for numerous couplings within a single decision window, reflecting the dynamic policymaking in parliamentary systems. The concept of multiple couplings has already been developed in the agenda-setting literature (Dolan, 2021), though the emphasis has been on multiple *partial* couplings during the *agenda-setting stage*, i.e. linking two streams together before (hopefully) eventually achieving a *complete* coupling of all three streams. Dolan develops the concept of multiple partial couplings to explain how the issue linking strategies of policy entrepreneurs works: Coupling together two streams "raises the likelihood of agenda change even when all three streams for any single issue are not ripe" (2021, p. 183). However, as seen in the Norwegian case, even though the problem and policy streams remained the same, there were two *complete* couplings in the *decision-making stage*,

i.e. all three streams combined to change the outcome, which is substantially different. Moreover, we argue that the decision window did not close with the passing of the ban, as the agenda-setting literature would suggest, but that the window remained open long enough for a second decision coupling, largely as a result of changes in the politics stream and party competition.

Analytically separating the agenda-setting and decision-making stages, and analytically separating the two decision coupling processes, has proved particularly fruitful in our case. Firstly, the policy entrepreneurs differed across the different stages. The ENGO Sabima and the Liberal Party jointly acted as entrepreneurs in the agenda-setting and first decision-making stage, whilst the Centre and Labour parties were entrepreneurs in the latter decision-making stage. Secondly, the instruments for support differed across the two decision-making stages. The literature (see Herweg et al., 2015; Zohlnhöfer et al., 2016) identifies three instruments: concessions, package deals and manipulation. In the first decision-making stage, the Liberal Party clearly made concessions in order to pass the bill, whilst in the second decision-making stage Labour sought to gain support for its proposal by packaging it together with broader development of peatlands (although critics might argue that they used manipulation). Third, the type of coupling (Zaharidis, 2003) also differed across the agenda- and decision-making stages. In the agenda-setting stage the coupling was consequential, with a fairly linear process from the problem emerging, pressure building, thus incentivising government to find policy solutions. In the latter decision-making stage the coupling was more doctrinal, with the Centre Party taking advantage of the opportunity created by the breakdown of the agricultural negotiations and the upcoming elections to push for their pet solution, namely fewer regulatory burdens on the agricultural sector. Importantly, analytically separating the different stages has allowed us to assess how the policy proposal changed through the policy process and why. We find that political parties have acted as important policy entrepreneurs and that party competition has been influential in shaping the implementation of the ban.

In response to our second research question, we have observed both a change in policy image and a shift in venue, thus reducing negative feedback to radical policy change. Climate policy shifted from being focused on emission reductions abroad to emphasising domestic and win–win-solutions for climate and nature, which often centre on land-based solutions. The Paris Agreement and the climate agreement with the EU also made domestic action a legal requirement and less of a choice that governments could renege on.

We have also shown how the (adapted) MS and PE frameworks can combine to provide a holistic explanatory framework and that our case exhibits a good fit with key elements of both models. As our case demonstrates, the two models can in fact complement each other, with the MS model providing a more fine-grained explanation of specific policy developments whilst the PE model helps explain how a policy area shifts overall into a new equilibrium. Even though the alteration of the ban in 2021 is seen by some as a weakening of the original formulation, there are two important facts that point to a new equilibrium. The first is that the Centre Party's motion to revoke the ban fell flat and received the support of only one other party. The risk of peatlands protection disappearing was therefore very low. The second was that 'climate change' was retained as a reason for regulating peatlands in Labour's alternative motion, and removing it was not even discussed. The inclusion of this wording in Section 12 of the Land Act thus constitutes a significant step forward for peatlands protection and shifted the discussion to practical implementation rather than whether cultivation should be allowed or not. Furthermore, peatlands protection is now firmly on the political agenda in Norway and is unlikely to descend back to its status pre-2016. As a previous Minister for Climate and Environment pointed out: "The discussion around peatlands will not disappear off the political agenda, it will only be strengthened and expanded to new areas, such as infrastructure development. This is just the start" (Interview 18).

However, one element of both models, namely the brevity of the window of opportunity or punctuation, does not bear out in our case. The agenda window resulting in the government declaration in 2016 was of an expected duration. However, although one would expect the decision window to be longer given the need for parliamentary debate and negotiations, the duration was nonetheless very long and allowed for two decision couplings. The ban maintained its saliency from the initial government declaration in 2016 to its entering into force in 2020, and even then remained high on the agenda until the adapted ban was passed in June 2021. As shown, this long punctuation was largely due to party politics and party competition. The passing of the ban was not simply the result of public concern over climate change. Leading up to the government declaration in 2016, the climate change issue still lagged behind others, and was thus more the result of the Liberal Party taking ownership of the issue and negotiating concessions from the conservative block. Similarly, in the decision-making phase the negotiations over exemptions and the competition between the Centre Party and competitors heavily shaped the implementation of the ban. Interestingly, Labour's U-turn also demonstrates that the issue became less partisan and more one of 'competitive consensus' (Carter and Jacobs, 2014) whereby parties on both sides of the political spectrum sought to 'out-green' each other on the issue. These developments underline how central party politics can be in shaping policy. Party politics was not central in the original versions of the two models (e.g. Walgrave and Varone, 2008, p. 368; Zaharidis, 2003), largely due to their US focus, which resulted in an emphasis on other actors such as interest groups (Baumgartner et al., 2006, p. 965). However, our findings echo those of Carter and Jacobs (2014) who, also combining the MS and PE models, found a similarly long punctuation as a result of party competition in the case of UK climate policy under the Labour government (2006–2010). As such, our article answers their call for research examining whether similarly long punctuations are found in other fields and if similar characteristics are exhibited in other cases (Ibid., p. 139).

We therefore argue that both agenda-setting models (MS and PE) are combinable and complementary, and that one model alone would miss important elements of the policy process. Moreover, both models suffer from the same weakness, i.e. being unable to account for long policy windows or punctuations, and the role of party politics in explaining this. Through analysing the case of the Norwegian ban on cultivating peatlands we therefore make a significant contribution to the climate policy field by adding empirical evidence to debates on climate policy development and change, and especially to the relevance of party politics in such processes. A deeper understanding of such processes, especially in intractable sectors such as agriculture, helps shed light on pathways to decarbonisation. We also hope our case contributes to the theoretical development within the agenda-setting literature.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Fay M. Farstad: Project administration, Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Erlend Andre Tveiten Hermansen:** Funding acquisition, Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Bård Sødal Grasbekk:** Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Kristiane Brudevoll:** Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Bob van Oort:** Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Annex I. List of interviewees

1. Senior civil servant, agriculture and land use[4] 08.10.2020
2. Senior civil servant, agriculture and land use 22.10.2020
3. Senior civil servant, agriculture and land use 22.10.2020
4. Senior civil servant, climate and environment[5] 07.10.2020
5. Senior civil servant, climate and environment 28.10.2020
6. Representative from the Norwegian Farmers and Smallholders Union 05.11.2020
7. Representative from NORSKOG [member organisation for forest owners] 06.10.2020
8. Representative from the Norwegian Farmers Union 02.12.2020
9. Representative from Trøndelag County Municipality 09.10.2020
10. Representative from the Hol Municipality 16.10.2020
11. Representative from the Smøla Municipality 23.10.2020
12. Representative from the County Governor's Office, Møre and Romsdal 30.10.2020
13. Representative, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities 10.11.2020
14. Representative from the Norwegian Ornithological Society 12.10.2020
15. Representative from Sabima 06.11.2020
16. Representative from the Norwegian Green Party 06.10.2020
17. Representative from the Liberal Party 09.10.2020
18. Previous Minister for Climate and Environment 23.06.2021
19. Labour Member of Parliament 28.06.2021

Annex II. Core[6] Interview questions

1. When did a ban on cultivating peatlands arrive on the political agenda?
2. Are you familiar with the process behind the failed attempt at a ban in 2010?
   a. What is your view on the process in 2010 (which actors were opposed or supportive, what was the political landscape like)?
   b. Why did the 2010 proposal fail? Who were central in shutting it down, how did they proceed and why did they succeed? How was the ban and its opposition framed by different actors (e.g., climate, nature, business/sector interests, rural politics)?
3. Why did a ban ascend the political agenda in 2016, and why then?
4. How did a ban arrive on the political agenda?
   a. Which actors were central in getting it on the agenda?
   b. How did these actors get the issue on the agenda?
   c. What framings did the proponents and opponents of a ban use (e.g., climate, nature, business/sector interests, rural politics)?
   d. Why do you think the proponents/opponents of the ban supported/were against it?
   e. Why was the proposal for a ban successful in 2016 and not in 2010?
5. In general, how has the political landscape changed from 2010 until today? Why?
6. What is your view of the ban (positive/negative), and why?
7. How effective do you think the ban will be?
8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the ban?
9. Do you foresee any challenges with its implementation, if so, which?
10. How difficult will it be to get dispensations, do you think?
11. At which level (nationally, regionally or locally) do you think the ban should be administered?
12. How important is this issue for you/your organisation/party? Why is this so/not important?
13. Was there internal disagreement on the ban, and if so why/what were the areas of disagreement?
14. Were other policy measures, other than a ban, considered? Which, why, and why were these not realised?
15. How do you balance different perspectives within climate policy, for example in the case of the ban on cultivating peatlands?
    a. Those wanting more or less ambitious climate policy
    b. Urban/rural dimension
    c. Rural economy
    d. How do you think [competing party/ies] balance these perspectives? Why?
16. Why do you think [competing party/ies] agreed/disagreed with you on the ban?
17. How has Norway's membership in the Paris Agreement and the EU climate agreement respectively affected Norwegian climate policy?
18. Why did the Centre Party propose to revoke the ban, and why now?
19. Why did the Labour Party decide not to support the revocation, and why propose an alternative motion?
20. Does the new (2021) motion strengthen or weaken peatlands protection?
    a. Do you think there is a risk of policy dismantling in the future?

[4] To preserve anonymity we do not distinguish between ministry and underlying agency.

[5] To preserve anonymity we do not distinguish between ministry and underlying agency.

[6] Questions were added/removed or edited in line with the interviewee's role/expertise.

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