

Call for papers:

Political Emotions in Times of Conflict: Climate, Inequality, and Democracy

Faculty of Political and Social Science, Scuola Normale Superiore (SNS)

Palazzo Strozzi, **Florence, 11-12 March 2026**

Organizers: Manuela Caiani, Ipek Demirsu, Nikolaos Saridakis, Giovanni Daniele Starita, Batuhan Eren (SNS)

Keynotes lectures:

Åsa Wettergren (University of Gothenburg); Anna Durnova (University of Vienna); Luigi Pellizzoni (Scuola Normale Superiore)

Climate change is a multifaceted phenomenon, deeply intertwined with social norms, political identities, and emotional dynamics. The climate crisis reinforces existing social inequalities. As governments, communities, and individuals seek to cope with the demands of mitigation, adaptation, and systemic transformation, the climate crisis and related policies increasingly unearth struggles over justice, legitimacy, belonging, and democratic participation. Emotions such as fear, anger, hope, anxiety, and resentment are not merely reactions to environmental change, but active forces shaping political debates, public mobilizations, and how climate futures are imagined, accepted, or contested.

This interdisciplinary conference invites scholars working at the intersections of climate politics, sociology of emotions, collective action, political communication, and participatory democracy to explore how emotions shape the evolving political landscapes (identities, networks and practices) of climate change. We welcome contributions that investigate how various actors on the progressive and regressive sides, from far-right movements to farmers, policymakers to online communities, mobilize, express, and negotiate emotional responses in relation to climate policies, energy transitions, and environmental imaginaries.

We are particularly interested in understanding how emotional dynamics convey and amplify perceptions of inequality, including along lines of gender, class, and

geography, and how these emotions inform both resistance to and support for climate action. We seek contributions that explore how deliberative forums and participatory mechanisms, formal or informal, digital or in-person, mediate emotional engagement with climate policy, especially in marginalized or rural communities often excluded from elite policymaking arenas.

Drawing on these developments, we are particularly interested in the following themes:

- What kind of **mobilisations on the progressive and regressive sides shape new identities, networks and practices on climate**? How are **political emotions** produced and mobilized in climate-related polarization?
- How do **far-right or populist actors** use emotional framings to undermine or reframe climate action?
- What are the **gendered dimensions of climate emotions**, and how do they influence participation in and perceptions of climate policy?
- How do emotional narratives shape understandings of fairness, responsibility, and loss in the face of **climate transitions**?
- In what ways do emotions influence responses to **climate policy**, especially in contested sectors such as energy and agriculture?
- What are the **methodological challenges** in identifying and analyzing political emotions and narratives on climate across diverse contexts?
- How do **digital platforms** and media ecosystems influence the expression and spread of climate emotions?
- How are emotions negotiated in deliberative processes, citizens' assemblies, or participatory climate dialogues? On the other hand, in what ways do emotions influence responses to climate policy, especially in contested sectors such as energy and agriculture?

The conference invites theoretical and empirical contributions from all related academic fields. We welcome papers with different regional foci and aim for methodological pluralism.

The deadline for paper proposals is **31 December 2025**. Please send an abstract of your planned contribution (max. 400 words) together with a short bio to ipek.demirsudibiase@sns.it. Notification of acceptance will be sent by **15 January 2026**.

There is no registration fee, but accommodation and travel costs are to be covered by participants.

LIST OF PANELS

**Additional panels will be organized based on the thematic focus of the papers received*

Panel 1. Far-Right Politics and Climate Change: Denial, Emotion, and Mobilization

Chair: Nikolaos Saridakis (SNS)

Discussant: Batuhan Eren (SNS)

This panel invites contributions that explore the complex and evolving relationship between far-right actors and climate change. In recent years, the global climate crisis has not only intensified ecological and economic challenges but also reshaped the terrain of political conflict. Far-right parties and movements have emerged as key players opposing climate policies and capitalizing on anxieties linked to decarbonization, energy transitions, and social change. We welcome analyses that examine climate change political participation, denialism, the strategic framing of environmental critique, and the ideological narratives that ‘far-right’ actors, broadly understood as a collective actor, deploy to contest climate action or reframe environmental debates. We particularly encourage papers that investigate the emotional and strategic dimensions of far-right engagement with climate politics. Topics of interest include the role of “climate anxiety” and political emotions in shaping mobilization and resistance, as well as the framing strategies used to align environmental discourse with nationalist or populist agendas. Contributions may address the discursive, electoral, or movement-level dynamics of far-right climate politics, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative approaches. By bringing together diverse perspectives, this panel aims to deepen our understanding of how far-right actors influence climate debates, policy outcomes, and public attitudes toward environmental transformation.

Panel 2. Reflections from the fields: Renavigating Identities and Political Positionalities of Farmers in the Climate Crisis

Chair: Manuela Caiani (SNS) and Ipek Demirsu (SNS)

Discussant: Giovanni Daniele Starita (SNS)

This panel focuses on farmers' protests and mobilisations in Europe and beyond. It seeks to foster a critical and interdisciplinary dialogue on the multifaceted ways in which farmers are navigating the intersecting challenges of climate change, climate policy, and broader socio-political transformations. Farmers today are not

only on the frontlines of experiencing the material consequences of climate disruptions, from droughts and floods to changing growing seasons, but are also key actors in shaping and contesting the narratives and policies designed to mitigate those very changes. Their lived experiences, social identities, and political engagements are being reshaped in the process, raising important questions about agency, resistance, and adaptation. A major example is unfolding in EU countries after the approval of the Green Deal, where farmers set up protest movements challenging policies concerning their sector and shaping public narratives related to climate change mitigation policies. In particular, this panel invites contributions that examine how farmers' identities, networks and mobilisations, as well as political positionalities and emotional landscapes are being reconfigured in response to climate-related pressures and policy frameworks. How do farmers interpret and engage with national and international climate policies? What forms of protest, negotiation, or withdrawal are emerging in rural communities in response to perceived policy failures or injustices? And last but not least, what is the role of emotions in these engagements?

Panel 3. Ambiguous emotion and climate change: theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and analytical challenges.

Chairs: Raili Marling (University of Tartu) and Anna Durnova (University of Vienna)

Discussant: Sussanna Soosaar (University of Tartu)

Research on climate change emotions reveals ambiguous emotional landscapes that often resist conventional emotional categories and may prove difficult to articulate or analyze. While emotions have been one of the recent academic buzzwords, there is little academic consensus on the methods suitable for studying them across social science disciplines. By ambiguous emotion, we refer to vague and unfocused affective states that are characterized by uncertainty, contradiction, multiplicity, diffuseness, or ineffability.

This panel invites papers that discuss the theoretical, conceptual, methodological, or analytical dimensions of ambiguous emotions in the context of climate change. We welcome both theoretical contributions that advance the frameworks for understanding emotional ambiguity, as well as empirical research that contributes to the conceptualization of ambiguous emotions. It is also an occasion to bring together scholars who use different qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate political emotions. Possible topics of discussion are the difficulty of extracting emotions from the data, the difficulty of identifying the target of emotions (specific political issue or political actor), the challenges of working across languages and cultural settings and the complex intersections of emotions with different inequalities.

Panel 4. Emotional conflicts around Energy transitions in Europe: Policy narratives and policymaking dynamics

Panel Chair: Sonja Blum (Bielefeld University) and Nora Habelitz (Bielefeld University)

Discussants: We will use a mutual discussant system, where each participant gives feedback on one other paper.

Sustainable energy transitions are complex policy problems, often linked to heated policy conflicts. This is due to their cross-cutting effects, their tendency to increase existing social inequalities, and the different levels of stakeholders and targets involved. Energy transitions are thus highly emotional, often related to a high degree of insecurity regarding future prospects. The key to understanding these policy conflicts is political emotions that shape how citizens, communities, and organized actors perceive and engage with energy transitions. This panel aims to explore how political emotions drive, structure, and are mobilized within energy transition policy conflicts and their policymaking dynamics across Europe, at national, and European levels. Papers may address how emotions in energy transition conflicts are addressed in policy narratives, articulated by organized actors and mediated through policy and media communication or participatory processes. We particularly invite contributions with comparative research designs, examining emotions' role, for instance, in renewable energy expansion, citizen participation in energy transition projects, eco-social policy conflicts (e.g. just transition, energetic retrofitting, energy poverty), or political opposition to sustainable energy policies.

Panel 5. Political Emotions and Climate in Social Media Communication

Chair: Fabienne Lind (University of Vienna) and Hans Joerg Trenz (SNS)

Discussant: Veronika Ebner (University of Vienna)

Social media have become central platforms for diverse climate change communication: Spaces where causes and consequences are explained, activism is mobilized, political decisions are critically reviewed, and, at times, mis- or disinformation are used to polarize discussions. Simultaneously, these platforms offer possibilities to build communities, foster dialogue, and inspire individual and collective sustainable behaviors. In the multitude of perspectives, this panel focuses on hopeful and constructive approaches to climate-related social media content.

We invite contributions that analyze narratives, emotions, and engagement surrounding climate change discourses in social media contexts. Contributions may address, but are not limited to:

- Narratives in social media communication about climate change, environmental issues, or related policies
- Positivity, constructive dialogue, hope, efficacy, or resilience in climate discourses

- Media effects and audience engagement with climate-related social media content
- Citizen perspectives on climate communication, including interviews, surveys or experimental research

Panel 6. Gendered Political Emotions in the Climate Crisis: Power, Care, and Resistance

Chair: Prof. Emanuela Lombardo (SNS) and Ipek Demirsu (SNS)

Discussant: Linda Coufal (Charles University)

This panel explores the intricate intersection of the climate crisis, gender, and political emotions. As climate change increasingly disrupts lives, livelihoods, and ecologies, it also reconfigures affective landscapes deeply shaped by gendered and intersectional social positions, power relations, and cultural expectations. This panel invites contributions that examine how political emotions are mobilized, embodied, or contested across gendered experiences of climate change. We are particularly interested in work that investigates how emotional responses to environmental loss, policy failures, or climate activism become sites of both personal and collective meaning-making, resilience and resistance. We also welcome papers that address the politics and policy of climate change from gender and intersectional perspectives. The panel aims to foster critical dialogue on the affective dimensions of climate politics and policy and highlight the centrality of gender in understanding the emotional contours of environmental change and the political struggles around it.

Panel 7. Climate as a Question of Inequality: Perceptions, Interpretations, and Affective Moral Economies of the Climate Transformation

Chair: Dominik Želinský (Slovak Academy of Sciences)

Discussants: Jacopo Custodi (SNS), Michal Kolmas (Metropolitan University of Prague), Dominik Želinský (Slovak Academy of Sciences)

The climate crisis reinforces existing social inequalities, both in terms of vulnerability and exposure, as well as access to protective measures during climate-related disasters, and in the distribution of responsibility. At the same time, climate policies such as the increase in energy prices also have inequality-enhancing effects that disproportionately affect lower-income groups. The energy crisis of recent years has highlighted this dynamic and made the need for an eco-social policy itself a central challenge of the climate transformation.

In our panel, we seek to explore how people perceive and evaluate the climate transformation and the role of climate policy within it. We focus on how people's personal relationship to climate issues and their sense of justice shape their interpretation of societal and political responses to the climate crisis. Particular attention is given to the ambivalence of attitudes toward the environment, climate, and climate policy. People often express contradictory views and relate

these issues to their everyday lives in diverse ways. This calls for a nuanced social-scientific toolkit to uncover the theoretical significance of these phenomena. This panel addresses the role of perceptions and interpretations of inequality constellations, as well as the importance of culture and socially shared interpretive frameworks. We are particularly interested in class and culture, work experiences and moral economies, gender, and the interplay of affect and economy that emerge around ideas of justice in the context of the climate transformation. As part of We particularly welcome contributions that engage theoretically and/or empirically with inequality and emotions, as well as comparative perspectives across different countries (in Europe and beyond).

Panel 8 – Reinvigorating democracy: The role of emotions in engaging citizens in participatory engagement around environmental policymaking.

Chair: Timothy Stacey (Utrecht) & Jesse Hoffman (Utrecht)

Discussant: Christina Klubert (Utrecht)

Might better understanding how emotions arise in democratic processes help to restore faith in those processes? As sustainability transitions accelerate and policy ambitions begin to materialize, strong emotional responses are increasingly coming to the fore. From reshaping energy grids to building wind farms, retrofitting homes, shifting agricultural practices, and transforming everyday lifestyles, we are witnessing growing backlash against climate policy. Public engagement is often invoked as a strategy to bolster policy support, yet these processes remain contentious and frequently marked by frustration and disenchantment among both: not only among citizens but also among policymakers themselves. Officials often note that they struggle to navigate these tensions. What, then, are the long-term consequences when emotions remain hidden undercurrents within participatory practices?

The inability to recognize and respond to citizens' emotional experiences of societal change risks undermining environmental policy efforts and eroding trust in institutions. To unlock the potential of participatory democracy, it is therefore essential to understand why and how emotions surface in public engagement and what it means to take them seriously. Because participatory processes bring together citizens, professionals, and policymakers in joint action, this panel is interested in exploring how emotions emerge in social interaction. Believing that emotions cannot be understood without the context in which they arise, it also empathises the performative dimension of policy processes: specifically, how the design and staging of these processes shape and produce the emotions that unfold.

Finally, the panel is interested to examine what role emotions can play for democratic participation around climate policy.

We invite contributions that are concerned with the following questions:

- How and why do emotions surface in public engagement around climate policy?
- How can we characterize the emotional experiences of both citizens and policymakers during participatory engagement?

- How does the dramatization of policy processes shape and produce the emotions that arise?
- What explains the persistent contestation surrounding participatory engagement?
- How might public participation in climate policy be reconfigured to better integrate the democratic role emotions can play in climate politics?
- How does a sociological understanding of emotions help policy officials navigate tensions in engagement practices?