

International Attitudes Toward Global Policies

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January 27, 2023

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Abstract

The “Global Climate Scheme” (a global carbon price funding a global basic income) would be an effective and progressive way to combat climate change and poverty. Yet, such policy is mostly absent from political platforms and the policy debate. Using surveys on 40,000 respondents in 20 countries covering 72% of global CO₂ emissions, we document majority support for this and other global policies. Using a complementary survey on 3,000 U.S. respondents, we test several hypotheses that could reconcile strong stated support with a lack of salience of these issues. The complementary analyses show that the stated support is mostly sincere, although we cannot rule out insincerity for 3% to 9% of the population from the willingness to sign a real-stake petition and a list experiment, respectively. Global redistributive policies rank high (though not highest) in the prioritization of policies. Conjoint analyses reveal that the Democratic party would not significantly lose votes if it endorsed the Global Climate Scheme, while a candidate at the Democratic primary would actually win votes by doing so. Accurate beliefs about the level of support for the scheme dismisses the hypothesis of pluralistic ignorance of the support. Strong universalistic attitudes are confirmed in more general questions, suggesting that the support cannot be explained away by malleable opinion or experimenter demand. In sum, our findings indicate that global policies are genuinely supported by a majority of the population. Public opinion is therefore not the reason that they do not prominently enter political debates.

JEL codes: P48, Q58, H23, Q54

Keywords: Climate change, global policies, cap-and-trade, perceptions, survey.

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[§]The project was preregistered in the Open Science Foundation registry (osf.io/fy6gd).

We are grateful for financial support from the University of Amsterdam and TU Berlin. We thank Antoine Dechezleprêtre, Tobias Kruse, Blueberry Planterose, Ana Sanchez Chico, and Stefanie Stantcheva for their invaluable inputs for the project. We thank Auriane Meilland for feedback. We thank Laura Schepp, Martín Fernández-Sánchez, Samuel Gervais, Samuel Haddad, and Guadalupe Manzo for assistance in the translation.

1 Introduction

Extreme poverty and climate change are among the most critical issues of our time. The first could be solved by redistributive transfers, the second by capping global emissions. A fair and effective policy to tackle these two problems is the “Global Climate Scheme” (GCS), which combines these two solutions. The GCS consists of a global cap-and-trade system, where emission rights are auctioned each year to polluting firms, and of a global basic income, funded by the auction revenues.

In this paper, we study attitudes toward global policies that address climate change, global poverty or inequalities, with a focus on the GCS. Using an international survey on climate attitudes, we document majority support for global policies like the GCS in 20 among the largest countries. Yet, such global policies are nowhere to be seen in policy debates. Why? To explain this paradox (absence of the policy despite majority stated support), we run a complementary survey on 3,000 U.S. respondents and test different hypotheses: insincerity of support for the GCS, pluralistic ignorance (i.e. false belief that most do not support it), defavorable electoral outcomes for a candidate that would support it, or low priority given to global issues. Furthermore, we also study attitudes toward other global policies, global redistribution, and universalistic values.

1.1 Data

Beware, data collection is still ongoing (we have 80% of the final sample) so results are partial and not definitive. Please do not cite at this stage.

We measure stated support for different global policies using a survey on climate attitudes conducted in 2021 on 40,680 respondents from 20 countries covering 72% of global CO₂ emissions (the questions of this survey on climate attitudes national policies are analysed in another paper¹). We then conduct a representative survey on 3,000 U.S. respondents to study in detail the sincerity and rationales behind the support for the GCS, the attitudes toward various global policies, global redistribution, and universalistic values.

2 Discussion

In 20 among the largest countries, we find strong majority support for global climate policies, even in high-income countries that would financially lose from the globally redistributive policies that we test. The complementary survey in the U.S. confirms these

results. For example, there is a strong support for global taxes on the wealthiest, and majority support for our main policy of interest, a Global Climate Scheme that would establish both carbon pricing at the global level through an emission trading system, and a global basic income funded by its revenues. A list experiment and a real-stake petition show that the support for the GCS is mostly sincere. This genuine support is confirmed by the prioritization of this global climate policy above some prominent national climate policies, and consistent with around half of the population holding universalistic (rather than nationalistic or egoistic) values. Moreover, the conjoint analyses reveals that a Democratic candidate should not lose voting shares by endorsing the GCS, and would even win votes at the Democratic primary by doing so. Besides a potential lack of sincerity and weak opinions, we dismiss another hypothesis to explain the scarcity of global policies in the public debate despite a strong support: that people underestimate the support of their fellow citizens. As we ruled out all hypotheses of our registration plan,¹ we now need to study new explanations.

Bibliography

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