International Attitudes Toward Global Policies

Adrien Fabre[*], Thomas Douenne[†] and Linus Mattauch[‡][§]

January 25, 2023

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 CO_2 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. Finally, we conclude that there is no compelling reason why global policies do not enter the public debate or political platforms, as they seem genuinely supported by a majority of the population.

JEL codes: P48, Q58, H23, Q54
Keywords: Climate change, global policies, cap-and-trade, perceptions, survey.

1 Introduction

Ethical theories often warrent transfers from high- to low-income people, hence from high- to low-income countries. This is the case of utilitarianism, the benchmark ethical theory used in economics. Utilitarianism assigns the same weight to each person and thus considers that a dollar is better allocated to a low-income person, which has a higher marginal utility than a high-income person.[5]
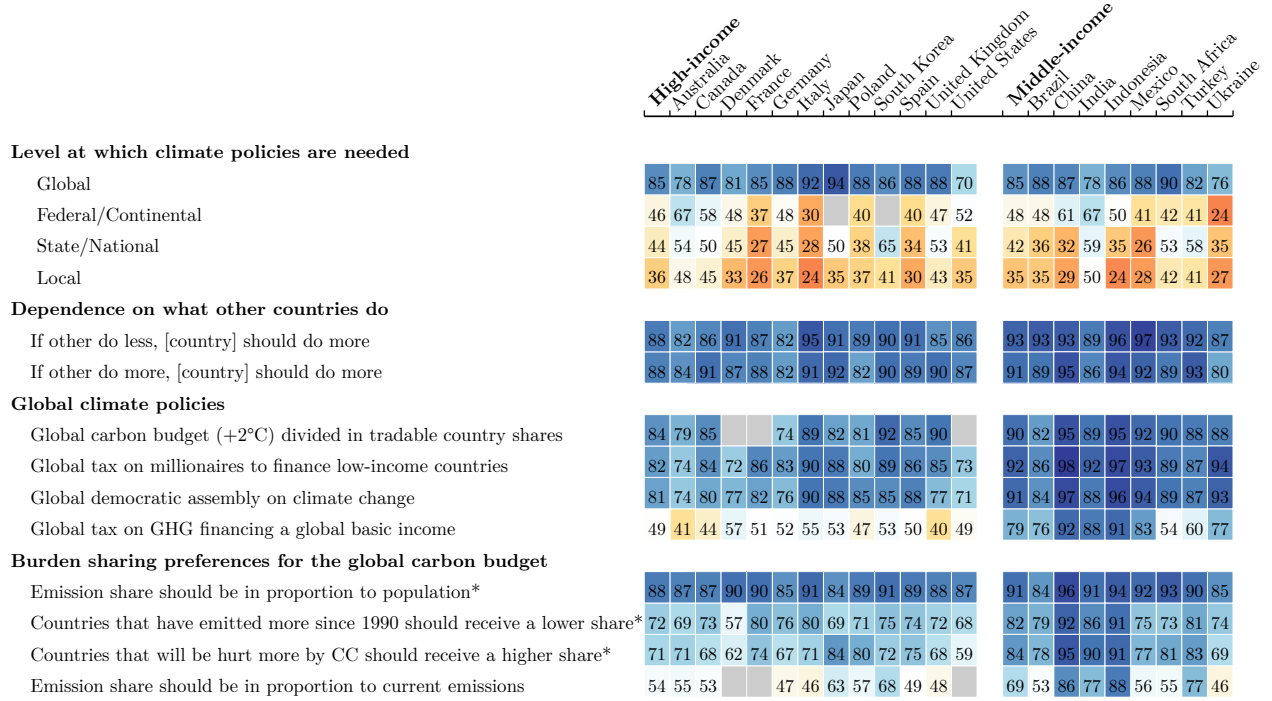
Addressing global poverty, inequalities and climate change are at the heart of the universally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). It has been pointed out that low-income countries generally do not have enough domestic resources to eliminate the poverty gap in the short run.[1] In other words, it would hardly be possible to achieve the first SDG and end extreme poverty by 2030 without international transfers.

Climate change is another issue that calls for a global response and international transfers. Postulating that each human has an equal right to emit CO_2, low emitters have a legitimate claim *vis-à-vis* high emitters, that can be settled by monetary transfers. Coupling this burden-sharing principle to the carbon budget (remaining emissions that would be compatible with the Paris agreement) naturally defines a global climate policy. We call it the "Global climate scheme" and denote it G; it consists of a global cap-and-trade system where emission rights are auctioned each year to polluting firms and the revenues finance a global basic income. Using the price and emissions trajectories from the Stern-Stiglitz report,[6] we estimate that the basic income would amount to $30 per month for each human above 15 in 2030, enough to lift out of extreme poverty the 700 million people who live with less than PPP $2 per day. Conversely, high emitters like a typical American (with median U.S. CO_2 emissions) would lose in net $85 per month, as they would face $115 per month in price increases (assuming a carbon price of $90/tCO_2$ in 2030).

If high emitters share universalistic ethical values, we expect strong support for G, even in high-income countries. On the contrary, if people defend their own financial interest, we expect low support for G in high-income countries.

In this paper, we study attitudes toward global policies that address climate change, global poverty or inequalities, with a focus on G. We measure stated support for different global policies using unpublished results from a survey[2] on climate attitudes conducted in 2021 on 40,680 respondents from 20 countries covering 72% of global CO_2 emissions. We then conduct a representative survey on 3,000 U.S. respondents to study in detail the sincerity and rationales behind the support for G, the attitudes toward various global policies, global redistribution, and universalistic values.

Figure 1: Share of support (somewhat or strongly) for the main global policies among non-*indifferent* (n = 40,680).

	High-income	Australia	Canada	Denmark	France	Germany	Italy	Japan	Poland	South Korea	Spain	United Kingdom	United States	Middle-income	Brazil	China	India	Indonesia	Mexico	South Africa	Turkey	Ukraine
Level at which climate policies are needed																						
Global	85	78	87	81	85	88	92	94	88	86	88	88	70	85	88	87	78	86	88	90	82	76
Federal/Continental	46	67	58	48	37	48	30		40		40	47	52	48	48	61	67	50	41	42	41	24
State/National	44	54	50	45	27	45	28	50	38	65	34	53	41	42	36	32	59	35	26	53	58	35
Local	36	48	45	33	26	37	24	35	37	41	30	43	35	35	35	29	50	24	28	42	41	27
Dependence on what other countries do																						
If other do less, [country] should do more	88	82	86	91	87	82	95	91	89	90	91	85	86	93	93	93	89	96	97	93	92	87
If other do more, [country] should do more	88	84	91	87	88	82	91	92	82	90	89	90	87	91	89	95	86	94	92	89	93	80
Global climate policies																						
Global carbon budget (+2°C) divided in tradable country shares	84	79	85			74	89	82	81	92	85	90		90	82	95	89	95	92	90	88	88
Global tax on millionaires to finance low-income countries	82	74	84	72	86	83	90	88	80	89	86	85	73	92	86	98	92	97	93	89	87	94
Global democratic assembly on climate change	81	74	80	77	82	76	90	88	85	85	88	77	71	91	84	97	88	96	94	89	87	93
Global tax on GHG financing a global basic income	49	41	44	57	51	52	55	53	47	53	50	40	49	79	76	92	88	91	83	54	60	77
Burden sharing preferences for the global carbon budget																						
Emission share should be in proportion to population*	88	87	87	90	90	85	91	84	89	91	89	88	87	91	84	96	91	94	92	93	90	85
Countries that have emitted more since 1990 should receive a lower share*	72	69	73	57	80	76	80	69	71	75	74	72	68	82	79	92	86	91	75	73	81	74
Countries that will be hurt more by CC should receive a higher share*	71	71	68	62	74	67	71	84	80	72	75	68	59	84	78	95	90	91	77	81	83	69
Emission share should be in proportion to current emissions	54	55	53			47	46	63	57	68	49	48		69	53	86	77	88	56	55	77	46

2 Results

2.1 Global support

The global survey shows strong support for climate policies at the global level (Figure 1). When asked "At which level(s) do you think public policies to tackle climate change need to be put in place?", 70% (in the U.S.) to 94% (in Japan) choose the global level. Meanwhile, the European level is chosen by less than half of the European respondents while the federal level is chosen by only 52% of U.S. respondents. More local levels are generally chosen less than broader ones. This preference for the global level is consistent with the two of the three key motives identified to support climate policies:[2,3,4] effectiveness and fairness (the third being self-interest).
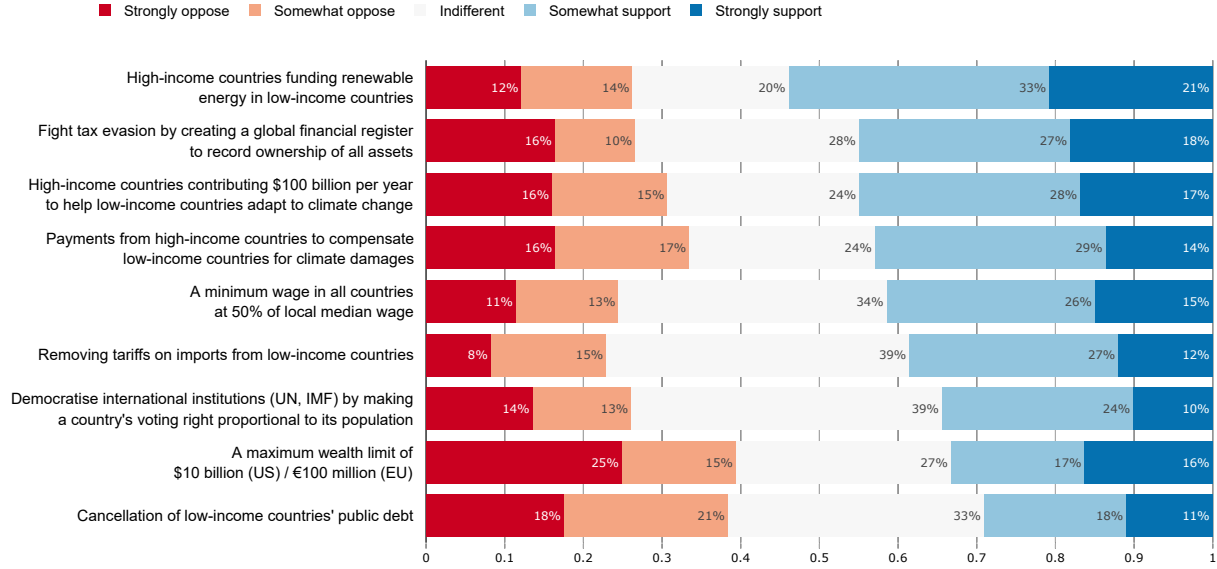
Several global policies obtain an absolute majority support in all countries: "a tax on all millionaires in dollars around the world to finance low-income countries that comply with international standards regarding climate action [which] would finance infrastructure and public services such as access to drinking water, healthcare, and education", "a global democratic assembly whose role would be to draft international treaties against cli-

mate change [where] each adult across the world would have one vote to elect members of the assembly" (though this one receives only 48% of support in the U.S.), and an international emission trading scheme where "countries that emit more than their national share would pay a fee to countries that emit less than their share". In high-income countries, this global quota obtains 64% of absolute (i.e. *somewhat* or *strong*) support and 84% of relative support (i.e. excluding *indifferent* answers). The support is even higher in middle-income countries, though one should interpret the results with caution in middle-income countries as their samples are only representative of the online population (young, graduated and urban people are over-represented). After the support for the global quota, we ask how the carbon budget should be divided among countries. The preferred burden-sharing rule is to allocate the rights to emit on an equal per capita basis: this fairness principle secures an absolute majority support in all countries, and a relative majority support never below 84%. Taking into account historical responsibilities and vulnerability to climate damages is also popular, though less consensual, while grand-fathering (i.e. allocating emission shares in proportion to current emissions) comes last everywhere. The Global climate scheme, i.e. a global quota where emission rights are allocated on an equal per capita basis, has the same distributive effects as a global carbon tax that would fund a global basic income. We also test the support for this policy, but here we specify to the respondents the distributive effects: that it would lift the 700 million people who earn less than $2/day out of extreme poverty, and that the typical person in their country would lose a certain amount (that we specify) due to the price increases. Despite their similarity, the global tax is less supported than the global quota, and it even fails to obtain a majority in Anglo-saxon countries. This lower support is likely due to the fact that distributive effects are made salient in the case of the tax, an interpretation that is consistent with the level of support for the global quota once we make the distributive effects salient, which we do in the complementary surveys.

2.2 Stated support for various policies

In the complementary U.S. survey, we describe the Global climate scheme (G), explain its distributive effects (specifying the amounts at stake), test the understanding that typical people would lose in high-income countries and that the poorest humans would win using an incentivized question, and then give the correct answer. We proceed the same way for a National redistribution scheme (R) that would tax the top 5% to finance cash transfers offseting the monetary loss of G for the median emitter, expecting people to

4

Figure 2: Support for various global policies in the U.S. (*n* = 3,000).

	Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Indifferent	Somewhat support	Strongly support

Policy					
High-income countries funding renewable energy in low-income countries	12%	14%	20%	33%	21%
Fight tax evasion by creating a global financial register to record ownership of all assets	16%	10%	28%	27%	18%
High-income countries contributing $100 billion per year to help low-income countries adapt to climate change	16%	15%	24%	28%	17%
Payments from high-income countries to compensate low-income countries for climate damages	16%	17%	24%	29%	14%
A minimum wage in all countries at 50% of local median wage	11%	13%	34%	26%	15%
Removing tariffs on imports from low-income countries	8%	15%	39%	27%	12%
Democratise international institutions (UN, IMF) by making a country's voting right proportional to its population	14%	13%	39%	24%	10%
A maximum wealth limit of $10 billion (US) / €100 million (EU)	25%	15%	27%	17%	16%
Cancellation of low-income countries' public debt	18%	21%	33%	18%	11%

find out that the richest would lose and the typical people in their country would win. Then, we display summaries of the schemes' description to make sure that the respondents remember them ask again incentivized question of comprehension, and later give the expected answer that a typical fellow citizen would neither win nor lose with G and R combined. Finally, we ask directly ask the support for G and for R in simple *Yes/No*: the stated support for each is at 54% (*n* = 3,000).

We also test support for more realistic global policies (Figure 2). All receive relative majority support but two: "a maximum wealth limit of $10 billion" and the "cancellation of low-income countries' public debt". Climate-related policies are particularly popular: "high-income countries funding renewable energy in low-income countries" obtains absolute majority support while loss and damages compensation (which was approved at the COP27) receives a relative support of 57%.

After explaining that "0.4% of U.S. government spending (that is, 0.2% of U.S. GDP) is spent on foreign aid to reduce poverty in low-income countries", less than 20% state that U.S. foreign aid should be reduced while 57% state that it should be increased, including 14% who support an inconditional increase. To the 43% who answer that aid should be increased but only if some conditions are respected. The three conditions most chosen are all largely respected by the Global climate scheme: "that we can be sure the aid reaches people in need and money is not diverted" (chosen by 74%)," that recipient countries comply with climate targets and human rights" (59%), and "that other high-

Table 1: Number of supported policies in the list experiment in function of the composition of the list. *G* stands for the Global climate scheme and *R* for the National redistribution scheme (*n* = 3,000).

	Number of supported policies
Mean	1.364
List contains: G	0.464***
	(0.054)
List contains: R	0.494***
	(0.053)
List contains: G × R	−0.001
	(0.091)
Observations	1,799
R^2	0.111

income countries also increase their foreign aid" (44%). On the other side, not wishing to increase their country's foreign aid is mostly justified by prioritizing one's fellow citizens or viewing each country as responsible for its own fate.

2.3   Sincerity of support

We use several methods to assess the sincerity of the support for the Global climate scheme (G): a list experiment, a real-stake petition, conjoint analyses, and the prioritization of policies. All methods suggest that the support is either completely sincere, or the share of insincere answers is limited.

2.3.1   List experiment

The tacit support for G measured through the list experiment is 46%, i.e. 8 p.p. lower than at the direct question. This may be the sign of a social norm pushing some people to state that they support G although they secretly do not. Still, if there is a social norm in favor of G, there is a similar norm in favor of the National redistribution scheme, as the gap between the tacit and direct support for it is comparable (at 7 p.p.).

2.3.2 Petition

When told that "we will send the results to the U.S. President's office, informing him what share of American people are willing to endorse the Global climate scheme", 4 p.p. fewer people are willing to sign a petition for G than to simply state their support. For the National redistribution scheme, the proportion of support is not significantly different in the petition and in the simple question.

2.3.3 Conjoint analyses

In our *conjoint analyses*, we ask respondents to make five choices between pairs of political platforms. The first conjoint analysis suggests that G is supported for itself, independently from being complemented by a national climate policy (denoted C, "Coal exit" in the U.S., "Thermal insulation plan" in Europe) and the National redistribution scheme (denoted R). Indeed, 55% of (n = 3,000) respondents prefer the combination of C, R and G to the combination of C and R alone, indicating a similar support for G conditional on R and C than for G alone (as it does not significantly differ from the direct support of 53%). For the second analysis, we split the sample into four random branches. This analysis shows that the preference for C, R and G together is as high, at 55% (n = 750), if the alternative is R alone; that the support for G conditional on R, at 59% (n = 750), is somewhat higher than the direct support for G; that the support for C conditional on R is even higher, at 63% (n = 750); which is confirmed by the fact that 52% (n = 750) prefer C to G (both) conditional on R. In other words, there is majority support for G and for C, slightly more people prefer C but C does not act as a substitute for G, and some people find G complementary to R though the number of people requiring R to support G remains small.

The third analysis suggests that a Democratic candidate would not significantly lose voting share at the 2024 presidential election if he or she were to endorse G. To estimate this, we present to two random branches of the sample hypothetical Democratic and Republican platforms that differ only by the presence (or not) of G in the Democratic platform. Although the share of respondents choosing "None of them" is slightly higher (at 13% instead of 11%) when the Democratic platform includes G, the share choosing the Democrat is not significantly lower (52% in both cases). Our last two analyses is run on the subsample of non-Republicans (n = 1,250), i.e. the respondents who choose *Democrat*, *Independent*, *Non-Affiliated* or *Other* for their political affiliation. We frame the choice be-

Figure 3: Conjoint analysis (asked only to non-Republicans). Average Marginal Component Effects (relative to the baseline: an absence of policy of that category) of policies in the choice of candidate for a hypothetical duel in the 2024 Democratic primary, where both platforms are randomly drawn (*n* = 2,000).
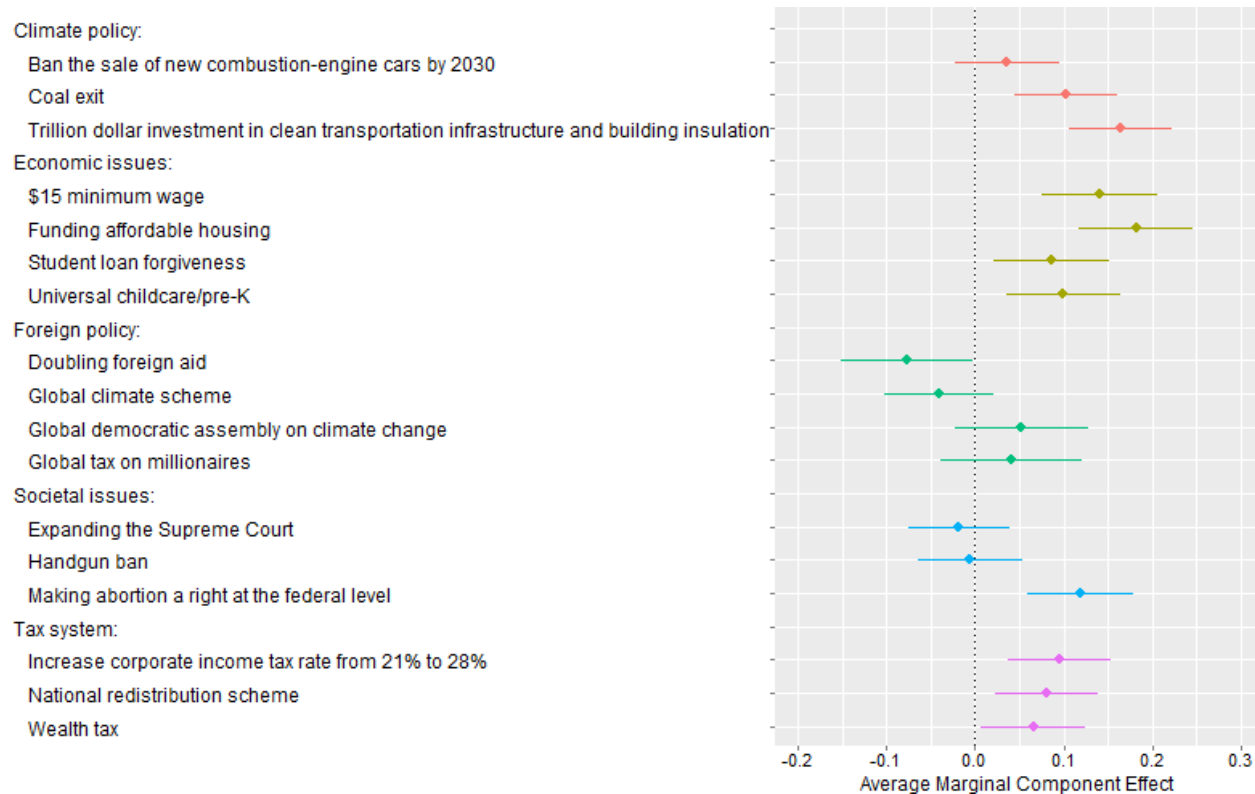
tween two platforms as a hypothetical duel at the 2024 Democratic primary and force the respondents to choose between candidate A or B. In the fourth analysis, a policy (or an absence of policy) is randomly drawn for each platform in each of five categories: *economic issues*, *societal issues*, *climate policy*, *tax system*, *foreign policy* (Figure 3). Except for the category *foreign policy*, which features G 42% of the time, the policies are prominent progressive policies and they are drawn uniformly. When a platform features G and not the other, the one with G is chosen 53% (which is significantly more than half) of the time (*n* = 3,000). The fifth analysis draws random Democratic platforms in a similar ways, except that candidate A's platform always contains G while candidate B includes no foreign policy. In this case, 61% of respondents choose A (*n* = 3,000). In short, our conjoint analyses indicate that a candidate at the Democratic primary would have more chances to obtain the nomination by endorsing G, and this endorsement would not penalize her or him at the presidential election.

At the end of the survey, we pick six policies at random (and uniformly) among the progressive policies used in the last conjoint analyses, and ask respondents to allocate 100 points (using sliders) among them, with the instruction that "the more you give points to a policy, the more you support it". For each policy presented, the average support is thus 16.67 points (Figure 4). G ranks in the middle of all policies (9th. out of 17), with an average number of points of 15.3 which is only slightly lower than average. It is higher than to "ban the sale of new combustion-engine cars by 2030" (13.4) and "coal exit" (10.0), but lower than the third climate policy: "trillion dollar investment in clean transportation infrastructure and building insulation" (20.3). The support for other globally redistributive policies is variable: "Doubling foreign aid" is the least supported policy (8.4), while the "Global tax on millionaires" is one of the five policies with more than 20 points (20.2), and the "global democratic assembly on climate change" is just below G (14.5). The most supported policies are "Funding affordable housing" (28.5), "$15 minimum wage" (23.8), and "Universal childcare/pre-K" (22.1).
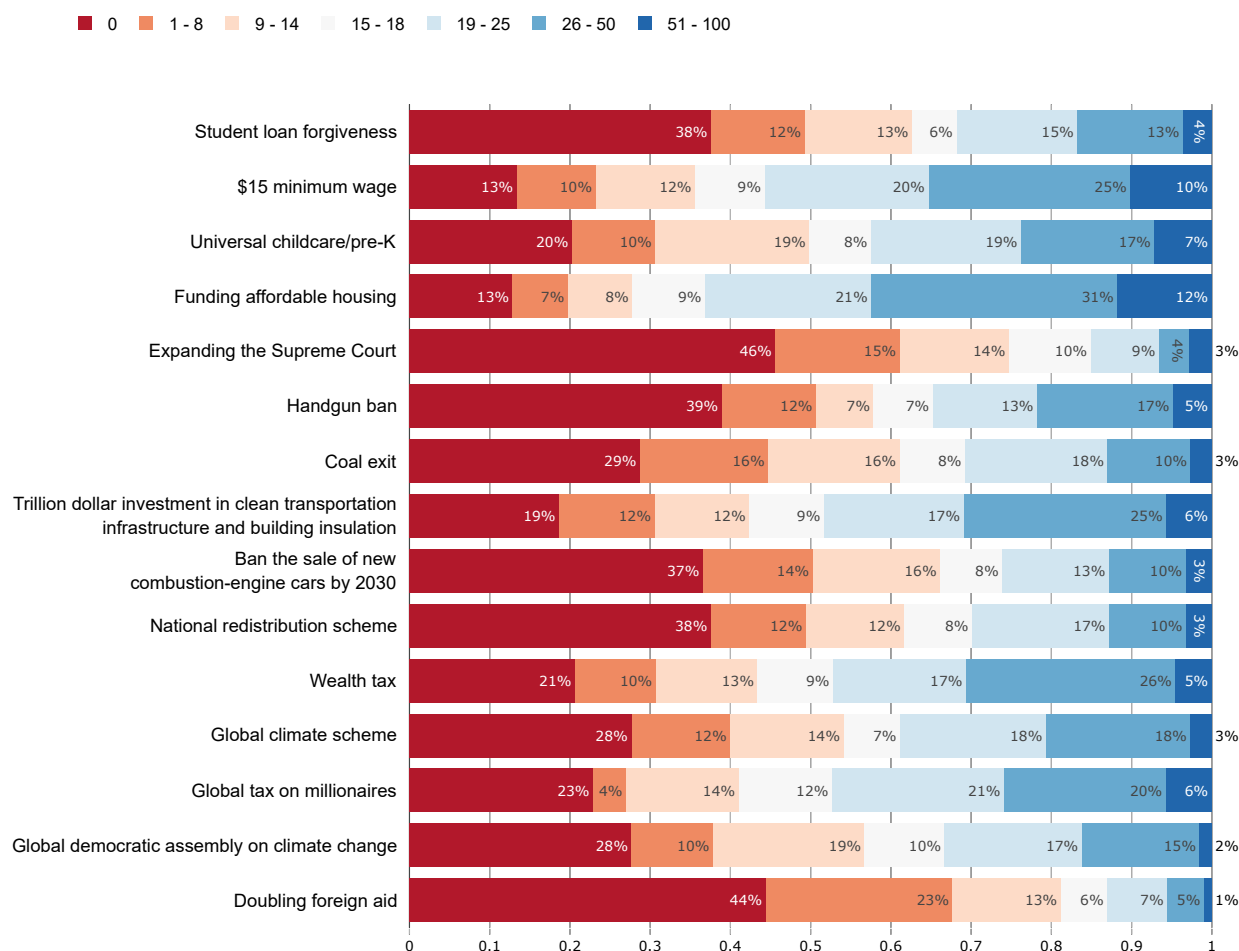
2.4 Second-order beliefs

To explain a strong support for G despite its absence from political platforms and the public debate, we hypothesized pluralistic ignorance, i.e. that most people and policymakers wrongly perceive G as unpopular. People would then hide their support for such globally redistributive policies, knowing that advocating for them would be vain. We do not find any evidence of pluralistic ignorance in an incentivized question on the perceived support. On the contrary, people have quite accurate beliefs regarding the level of support for G. Indeed, the mean (resp. quartiles) perceived support is 52.0% (resp. 36, 53, 69%, n = 1,500) vs. an actual support of 53%. For the record, the second-order beliefs are equally accurate for R, with mean (resp. quartiles) perceived support of 54.7% (resp. 40, 55, 71%, n = 1,500) vs. 56%.

2.5 Universalistic values

Another hypothesis to explain the discrepancy between the lack of interest for global policies in the public debate despite a strong stated support is that opinions on the topic are weak and malleable. A way to test this is to ask broad question on people's values, to see whether their core values are consistent with universalism. Asked what group they defend when they vote (n = 3,000), 19% choose "sentient beings (humans and animals)",

Figure 4: Prioritization of policies. Each respondent faces six policies taken at random from the ones below and allocates 100 points among them to signal the strength of their support for each one (*n* = 3,000).

Legend: ■ 0 ■ 1 - 8 ■ 9 - 14 □ 15 - 18 □ 19 - 25 ■ 26 - 50 ■ 51 - 100

Policy	0	1-8	9-14	15-18	19-25	26-50	51-100
Student loan forgiveness	38%	12%	13%	6%	15%	13%	4%
$15 minimum wage	13%	10%	12%	9%	20%	25%	10%
Universal childcare/pre-K	20%	10%	19%	8%	19%	17%	7%
Funding affordable housing	13%	7%	8%	9%	21%	31%	12%
Expanding the Supreme Court	46%	15%	14%	10%	9%	4%	3%
Handgun ban	39%	12%	7%	7%	13%	17%	5%
Coal exit	29%	16%	16%	8%	18%	10%	3%
Trillion dollar investment in clean transportation infrastructure and building insulation	19%	12%	12%	9%	17%	25%	6%
Ban the sale of new combustion-engine cars by 2030	37%	14%	16%	8%	13%	10%	3%
National redistribution scheme	38%	12%	12%	8%	17%	10%	3%
Wealth tax	21%	10%	13%	9%	17%	26%	5%
Global climate scheme	28%	12%	14%	7%	18%	18%	3%
Global tax on millionaires	23%	4%	14%	12%	21%	20%	6%
Global democratic assembly on climate change	28%	10%	19%	10%	17%	15%	2%
Doubling foreign aid	44%	23%	13%	6%	7%	5%	1%

25% "humans", 34% "Americans", 15% "My family and myself", and the rest (7%) choose another group (mostly "My State or region" or "People sharing my culture or religion"). The first two categories can be described as universalist, and they represent close to one out of two people. The share of universalist even constitutes a majority (at 51%) of non-Republicans. When asked what should U.S. diplomats defend in international climate negotiations, only 14% prefer "U.S. interests, even if it goes against global justice"; 25% prefer global justice (mitigated or not by U.S. interests) and the bulk of respondents (37%) prefer "U.S. interests, to the extent it respects global justice" ($n = 3,000$). Finally, when asked to judge the extent to which climate change, global poverty and U.S. inequality are an issue, climate change is generally viewed as the biggest problem (with a mean of 0.40 once we recode answers between -2 and 2), followed by global poverty (0.20) and U.S. inequality (0.19, $n = 3,000$). Overall, answers to these broad value questions are consistent with half of Americans supporting global policies like G, as people find that global issues are among the biggest problems, almost half of them are universalist when they vote, and most of them wish that U.S. diplomats take into account global justice.

3 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 flagship policy, a Global climate scheme (G) 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 G 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 G, 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 our pre-registered hypotheses, we now need to formulate

new hypotheses.

We see four potential explanations for the scarce mention of globally redistributive policies in the public debate. Among the new hypotheses, the first two are variations of pluralistic ignorance, and the last two represent complementary (rather than substitute) explanations. First, there may be pluralistic ignorance of univeralistic values, of the support for G, or of the electoral advantage of endorsing it *among policy makers*. We intend to test this hypothesis by running a survey on Congress staffers and Members of the European Parliament. Second, there may be a more subtle form of pluralistic ignorance: although people correctly predict what people would answer to a survey question, they may view globally redistributive policies as unrealistic, perhaps because they have never reflected upon the fact that many people across the world hold univeralistic values and are supportive of global solidarity. Third, most people and perhaps even most policy makers may have simply never heard of G, let alone built their political ideas upon it. The ignorance of G itself seems supported by the feedback fields, where the most common answer is a variation upon "thank you for this interesting, thought-provoking survey". Fourth, most institutions are national: the largest scale votes take place at the national level, most media target a national audience, most commentators frame their discourse from a national perspective, and relations to foreign countries as conflictual. The prominence of national institutions may create a nationalistic bias in political thoughts, silencing the univeralistic values of people.

In any case, if any (or several) of the remaining hypotheses is confirmed by evidence, we could draw the same conclusion. There is a strong support for global policies that address climate change and global inequality, even in high-income countries, and the frontier of what is considered politically realistic might soon shift on this issue. Publishing evidence for this might actually contribute to garner more attention to global policies in the public debate and political platforms.

4 Methods

References

[1] K. B. Bolch, L. Ceriani, & L. F. López-Calva. The arithmetics and politics of domestic resource mobilization for poverty eradication. *World Development*, 2022.

[2] A. Dechezleprêtre, A. Fabre, T. Kruse, B. Planterose, A. Sanchez Chico, &

S. Stantcheva. Fighting climate change: International attitudes toward climate policies. *NBER Working Paper*, 2022.

[3] T. Douenne & A. Fabre. Yellow Vests, Pessimistic Beliefs, and Carbon Tax Aversion. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 2022.

[4] D. Klenert, L. Mattauch, E. Combet, O. Edenhofer, C. Hepburn, R. Rafaty, & N. Stern. Making carbon pricing work for citizens. *Nature Climate Change*, 2018.

[5] J. S. Mill. *Utilitarianism*. Oxford University Press, Oxford ; New York, 1861. ISBN 978-0-19-875163-2 978-0-19-875162-5.

[6] N. Stern & J. E. Stiglitz. Report of the High-Level Commission on Carbon Prices. Technical report, Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition, 2017.