Reviewing the sociotechnical dynamics of carbon removal

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Abstract: In recent years, carbon removal and associated net-zero energy technologies have emerged as serious options for policymakers and scientists to consider when trying to address climate change. How, where, and when to use these options effectively, however, is polemic, and research examining the social or justice dimensions of deployment—actual or prospective—remains uncommon. This Review provides an interdisciplinary and holistic perspective of the sociotechnical dynamics of carbon removal options. It employs a sociotechnical approach which reveals the different epistemic, economic, technical, social, political, and environmental elements necessary for a net-zero energy transition. In this Review, we first summarize seven broad classes of carbon removal—afforestation and reforestation, soil carbon sequestration, marine biomass and blue carbon, direct air capture with carbon storage, bioenergy with carbon capture and storage, enhanced weathering, and biochar. The Review then explores four critical sociotechnical areas in greater depth: modeling and assessment, social acceptance, innovation and scaling, and policy and governance. We conclude with implications for policy and research.

Keywords: carbon dioxide removal; negative emissions technologies; greenhouse gas removal; net-zero transition; climate engineering

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1. Introduction

The most recent United Nations climate agreement has set the goal of keeping global temperature change well below 2 °C. 1 2To achieve this goal, technologies such as greenhouse gas removal, hereafter called "carbon removal," are increasingly recognized as critically important by making it possible to capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it safely and durably. See Carbon removal has become a central feature in recent global discussions about the transition to net-zero energy systems that can, on balance, generate energy services without contributing to climate change. This is especially the case in "hard-to-abate" sectors of the economy such as aviation and industry. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently argued, carbon removal "is a necessary element to achieve net-zero carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas emissions both globally and nationally, counterbalancing residual emissions from hard-to-transition sectors" and it is a key element in scenarios likely to limit warming to 2°C or lower by 2100."

How, where, and when to use these options effectively, however, is very controversial, and research examining the social or justice dimensions of deployment—actual or prospective—is sparse. One particular option, bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS), by itself would require "unprecedented" new sociotechnical systems and alignment with global energy systems, a feat that would only be accomplished by "transformational upscaling" and "unprecedented technological, economic, socio-cultural and political effort." Other land-based options, such as afforestation or reforestation, could run the risk of exceeding planetary boundaries for land system change ¹², especially in the forestry sector. ¹³

The bulk of research on carbon removal addresses techno-economic aspects but rarely their social, legal, political and even ethical dimensions. ¹⁴ Anderson and Peters ¹⁵ argue that the bulk of integrated assessment models used to examine scenarios for reaching 2°C "assume that the large-scale rollout of negative-emission technologies is technically, economically, and socially viable." Van Vuuren and colleagues caution that the expected use of negative emissions technologies after 2050 will have a strong impact on emissions reduction strategies *now*, and that a "timely decision needs to be made on how much we want to limit (or even totally avoid) negative emissions technologies, or not." ¹⁶

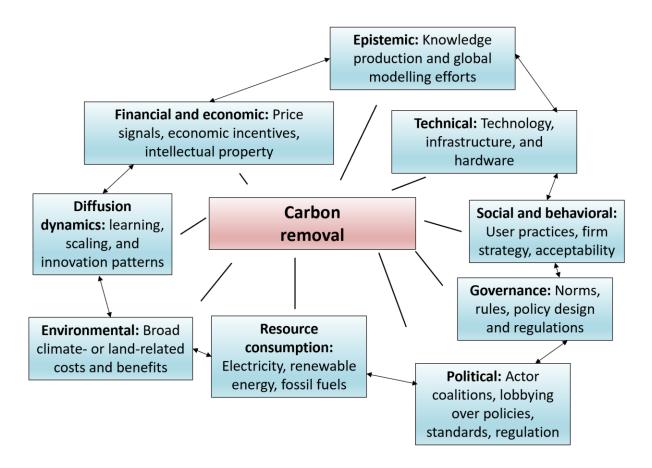
Yet, the pace of enhancing our understanding of innovation in these technologies, other than at the R&D stage, is nascent.¹⁷ Similarly, of all the options policymakers have to address

climate change, the economics, dynamics, and prospective management of carbon removal are one of the most poorly understood, given that pathways have a high degree of uncertainty, risks are complex, and that public acceptance and political support are unknown.¹⁸

This Review seeks to address some of these gaps, and it provides an urgently needed interdisciplinary and holistic perspective of carbon removal. Such state-of-the-art research is of critical importance in producing a comprehensive, up-to-date, multidisciplinary body of knowledge about future carbon removal pathways, along with, crucially, one more deeply rooted in the social sciences, especially for the research community and policy communities, and affected societies.

To do so, we employ a sociotechnical approach that considers not only the technology of carbon removal, but also how deployment will shape and be shaped by the broader and more heterogenous dimensions summarized by Figure 1. As Sovacool²⁰ summarizes, "the idea of a sociotechnical system helps reveal that technologies must be understood in their societal context, and that the different values expressed by inventors, managers, and consumers shape technological change." Such "systems thinking" reveals the different elements necessary for a new class of technology such as carbon removal to achieve widespread use, elements (shown in Figure 1) which furthermore interlink and coevolve together. It also maps onto the four core dimensions of the Review which will be introduced in Section 3.

Figure 1: Visualizing carbon removal as a sociotechnical system



Source: Authors, inspired from ²¹. The black bidirectional arrows are meant to depict the interconnected nature of the sociotechnical system, with each distinct dimension able to affect the other dimensions, and vice versa.

To be clear, a sociotechnical approach still features many of the technical aspects of carbon removal, such as power plants, carbon storage networks, solvents, materials, forest plantations, prospective carbon sinks, and other related technologies or infrastructures. But it also focuses on patterns of resource consumption (electricity, renewable energy, fossil fuels) and the financial mechanisms involved in research and deployment (inclusive of areas such as capital cost of building and operating technologies, business models and markets, and intellectual property). A sociotechnical approach includes political elements (national competitiveness, rivalry, regional cooperation) alongside environmental elements (removed and stored greenhouse gas emissions, a more stable climate, integration with renewable sources of energy, negative externalities) and even behavioral elements (such as the practices of endusers or firms). The approach therefore offers a more holistic assessment of carbon removal, one that seeks to better capture a more complete set of factors involved in any net-zero energy transition.

2. Conceptualizing seven carbon removal technologies and practices

The most recent IPCC report defines "carbon dioxide removal" as "anthropogenic activities removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and durably storing it in geological, terrestrial, or ocean reservoirs, or in products." A multitude of terms have arisen over the past few decades that seek to describe carbon removal, with some treating it as a reference class of "geoengineering" or "climate geoengineering," others using terms such as "carbon dioxide removal" or "greenhouse gas removal," and still others even describing options as parts of climate mitigation or adaptation. There is also an intense debate in the literature about whether assessments would do better to "split" to investigate very discrete options or "lump" them together by considering options collectively. 28 29

We sidestep such debates in this Review and focus instead on the seven particular classes of carbon removal technologies summarized by Table 1. The first of these is afforestation and reforestation. Both afforestation and reforestation aim to limit the effects of climate change by planting trees (over a period of at least 50 years³⁰), either where there were no trees before in the case of afforestation or where forests have been cut down or damaged for reforestation. As the trees grow, they absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, which is then stored for decades or longer. Some forms of tree harvesting also store carbon by embedding wood into construction material or other harvested wood products. Such measures might result in competition for land and water with agriculture and other uses, however. Also, if trees were harvested or happen to burn down, then the carbon dioxide would again be released into the atmosphere.

Table 1: Overview of seven approaches to carbon removal

Option	Picture	Description	Estimates for carbon removal and sequestration (in GtCo2/year)
Marine biomass and blue carbon	Carbon uptake through photosynthesis Mangroves Sagrass meadows Salt marshos Macroalgae Macroalgae	Harnessing the ability for coastal mangrove forests, tidal marshes, and seagrass meadows to accelerate their uptake of carbon dioxide	<1 (coastal wetlands)

Enhanced weathering and ocean alkalization	Crushed silicate rock Limestone deposit	Deploying physical or chemical mechanisms to accelerate the geochemical processes that naturally absorb CO ₂ at slow rates.	2-4 (enhanced weathering) and 1-100 (ocean alkalinity enhancement)
Direct air capture	Fans pull air across CO ₂ - absorbing liquid CO ₂ is converted into a carbonate solution and then pure carbon is separated.	Capturing carbon dioxide from the air via engineering or mechanical systems, and then using solvents or other techniques to store it safely	5-40

Bioenergy with carbon capture and storage	CO ₂ absorbed by trees CO ₂ compressed and transported to carbon sequestration site	Harnessing specific energy crops (e.g., perennial grasses, or short-rotation coppicing) or increased forest biomass to replace fossil fuels, and capturing and storing consequent carbon dioxide	0.5-11
Biochar	Some of the organic matter is converted to biochar Carbon returned to soil as biochar Heat	Managing the thermal degradation of organic material in the absence of oxygen to increase soil carbon stocks and improve soil fertility	0.3-6.6

Soil carbon sequestration or enrichment	Better land management builds carbon in soil	Growing cover crops, leaving crop residues to decay in the field, applying manure or compost, using low- or notill systems, and employing other land management techniques to improve soil	0.6-9.3
Afforestation and reforestation	CO ₂ absorbed by trees	Planting trees or vegetation to absorb carbon dioxide	0.5-10

Source: Compiled by the authors, with estimates for carbon removal and sequestration from Table TS:7 from the most recent IPCC report. Pictures for afforestation and reforestation, BECCS, and enhanced weathering, from ³¹. Pictures for soil carbon sequestration and biochar, from ³². Picture for marine biomass and blue carbon, from ³³.

Both marine biomass and blue carbon focus on improving the capacity of the Earth's oceans to store carbon dioxide. Blue carbon does this by restoring or growing ecosystems such as mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrass meadows, while marine biomass grows seaweeds or macroalgae. As all of these grow and mature, they absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere which can be stored for decades to centuries when it is taken up into sediments at the bottom of the ocean after they decay or are eaten by other animals and pass through the food chain. Whether such measures can be easily managed and implemented is uncertain however, given the number of actors involved. Also, if these ecosystems are disturbed or destroyed or the plants are harvested, then the carbon dioxide would again be released into the atmosphere.

Direct air capture with carbon storage utilizes very large fans to remove carbon dioxide directly from the air. Once the carbon dioxide is pulled into the fans, absorptive substances convert the carbon dioxide using a chemical process into a form that can be stored indefinitely underground. This measure takes up limited land but does require high amounts of energy along with being reliant on the availability of geological formations for carbon storage. As the technology is in the early stages of development being developed, it has also not yet been demonstrated to work at a large scale and costs are currently very high.

Bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) emphasizes growing and harvesting plants as a source of energy and thus carbon storage. As plants grow, they absorb carbon dioxide from the air. By burning these plants and/or capturing the carbon dioxide that is released through a chemical process, this measure can provide energy for homes and businesses or be stored underground indefinitely. Such techniques might result in competition for land and water with agriculture and other uses, however. It is also reliant on the availability of geological formations for carbon storage and has not yet been demonstrated to be work at a large scale.

Enhanced weathering works by increasing the ability of rocks to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. As rocks such as limestone and basalt are exposed to natural processes like rain, wind, or the action of waves, they are ground down, which allows them to absorb carbon dioxide from the air. However, this process takes place extremely slowly, so this measure looks to speed it up by physically or chemically grinding the rocks before placing them onto agricultural lands, beaches, or next to rivers. Over time, rocks and their stored carbon dioxide are ultimately stored in oceans indefinitely. Whether this measure will work at a large scale is uncertain however, as is whether the need for rocks will cause negative ecological and human health impacts (and greater energy use) from additional mining and extraction.

Soil carbon sequestration seeks to change agricultural and land-management techniques in order to store more carbon dioxide in the Earth's soils. For instance, by planting different crops, leaving crop residues on the field, or increasing the number of trees on agricultural lands, this measure could help remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and bury it underground for decades to centuries. No additional land would be required, and it is possible to also improve soil quality. Whether farmers and land managers are willing to consistently implement these techniques is uncertain, however. Also, if agricultural practices are not sustained, the carbon dioxide would again be released into the atmosphere.

Lastly, biochar removes carbon by converting organic material, whether from plants or animals, into a form of charcoal. By heating such material in the absence of oxygen, it is possible to remove carbon dioxide from the air which, if mixed into the soil, can be stored for decades to centuries. This measure does not require more land while also having the chance to improve soil quality. Whether farmers and land managers are willing to consistently implement these techniques is uncertain, however. Its need for biomass may also result in competition with other uses such as fuel or electricity.

Over time, the understanding of what constitutes "geoengineering" has evolved, to the point where "carbon removal" and "solar radiation management" are increasingly, though not exclusively, considered separately, as distinct options for tackling the climate crisis. This is occurring for various reasons, though one is the increasing acceptance of carbon removal as an option in, e.g., IPCC modelling³⁴ along with concerns that solar geoengineering might constitute an unwanted distraction and/or moral hazard for broader mitigation efforts.³⁵ ³⁶ ³⁷ In part, it is necessary to pushback on this received wisdom, notably, given that it forecloses discussion of portfolios which might employ both kinds of technologies, even potentially in sequence, ³⁸ ³⁹ ⁴⁰ not to mention the tendency for what is taken as a "distraction" from climate mitigation to evolve over time. ⁴¹ ⁴² Accordingly, and in order to adequately reflect the entirety of the literature on public acceptance of carbon removal, we also here consider studies, particularly those conducted closer to the start of the last decade, wherein there was not such a strong distinction between "carbon removal" and "geoengineering", broadly understood.

Many carbon removal options intersect with net-zero energy technologies, which Azevedo and colleagues define as "energy systems that emit no net CO2 and potentially no net greenhouse gases." Such net-zero transitions are required across a number of sectors such as electricity and power generation huildings, transport, and agriculture (to name a few), with increasing per-ton costs for carbon abated, as Figure 2 indicates. In this way, carbon removal becomes an *energy* policy and security issue because various forms of removal are

advocated to compensate for energy sector emissions, and many forms also have different energy inputs. However, net-zero energy technologies have radically different characteristics in innovation, performance and operations, governance trends and even modeling from the conventional energy systems of today.⁴⁸ Moreover, there is still the issue of handling legacy CO2 emissions, which is where carbon removal can play a role, depending on its per-ton cost, of helping to substitute for increasingly costly solutions to abate emissions and/or helping to deal with legacy emissions. Net negative emissions technologies and carbon removal are thus tightly coupled at many layers of the sociotechnical system.

1,000 Current global Carbon Abatement Curve emissions continue to rise Carbon abatement cost (US\$/t CO₂eq) 800 700 The cost of carbon abatement rises 600 quickly at larger 500 volumes 400 300 None of this addresses legacy CO2 already in the atmosphere 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40 42 44 46 48 50 52 Cumulative GHG emissions abatement potential (Gt CO₂eq) ■ Transport

Figure 2: Global carbon abatement curve for various net-zero technologies and climate pathways

Source: 49

3. Four critical areas of carbon removal research: Assessment, policy, innovation, and behavior

A sociotechnical lens applied to the seven carbon removal options in Section 2 brings into focus four very different, but salient, dimensions related to future research, deployment, policy, and governance. These four dimensions are all cross-cutting in that they involve multiple elements of the sociotechnical system (technology, behavior, policy and politics, resources, finances, and the environment), and some of them involve all elements. We will return to how these four dimensions themselves interact, and germinate interconnections, in Section 4.

3.1 Assessments: From global modelling to critical reflection and multiple scales, actors, and mixed-methods designs

This particular dimension intersects with the epistemic and political aspects of the sociotechnical framework. Building on the recent publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report, 50 academic communities (reflected in both formal research communities supporting carbon removal⁵¹ as well as less formal knowledge networks and epistemic communities⁵²) have often recognized that the emergent strategy for carbon removal has emphasized a limited number of approaches – afforestation and reforestation, and a more unscaled and immature hybrid of bioenergy and carbon capture and storage. These particular emissions pathways were first prominently featured in the Fifth Assessment Report⁵³ and the Special Report on 1.5C.⁵⁴ IPCC pathways have since helped spur an initial wave of national and corporate commitments towards net-zero (or carbon and greenhouse gas neutrality) by 2050, and expanding efforts in innovation, incentivization, and regulation. The Integrated Assessment Modelling (IAM) community that constructs these pathways has gone to further efforts to expand the inclusion of social science, innovation, and policy inputs, highlighted in future programmes of work surrounding the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs), which further cluster mitigation options into sets of "futures" defined by high and low challenges to mitigation or adaptation.⁵⁵

Such modelling efforts, moreover, are not purely technical or scientific, but inherently social and political. Lahn traced the scientific work being done on carbon budgets within the IPCC and identified multiple pressures from scientists to advocate for their work, to be policy relevant, and to include political parameters in their modelling.⁵⁶ This "modifying-work", consequently, has shaped not only the size and scope of carbon budget assessments but also the adoption of new net-zero targets and social campaigns around divestment and the stranding of fossil-fuel assets. Edwards similarly examined computer-modeling efforts within the IPCC and the broader climate change community, and documented a healthy debate and controversy within particular models and scenarios, which only became misconstrued once taken up by the media and manipulated by particular lobbies.⁵⁷ As he went on to write:

Like most true infrastructures, the climate knowledge infrastructure is made up of many interlocking technical systems representing many links and layers of systems and structure, most of which long predate the IPCC. The assessment process ... has created imperatives, structures, and processes that link a vast array of knowledge producers and bring their disparate methods and products to bear on a common project.⁵⁸

Contestation and disagreement are a normal part about how such iterative climate science is done, and it means climate knowledge is messy—full of countless versions and interpretations, dependent on an ever-expanding base of evidence and refinement, and reliant on entirely new forms of intergovernmental organization. Edwards concludes that these features make global climate science akin to "trying to make a movie out of still photographs shot by millions of different photographers using thousands of different cameras".⁵⁹ More recently, Low et al. explored how similar processes of divergence and contestation hold true for carbon-removal scenario building. ⁶⁰ In their study, anticipatory assessments of climate interventions were labelled as perpetually "undone science," given that explorations of the emerging societal dimensions of climate pathways required new modes of disciplinary expertise, qualitative and deliberative practices, and degrees of stakeholder involvement that modelling processes have difficulty navigating.

Resonantly described as part of a "cartography of pathways" 61 62, carbon-removal-heavy scenarios have thus been critiqued, defended, nuanced, and further expanded. Initial criticism came from social science and policy analysis, pointing out the perceived feasibility of otherwise implausible climate targets – firstly, by creating the concept of a temporary, near-term 'overshoot' of temperature targets under the Paris agreement, to be drawn down by carbon removal approaches in later decades, and furthermore, by doing so through socio-technical approaches that were unproven and speculative at scale. 63 64 In (the leadup to) AR6, modelling efforts have in turn responded by nuancing the scope of carbon removal, and by limiting overshoot in pathways. 65 66 67

Critique has been also expanded into interrogation of IAMs – that pathways have not simply mapped alternative mitigation options, but functionally shepherded global climate policy into developing carbon removal⁶⁸; that largely-hidden parameters within modelling heavily influence what options emerge (e.g. the discount rate⁶⁹); on model-centric prioritization of techno-economic solutions in response to policy targets⁷⁰; and that IAMs have a demonstrably long history of meeting targets with "technological promises".⁷¹ Much critique takes place in the context of "mitigation deterrence"⁷², historically and still colloquially referenced as a "moral hazard"⁷⁴: that the promise of far-off carbon removal presents systemic disincentives to undertake deep-lying decarbonization.⁷⁵ ⁷⁶ ⁷⁷ ⁷⁸ Some studies have attempted to gauge the amount and type of emissions that might be avoided by the prospect of carbon removal.⁷⁹ ⁸⁰

Mapping the "feasibility" of carbon removal approaches, in particular, has grown, especially insofar as it identifies a misalignment between priorities and contexts that are

techno-economic (for IAMs) vs. socio-political or environmental (for other observers). ⁸¹ Calls have therefore emerged exploring how more multi-disciplinary, local-to-regional criteria for examining how carbon removal can be integrated into models and adjoining assessments. ⁸² ⁸³ ⁸⁴ Further thought has gone into the inclusion of non-quantitative social science knowledge into IAM work, and the expansion of modelling into a more multi-scale, mixed-methods, and actor-focused (from industry, to local communities, to national and regional polities) mode of assessment. ⁸⁵ ⁸⁶ ⁸⁷ ⁸⁸ ⁸⁹ ⁹⁰ Particular shortcomings within carbon removal modelling, and areas of needed improvement, include social and political drivers ⁹¹ and geopolitics ⁹², small-scale experiments and pilot demonstrations ⁹³, ethics, equity, and justice ⁹⁴, and connections to biodiversity ⁹⁵, as well as possible synergies or trade-offs with the Sustainable Development Goals. ⁹⁶ ⁹⁷ ⁹⁸ Crucially, calls are emerging for a focus on the thus-far elided perspectives of the Global South. ⁹⁹

A key aspect of this work, in light of the potential incorporation of carbon removal into Nationally Determined Contributions and into carbon offsetting and trading, is on carbon accounting assessments for life cycle emissions¹⁰⁰, supply chains¹⁰¹, and storage¹⁰² that would stretch unevenly for different kinds of carbon removal across different timelines and geographies¹⁰³. Additionally, there is a pressing need to expand assessment beyond the initial focus on agricultural and forestry management approaches such as BECCS and afforestation and reforestation¹⁰⁴, to consider distributional impacts and the question of who pays¹⁰⁵, and highlight the risks of incorporating removals in markets.¹⁰⁶ In-depth, multidisciplinary, and politically oriented assessments in other spheres – such as DACCS¹⁰⁷, enhanced weathering, or marine and other ocean-based approaches¹⁰⁸ – are only just beginning.

3.2 Social acceptance: Community engagements and perceptions

This dimension connects with the social and behavioral as well as environmental aspects of the sociotechnical framework. An adjoining literature on public understanding and acceptance of carbon removal technologies has increased in scale, complexity, and geographic focus over the past decade. When it comes to the methodology employed, quantitative approaches (and surveys in particular) have tended to dominate, accounting for more than half of all studies. While an additional third have employed qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, only eight of all studies have utilized a mixed-methods approach, for instance, by combining surveys with deliberative workshops or an economic experiment. 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116

Despite the existence of some methodological diversity, the same is less true when it comes to the geographic scope of public-understanding research. As illustrated by Figure 3, a few countries are starkly over-represented in the literature, notably, the United Kingdom (22 times), United States (20), and, to a slightly lesser extent, Germany (13). Together, these countries account for more than 60% of times that a country is included in a research study. No other country appears more than five times, with countries such as Switzerland, Australia, Japan, and Sweden the next-most studied. Quite critically, only seven countries from the Global South have been examined, with China the only one to be considered twice. Of these seven, all but one is in Asia and Oceania, that being Kenya. No country in Latin America has yet been the focus of research.

■ 20 or more ■ 10 to 15 ■ 3 to 5 ■ 1 or 2

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Figure 3: Geographic Focus of Research on the Social Acceptance of Carbon Removal

Source: Authors.

In addition, there is a significant tendency for research on this topic to focus on a single country, often with a focus on only one technology or by looking at "carbon dioxide removal" as a suite of "climate geoengineering" (see Figure 4). Of the 57 studies that we catalogued, less than a quarter have employed a cross-country design: six surveys; 117 118 119 120 121 122 five focus groups and/or interviews; 123 124 125 126 127 and three with mixed methods. 128 129 130 For the most part, such studies tend to compare views of the public in western, industrialized countries to one another, with the most frequent pairings including United States and United Kingdom, either on their own or with a couple of other countries. Moreover, only three studies have employed a cross-country design to compare and contrast perceptions in the Global North with

those in the Global South.¹³¹ ¹³² ¹³³ All of these, however, only explore views on a single technology, notably BECCS, or for the topic of geoengineering in general.

Figure 4: Breakdown of Studies with Cross-Country Design

Source: Authors. The three studies that are outlined represent those that included at least one country from the Global South. Although Bostrom et al.¹³⁴ does include Bangladesh, this amounts to only 25 undergraduate students versus, for instance, nearly 300 in Austria and around 150 in both Norway and Germany.

Number of technologies

Lastly, given the predominant reliance on surveys in the literature, including as part of mixed-method designs, some discussion of the kinds of surveys conducted is required. To give a sense of how this research has been conducted, an overview of all surveys exploring multiple technologies is provided in Table 2 (also, we provide a full enumeration of all studies on public acceptance and their relevant factors in the Supplementary Material). The principal explanandum of such research is acceptance or support for the technology in question – or, e.g., geoengineering or CDR in general – and, as a secondary aspect, perceptions of risks and benefits. At the same time, what is notable is how research has tended to focus on a handful of factors to explain public perceptions. In particular, most studies have inquired on prior familiarity or knowledge on geoengineering or certain technologies ¹³⁵ ¹³⁶ ¹³⁷ ¹³⁸ ¹³⁹ ¹⁴⁰ ¹⁴¹ and perceptions of and concern about climate change. ¹⁴² ¹⁴³ ¹⁴⁴ ¹⁴⁵ ¹⁴⁶ ¹⁴⁷ ¹⁴⁸ ¹⁴⁹ ¹⁵⁰ ¹⁵¹ ¹⁵² ¹⁵³ Values have also played a prominent role, typically drawing on the value orientations scale, ¹⁵⁴ ¹⁵⁵ which enables studies to explore the relative impacts of altruistic, egoistic, and biospheric values on individual attitudes. ¹⁵⁶ ¹⁵⁷ ¹⁵⁸ ¹⁵⁹ ¹⁶⁰ ¹⁶¹ ¹⁶²

Table 2: Surveys of carbon removal perceptions looking at multiple technologies

Authors	Year	Journal	Countries	Sample Size	Carbon removal technologies included	Measures
Campbell-	Tour	Climatic	United	SILC	CDR in general; BECCS;	Perceived threat of climate change; Support for
Arvai et al.	2017	Change	States	N=984	DACCS; Reforestation	climate change mitigation; Political ideology
Braun et al.	2018	Climate	Germany	N=3526	Afforestation; SAI	Awareness; Attitudes towards risk; Environmental beliefs (NEP); Perceived seriousness of climate change; Trust in institutions; Acceptance; Attitudes; Value orientations; Cognitive reflection
Merk et al.	2019	GAIA	Switzerland	N=891	BECCS; SAI	Familiarity; Perceived risks and benefits; Support for research and deployment
Wolske et al.	2019	Climatic Change	United States	N=980	Afforestation; DACCS; BECCS	Familiarity; Tampering with nature; Aversion to tampering with nature; Support
aı.	2019	Change	States	11-900	DACCS; BECCS; Afforestation;	Subjective knowledge; Perceived risks and
Jobin and		Risk			Biochar; Enhanced weathering; Ocean fertilization; Soil carbon sequestration; SAI; Cloud	benefits; Tampering with nature; Trust in science/institutions; Support for research/deployment; Concern about climate
Siegrist	2020	Analysis	Switzerland	N=1575	brightening; Mirrors in space	change
	2020	Technology		N. (70	DECCG GAI	Perception of climate change; Severity of climate change threat; Positive and negative affect; Perceived risks and benefits; Perceived fairness; Trust in decision-makers; Trust in society; Locus of control; Subjective norm; Tampering with nature; Ecological behavior; Acceptance;
Klaus et al.	2020	in Society	Germany	N=678	BECCS; SAI	Behavioral intentions
Sweet et al.	2021	Climatic Change	United States	N=1222	Soil carbon storage (with and without biochar); BECCS; DACCS; Afforestation	Climate change beliefs; Aversion to tampering with nature; Perceived naturalness; Support for CDR
Wenger et	2021	Climatic		N. 602	BECCS; DACCS; biochar; afforestation; soil carbon	Tampering with nature; Trust in responsible actors; Perceived risks and benefits; Support for CDR;
al.	2021	Change	Switzerland	N=693	sequestration	Affective evaluation

Note: Details for Merk et al. (2019) pertain to the first of the two surveys, since this was the only one to include multiple technologies. DACCS stands for Direct Air Capture with Carbon Storage: BECCS stands for Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage. CDR stands for Carbon Dioxide Removal. SAI stands for stratospheric aerosol injection.

Other studies have looked at the role of environmental beliefs in particular, almost exclusively using the New Ecological Paradigm scale¹⁶³.¹⁶⁴. ¹⁶⁵. ¹⁶⁶. ¹⁶⁷. ¹⁶⁸. ¹⁶⁹ Still others, meanwhile, consider the impact of trust, whether in decision-makers, climate science, scientists, or various institutions. ¹⁷⁰. ¹⁷¹. ¹⁷². ¹⁷³. ¹⁷⁴. ¹⁷⁵. ¹⁷⁶. ¹⁷⁷. ¹⁷⁸. ¹⁷⁹.

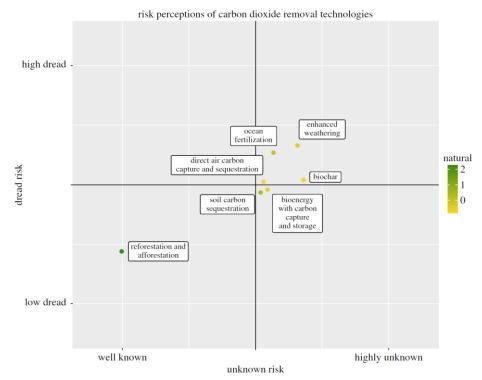
In view of the special importance of naturalness concerns in this context, ¹⁸⁰ ¹⁸¹ there is an undercurrent related to perceptions of the relationship between negative-emissions and geoengineering technologies and the natural world, ¹⁸² ¹⁸³ notably, through the "tampering with nature" factor. ¹⁸⁴ ¹⁸⁵ ¹⁸⁶ ¹⁸⁷ ¹⁸⁸ ¹⁸⁹ Recently, such interest has prompted development, validation, and application of the "aversion to tampering with nature" scale, which offers a corresponding individual factor to perceptions that a technology tampers with the natural world. ¹⁹⁰ ¹⁹¹ ¹⁹² While still at a minimal level, several studies have tried to explore the role of affective factors. ¹⁹³ ¹⁹⁴ ¹⁹⁵ ¹⁹⁶ ¹⁹⁷ ¹⁹⁸ ¹⁹⁹

As a final note, we highlight another notable limitation, which is the principal focus on attitudes of the public instead of, e.g., intention or behavior. Indeed, only one study²⁰⁰ explicitly inquires about behavioral intentions, e.g., if participants would support a petition in favor or against the measure, might try to convince others, or would vote for a party or national referendum which took a stance one way or the other. Two other interesting exceptions include a survey by Klaus et al.²⁰¹ that established how type and stance of different information sources, i.e., of information use by individuals, affected acceptance of various geoengineering options. Furthermore, by means of a "framed field experiment", Merk et al.²⁰² not only looked at the potential risk of moral hazard from being informed about geoengineering but also, using a follow-up task, if this was reflected in the decision to purchase voluntary carbon offsets. Rather than pointing to evidence of moral hazard, they found that those informed were more likely to purchase offsets, that is, to attempt to mitigate their climate impact. Of course, the presently hypothetical nature of most geoengineering technologies limits the degree to which intentions or behavior can be explored, even if certain options are gradually becoming more feasible. Nevertheless, more such creative attempts would provide key insights into public acceptance.

As a result, there is a gap within the literature in terms of both the scope and breadth of understanding of carbon dioxide removal approaches, especially in view of the growing scientific and media attention to these as a potential option for dealing with global carbon budgets and climate targets.²⁰³ In sum, there is a need for more research that simultaneously explores and attempts to offers insights into perceptions of multiple climate-intervention technologies across multiple countries.

A final relevant theme concerns social opposition to the technologies, or resistance. As an example, one study noted a high amount of "dread" associated with carbon removal technologies, with variations in the level of dread evoked summarized in Figure 5.²⁰⁴ Bertram and Merk²⁰⁵ found in their review that direct injection of carbon dioxide was viewed "very negatively" and strongly opposed by the public, while Low et al. 206 catalogued 21 cases of opposition against ten early-stage enhanced weathering experiments (among other non-CDR based climate measures) and noted social opposition across all types, including terrestrial environments such as croplands and rangelands (e.g., the Guelph wollastonite trials, Working Lands Innovation Center, and Project Carbdown), coastal and marine environments (e.g., One Tree Reef, Project Vesta, OceanNETs,), and the mining sector (e.g. FPX Nickel Corporation trials or CarbonVaultTM). Cox et al.²⁰⁷ add that when one takes into consideration social opposition and lack of social acceptance, some options, such as iron fertilization, become completely infeasible and must be taken entirely off the table. In some situations, opposition is not to the technologies themselves, but the "place-blind" ways they are implemented, i.e., as being perceived as unfair or inequitable. ²⁰⁸ Furthermore, there is a growing tendency to aim at understanding not just the support or opposition for technologies in a broad sense but also their particular fit in different national or policy contexts as well as the particular concatenations of how they will be rolled-out and deployed. Other forms of opposition could therefore relate to a perceived inequity in the distribution of costs and benefits, whether within a given nation or between nations in a global context, or frustration over procedural issues of fairness and representation in policymaking and planning. 209 210

Figure 5: Risk perceptions of carbon removal technologies

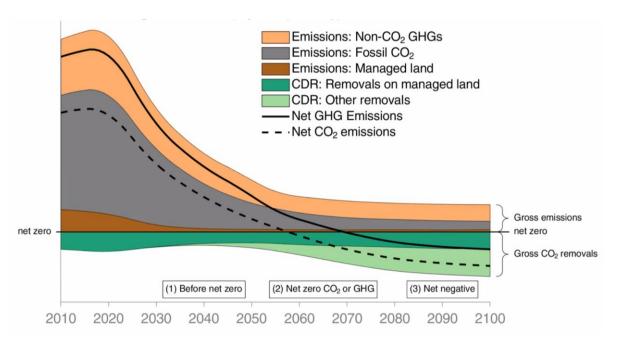


Source: ²¹¹ As noted by the authors, values stem from a survey of Amazon MTurk participants (N=113) and should not thus be considered a representative sample.

3.3 Innovation: Diffusion, learning and scaling

This dimension interrelates with the diffusion dynamics and technical aspects of the sociotechnical framework, as well as some of the epistemic and resource aspects. Understanding pathways for research, innovation, and technology diffusion for carbon removal is a third sociotechnical topic demanding further inquiry. Most of the modeling results discussed in Section 3.1 show that carbon removal needs to be scaled up massively to remove net gigatonnes of additional CO2 annually by mid-century²¹², a process which needs to begin soon given the decadal time scales inherent to technology adoption (see Figure 6) BECCS in particular would need to expand to restore the climate at the scale of billions of tons of additional production of fuels or building materials per year.²¹³

Figure 6: Stylized pathways for greenhouse gas emissions and carbon removal from 2010 to 2100



Source: ²¹⁴ Note: GHG = greenhouse gases, CDR = carbon dioxide removal.

However, previous work locating carbon removal papers in the process of innovation has identified many "knowledge gaps," including some of the up-scaling issues or side-effects shown in Table 3. These gaps extend far beyond mere "modeling gaps" to include gaps in empirical data, inconsistent data, and a lack of comprehensive field studies. For enhanced weathering, knowledge gaps may relate more to being able to detect experiments and attribute impacts, whereas for direct air capture knowledge gaps are more about upscaling and side-effects. Afforestation has gaps related to knowledge about land use practices, biochar and BECCS about soil quality and fertilizer use.

Table 3: Gaps in knowledge and evidence for selected carbon removal technologies

Technology	Category	Nature of field studies	Knowledge gaps
Enhanced weathering	Land-based and/or coastal (in application), ocean- based (for storage)	Unconstrained, transient, small scale, sometimes illegal	Detecting experiments, attributing impacts, upscaling issues, unanticipated side- effects
Direct air capture	Land-based, physical transport of carbon	Unconstrained, transient, medium scale	Upscaling issues, side- effects
Land-based carbon dioxide removal	Afforestation	Impermanent, large scale	MRV of forest management practices, permanence of emissions reductions
Biochar	Soil amendments	Unconstrained, transient, small to medium scale	Extent of fertilization use, interactions with

			other systems (water, air pollution)
BECCS	Bioenergy crop plantations	Unconstrained, transient, small to large scale	Extent of fertilizer use, interactions with other systems (water, air pollution)

Source: Modified substantially from ²¹⁵. MRV = monitoring, reporting, and verification.

Further research has revealed "innovation gaps"²¹⁶; most carbon-removal technology analyses are limited to the early stages of innovation (e.g., R&D) and have yet to seriously assess "demand pull"—market opportunities, policies, and niche markets that would stimulate their investment, improvement, and adoption. No comprehensive information exists on which private and public organizations are actively developing and patenting these technologies.

Some cutting-edge work has begun to address this. Nemet²¹⁷ places carbon removal within a taxonomy of low-carbon technology types captured in Figure 7. Such typologizing helps examine carbon removal technology in terms of possible scale, markets, adoption, system integration, and policy relevance.²¹⁸ Reliability among carbon removal options varies; some geological storage sites may be more secure than others, while others seek to store carbon in the biosphere or forests. Further, lifecycle emissions reduce net sequestration and add uncertainty, especially in the case of bioenergy for BECCS.²¹⁹ ²²⁰ Innovation accelerators for carbon removal could also have a role to play for technology push, knowledge spillovers, and demand pull that emerge from assessing both case studies as well as technology dynamics, adoption, and portfolio analysis.²²¹

Technology type Innovation model Low-carbon target High-tech, iterative, disruptive Low-tech, small, 2. distributed Large, system 3. integration intensive Artificial General purpose Supply factors Demand factors niche public demondemand R&D scale up strations markets pull accept Example feedbacks

Figure 7: Typologies of technologies and innovation dynamics for carbon removal

Source: 222 223

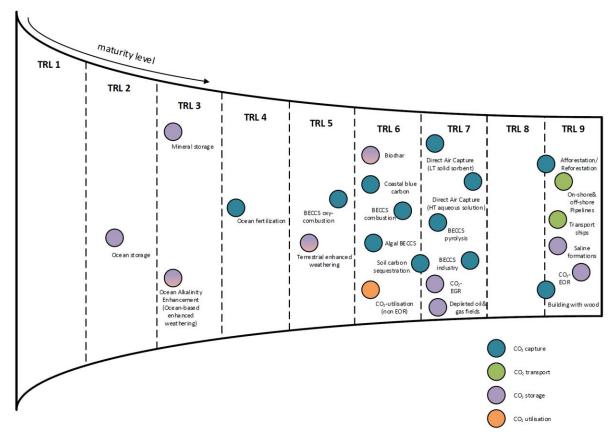
A final innovation challenge relates to the heterogeneity of particular carbon removal options themselves, in terms of readiness. One helpful framework for examining the readiness of a technology is the "Technology Readiness Level," or TRL. TRLs are a widely used conceptual metric and framework for systematically measuring and managing technologies over different parts of the journey from invention to maturity²²⁴. Nine TRLs are often identified in order to track the status of development progression:

- 1. Initial idea: basic principles have been defined
- 2. Application formulated: concept and application of solution have been formulated
- 3. Concept needs validation: solution needs to be prototyped and applied
- 4. Early prototype: prototype proven in test conditions
- 5. Large prototype: components proven in conditions to be deployed
- 6. Full prototype at scale: prototype proven at scale in conditions to be deployed
- 7. Pre-commercial demonstration: solution working in expected conditions
- 8. First-of-a-kind commercial: commercial demonstration, full-scale deployment in final form
- 9. Commercial operation in relevant environment: solution is commercially available, needs evolutionary improvement to stay competitive

The TRL framework is increasingly used and expanded as a springboard to investigate the social dimensions of new or experimental technologies, especially in the context of climate change mitigation or decarbonization. ²²⁵ ²²⁶ ²²⁷ ²²⁸

In Figure 8, we draw from a recent review of carbon removal-experiments to depict the specific TRLs for 24 specific applications of our seven types of carbon removal. The TRL diagram has three implications for research and policy. First, it requires the horizontal or vertical coupling together of different elements of the sociotechnical system, such as capture, transport, or storage. As the diagram indicates, some options (in blue) deal only with the carbon capture element of carbon removal, such as afforestation, direct air capture, or BECCS. Others, in green, deal only with transport, such as pipelines or ships. Options in purple deal almost entirely with storage, such as biochar, mineral storage, or ocean storage. One option in orange could even be used (or misused) via direct air capture to promote advanced oil recovery and enhanced fossil fuel use.²²⁹ Second, it illustrates very different levels of readiness, with some options (ocean storage, mineral storage) having low TRLs, and on the cusp of basic research; conversely, options such as afforestation or storage in saline formations are fully developed and commercialized. Other options such as enhanced weathering, BECCS, and direct air capture fall into the middle. Each therefore exist at a different stage of research, development, and deployment and may need very different support mechanisms; in short, there is no "onesize-fits-all" policy to assist and promote carbon removal innovation. Third, given many of the options have low- to mid-TRLs, there is great uncertainty about future deployment and performance; some options may never actually achieve readiness nor escape their lower-bound TRLs.

Figure 8: Visualizing the Technological Readiness Levels for Carbon Removal Options and Particular Applications



Source: Authors, modified from ²³⁰. Note: we also include the technologies themselves given that, among other things, these help to provide reference for how particular applications can vary depending how and in which sector the technology is applied.

Existing experiments, and accompanying learning processes, may not be attuned to overcoming innovation gaps and may not necessarily help to advance options to graduate out of the early-stage TRLs. One review noted, for example, that for ocean-based and marine carbon-removal options, experiments remain limited to very small scales, run over limited periods of time, function as one-off events, and have little capability to scale up.²³¹ Yet experiments that are larger and cut across national or even transboundary locations will be even more challenging to monitor, regulate, and approve.²³² Existing supply chains for biomass, similarly, are not extensive enough to move beyond smaller, more distributed BECCS facilities.²³³ Scaling up of both BECCS and direct air capture are limited and have challenges in the form of unclear monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) or high energy costs per ton of captured or avoided carbon dioxide; increasing conflicts over land use or biodiversity; and competition from wind and solar that undercut the need for storage (i.e., because mitigation is cheaper) or for bioenergy (since biomass is more expensive).²³⁴ Scaling up of carbon storage, especially in saline aquifers or at other underground geological sites, will also face extreme limits; they need to grow at no less than 10% per year every year from 2020, and yet the

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine warned²³⁵ that "scale-up could be limited by materials shortages, regulatory barriers, infrastructure development (i.e., CO2 pipelines and renewable electricity), the availability of trained workers, and many other barriers."

3.4 Policy: Firm behaviour, carbon accounting, and regulation

This dimension connects to the governance and financial aspects of the sociotechnical framework. Policy formation for carbon removal is nascent but escalating²³⁶. The European Commission has issued a communique that frames and develops a number of agricultural, forestry, and marine-space management approaches as "carbon farming", in the context of "sustainable carbon cycles." ²³⁷ Mappings of policy contexts and efforts – existing, stillforming, or needed – are taking place primarily in OECD states²³⁸, as well as supported by the European Green Deal²³⁹. Main strands within this body of work on policy design include incremental modification of existing policy – notably, upscaled incentives for direct air capture in the United States under the 45Q tax-credit program, as part of the newly legislated Inflation Reduction Act. This includes incentives being increased from \$50 to \$180/ton for carbon which is stored underground, a tenfold reduction in the capture thresholds needed to qualify, direct payment of tax credits for small businesses, and the extension of the deadline for breaking ground by a decade.²⁴⁰ Other related developments include policies treating emissions reductions and removals as fungible (a cornerstone for the functioning of carbon markets²⁴²), and support for niche technological development.²⁴³ At the same time, such efforts need to remain vigilant and wary of the risks to marketization and perverse outcomes that we will also explore in this section.

In terms of firm behavior, there are many incentives for businesses to try to utilize their supply chains or strategies to involve carbon removal. One review found multiple areas of carbon removal that could be monetized by businesses, including²⁴⁴:

- forest-related payments for ecosystem services or tourism revenue (for afforestation);
- heat sales, electricity sales, or waste-treatment charges (for BECCS);
- Heat sales, electricity sales, soil amendments or enhanced agricultural productivity (for biochar);
- Sale of pure carbon as feedstock (for direct air capture);
- Sale of sand, pebbles, formed carbonates, paper and fertilizer (for enhanced weathering);
- Increased fisheries yields or marine conservation (for marine-based approaches).

These reasons may be why so much climate finance and equity has recently been put into carbon removal options, with the Biden Administration committing \$3.5 billion to regional direct air carbon capture hubs in May 2022, although it is unclear whether the carbon dioxide will be utilized (i.e., for synfuels) or lead to longer term carbon storage. The State of New York has passed its "Carbon Dioxide Removal Leadership Act", a first-ever, state-level bill aiming to advance near-term deployment and scaling-up through, inter alia, an advance market commitment to purchase durable carbon removal. The City of Ottawa recently unveiled a \$2.6 billion Carbon Capture Tax Credit for Energy Sector to help industry finance net-zero ambitions (including carbon removal). In addition, Finland became the first country in May 2022 to have enshrined their commitment to not just carbon neutrality but indeed "carbon negativity" into law, setting a goal of 2040. With support from Google, Stripe similarly announced a \$925 million carbon removal fund (Frontier) in April 2022. Conceived as its own "advance market commitment", Frontier was established with other major big technology firms such as Meta (Facebook), Shopify, and McKinsey Sustainability, and it attempts to act as a "startup accelerator" so that companies invited into Frontier's portfolio have access to advanced capital to develop and scale selected carbon removal technologies. 245 To be very accurate, there is both an element of an "advance market commitment" as well as of an "offtake agreement", where Frontier pledges to buy a certain amount of carbon removal as soon as available (useful if a start-up needs to demonstrate to a bank that they have customers waiting).²⁴⁶ ²⁴⁷ Elsewhere, Lowercarbon Capital has raised \$350 million to support carbon removal start-ups in 2022. And this does not count further private sector support to firms such as Climeworks (CarbFix project in Iceland), Carbon Engineering, Global Thermostat, Infinitree LLC and Skytree.²⁴⁸ Other revenues could come from ancillary markets associated with carbon removal such as water markets and rights in rural areas²⁴⁹, as well as carbon offsetting and emissions credits markets.²⁵⁰ That said, consensus does not yet exist on the optimal balance between the level of carbon removals and how it affects emissions abatement, and the ability for emissions trading systems to achieve net-zero targets has yet to be tested in global carbon markets.²⁵¹

However, since carbon is primarily a waste product, business models are constrained – represented by a currently limited range of second-life uses (e.g., construction materials, synthetic fuels), a still-unscaled CCS infrastructure, early DACCS projects, biochar, and forestry credit-generation projects for voluntary carbon markets. Calls for adequate carbon pricing are ubiquitous, both to escalate niche technological development and to set the stage for more strongly regulated carbon markets and trading ²⁵² ²⁵³ ²⁵⁴ Some highlight the emerging

potential of incorporating carbon removal into the revival of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme.²⁵⁵

Adjoined are calls to improve monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) as part of carbon accounting and accreditation – strongly motivated by historic difficulties in establishing additionality in projects developed through the now-defunct Clean Development Mechanism and the ongoing REDD+ mechanism, as well as the long-running but questionable practice of developing cheap credits from forestry projects (in tropical developing countries) for voluntary carbon markets²⁵⁶ ²⁵⁷. Disguising the delay of emissions reductions within carbon removal is an overarching concern. Three dangerous "non-equivalences" exist in treating distinct (i) approaches (e.g. biogenic or nature-based forestry practices vs. engineered e.g. DACCS), (ii) geographies, and (iii) permanence (or time-lengths of storage), as fungible²⁵⁸. Others similarly call for future net-zero commitments to clearly specify their emissions baskets, their variegated timelines, and whether they are to be achieved by reductions, removals, or offsets.²⁵⁹

A key element of new regulations for offsets is defining what sectors and emissions baskets are "hard-to-abate" or "residual" (left over after as much meaningful reduction as possible has taken place) – and therefore first in line in eligibility for offsets.²⁶⁰ Combining insights from the "non-equivalence" of different carbon removal approaches with potential efforts by industries to self-define as "hard-to-abate", many argue for the need to separate industry and aviation from using offsets derived from biogenic or nature-based approaches.²⁶¹.

Accordingly, many call for closer scrutiny of industry and corporate actors²⁶², where commitments towards net zero have escalated in recent years²⁶³. There are adjoining concerns that carbon removal presents opportunities for innovation actors to use the promise of future up-scaling for creating phantom commodities that eventually fail but will momentarily enrich initial founders and investors, or are incorporated into incumbent industries as incremental and fringe efforts²⁶⁴. A related recommendation calls for the separation of targets for emissions reduction and carbon removal, with the goal of preventing the latter from substituting for the former in developing future net-zero commitments.²⁶⁵ A legitimate debate also exists concerning whether the marketization of carbon removal is a positive or negative phenomenon, given that some forms of policy mechanisms that treat removals as homogenous could create perverse outcomes. Examples of such market failure or abuse already occur in forest management and conservation²⁶⁶ ²⁶⁷ as well as previous trading regimes for carbon credits under the Kyoto Protocol.²⁶⁸

Many proposals go beyond carbon pricing, markets, and offsets, to focus on multi-level policy levers, financing, and long-term roadmaps.²⁶⁹ ²⁷⁰ ²⁷¹ These also call for combinations of

"incentives and mandates" targeting key industries – such as repurposing the assets of the oil and gas sector in relation to DACCS²⁷², or agriculture and biomass with relation to BECCS, and fertilizer and waste rock with relation to enhanced weathering²⁷³. The long arc of solar-photovoltaics development is cited as an analogy for DACCS systems, where a combination of targeted early investments and a range of niche applications that developed advanced materials and expanded business models have contributed to a now un-arrestable progress.²⁷⁴

Co-benefits for industry and communities are stressed for up-scaling initial, near-term demonstration efforts, with an eye towards portfolios of approaches catered to local-to-regional technical, socio-economic, and regulatory contexts.²⁷⁶ ²⁷⁷ A lurking but incoming issue will be on how to square MRV processes that currently focus on carbon management – already a difficult prospect due to varied supply chains, life cycles, storage permanence, and geographies – with the incorporation of even more varied societal co-benefits.²⁷⁸

Many accordingly call for policy formation with an eye to climate justice and equity. The key point here is that policy for aiding innovation is not enough; regulation to prevent incoming carbon removal efforts from being captured by incumbent interests must be forestalled by policy guardrails. Furthermore, incentivization of carbon removal requires concerted stakeholder participation and meaningful co-design²⁷⁹ (also covered in detail section 3.2 on public and social acceptance), to ensure that historic inequities – the dominance of the Global North in agenda-setting and technological capacity, in land grabs for carbon stocks or pollution exporting, and asymmetrical power relations – are not repeated. 280 281 282 This has been especially demonstrable in the terrestrial carbon removal approaches that intersect with agricultural, forestry, and ecosystems management – where food vs. fuel vs. fiber conflicts and monoculture plantations offer ample negative precedents²⁸³ ²⁸⁴. Here, developing new carbon removal projects offers opportunities to improve tenure and rights for millions of smallholders, and to develop more nuanced mixed-uses of terrestrial space that combine preserving or regrowing carbon stocks with ecosystems services or crop growing²⁸⁵. These conversations – on improving MRV, on diverse mixed-uses, and on local co-benefits and co-design of projects – are being carried forward from terrestrial environments into marine (coastal and ocean) spaces, where policy opportunities exist for leap-frogging issues that confound the land sector.²⁸⁶ ²⁸⁷ 288

A second aspect of justice and equity is the prospect for carbon removal to expand the carbon budget for states in the Global South - e.g., by developed countries reaching netnegative (instead of merely net-zero) emissions²⁸⁹ ²⁹⁰. Indian and Chinese representatives have

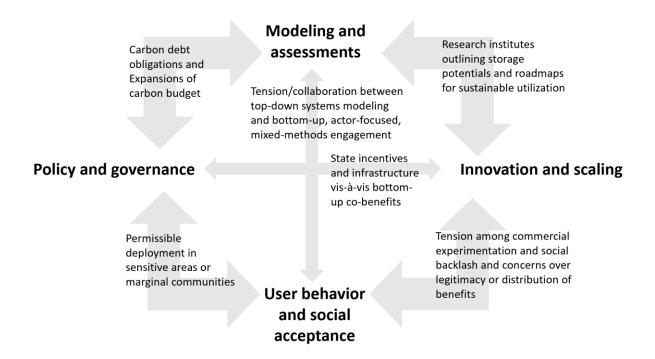
already made this demand, but with unclear further uptake. It is for now a space to watch – that may escalate near term carbon removal commitments and all its complexities.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Employing a sociotechnical perspective, we have enumerated four particular dimensions of carbon removal that we believe should (continue to) constitute the evolving frontier of research. Our Review therefore not only offers an assessment of the current body of evidence on modeling, policy, innovation, and social acceptance; it also reveals ongoing focus of these areas as well as of topics and themes insufficiently considered. Tracking developments within and between these four dimensions would offer analysts and policymakers a more complete picture of the contexts and activities by which carbon removal is being envisioned, researched, deployed, and even critiqued.

As Figure 9 indicates, however, these dimensions also intersect, and some very interesting research topics emerge in the boundary zones between those topics. For example, some of the roadmaps produced by the foregoing assessments could intersect with innovation and scaling in a transmission zone about adequate storage potential or the sustainability of deployment. A tension between experimentation and social backlash would emerge from the transmission zone between innovation and social acceptance, notably, with called-for attempts to gain greater understanding into the risks and benefits of employing these technologies at scale resulting in both greater awareness in the public and, potentially, the emergence of opposing coalitions. The determination of adequate global carbon budgets is both a matter of policy and governance ²⁹¹ ²⁹² and modeling and assessment. ²⁹³ ²⁹⁴ The relaxing of standards or push for more aggressive policy deployment would also intersect in a transmission zone with concerns from marginal communities or perceptions of damaging environmentally (or culturally sensitive) areas.

Figure 9: Emerging frontiers for the sociotechnical dynamics of carbon removal



Source: Authors, inspired and substantially modified from ²⁹⁵. Note: Grey arrows depict "boundary zones" between the four sociotechnical dimensions explored in this Review.

Another implication of Figure 9 is that the potential consequences of transmission are double-edged: some possibilities are exploitative or may delay deployment, especially issues over scaling and social acceptance, while others present co-benefits underpinned by modeling and assessment or supportive policy efforts. ²⁹⁶ Moreover, all of our sociotechnical dimensions call into question any reliance on more simplified and overly artificial divides between technology and policy or scaling and acceptance. Instead, our review strongly suggests the potential for all of these to coevolve as part of the same sociotechnical system, with the particular evolutionary trajectory depending on the underlying "terms of agreement" or "rules of the road", that is, the norms, behavior, standards, rules, etc., that determine how these different dimensions relate to one another. In addition, as highlighted by the exemplary tensions presented above, the foregoing also provides an illustration of not considering these ongoing and emergent dynamics through such a sociotechnical lens. After all, this system is also inherently multi-scalar, blurring distinctions between actors (local and global, corporate or government) and jurisdictions (land use, food security, energy supply, innovation systems).

Our findings therefore offer a challenge to attempts to model integrated portfolios, to determine interactions, and to better understand the non-technical constraints of carbon removal.²⁹⁷ Before national and global scientists, policymakers, financiers and industry leaders commit fully to carbon removal, there is a fundamental need to pursue a more broad-based,

more interdisciplinary research program that acknowledges, rather than obscures, the sociotechnical dynamics of carbon removal.

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