Partisan Support for Climate Policy in the United States

Adrien Fabre, Bluebery Planterose, and Stefanie Stantcheva

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Which climate policies attract support across the US political spectrum, and which divide it? In our paper *Fighting Climate Change: International Attitudes Toward Climate Policies*, also co-authored with Antoine Dechezleprêtre, Tobias Kruse, and Ana Sanchez-Chico, we show that support for climate policies is strongly associated with beliefs about their effectiveness, their distributional consequences, and their effects on respondents' own households. In particular, we show that respondents' believes might differ from the policy's intended distributional design. For instance, in the case of the carbon tax with equal cash transfers we present, low-income households are expected to receive more in transfers than they pay in taxes, on average. Yet only 23% of US respondents in the control group expect these households to benefit, compared with 35% who expect high-income households to benefit. These aggregate results leave open whether the same perceptions are shared across parties. The proposed paper will therefore examine to what extent support for different policy designs varies across political parties, how these differences relate to different perceptions, and whether information changes partisan gaps.

To answer these questions, we will use the 2,218 respondents US survey from 2021–2022 our AER paper. This survey records respondents' preferences across a wide range of climate policies, alongside their beliefs about policy effectiveness, distributional consequences, and their own financial gains or losses. It also measures political affiliation, socioeconomic characteristics, energy use, climate knowledge, and concern about climate change. Observing these beliefs and preferences for the same respondents allows us to examine how differences in perceptions relate to partisan differences in support. Finally, the randomized information treatments we implemented provide a separate way to estimate how explanations of climate change and climate policies affect beliefs and support within each political group.

We will first compare support for different policy designs among Democrats, Republicans, and independents. For carbon taxes, we will examine how support varies with the use of revenues, including equal and targeted transfers, environmental spending, and reductions in taxes or the public deficit. For vehicle restrictions, we will compare bans on sales of new combustion-engine cars with and without transport alternatives, as well as restrictions in city centers. For green infrastructure investment, we will examine support for the program and the acceptability of different sources of financing. These comparisons will show whether political groups rank policy designs differently or mainly differ in their overall levels of support.

We will then examine how partisan gaps in support relate to differences in perceptions and beliefs about policy effectiveness, distributional consequences, and respondents' own

financial gains or losses. For the carbon tax with cash transfers, the vehicle ban, and green infrastructure investment, we will compare beliefs about emissions reductions, consequences for low-income households, and respondents' own financial gains or losses across political groups. We will then assess how much of each partisan gap is accounted for by these beliefs, alongside differences in socioeconomic characteristics, energy use, climate knowledge, and general concern about climate change. This decomposition will allow us to examine whether respondents' beliefs may also reflect their prior policy preferences. Open-ended responses, elicited before the information treatments, will also help interpret the concerns respondents express about policy costs, jobs, and government action.

Finally, we will use the randomized information treatments to test whether explaining policy consequences affects partisan gaps. In our survey, we randomly assigned respondents to watch videos about climate change impacts, how climate policies reduce emissions and affect households, both, or neither. In the US, our results show that the policy video increased support for the carbon tax with cash transfers by 8.3 percentage points relative to the control group. This average increase leaves open whether information reduced partisan disagreement or shifted support similarly across groups. We thus plan to estimate treatment effects on beliefs and support within each political group for all three main policies, and test whether information narrows, leaves unchanged, or widens partisan gaps.

The paper will document where support for climate policy extends across US political groups and where it divides them. By examining beliefs and responses to information, it could help interpret US debates over household compensation, transport alternatives, and the financing of green investment.