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What makes climate change mitigation policies acceptable by public? A review of influential factors

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Abstract for submission - Third Annual Conference on the theme of "Fiscal Policies and the Green Economy Transition: Generating Knowledge - Creating Impact"

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Title:

What makes climate change mitigation policies acceptable by public? A review of influential factors

Abstract:

When designing policies and policy instruments, policy-makers take not only their effectiveness into account, but also feasibility, i.e. the probability of the instrument to be implemented by the governing body. This probability depends, among other things, on public opinion and public acceptability of the proposed instrument, since the decision-makers are, in most cases, elected representatives of the public. Driven by general public opinion, policy-makers may opt for weaker, less efficient, but more popular, policies. Attitudes of the public towards the instrument also play an important role after the decision is made – during and after the process of implementation. Opposition towards the instrument may lead to protest, evasion, counteraction or at least non-compliance. This may cause partial or ultimate fail of otherwise efficient policies. Research in policy acceptability and acceptance provides valuable insights into public responses to policy instruments and factors influencing them. It informs policy-makers about potential barriers and drawbacks of some policy designs and advantages leading to higher acceptability of others. Results of this research can be used in designing policy mixes (combining less popular instruments with those raising acceptability), framing and formulating policy instruments, or predicting more accurately the reaction of the public.

Already, the research has identified several determinants of policy acceptability. In general, two groups of factors may be distinguished - i) individual characteristics, such as values, beliefs (about the environment, policies and their outcomes), norms, perceptions, trust and other social-psychological and also socio-demographic and economic variables (e.g. age, income); ii) characteristics of the instrument, such as a type in general (measures based on incentives or bans and fees, i.e. pull or push measures), distribution of costs and benefits, level of coerciveness, effectiveness, presentation and framing in the public debate, governance level on which it would be implemented etc.

The presented paper reviews the research of public acceptability of climate change GHG emission reductions policies in the developed world in the last 13 years (2000 – 2013). It is based on a systematic review of empirical studies examining factors influencing policy acceptability, i.e. the attitude towards a policy or a policy instrument before it is implemented (occasionally also policy acceptance, i.e. attitude after implementation). The studies being

reviewed include wide range of instruments, including command-and-control and support for green technologies, making special focus on taxes, charges and fees. Our review covers three rather distinct fields of research – studies that rely on economic theory and use stated or revealed preference methods, studies that utilize social-psychological models of behaviour, and public opinion research using *ad hoc* models or descriptive statistics only. In this paper, we summarize the studies covering all three fields while paying greater attention to studies based on economic approach, particularly those applying the stated preference methods to elicit individual preferences for policy instruments and their attributes.

The paper is first such comprehensive review in the field. It contributes to the future research of the issue by summarizing not only existing results, but also methodological and conceptual problems encountered and by proposing some advances in this respect. Moreover, it provides general conclusions valuable for policy-makers in designing, formulating or proposing and presenting instruments.