

Linking climate policy with social policy makes it more popular

The political logic behind the Green New Deal makes climate policy more popular among Democrats without turning off Republicans.

Based on Parrish Bergquist, Matto Mildenerger, and Leah C. Stokes. 2020. "How combining climate policy with economic and social reforms increases support for climate action." *Environmental Research Letters* 15(5): 054019.

The Policy Problem

US climate policymaking remains gridlocked. In a bid to break this impasse, some politicians want to link climate policy to social and economic reforms. From this perspective, linked policies can build stronger political coalitions in favor of climate reforms, while addressing the fundamentally interconnected nature of social, environmental and economic inequalities. This assumption is central to proposals for a Green New Deal. But does the assumption hold in practice?

Key Findings

- Linking climate policy with social and economic reforms makes climate action more popular with the public
- Policy bundling increases support significantly among Democrats (mostly) without reducing Republican support
- Linking climate and social policies is particularly important for people of color

What We Found

Americans support the key idea behind the Green New Deal: addressing climate change alongside economic and social problems.

Compared with standalone climate reform, a package including economic policies such as a jobs guarantee, unionized clean energy jobs and retraining for fossil fuel workers increased climate policy support by an average of 12 percentage points. While Democrats in our survey viewed these policies more favorably, including economic measures in a climate package did not drive Republicans away.

We found similar results when we added some social policy planks, such as affordable housing and a \$15 minimum wage, which increased support for a climate policy package by an average of 11 percentage points. However, other social policies — such as universal, government-run health insurance and free college — increased the package’s overall popularity but decreased Republican support.

The take-home message is clear: Linking climate policy with social and economic reforms makes climate action more popular with the public.

What We Did

We asked a representative sample of 2,476 Americans to choose between different climate policy packages. Some people read about climate policy packages that included social or economic programs; others saw packages that only included climate policies. Social scientists call this type of experiment a “conjoint design” — it’s a way to measure people’s preferences when facing complex policy choices. When we analyze our conjoint experiment, we can measure whether each individual component of a policy package increases or decreases support for overall climate reforms.

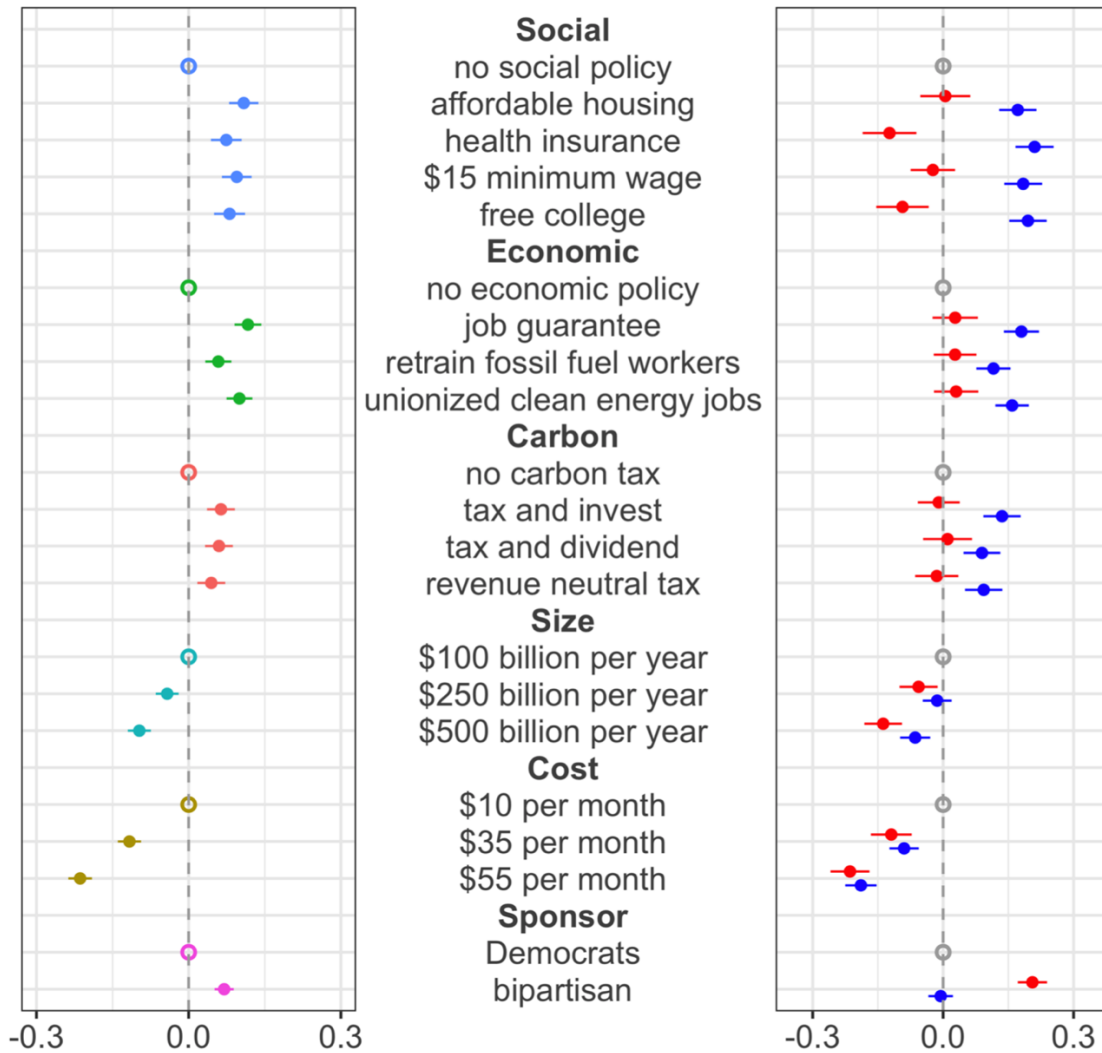


Figure: How policy details shape support for climate packages. Point estimates visualize how much including a given policy element changes support for the overall policy package (x-axis). The left pane gives the effects overall for all Americans, while the right pane breaks our sample down by Democrats (blue) and Republicans (red).