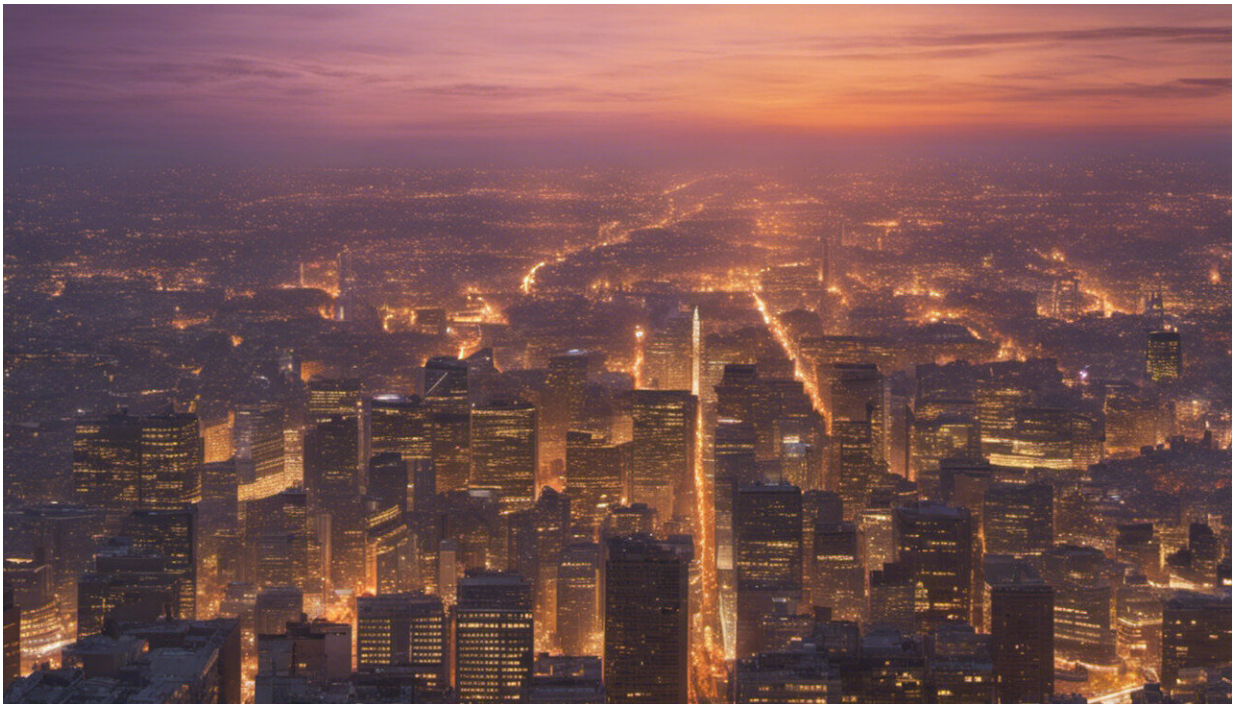


Societal divisions could hinder EU climate policy

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Many contemporary political conflicts are between those who would prioritize the needs of local or national communities and those with a more universal outlook. According to a new study by IASS researcher Silvia Weko, this split between 'communitarian' and "cosmopolitan" Europeans is also evident in their attitudes towards European climate

policy. Achieving climate neutrality without exacerbating societal divisions within and between countries will require the EU to strike a careful balance.

In political philosophy cosmopolitans and communitarians are frequently characterized as 'winners' and 'losers' of globalization. Their respective gains and losses have an objective and a subjective dimension: globalization can be perceived as threatening or promising in view of such hard facts as job losses or due to ideologies or values. The most important subjective difference is the perception of community. Cosmopolitans see community as universal, conceiving of individuals as equal regardless of [group membership](#), while communitarians perceive community in terms of belonging to a particular group, often defined locally.

Ideology plays a larger role than party preferences

This division is a challenge for the EU's [climate](#) policy. The successful implementation of the Green Deal, which aims to make Europe completely carbon-neutral by 2050, will require the backing of publics across the Member States. Silvia Weko has analyzed data from the European Social Survey to ascertain how deep the divisions between cosmopolitan and communitarian Europeans—evident in other policy areas such as migration—are in relation to climate and energy.

"The results show that [political ideology](#) is also highly influential in shaping attitudes towards climate policy. Indeed, it influences attitudes towards climate policy across all of the countries examined and to a stronger degree than individuals' identification along the left-right divide," explains the sociologist. The more cosmopolitan a person's political ideology, the more positive their attitudes are towards climate action. In the case of both groups, subjective aspects have a greater influence on attitudes towards climate protection than objective

circumstances. On average, people in Eastern European countries are less concerned about climate change than those in Western European countries. Instead, their priorities are energy security and economic development.

Surveys can support decision-making on climate policy

The EU now faces the challenge of winning over communitarian-minded Europeans and ensuring that no one is 'left behind' as it moves towards climate neutrality. Weko identifies a number of promising signs: "The European Commission has stressed its intention to ensure that no one will be 'left behind.'" One concrete measure, would be to tackle energy poverty, which is much more widespread in Eastern Europe, by renovating social housing, schools, and hospitals." The Just Transitions Fund could also help to support regions hit particularly hard by structural change.

Weko also suggests that the European Commission should regularly assess attitudes towards climate and energy [policy](#), ideally in an annual survey, just as it already does in relation to issues around integration and migration. Gaining a better understanding of people's concerns would help to address future obstacles to achieving climate neutrality.

More information: Silvia Weko, *Communitarians, cosmopolitans, and climate change: why identity matters for EU climate and energy policy*, *Journal of European Public Policy* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2021.1918751](https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1918751)

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