

Social norms influence willingness to protect the climate

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People contribute only very little to climate protection, because they underestimate the willingness of others to contribute. This is the central result of a new study by the behavioral economists Peter Andre, Teodora Boneva, Felix Chopra and Armin Falk, members of the Cluster of Excellence ECONtribute at the Universities of Bonn and Cologne, published as an ECONtribute Discussion Paper.

The researchers show that information about [social norms](#) and behaviors increases the [willingness](#) to contribute to [climate protection](#). The study

also shows the extent to which economic preferences and moral values are decisive for individual attitudes toward [climate](#) protection. The results are based on an extensive survey experiment in the U.S.

Proportion of climate protection supporters significantly underestimated

Around 8,000 representatively selected adults in the U.S. had the opportunity to win \$450 in the experiment. In advance, they had to indicate how much of this amount they would be willing to donate to a climate protection organization in case they win. With the total sum, they could offset the annual CO₂ emissions of an average American. Based on the amounts given, the scientists were able to measure the extent to which people were willing to support the fight against [climate change](#) at their own expense.

On average, respondents said they would donate half of the money they won to climate protection. The participants were also asked to estimate the proportion of their compatriots that actively engage in climate protection or consider the fight against climate change to be important, according to surveys. They significantly underestimated the actual proportion of those actively involved in climate protection (62 percent) and those in favor of climate protection (79 percent). If participants were informed about these figures before making their decision, their willingness to donate was five to six percent higher. The effect is particularly large among people who deny climate change or are at least doubtful about it.

Women donate more than men on average

On average, women donate \$17 more to climate protection causes than men do.

Democrats contribute \$45 more than Republicans do. The willingness to donate increases in household income, but actually declines for Republicans with higher educational attainment. The analysis of personality traits shows that patience and the intent to contribute to the welfare of others have a [positive effect](#) on willingness to protect the climate. Participants whose [moral values](#) apply universally to all people are more willing to donate than those who feel more committed to their own group.

"Climate protection is a matter of cooperation. But people tend to be cooperative to a certain extent only: If you cooperate, I'll cooperate. That's why it's especially important to uncover and correct misconceptions about others' willingness to cooperate in the fight against climate change," explains Armin Falk, professor at ECONtribute at the University of Bonn and director of the briq Institute on Behavior & Inequality. In order to achieve [behavioral changes](#) and acceptance for climate policy measures, he states that it is crucial that climate protection is perceived as a social norm.

Broad-based information campaigns could have a self-reinforcing effect here, according to the researchers.

More information: Fighting Climate Change: the Role of Norms, Preferences, and Moral Values, ECONtribute Discussion Paper No. 101, online:

[www.econtribute.de/RePEc/ajk/a ... tribute_101_2021.pdf](http://www.econtribute.de/RePEc/ajk/a...tribute_101_2021.pdf)

Provided by University of Bonn

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