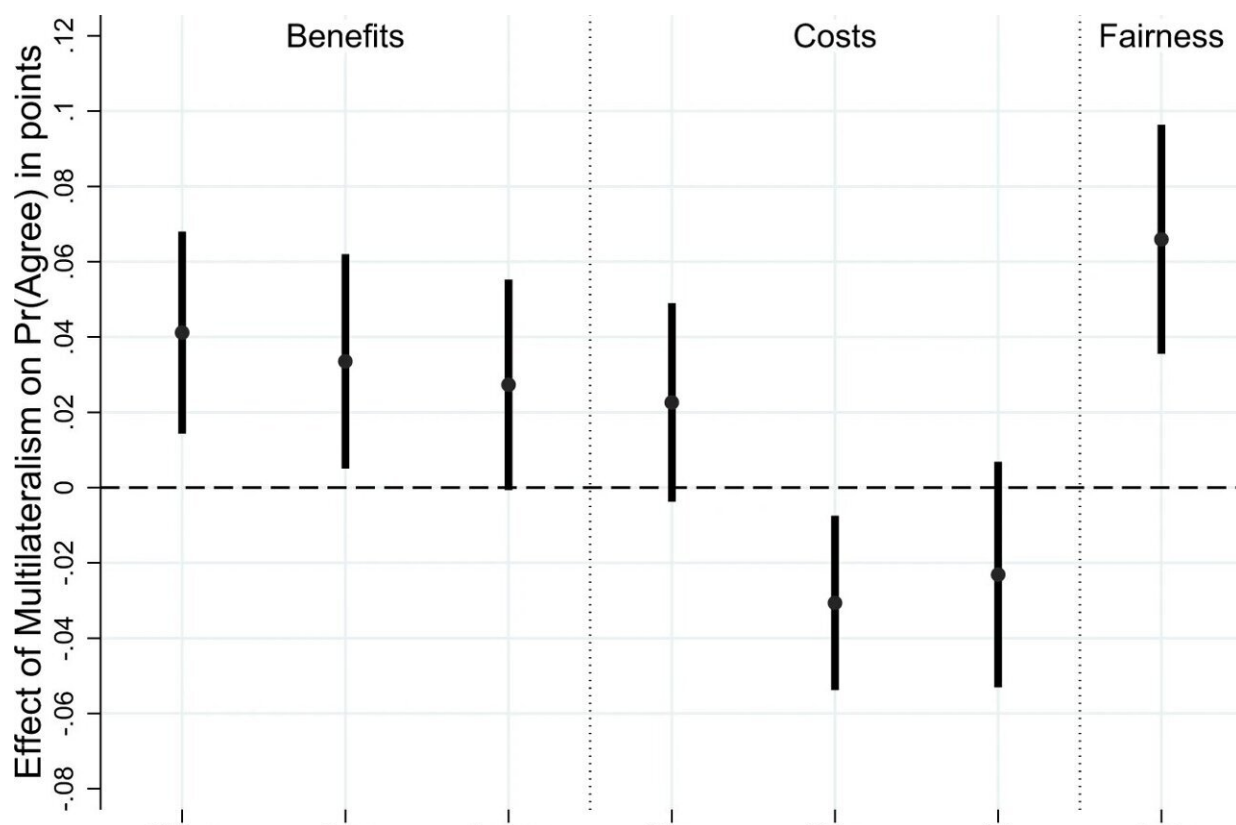


Public more likely to support climate action if other countries commit as well

November 3 2022, by Gabriele Meseg-Rutzen



The causal effects of multilateralism on sustainability beliefs: benefits, costs, and fairness of climate action in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (N = 6000). This plot reports coefficients from linear regressions of statement approval on a binary indicator that is one if climate action is multilateral and is zero if climate action is unilateral. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. All regressions control for gender, age, income, education, and employment status. Country-fixed effects included. Survey weights applied. N (France) = 2000, N (Germany) = 2000, N (United Kingdom) = 2000. Credit: *Nature*

Communications (2022). DOI: 10.1038/s41467-022-33830-8

The public is more willing to bear the costs of climate action if other countries contribute as well. This is the result of a study conducted by Professor Dr. Michael Bechtel, member of the Cluster of Excellence ECONtribute (University of Cologne), Professor Dr. Kenneth Scheve (Yale University), and Dr. Elisabeth van Lieshout (Stanford University), which has recently been published in the journal *Nature Communications*.

In [representative surveys](#), the researchers investigated whether the extent to which the public supports costly climate policies (e.g., the introduction of a domestic [carbon tax](#)) depends on whether other countries also pursue [climate action](#). The results suggest that if other countries invest in climate action, the domestic public is more willing to approve introducing a domestic carbon tax because individuals expect these policy efforts to be fairer and more likely to be effective.

The team surveyed a total of 10,000 citizens in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States in early 2019. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they approved or disapproved the introduction of a carbon tax. 60% of respondents supported a tax if other countries also introduced one. However, when other countries did not join these efforts, domestic carbon tax approval dropped to 53%.

"We also find that when domestic climate measures are embedded internationally, people are more likely to believe that these reforms will have a positive impact on important social, economic, and environmental sustainability goals," says Michael Bechtel.

In a second study, the research team investigated whether the costs of

climate action would be more broadly accepted domestically if other countries pursued more ambitious and thus more costly measures. Participants were asked whether they would be willing to support costly climate policy scenarios in which the researchers varied the level of contributions made by other countries.

If domestic monthly household costs increased from a low to a higher level, in the case of Germany for example from EUR 39 to 77 per month, support decreased by seven percentage points if the price of carbon dioxide remained low abroad. However, if other industrialized countries decided to introduce high monthly household costs, domestic policy support fell only by about five percentage points in response to a domestic CO₂ price increase.

"Even if people generally dislike costs, they are more willing to accept cost increases if other countries also make higher contributions," says Michael Bechtel.

Climate change measures in other [countries](#) thus play a crucial role in securing mass support for domestic climate [policy](#), according to the study. "Investing in well-functioning international agreements is worthwhile not only from a natural science perspective, but also for policymakers interested in securing broader public support for costly [climate](#) action domestically," says Bechtel.

More information: Michael M. Bechtel et al, Improving public support for climate action through multilateralism, *Nature Communications* (2022). [DOI: 10.1038/s41467-022-33830-8](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-33830-8)

Provided by University of Cologne

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