

Vulnerability, Compensation and Support for Climate Policies

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Abstract

Combating climate change requires large economic adjustments that will have significant distributional implications for countries around the world. Scholars and policymakers have increasingly proposed compensation policies to ease the costs of the “carbon transition” for vulnerable communities and create momentum for climate policy cooperation. However, to date, little work exists to explicate the determinants of individual support for compensatory climate policy and particular modes of compensation over others. We argue that the uneven distribution of vulnerabilities to climate change events and economic adjustment to decarbonization generates distinct positions on compensatory climate policy designs. Employing new data from several original surveys in the US, we show that communities that are only exposed to the economic costs of implementing climate policy (namely, coal country communities) have more cohesive opinions in favor of compensation for workers vulnerable to decarbonization efforts than fossil fuel communities that are also exposed to climatic events. Both groups stand in contrast to the general population, which cares less about losing workers and more about alternate types of large-scale compensation. Importantly, we find that the strong opinions about compensation in the coal communities are closely connected to fears that climate policy may threaten their collective identity. Although greater recognition of climate policy compensation may improve governments’ responses to the climate crisis, our findings also point to the likely polarization that compensatory options can generate in relevant political constituencies.

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<https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/dtingley/files/compensationvulnerability.pdf>