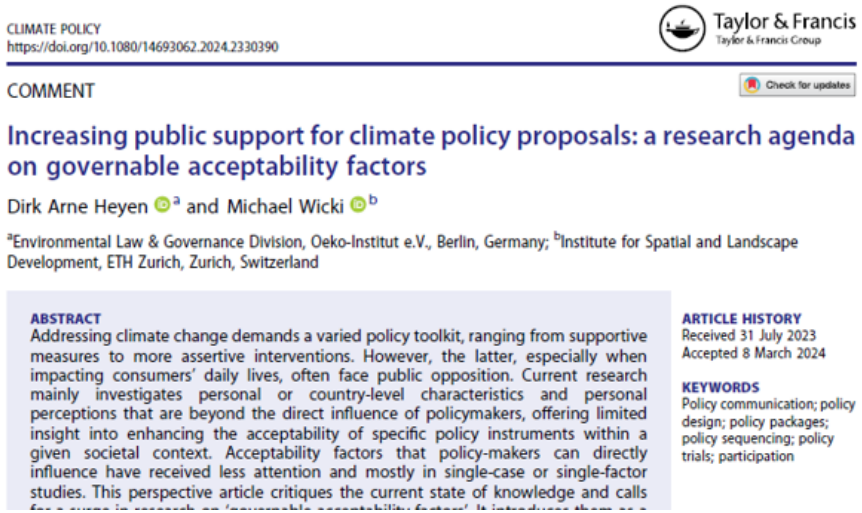
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Public support for climate policy: Research needs on ‘governable acceptability factors’ to enhance political relevance

Dirk Arne Heyen, Senior Researcher at Öko-Institut (Berlin)

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COMMENT

Check for updates

Increasing public support for climate policy proposals: a research agenda on governable acceptability factors

Dirk Arne Heyen [a] and Michael Wicki [b]

[a]Environmental Law & Governance Division, Oeko-Institut e.V., Berlin, Germany; [b]Institute for Spatial and Landscape Development, ETH Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

ABSTRACT
Addressing climate change demands a varied policy toolkit, ranging from supportive measures to more assertive interventions. However, the latter, especially when impacting consumers' daily lives, often face public opposition. Current research mainly investigates personal or country-level characteristics and personal perceptions that are beyond the direct influence of policymakers, offering limited insight into enhancing the acceptability of specific policy instruments within a given societal context. Acceptability factors that policy-makers can directly influence have received less attention and mostly in single-case or single-factor studies. This perspective article critiques the current state of knowledge and calls

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Policy communication; policy design; policy packages; policy sequencing; policy trials; participation

Limitations of current acceptability research regarding practical policy relevance

- Many studies compare acceptability of very different policy instruments

  → Interesting but does not help much for improving the acceptability of a specific instrument, e.g. by changing its design (particularly in case of rather unpopular push measures)

- Many studies analyze factors (e.g. socio-demographics, values) that explain stable differences in policy support between different groups of people

  → Interesting but these factors are hardly politically influenceable

- Many studies investigate people's perceptions of instrument effectiveness and fairness but not what determines these beliefs

  → False conclusions on causality like "perceived effectiveness influences acceptability" lead to wrong policy advice ("make policies as effective as possible")

Research agenda on ‘governable acceptability factors’

More research needed on factors that are politically influenceable:

- **Instrument characteristics**: supported policy design features, policy packages, (re)distribution principles for use of revenues
  - good knowledge on carbon pricing but little knowledge on other measures
- **Process**: political timing, policy sequencing, trial runs, citizen participation, involvement of stakeholder & opposition
  - little empirical knowledge on all these aspects
- **Communication**: information on problem / policy, different framings
  - more but mixed evidence on influence of additional information and different frames
  - very little knowledge on influence of counter-frames / argumentative competition

Way forward on methodological grounds

- Survey experiments, systematically varying governable acceptability factors
  - Combining different types of acceptability factors (e.g. instrument characteristics and framing) to uncover their relative importance and their interlinkages
- Longitudinal panel surveys and meta studies to better understand temporal and spatial context factors
- More use of qualitative (and mixed) methods like focus groups and open-ended survey questions, e.g. to examine considerations behind people's acceptability and especially fairness judgments in more depth
- AI-based large-scale content and sentiment analysis of comments / discourses in social media, internet forums, Telegram channels…

Questions for discussion

Surveys (and focus groups) take place in an “artificial setting”, so

- How can we better account for real-world (-like) political discourses with competing claims and fake news?
- How can we learn from the empirical richness of past or ongoing policy processes and public acceptability therein despite the weaknesses of case studies in terms of causality?

Contact details

Dirk Arne Heyen
Senior Researcher

Oeko-Institut Consult gGmbH
Borkumstraße 2
13189 Berlin

Phone: +49 (0)30 / 405085-356
E-Mail: d.heyen@oeko.de



https://www.oeko.de/das-institut/team/team-detail/dirk-arne-heyen

https://www.linkedin.com/in/dirk-arne-heyen-5829b4a6/

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dirk-Heyen