

The relevance of social impacts and fairness perceptions for acceptability of climate-policy instruments...

... and implications for research and policy-making in tough times

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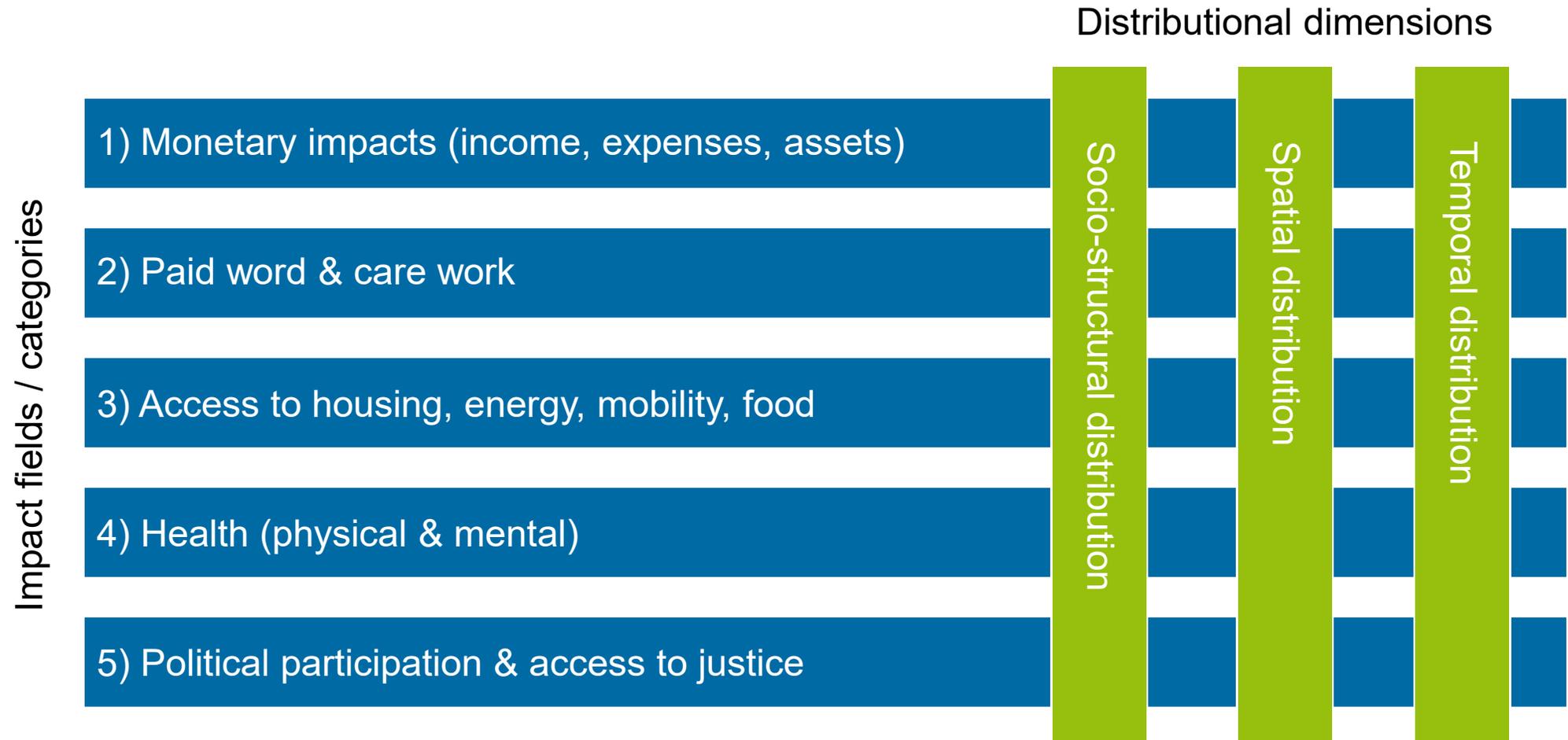
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Intro

- Focus: intr^{an}ational social impacts within Germany and other Global North countries
 - *not* about transnational effects and global climate justice
- Structure of the presentation:
 - What do I mean by “social impacts of climate policy instruments”?
 - What is their relevance for climate-policy acceptability?
 - What are knowledge gaps in this field?
 - What are implications for research and policy-making?
- Sources: based on several literature reviews & policy papers (Heyen 2021, 2023, Heyen & Wicki 2024; Heyen & Schmitt 2024; Heyen et al. 2025; Heyen et al. i.E.)

Social impacts of climate policy instruments



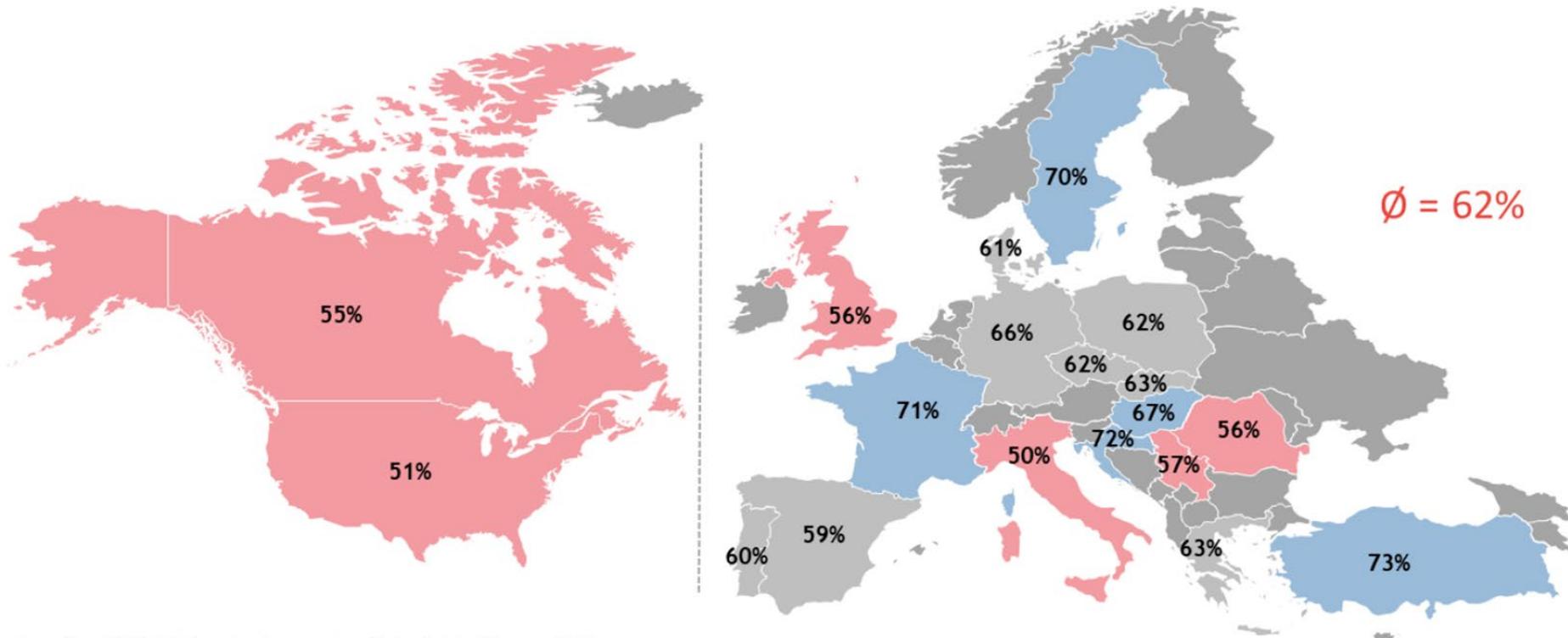
Relevance for policy acceptability

- Monetary impacts, esp. affordability of energy and mobility are particularly relevant, esp. since the energy price peaks 2022 (Melloh et al. 2022; Gagné 2024; TÜV Association 2024)
- Restrictions of consumption / mobility options are rather unpopular (lit. overview: Heyen & Wicki 2024)
- Other social impacts can also be relevant but less empirical evidence on them
- Fairness perception of concrete climate-policy instruments is the factor most strongly linked with instrument acceptability according to international meta-study (Bergquist et al. 2022)
- Growing majority perceives climate policy / energy & mobility transition as “unfair” and as a “threat to social cohesion” (Detsch 2024; Faas et al. 2024; Gagné 2024; Gagné & Krause 2021; Holzmann & Wolf 2023)
 - especially instruments like carbon pricing on heating & fuels (e.g. Eßer & Frondel 2024; Holzmann & Wolf 2023)
 - especially regarding low-income and rural households (Holzmann & Wolf 2023)

Relevance for policy acceptability

Measures to protect the climate and the environment are socially unjust, as they burden low-income earners in particular.

"Fully agree / Somewhat agree"



Quelle: SINUS, im Auftrag der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Relevance for policy acceptability

- Targeted relief for low-income households (e.g. in case of carbon pricing revenue recycling) is perceived \emptyset as fairer than equal cost distribution or based purely on energy consumption (Bauske et al. 2023; Baute 2024; Blesse et al. 2024; Dechezleprêtre et al. 2022; Detsch 2024; Holzmann & Wolf 2023; Wolf et al. 2022)
 - even greater approval is often given to using revenues to promote investments in green technologies (e.g. Dechezleprêtre et al. 2022) or to combining different forms of use (e.g. Kaestner et al. 2023)
 - preferences depend on party affiliations (Behringer et al. 2024)
 - in principle, pricing instruments tend to be more accepted if revenue use is determined and communicated in advance (Mohammadzadeh Valencia et al. 2024)

Knowledge gaps and limitations in current research

- Little research on social impacts of environmental policies beyond climate / energy / transport policy, e.g. circular economy or nature & land-use policy (Heyen 2021)
- Less research on non-monetary than on monetary social impacts and on their (relative) relevance for policy acceptability
- Little knowledge, apart from carbon pricing, on what exactly drives fairness judgements and what policy-design (-packages) options can improve them (Heyen & Wicki 2024)
 - strategic responses can hide underlying self-interests (Bolderdijk et al. 2017; Heyen & Wicki 2024)
 - whole range of justice principles that can be applied in fairness judgements (cf. Heyen 2023):
 - Equality: equal rights, equal treatment, equal opportunities / capabilities, equal outcome
 - Proportionality: polluter pays, beneficiary pays, ability to pay, need level, loss level etc.
 - Minimum threshold: absolute standard (basic rights / needs) that needs to be guaranteed

Implications for research

- More research on policy instruments' social impacts beyond carbon pricing (Heyen 2021)
- More research also on non-monetary social impacts (Heyen 2021)
- More qualitative research on which justice principles drive fairness judgments (Heyen & Wicki 2024)
- More research on acceptable policy design & packages (Heyen & Wicki 2024)

Implications for policy-making

- Carefully considering social impacts in policy formulation
 - serious and timely ex-ante social assessments necessary
 - ideally, analytical methods combined with surveys / focus groups on people's perceptions
- Avoiding regressive impacts, e.g. by specific support for low- to middle-income households
 - ideally, not only compensate higher prices but enable households to escape “carbon lock-in”: switch to climate-friendly options saving money in the long term (“double dividend”)
- Making climate-friendly alternatives attractive before restricting other options
- Timely communication of supporting facts & figures (incl. cost calculations for different household types), co-benefits and positive examples – ideally by “trusted messengers”

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