research highlights

PUBLIC POLICY

Crowding out climate policy

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In addition to advocating for policy change, government agencies and environmental organizations frequently encourage households to adopt pro-environmental behaviours, such as recycling and reducing energy consumption, to help mitigate climate change.

In a new study examining Japanese support for a tax increase on carbon emissions, Werfel demonstrates that pro-environmental behaviour at the household level reduces or “crowds out” support for action on climate change at the government level. Survey respondents who were reminded of the national *setsuden* (saving electricity) movement to change household energy consumption in the wake of the shutdown of the Fukushima power plant were less likely to support a tax increase on carbon emissions. The effect was largest for respondents who reported adopting more of the recommended energy-saving actions and those more likely to perceive sufficient progress from individual action. The research suggests that perceptions of the relative importance of private versus public action facilitated crowding out.

Government provision of a public good is well known to crowd out private contributions. This study demonstrates that private household behaviour can similarly crowd out support for government provision of climate change policy. Given that multi-faceted strategies for the provision of a public good are often required, understanding when individual action and government regulation are perceived as substitutes is of paramount importance.

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