

Debunking the Backlash – Uncovering European Voters' Climate Preferences

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Green backlash looming in the EU elections?



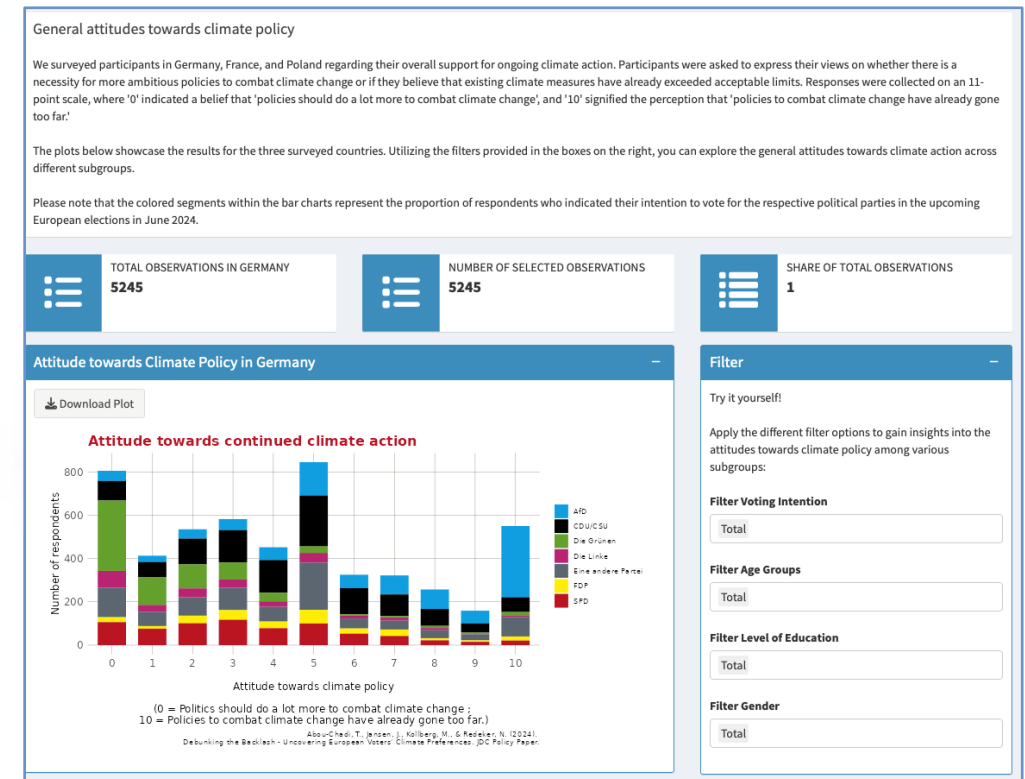
2019



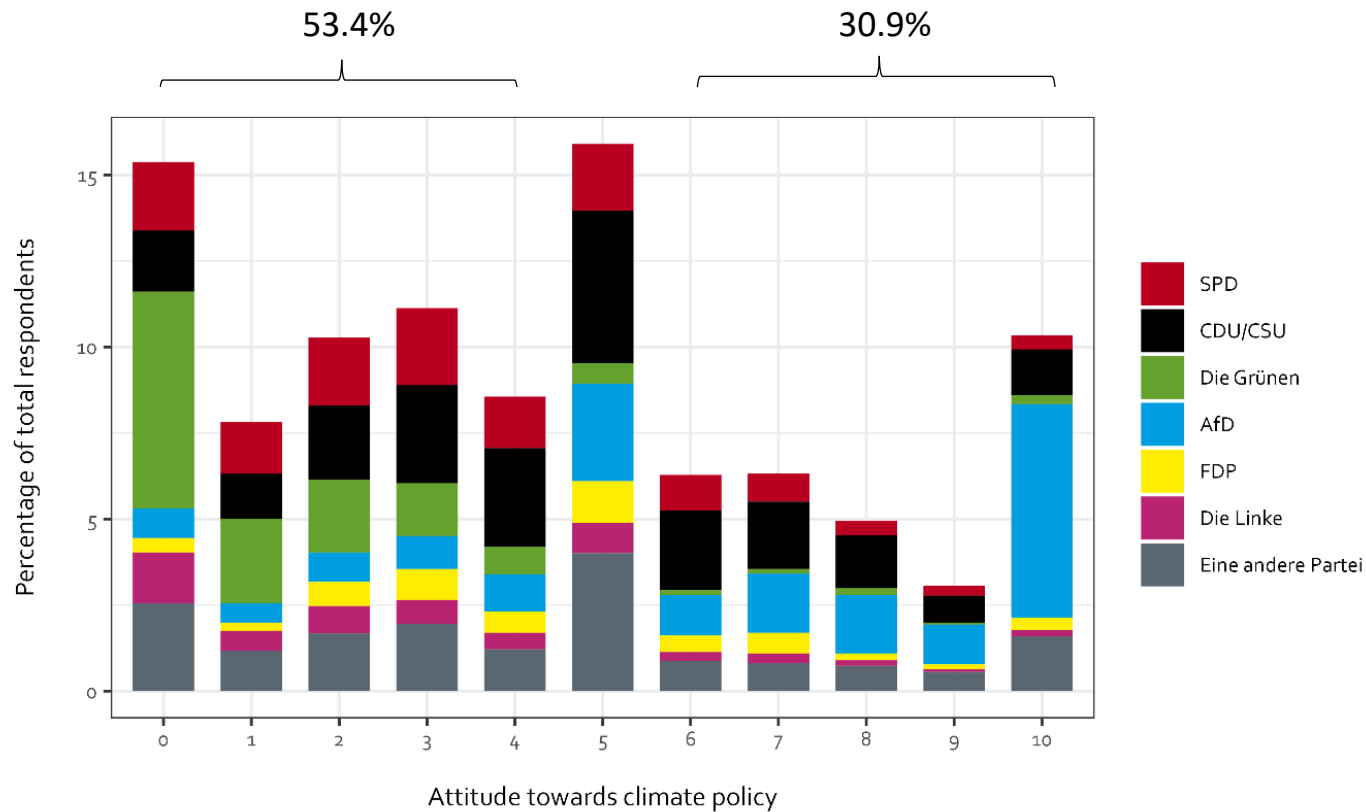
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Background

- Joined study with **Tarik Abou-Chadi** (University of Oxford) & **Markus Kollberg** (Humboldt University)
- **Online survey** quota sampled by age, gender, region, and education in Germany, France, and Poland
- **Detailed data: about 5,000 participants** per country, allowing for subgroup analysis
- **New data: November and December 2023**



General attitudes towards climate policy



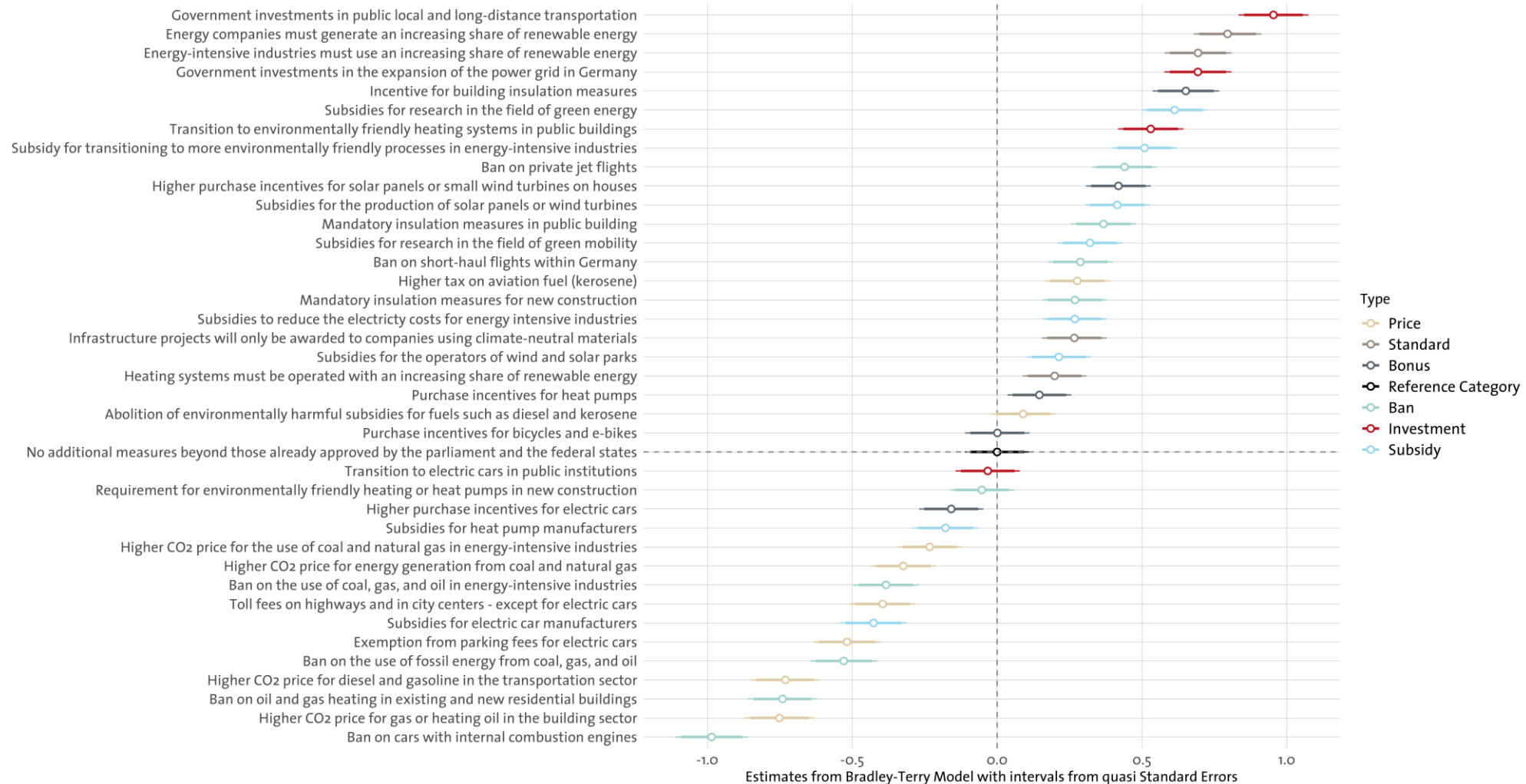
(0 = Politics should do a lot more to combat climate change ;
10 = Policies to combat climate change have already gone too far.)

Source: Survey in DE, 2023

- Majority still in favour of **more ambitious** climate policy
- Applies to Germany (approx. 53%), France (57%), and Poland (approx. 52%)
- **Sizeable minority** (31% in Germany) believes climate policy has gone too far
- Dominated by supporters of far-right parties and **no big increase in recent years**

Relative support for climate policies

Estimated 'Popularity' of climate policies in Germany
Relative to Baseline: No additional measures

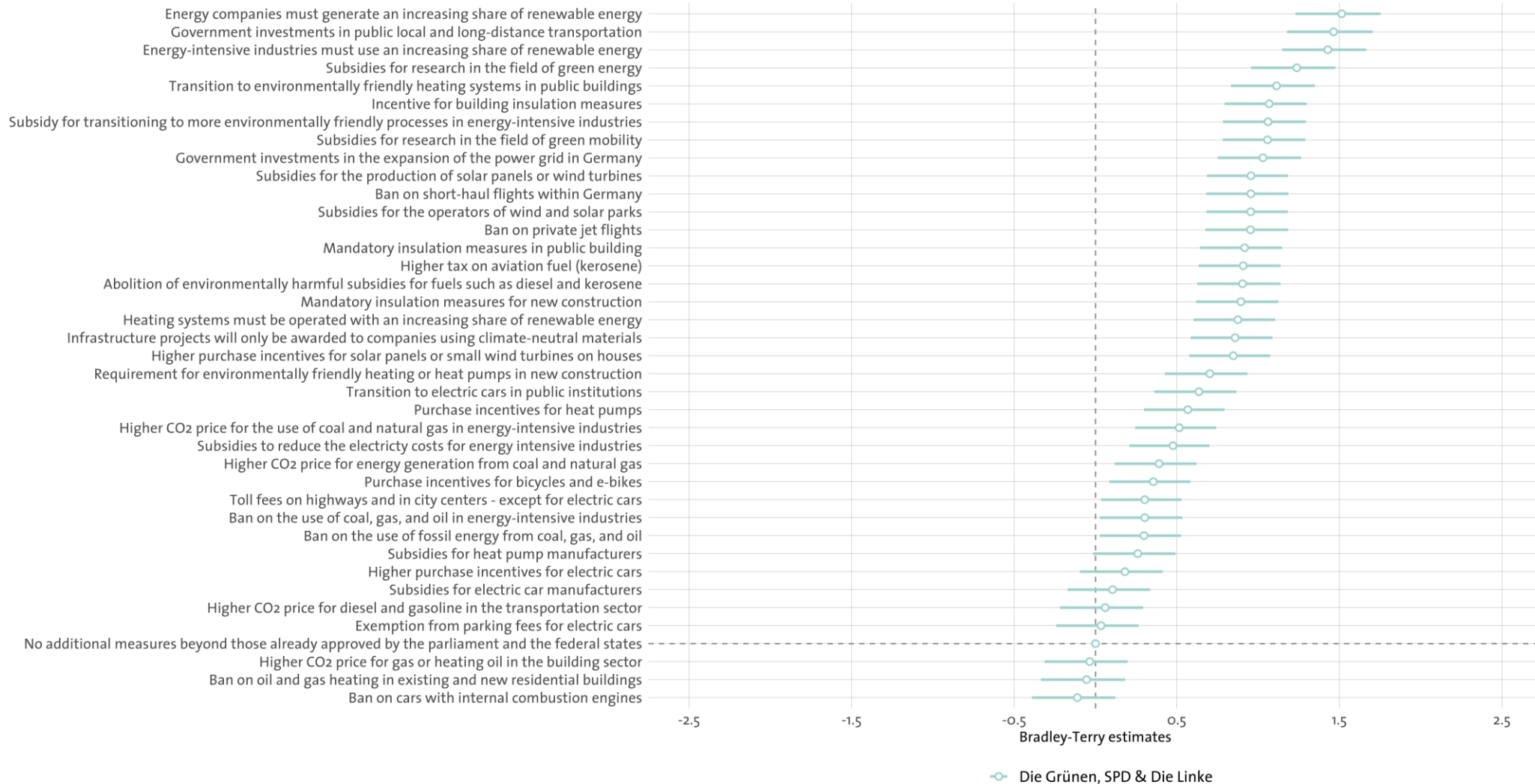


Relative support for climate policies

1. **No general backlash**: a wide range of climate measures preferred over the status quo
2. **Industrial and investment policies** especially popular: for instance, expansion of rail transport, electricity networks, subsidies for green technologies
3. **Targeted regulatory measures** find support: green standards for industry and power generation, ban on short-haul or private flights
4. **Broad bans and CO2 pricing mechanisms** relatively unpopular: e.g., CO2 price in the transportation and housing sectors, ban on internal combustion engine cars

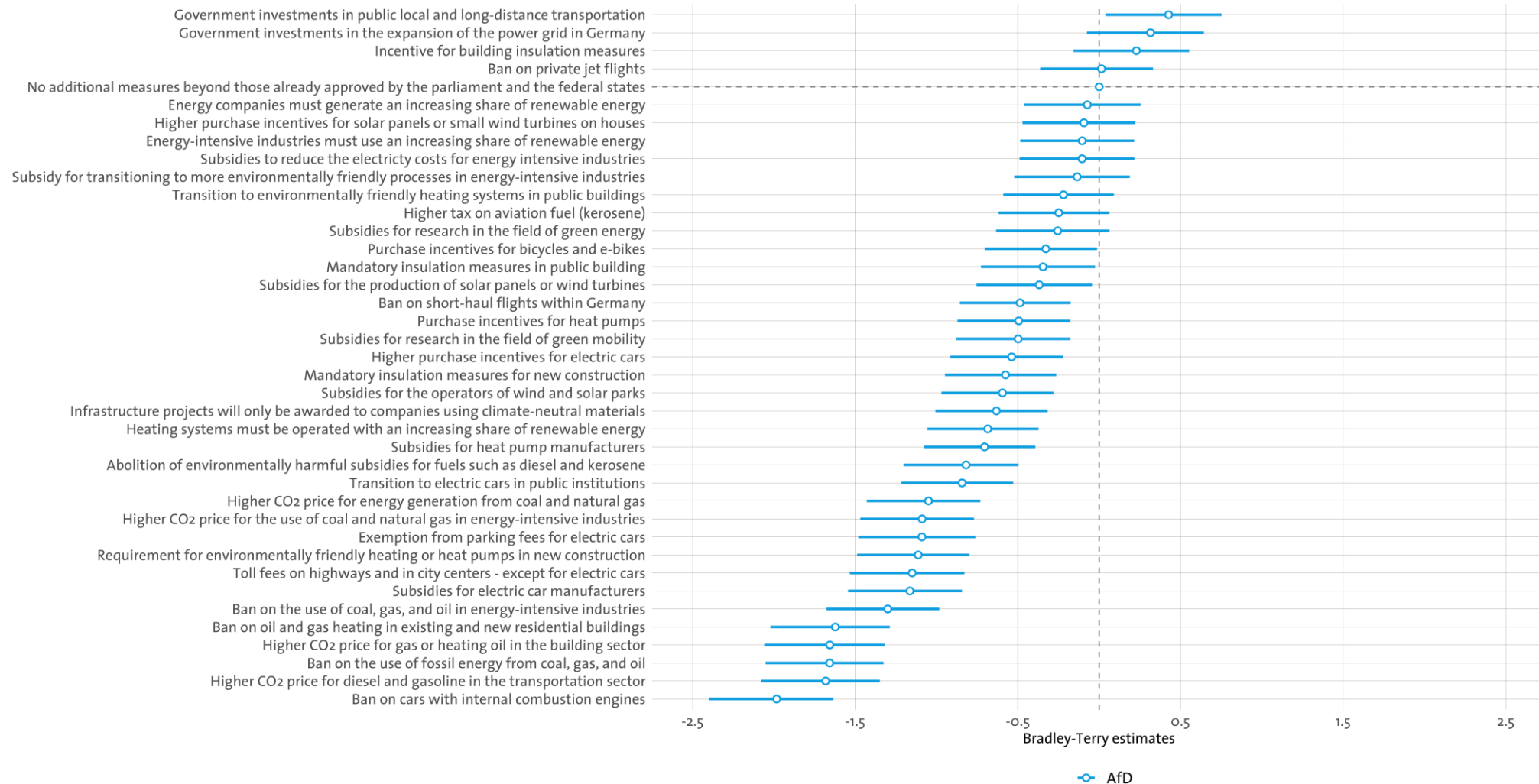
Supporters of green and left-leaning parties

Estimated 'Popularity' of climate policies in Germany
Relative to baseline: No additional measures



Supporters of far-right parties

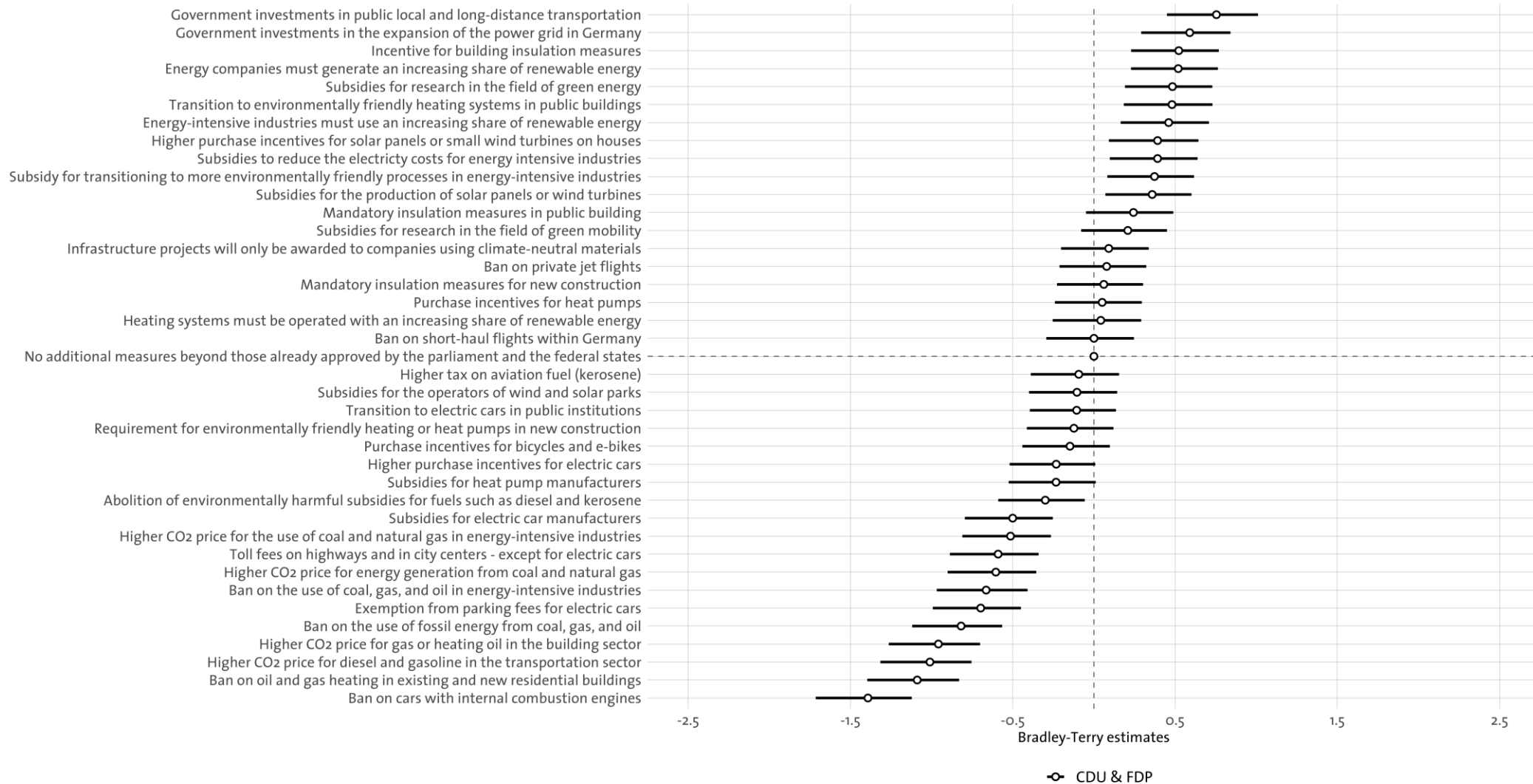
Estimated 'Popularity' of climate policies in Germany
Relative to baseline: No additional measures



Supporters of liberal and centre-right parties

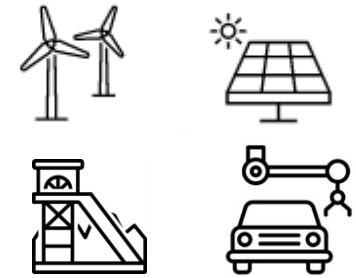
Estimated 'Popularity' of climate policies in Germany

Relative to baseline: No additional measures



Design of climate policies

- **Financing of popular policies:** tax increases unpopular; instead: **budget cuts in other areas** (esp. in FR and PL) or **higher public debt** (esp. left-leaning voters in DE)
- **Design of unpopular policies:** scepticism towards carbon pricing decreases when combined with **progressive redistribution of revenues**
- **EU-investment instrument:** surprisingly popular especially if it combines climate goals with other priorities, above all, **economic security**



Key takeaways

1. **No broad backlash:** a majority in the three countries still in favor of more ambitious climate policy
2. **Choice and design of policies:** particularly relevant to climate policy “swing voters” in the center of the political spectrum
3. **Party positions matter:** political actors could fabricate the fatigue they are trying to cater to
4. **Takeaways for next EU climate policy cycle**
 - Stronger focus on green industrial and investment policies (comes with financing questions)
 - Emphasis on realizing a just transition

Policy Brief

Debunking the Backlash
Uncovering European Voters' Climate Preferences¹

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#GreenTransition
#EuropeanElections
#PublicOpinion

The notion of a broad green backlash is set to dominate this year's European election campaign. Based on new survey data from more than 15,000 respondents in Germany, France, and Poland, we show that it is largely overblown. A majority of voters still wish for a more ambitious climate policy and would support a raft of concrete measures to bring down emissions. However, supporting pivotal voters in the middle will require a stronger focus on green investment and industrial policy and offsetting measures for effective but unpopular policies like carbon pricing. Parties should not waste the coming months outbidding each other over how to cater to imagined climate fatigue but compete over concrete recipes to green the economy.

The narrative of a widespread green backlash is set to dominate this year's European election campaign. The outgoing European Commission's overwhelming policy focus on climate – a familiar story goes (e.g. [here](#) and [here](#)) – has left voters increasingly disillusioned with the downsides of the economic transformation. So, when Europeans head to the ballot box this summer, they will turn towards politicians that promise to scale down EU climate ambitions, pause green regulation, or pivot to different topics altogether. This narrative seems plausible. It fits what we see in party manifestos, farmers' protests, and the final political rows within the outgoing European Parliament. **However, what we see in our data doesn't really bear this out.**

To get a comprehensive understanding of voters' climate preferences in the run-up to the elections, we surveyed 15,000 people in Germany, France, and Poland in December 2023. We used large representative samples, measuring preferences on more than 40 specific climate policies and different policy design options, and leveraging state-of-the-art survey experiments. Three findings stand out.

Interactive online dashboard

