
ECONtribute
Policy Brief No. 038

Germans' Concerns about Climate Protection

Armin Falk

Mark Fallak

Lasse Stötzer

June 2023

www.econtribute.de



Executive Summary

Many Germans are willing to give up personal freedoms for more climate protection

Germans consider the government's current climate action inadequate. Many would be willing to give up some individual freedom for better climate protection. This willingness is in line with a widespread concern about climate change and its consequences. A majority would be in favor of a "climate solidarity tax" to help poorer households cope with the costs of climate protection.

In a representative survey of around 2,000 people in Germany, almost two-thirds thought the German government was doing too little to combat climate change. This dissatisfaction is also widespread among voters of the governing parties.

About 89 percent of respondents believe that the government should step up support for solar and wind energy. Almost 74 percent support a much faster expansion of wind turbines, even if this would mean shorter approval procedures and lower distances to dwellings. Strict emission limits for gas and coal-fired power plants, and an increase in the CO₂ tax received less support among respondents, at around 60 percent each.

More than 80 percent are in favor of discontinuing domestic flights on the condition that the rail network is expanded. Two-thirds support a speed limit of 130 km/h on freeways. Both proposals would command a majority across all electorates – with the exception of the speed limit, which is rejected by more than half of AfD voters.

Most incentives to change consumer behavior are also supported by a vast majority. These include standardized labeling of CO₂ emissions for food and consumer goods and higher subsidies for climate-friendly behavior. By contrast, only 48 percent would approve of making climate-damaging meat and dairy products more expensive. Two-thirds would support a climate solidarity tax to help lower-income households finance additional spending on climate protection.

The high willingness to accept costs or restrictions is in line with people being strongly concerned about the consequences of climate change. A large majority of 78 percent said they were concerned – one-third are even "very concerned". Almost 84 percent of Germans believe in an obligation to protect the environment for future generations. 56 percent go even further and call on the German government to give greater weight to the needs of young people and future generations than to the needs of older people when making climate-related policy decisions.

Results

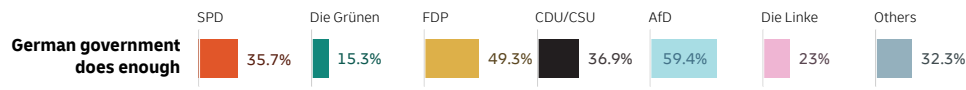
Government action

Climate protection is an important task for policymakers as changes in individual lifestyles alone will hardly be sufficient to stop global warming. Is the German population satisfied with the work of the German government? Which measures do people support, and which policies are unpopular?

To measure the opinions and attitudes toward climate change, we administer a survey to a representative sample of 2,002 German adults. In this *briq* policy monitor, we study which measures have broad support and how concerned people are about the effects of climate change.

Almost two-thirds (65 percent) of Germans believe that the German government is doing too little to combat climate change. Dissatisfaction is also widespread among voters of the governing parties. Only 15 percent of Green voters think the measures are sufficient.

Fig. 1: Satisfaction with the German government's climate policies



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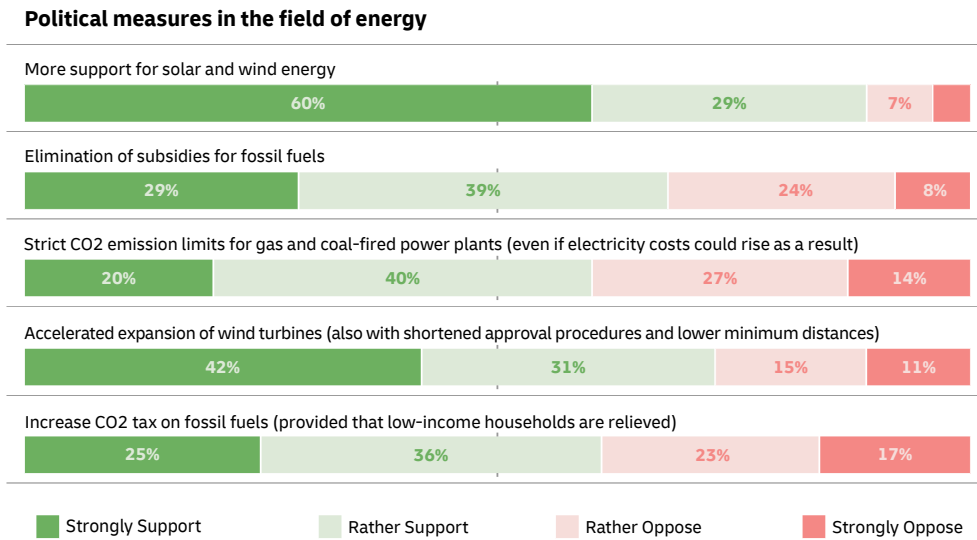
Around 85 percent of respondents believe Germans should act against climate change; 71 percent said they try to take personal action. This willingness is also reflected in the donation decision (see *briq policy monitor #3*), in which respondents were able to split 198 euros between themselves and a climate protection organization. On average, they donated 96 euros – enough to offset almost half of the annual per capita emissions of CO₂ emissions per capita.

Over 70 percent of people would also accept measures that restrict individual freedom of choice, for example in meat consumption or mobility. The following analysis shows the extent of public support, and its determinants, for different policy measures.

Energy

The transition from fossil to renewable energy sources is one of the core tasks of climate policy. A large part of the population is ready for a rapid energy turnaround. For example, 89 percent of respondents are in favor of more government support for solar and wind energy. Almost 74 percent support a massive acceleration in the expansion of wind turbines, even if this would mean shortening approval procedures and reducing the minimum distance to residential housing. 68 percent are in favor of stopping the remaining subsidies on fossil fuels. There is less support (around 60 percent in each case) for strict emission limits for gas- and coal-fired power plants, which could result in higher energy costs, and for a socially balanced increase in the CO₂ tax on heating and transport.

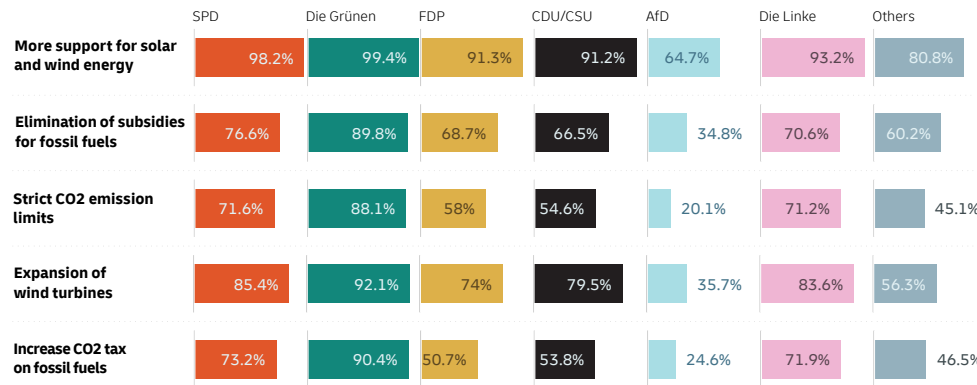
Fig. 2: Support for policies



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Support for climate policy measures is lowest among AfD voters. The largest division between supporters of the three governing parties is on a higher CO2 tax on fossil fuels for transport and heating. While only a small majority of FDP voters would support higher CO2 taxes, 90 percent of Green and 73 percent of SPD voters are in favor.

Fig. 3: Support for policies (by party preference)



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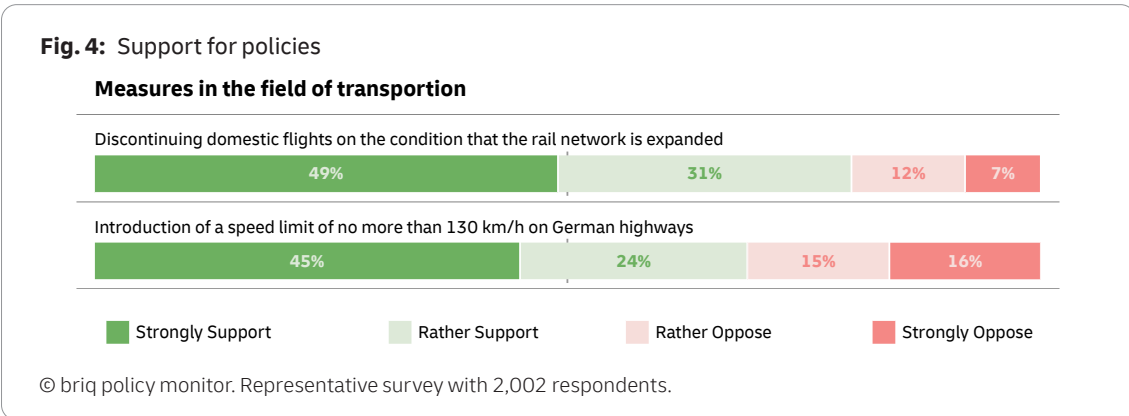
In addition to political preferences, support for climate policy measures is also influenced by economic preferences (patience, altruism and positive reciprocity), people's trust in science, and climate skepticism. In the case of the CO2 tax, support decreases with the level of monthly net income:

Income	Below 1300 €	1300 to 2600 €	2600 to 3600 €	3600 to 5000 €	Above 5000 €
Approval	71.7%	60.4%	58.0%	56.4%	54.1%

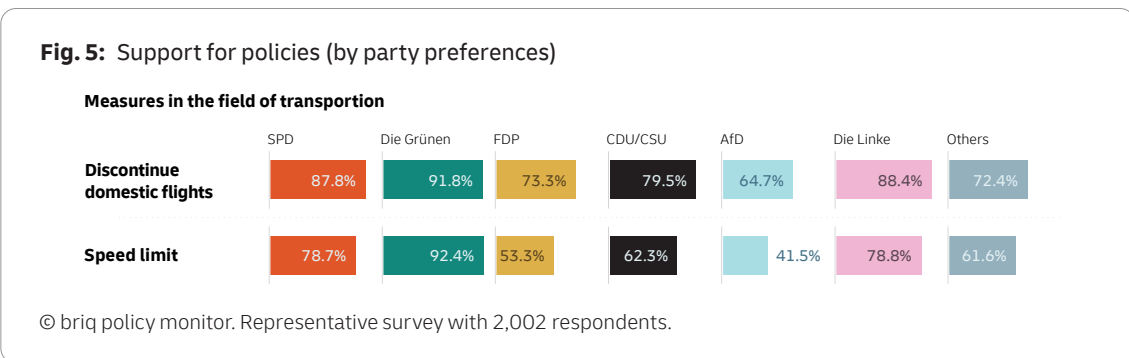
The accelerated expansion of wind turbines is viewed somewhat more critically in eastern Germany (63 percent approval), while 77 percent of respondents in the west support this proposal.

Transportation

Germans also support far-reaching measures to restructure transportation. More than 80 percent are in favor of discontinuing domestic flights on the condition that the rail network is expanded. More than two-thirds (69 percent) support a speed limit of 130 km/h on freeways.



Although there are clear differences depending on party preference (see Figure 5), both proposals would have majority support in almost all electorates – with the exception of the speed limit on highways, which less than 42 percent of AfD supporters would support..

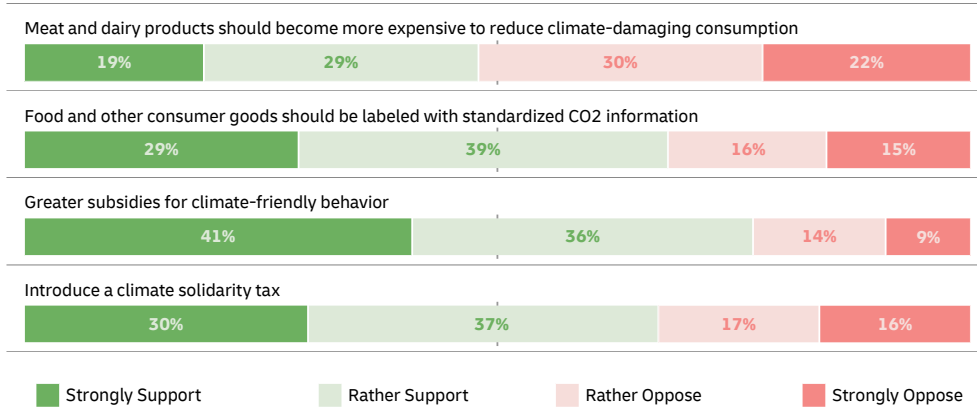


Consumer behavior and solidarity

Most of the proposed incentives for changing consumption behavior also receive strong popular support (see Figure 6). These include standardized labeling of CO2 emissions for food and consumer goods (72 percent in favor) and greater subsidies for climate-friendly behavior (77 percent). However, only 48 percent would support higher prices for meat and dairy products that are harmful to the climate – a suggestion that is quite popular only among Green Party voters (see Figure 7).

Fig. 6: Support for policies

Measures in the area of consumer behavior and solidarity



© briq policy monitor. Representative survey with 2,002 respondents.

Since the financial burden of climate protection affects people differently, a “climate solidarity tax” could serve to redistribute the financial burden between higher- and lower-income households. Two-thirds of Germans would support such an instrument.

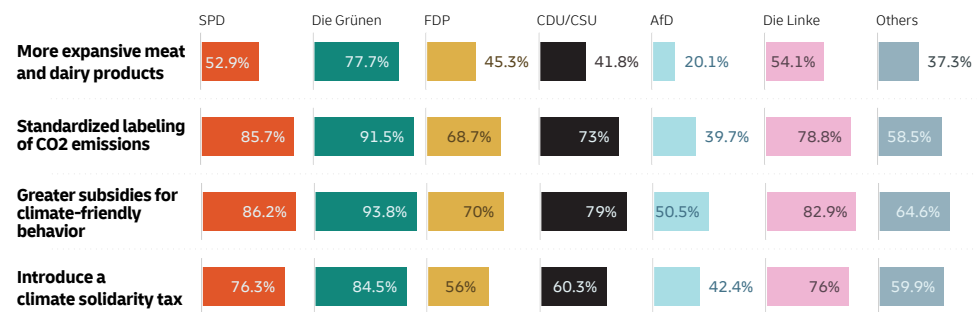
As with higher CO2 prices, support for such a solidarity tax also decreases with household income: 72 percent of respondents with a monthly net income below 2,600 euros, but only 60% of those with a higher income, are in favor of a climate solidarity tax.

Income	Below 1300 €	1300 to 2600 €	2600 to 3600 €	3600 to 5000 €	Above 5000 €
Approval	81.4%	68.0%	60.4%	62.2%	54.1%

Despite large differences along party lines, a climate solidarity tax would receive majority support among all electorates, except among AfD voters.

Fig. 7: Support for policies (by party preferences)

Measures in the area of consumer behavior and solidarity

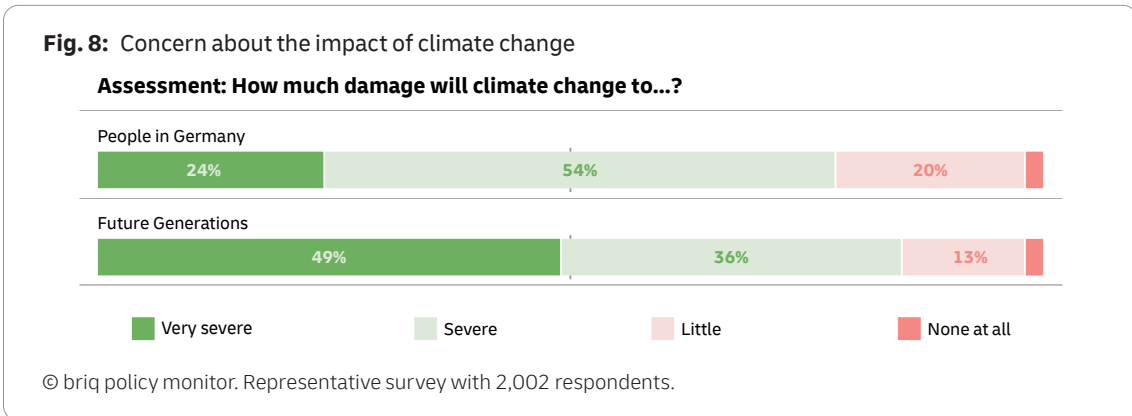


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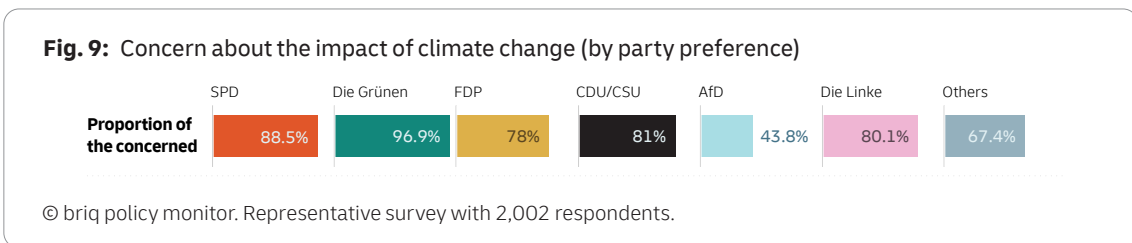
People's concerns

Droughts, heavy rains, floods, heatwaves – the consequences of climate change will be drastic, even with effective climate protection. How concerned are the Germans?

A large majority of 78 percent state they are concerned about the impact of climate change – one-third are even “very concerned” according to our survey. Also, around 78 percent expect climate change to cause massive damage to people in Germany. 85 percent expect damage to future generations across the globe (see Figure 8).



Women (82 percent) are more likely to express concern about climate change than men (75 percent). Economic preferences also play a role: Altruistic and patient people are more worried. The same applies to people with a high level of trust in science, while climate change skeptics (for a definition see *briq policy monitor #5*) are significantly less concerned. Again, there are sizeable differences by party preference (see Figure 9) and educational attainment.



Climate protection is also a question of intergenerational fairness. Many of the consequences of global warming will not be felt for several decades. Almost 84 percent of Germans, therefore, see an obligation to protect the environment for future generations and would be willing to pay for this.

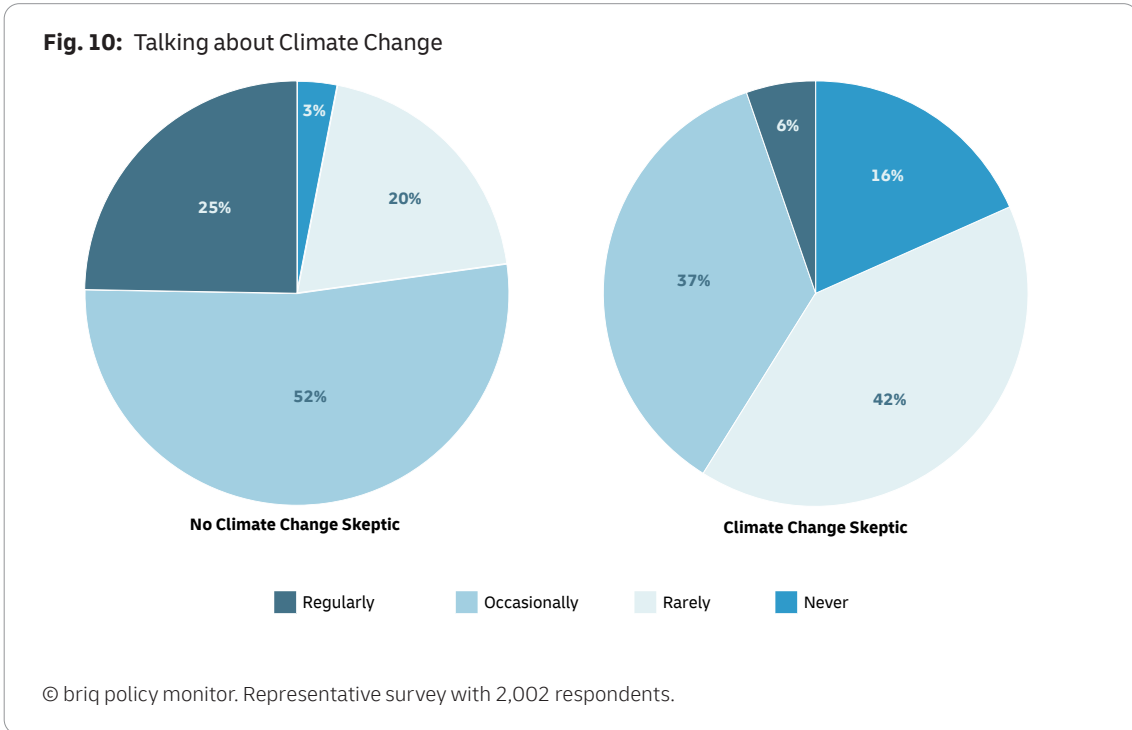
A small majority of 56 percent would go even further, calling on the German government to give greater weight to the needs of young people and future generations in climate policy decisions than the needs of older people. Not surprisingly, agreement with this demand depends on respondents' age: 63 percent of people under 30 would be in favor, but only 52 percent of respondents aged 50 to 60.

The extent to which climate change is of particular concern to the younger generation is also reflected in the fact that two-thirds (67 percent) of those under 30 say that climate change and its possible consequences will influence their decisions about the future – compared to only 52 percent of people aged 30 and above.

Climate change plays a role especially for decisions related to saving (money, energy, water, consumption, etc.) and housing. Nearly 47 percent of those under 30 said they adjust their savings behavior, and 28 percent state that climate change affects their family planning.

Another measure of the perceived importance of climate change is the frequency of discussions about it. 70 percent of Germans say they talk about climate change at least occasionally with their family, friends, or colleagues.

The more people deal with climate change in their private lives and perceive it as a threat, the more they talk about it. Conversely, climate change skeptics discuss the issue significantly less often in their social environment (see Figure 10):



Methods

We collected survey data from a representative sample of 2,002 study participants in Germany. To be eligible to participate in the study, respondents had to reside in Germany and be at least 18 years old. We collected the data in collaboration with the survey company Pureprofile. The experiment was computerized using the Qualtrics online survey tool. The data was collected between July 15 and 28, 2022. To ensure the highest possible quality of answers, all participants have to pass an attention check.

We used a stratified sampling approach to ensure that the samples represent the adult German population in terms of age, gender, and education. 48.25 % are male, the average age of the respondents is 51.8 years, and the median net income per month is between 1,600 and 2,600 euros. 22.98% of respondents live in eastern Germany (including Berlin), and 32.57 % live in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants.

Survey items: Climate concerns and support for climate action

Concerns

Wording of the questions, translated to English:

	Question	Scale
Worried by climate change	How concerned are you about climate change?	Worries me a lot / Worries me / Worries me a little / Does not worry me at all
Damage (Germany)	What do you think: How much damage will climate change cause to people in Germany?	Very severe / Severe / Little / None at all
Damage (future generations)	What do you think: How much damage will climate change cause to future generations?	Very severe / Severe / Little / None at all
Influence on decisions about the future	Does climate change and its possible impact influence your decisions about the future?	Yes / No
Decisions about future (only if respondent answered previous question with "Yes")	In which decisions does climate play a role for you?	Family planning / Saving (money, energy, water) / Career / Housing / Other:
Talking about climate change	How often do you talk about climate change with your family, friends or colleagues?	Regularly / Occasionally / Rarely / Never

Support for policy measures

The question "To what extent do you support or oppose the following policies?" was used to measure attitudes based on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Support, Rather Support, Rather Oppose, Strongly Oppose). Wording of the questions, translated to English:

The government should do more to promote renewables (e.g. solar and wind power).

Fossil fuels should no longer be subsidized.

The government should set strict CO2 emission limits for gas- and coal-fired power plants even if electricity becomes more expensive as a result.

The government should massively accelerate the expansion of wind energy by reducing bureaucracy and minimum distance to residential buildings.

The CO2 tax on fossil fuels used for transport and heating should be increased, with redistribution towards low-income households.

Meat and dairy products should become more expensive to reduce climate-damaging consumption.

Domestic flights should be discontinued and the rail network expanded instead.

Germany should implement a speed limit of 130 km/h (or less) on freeways.

The government should subsidize climate-friendly behavior (switching to e-cars, use of city bikes or expansion of solar panels on the roof) more strongly.

Food and other consumer goods should be labeled with uniform CO2 information.

	Question	Scale
Measures that restrict freedom of choice	To combat climate change, I also accept measures that restrict my individual freedom of choice (e.g. meat consumption or speed limits).	Do not agree at all/ Do not agree / Agree / Fully agree

Additional measures

We collect detailed information on individual background characteristics. These include age, gender, education, employment status, net income, number of children, party preferences, and state of residence. We further obtain an individual-level measure of altruism, patience and reciprocity following the methodology in the Global Preferences Survey.¹

¹ Falk, Armin, Anke Becker, Thomas Dohmen, Benjamin Enke, David Huffman, and Uwe Sunde. „Global Evidence on Economic Preferences.“ *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133, no. 4 (2018): 1645–1692.