

# The Multiple Dilemmas of Environmental Protection

The Effects of Generalized and Political Trust on the Acceptance of Environmental Policy Instruments

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## **Abstract**

With different environmental policy instruments (EPIs) that target individual citizens, the state can change activities or behaviors that have negative environmental consequences. However, EPIs are not likely to be implemented or have the intended effects unless people support these policies since a lack of support may affect willingness to comply, and politicians may not even introduce them due to the risk of loss in electoral support. Previous studies have suggested that political and generalized trust are important explanatory factors in EPI support. On an individual level and at least in some contexts, investigations have found that political and generalized trust generate more positive attitudes and higher acceptance of EPIs. There is, however, a lack of comparative studies.

The effects of political and generalized trust on EPI support are investigated in this thesis by studying cross-national differences in EPI preference. By using a comparative design, it is possible to study not only perceptions of whether public institutions are trustworthy and whether we find those effects in different countries, but also the effects of living in a society with more or less effective or corrupt public institutions.

It is suggested that people support different kinds of EPIs in different contexts. The data used are three international surveys and a Swedish mail survey. The results suggest several effects of trust on preferences for policies. One could be described as the coercion effect, where people with low trust choose more coercive policies in order to punish defectors; the second is the bureaucratic discretion effect, where people accept certain kinds of policies (typically economic instruments) only when the bureaucracy has a potential to deliver; third is an effect of trust in others, for people who do not trust others are not likely to choose certain policies when the risk of free-riding is high; and fourth is an indirect effect, for trust affects people's willingness to perform environmental action, which in turn affects policy preferences. In conclusion, as political and generalized trust are important explanatory factors in EPI support, we should expect the potential for such policy instruments to vary quite significantly across countries.

**Key words:** Social dilemmas, Generalized trust, Political trust, Environmental policy instruments, Environmental attitudes, Quality of Government