

DOES CLIMATE POLICY KILL JOBS? ASSESSING THE GAP BETWEEN THE OBJECTIVE AND PERCEIVED JOB TRANSITION RISK IN CANADA

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Overview

Fossil fuel groups have extensively used a ‘job killing’ argument to delay climate action (Vona, 2019). In fact, the most compulsory climate policies, such as carbon taxes, have been framed in terms of personal financial risks and threats to employment. This narrative has been particularly strong in Canada where affordability concerns caused by global inflation have been blamed on the federal carbon tax (Global News, 2024), despite extensive efforts by climate policy experts to counter such misinformation. Our study approaches this issue using a web-based survey of small and medium communities of Western Canada that are primarily dependent on fossil fuel extraction and use. Our research objectives are to: (1) provide an objective job risk assessment in Canada in light of stringent climate policies needed to meet emissions targets, (2) assess the gap (if any) between the objective job risk index and citizen perceptions of their job transition risk, and (3) assess associations between the perceived job risk and support for different types of climate policies as well as climate-justice policy mixes, while controlling for key socio-demographics and political ideologies.

Methods

The study employs a mixed method approach. First, we construct an objective transition risk index (TRI) using job types, the employment sector, and greenhouse gas emissions available through Statistics Canada, based on similar composite indices developed by Ebner et al. (2025) and Wagstaff and Neelsen (2020) (objective 1). Second, we will conduct a representative survey of Canadian citizens in small and medium communities of Western Canada (n=3,000), including the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, to measure individual beliefs in their job transition risk and to collect supplementary data on socio-demographics and political ideologies. We will then compare the gap between perceived beliefs in the job transition risk and the objective index (objective 2), hypothesizing that the perceived risk is overstated due to persistent misinformation campaigns. Finally, we will run a number of regression models to assess whether the perceived job transition risk explains support/opposition to different types of climate policies ranging from carbon taxes to regulations and subsidies, as well as climate policies combined with just energy transition policies such as worker retraining, job guarantees, and incomes tax reliefs (objective 3). We will control for key socio-demographics such as age, gender, income, education, region, and political ideologies.

Results and conclusions

Our results will be available in Spring 2025. The conclusions of our paper will help understand whether economic concerns expressed via the ‘job killing’ narrative are a strong driver of opposition to effective climate policies and whether this narrative becomes less salient when controlling for political ideologies and socio-demographics, as well as when climate policies are combined with compensatory just transitions policies. Ultimately, our research will help develop climate communication strategies to counter economic misinformation campaigns and design tailored climate policies that account for the perceived risk and/or include justice measures.

References

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