

Abstract

For many governments, enacting green policies is a priority, but such policies often impose on citizens substantial and uneven costs. How does the introduction of green policies affect voting? We study this question in the context of a major ban on polluting cars introduced in Milan. The policy was strongly opposed by the populist party Lega, portraying it as a "radical-chic-leftist" initiative that penalizes the common people. Using a set of inferential strategies, we show that owners of banned vehicles—who incurred a median loss of €3750—were significantly more likely to vote for Lega in the subsequent elections. This electoral shift did not stem from increased environmental skepticism, but rather from the perceived unfairness of the policy and its pocketbook implications. Indeed, recipients of compensation from the local government were not more likely to switch to Lega. The findings indicate that the design of green policies' distributive consequences is key in making them politically sustainable.