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Mapping the Drivers of Climate Policy Support Across Time: A Review

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Abstract

Grasping the changing factors of public and political support for climate policy is significant to ensuring the practical implementation, effectiveness, and long-term sustainability of these policies. This review integrates multidisciplinary literature to chart the drivers of climate policy support over three broad time periods: pre-2000s, 2000–2015, and post-2015. Before 2000, support for climate policy was limited by distant, technical framing, weak public communication, and elite-driven decision-making that failed to generate societal engagement. Between 2000 and 2015, risk awareness grew through extreme weather visibility, media attention, and economic arguments that framed climate action as necessary and cost-effective. International negotiations introduced more flexible and inclusive governance, helping broaden political appeal. Since 2015, support for climate policy have become increasingly shaped by decentralized climate governance, heightened public concern, digital media influence, and expectations of fairness and national leadership. The range of this review includes global and regional contexts, drawing on environmental psychology, political science, and behavioral economics. Over 150 studies are evaluated using thematic analysis, focusing on quantitative and qualitative approaches. Methodologically, the review compares methodologies across regions and disciplines, highlighting a bias towards the Global North and the prevalence of cross-sectional designs. The study identifies significant gaps in longitudinal studies, interdisciplinary frameworks, and Global South-focused studies. This article seeks to address the longitudinal gaps in the literature by reviewing the drivers of climate policy support evolution across distinct periods. The results highlight the need to address communication and policy interventions to evolving drivers of support. This review ends with strategic implications for policy and communication. Future research must continue bridging regional divides, synthesizing interdisciplinary perspectives, and adapting to changing public values, risk perceptions, and political realities.

Keywords: Climate Policy Support, Public Perception, Political and Institutional Factors

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1. Introduction

Climate change poses profound and escalating threats to human well-being, especially for children and young people, who are at disproportionate risk despite having little control over the forces driving these changes. Climate change is one of the most urgent global challenges and affects ecosystems, economies, and societies worldwide. Recent trends underscore the severity of the crisis. In 2024, global land surface temperatures were 1.98°C above the 1901–2000 average, the highest anomaly ever recorded (Statista, 2025). Additionally, global sea levels have risen by approximately 22.6 millimeters over the past two decades due to melting ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica (Statista, 2024a). This further highlights the accelerating pace of global warming. The human impacts are increasingly visible. In 2023 alone, droughts affected, injured, or displaced approximately 29.4 million people, while floods impacted an additional 32 million worldwide (Statista, 2024b; c). Historical data reveal that the most extreme droughts of the past 30 years are in 2002 and 2016, affected over 200 million people. These acute and chronic climate-related events exert long-term pressure on health, livelihoods, and social stability (Berry et al, 2018). In this context, implementing effective climate policies is essential to mitigating environmental degradation and safeguarding human development.

An effective government response to climate change requires the design and implementation of appropriate policies and interventions, as well as sustained public support to ensure long-term success. Support for climate policies refers to how individuals engage with government initiatives through their attitudes and behaviors. This support extends beyond activism and includes everyday, non-activist pro-environmental actions that are essential for the long-term success of policy implementation (Li & Liu, 2024). Over the past two decades, researchers have explored the psychological and social factors influencing public support for climate policies (Bord et al,

2000; Dietz et al, 2007; Drews & Van den Bergh, 2016; Lam, 2015; Leiserowitz, 2006; Li & Liu, 2024; Steg et al, 2005). Research on public support for climate policy has highlighted a wide range of individual-level determinants, including psychological, socio-demographic, economic, institutional, and media-related factors.

However, most of this literature remains concentrated on Western contexts, particularly the United States and Europe, and often examines these factors within narrowly defined temporal or national boundaries. Although numerous studies have identified the factors influencing public support for climate policy, many treat these drivers as static and unchanging. Far less attention has been given to how these determinants evolve in response to changing political, institutional, and communicative environments. There remains a paucity of understanding regarding the manner and rationale behind the evolution of the drivers of climate policy support over time, and the repercussions of this evolution for the sustained public commitment to climate action. This leads to the question addressed in this article: How have the determinants of public support for climate policy changed over time, and what are the implications of these changes for maintaining long-term support? Addressing this gap, this review seeks to chart and synthesize the principal drivers of public support for climate policy and uncovers the individual-level determinants of climate policy support and examine how these have changed across three broad phases: pre-2000s, 2000–2015, and post-2015 in order to better understand changing patterns of public support and the conditions necessary for sustaining long-term commitment to climate action and offering insights for policymakers, communicators, and scholars working to design more effective and socially grounded climate strategies.

2. Concept of Climate Policy Support

Support for climate policy occurs in three dimensions: public, political, and institutional. All of these dimensions have something unique to add to the formation, sustenance, and effectiveness of climate policies. Understanding how these spheres intersect and their respective drivers provides a rich context in which the paths of climate policy support can be traced over time (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Westerwinter, 2022). The importance of this threefold organization is that it can bridge individual behavior, political incentives, and institutional capacities and thus provide an integrated picture of how climate policy support is established and sustained across different conditions and horizons (OECD, 2022).

2.1. Public Support

Public opinion regarding climate policy revolves around the shared attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors of individual citizens toward climate issues and suggested solutions. It is the extent to which the public believes climate change poses an immediate threat, accepts the scientific consensus on climate change, and supports government or market interventions intended to reduce environmental damage (Tschötschel et al, 2021). Empirical research indicates an overall positive trend in climate concern among the world's population, and notably among high-income nations. In a global survey, over 80% of citizens in advanced economies such as Canada, Germany, and South Korea recognized climate change as a significant threat to their nation (Capstick et al, 2015). However, this concern does not necessarily extend to policy support. Readiness to contribute to climate action tends to depend on the perceived equity and affordability of suggested action. For instance, while most Swedes and Germans support higher fuel taxes to reduce emissions, fewer than 40% of Americans are in favor of equivalent taxation, citing personal cost and doubts about government efficiency as the main concerns (Sterner et al, 2024). In addition, public support strongly correlates with direct experience of climate-related catastrophes. Areas that are often impacted by heat waves, wildfires, floods, or hurricanes are likely to show increased public concern, which can be a strong catalyst for grassroots campaigning and political pressure (Osberghaus & Fugger, 2022).

2.2. Political Support

Political support is the choices, pledges, and rhetorical stances taken by political actors, legislators, executives, and political parties in framing and supporting climate policy. Policymaking on climate is political because it entails reconciling competing interests, crossing ideological fault lines, and balancing economic trade-offs. Political support is frequently contingent on the ideological leaning of governing parties, electoral motives, and lobbying (FitzGerald & NESC, 2019). Political endorsement of ambitious climate targets has also been strongly amplified in nations such as Germany and New Zealand, thanks to the existence and reach of Green Parties within ruling coalition governments. Green Parties have mainstreamed the topic of climate through larger policy platforms, including legislation such as Germany's Renewable Energy Sources Act and New Zealand's Zero Carbon Act. On the other hand, the United States provides a sharp example of partisan polarization breeding

policy instability (Brás et al, 2025). Under Democratic control, there has been substantial progress in climate action, like the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, whereas Republican administrations have routinely reversed or dismantled such action. Such switching between policies contradicts policy consistency and international leadership. Additionally, global deals like the Paris Agreement pressure national governments to sustain or improve political backing, typically driven by diplomatic imperatives, economic competitiveness, or reputational issues. Subnational authorities, as governors, mayors, and city councils, are also increasingly involved particularly where national-level political backing is fragmented or limited. Programs such as the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group show that municipal governments can drive climate action even without unified federal backing (Nguyen et al, 2020).

2.3. Institutional Support

Institutional support entails the organizational capability and dedication of official organizations like bureaucratic agencies, international institutions, and regulatory agencies charged with conveying political mandates into policy structures and grassroots-level enactment. These institutions make available technical competence, governance persistence, and policy oversight roles that are essential for extended-duration climate policies. Robust institutional structures are associated with more stable and enforceable climate policies (Semenets-Orlova et al, 2023). The European Commission's Fit for 55 Package, presented in 2021, is a good example of strong institutional support for lowering greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030. The policy package combines transport, energy, agriculture, and emissions trading mechanisms into a unified strategy that is consistent with the EU's overall objective of climate neutrality by 2050 (Commission, 2023). Institutional strength, however, differs greatly between regions. In developing nations, institutional weaknesses such as weak administrative capacity, political patronage, or inadequate financial resources represent key challenges to efficient climate governance. As the UNEP Emissions Gap Report (2023) emphasizes, numerous countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America have a double burden: they are highly vulnerable to climate impacts yet lack the institutional capacity to access and manage climate finance effectively (Stiftung, 2024). At other times, multilateral institutions such as the Global Environment Facility or the Green Climate Fund have intervened to fill gaps, but there are still concerns about funding access, absorptive capacity, and implementation at the local level. Furthermore, institutional support is shaped by policy legacies and feedback loops. Their record of effective environmental policy encourages institutional trust, which in its turn amplifies public and political backing, forming a virtuous cycle that allows for long-term climate ambition (Eriksen et al, 2021).

3. Categories of Drivers Influencing Public Support for Climate Policy

Some authors, such as Bumann (2021) and Drews & Van den Bergh (2016), have provided an overview of the factors influencing public support for climate policy. Bumann (2021) highlights that climate change beliefs are a significant determinant of climate policy support, noting that individuals who believe climate change is happening and is caused by human activity are more likely to support climate policies. She also finds that the perceived agreement among scientists on the issue positively impacts policy support and even mediates the relationship between political party identification and policy preferences. Bumann (2021) underscores the importance of public awareness, suggesting that greater knowledge of climate change leads to stronger support for climate policies. Meanwhile, Drews & Van den Bergh (2016) group these factors into three main categories: social-psychological factors and climate change perception, perceptions of climate policy and its design, and contextual factors. In this study, drivers will be grouped according to perception of climate change and related policy, socio-economic factors, institutional and political factors, media and communication drivers.

3.1. Perception of Climate Change and Related Policy, Psychological and Attitudinal Factors

Beliefs about the reality, anthropogenic causes, and severity of climate change are closely linked to policy preferences. Van Valkengoed et al (2022) and Dong et al (2018) find that individuals who perceive climate change as real, threatening and caused by humans are more likely to support mitigation and adaptation measures. Knowledge and awareness also influence attitudes. Empirical evidence shows that increased knowledge about climate change is associated with stronger policy support (Khatibi et al, 2021; Prasetyo et al, 2024). As Stepenuck & Green (2015) noted, informed individuals and communities are more likely to engage with and endorse environmental policies. Bulkeley (2000) added that integrating scientific knowledge with local values and experiences is essential for fostering public legitimacy and responsibility. Furthermore, personal experience with climate-related events like extreme weather can heighten risk perception and promote greater support for

climate action (Drews & Van den Bergh, 2016). Such experiences make the consequences of climate change more tangible and strengthen the perceived urgency of policy responses. Furthermore, trust in science and emotional reactions (like fear or guilt) can either motivate or hinder action, making it essential to frame policies in ways that evoke concern without inducing hopelessness or denial (Kaestner et al, 2025).

Public support for climate policy extends beyond general concern about climate change; it often depends on how the policy is designed and perceived. A significant factor is how costly the policy feels at the individual level. When people perceive a policy as financially burdensome to them, resistance tends to grow. Conversely, when the costs are viewed as fairly distributed, particularly when higher-income groups or major polluters are seen to bear a greater share, support for the policy is more expected (Harring et al, 2019). Perceptions of benefits and effectiveness also play an important role: policies that are seen as useful and capable of producing meaningful results tend to receive stronger backing (Huber et al, 2020). Finally, how governments use the revenue generated by climate policies can significantly influence public attitudes. Support increases when funds are reinvested in climate-related initiatives or redistributed to the public, as this promotes trust and a sense of fairness (Jagers et al, 2019). Earmarking revenues for environmental projects or public compensation is often viewed as a fair and constructive approach.

3.2. Socio-Economic Considerations

Socio-demographic factors like age, education, income, gender, and urbanization are crucial in shaping people's attitudes toward climate policy. Younger generations are more likely to be concerned about climate change and more willing to pay for radical environmental policies (Muttarak, 2021). Education is also important; individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to understand climate science and support evidence-based policies (Alawade & Obun-Andy, 2024; Poortinga et al, 2019). Income levels similarly shape attitudes: higher-income individuals support climate policy for ethical or health-related reasons, while lower-income groups often express concern about rising living costs or potential job losses (Correa González et al, 2024). Additionally, city dwellers are generally more supportive of climate action, as they are more frequently exposed to climate-related discourse, have greater awareness of pollution, and benefit from access to green initiatives (e.g., public transportation, recycling schemes). On the other hand, rural dwellers perceive climate action as a threat to conventional livelihoods, like fossil fuel industries or farming (González-Hernández et al, 2022).

Economic considerations such as perceived cost and benefit, job effects, and tax acceptability also affect the public and political support of climate policy. Citizens tend to view climate measures on a cost-benefit basis, frequently favoring economic security and affordability over sustainable environmental consequences in the long run (Hochachka & Mérida, 2023). For instance, the 2018 "Gilets Jaunes" (Yellow Vest) uprising in France was provoked by rising fuel taxes cast as environmentally required but seen by rural and working-class voters as economically backward-looking. On the contrary, measures that highlight co-benefits, e.g., the creation of employment opportunities in renewable energy industries or enhanced public health, have wider support (Wilkin, 2020). Furthermore, policy support might depend on policy design; individuals are more willing to accept carbon taxes if revenues are recycled into rebates, infrastructure, or community development, as illustrated in Canada's federal carbon pricing system (Ram et al, 2022).

3.3. Political and Institutional Factors

Political ideology and institutional trust are repeatedly found to be predictors of support for climate policy in varied geographic contexts and time frames. Those holding left or progressive political ideologies tend to be more accepting of climate mitigation policies, as these are premised on value systems prioritizing egalitarianism, environmental responsibility, and collective action. Right-wing individuals tend to be skeptical towards regulatory environmental approaches, prioritizing economic freedom, minimalist government intervention, and sovereignty (Johnson et al, 2025). Empirical evidence from the Pew Research Center (2020) underlines this ideological divide within the United States: 78% of Democrats agree with tougher environmental controls at any cost, but only 22% of Republicans agree with them. The polarization is found across other Western democracies, such as Canada and Australia, where right-wing parties have consistently fought or stalled vigorous climate legislation.

In addition to ideology, institutional trust specifically in scientific institutions, government agencies, and international agencies, is a mediating factor. Greater institutional trust correlates with greater acceptance of scientific consensus on climate change and more support for policy interventions like carbon pricing, emissions standards, and renewable energy investments (Biddlestone et al, 2022). Mistrust is regularly compounded by past failures of governance, perceptions of corruption, or foreign-driven agendas (Bogert et al, 2024). In addition, the

increase in nationalist populism has made the global climate governance context more challenging. Leaders like Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Donald Trump in the United States have cast climate action as a threat to national sovereignty or economic development, eroding public confidence in multilateral agreements like the Paris Accord (Sparkman et al, 2022). Therefore, establishing trust in democratic institutions and scientific expertise is a bedrock challenge for achieving long-term, bipartisan climate policy support.

Institutional and governance structures heavily influence the development, implementation, and public support of climate policies. In federal systems such as the United States, Canada, or Australia, subnational governments (e.g., states, provinces) tend to diverge, leading to policy fragmentation or innovation. California, for example, has set tighter emissions standards than the federal U.S. government has (Finnegan, 2022). In fragile institutions, implementation hurdles for climate policies can emerge, including corruption, bureaucratic inertia, or deficiencies in technical capability. Hence, strong, transparent, and inclusive governance arrangements are needed to build long-term institutional legitimacy and public support (Svensson & Wahlström, 2023).

3.4. Media and Communication Impact

Media framing, exposure to climate information, misinformation, and digital activism contribute significantly to climate attitudes. Conventional media coverage dictates the public's perception of the causes, implications, and solutions to climate change. A Reuters Institute report in 2023 established that individuals who read climate news from reliable sources, such as The Guardian, BBC, or National Geographic, regularly have increased concern and policy support (Bayes et al, 2023). But the spread of disinformation and climate skepticism, particularly on social media sites, has accelerated public polarization and confusion. Digital platforms have facilitated decentralized climate action, with the likes of Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and Sunrise Movement using social media to galvanize action, particularly from youth. Narrative approaches like framing in terms of justice, co-benefits, or local effects can similarly boost engagement and change public opinion (Lawrance et al, 2022).

4. Evolution of Drivers of Climate Policy Support Over Time

4.1. Early Drivers (Pre-2000s)

4.1.1. Perceptions of Climate Change as a Factor Limiting Policy Support

In the early 2000s, public perception of climate change was largely shaped by the dominance of scientific and technocratic narratives. Institutions such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established in 1988, played a central role in establishing scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change. The IPCC's First Assessment Report (1990) emphasized the link between human activity, particularly fossil fuel combustion, and rising greenhouse gas concentrations, projecting significant impacts including global warming and sea-level rise. This scientific framing underpinned major international agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) and the Kyoto Protocol (1997), reinforcing the treatment of climate change as a technical issue governed by international diplomacy and expert modeling.

However, the technocratic character of early climate governance had important implications for public perception and policy support. Climate change was rarely framed as a socio-political or ethical concern, and communication strategies often failed to translate complex scientific findings into accessible, relatable narratives for the broader public. As a result, citizen engagement remained limited, particularly among communities not directly involved in elite policy processes. The absence of discourses connecting climate change to everyday issues such as health, economic security, or equity, contributed to a perception that climate policy was remote, abstract, and primarily the concern of experts and diplomats.

Furthermore, major summits of the period, including the Rio Earth Summit (1992) and the Kyoto Conference (1997), prioritized emissions targets, technological cooperation, and differentiated state responsibilities, while neglecting themes such as climate justice, Indigenous rights, or adaptation needs in the Global South. This narrow framing reinforced the marginalization of civil society and vulnerable populations in climate discourse, thereby limiting broader public identification with, and support for climate policy. Consequently, during this period, public support was closely tied to trust in scientific authority rather than to perceived personal or collective relevance, hindering the development of more inclusive and socially grounded climate action.

4.1.2. Media Inconsistencies and Their Impact on Climate Policy Support

In the pre-2000s, the mass media played a limited and often problematic role in shaping public perception of

climate change, thereby influencing support for climate policy. Although the scientific consensus was growing, anchored by the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 and its First Assessment Report in 1990, media coverage remained sporadic, superficial, and poorly aligned with scientific developments. Environmental reporting was largely subordinated to dominant political and economic narratives of the time, such as the end of the Cold War, the Gulf conflict, and the rise of neoliberal globalization, which collectively marginalized climate discourse in the public arena.

When climate change was covered, it was often framed through journalistic norms emphasizing balance, even when scientific consensus was overwhelming. This approach, termed "balance as bias" by Boykoff and Boykoff (2004), resulted in disproportionate representation of climate skepticism in mainstream media. Their content analysis of major U.S. newspapers between 1988 and 2002 revealed that over half of the articles presented skeptic viewpoints alongside scientific findings, falsely equating them in credibility. Such framing contributed to widespread public misunderstanding and reduced the perceived urgency of the issue.

The lack of consistent and scientifically grounded media narratives impeded public engagement, with surveys in the late 1990s indicating that only a minority of Americans viewed global warming as a serious personal threat (Gallup, 1997). This disconnect between expert knowledge and public perception weakened societal pressure on policymakers and reinforced a technocratic model of climate governance, largely detached from broader public mobilization.

4.1.3. Political Factors

In the pre-2000s, political support for climate policy was primarily shaped by emerging environmental values, particularly within left-leaning parties and early green movements. In Europe, green parties like Germany's Bündnis 90/Die Grünen gained parliamentary influence and shaped national climate agendas through advocacy for renewable energy, emissions reduction, and ecological justice. Their voter base typically consisted of younger, educated, and middle-class constituents aligned with participatory and sustainability-oriented values. In contrast, conservative parties were more skeptical, framing environmental regulation as a threat to economic growth and individual liberty. Right-leaning institutions, such as the Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute in the U.S., challenged climate science legitimacy and emphasized market-based environmental approaches, laying the foundation for the ideological polarization of climate politics.

This political divide was reflected in early international agreements. The Kyoto Protocol (1997) marked a major institutional milestone by establishing binding emission targets for developed countries, operationalizing the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). However, its geopolitical limitations became evident: while the EU advanced implementation via mechanisms like the EU ETS, the U.S. refused ratification under the Bush administration, citing economic harm and fairness concerns. This underscored the vulnerability of international commitments to domestic political dynamics and the challenge of balancing global cooperation with national interests.

Institutionally, climate governance was dominated by elite-driven, top-down processes. The framing of climate change as a technocratic and scientific issue, reflected in the UNFCCC (1992) and Kyoto Protocol, limited public engagement and reinforced perceptions of climate policy as abstract and remote. Civil society mobilization remained weak; major environmental NGOs had yet to fully integrate climate change into their core agendas, and public awareness remained oriented toward localized environmental issues. The absence of digital communication tools also constrained grassroots coordination. As a result, early climate policymaking lacked bottom-up legitimacy and public accountability, contributing to implementation gaps and limited citizen pressure for ambitious action.

4.2. Mid-Period Drivers (2000s- 2015)

4.2.1. Risk Perceptions and Their Influence on Climate Policy Support

Between 2000 and 2015, public perception of climate change evolved markedly, contributing to a notable increase in support for climate policy. Heightened visibility of climate-related risks, such as rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, and observable glacial retreat, contributed to a growing perception of climate change as a present and escalating threat (Shi et al, 2025). This risk salience significantly enhanced public receptivity to policy interventions aimed at mitigation and adaptation.

Framing climate change as a moral and existential issue helped shift public perception. An Inconvenient Truth (2006), for example, effectively translated complex scientific data into emotionally compelling narratives, positioning climate change as a profound challenge. Its wide dissemination across educational and public platforms fostered broader public understanding and bolstered normative support for climate action (Liu et al,

2023).

Simultaneously, the rise of transnational climate movements, most notably 350.org, helped link climate risks to issues of social justice and intergenerational equity. These movements reframed climate change as an environmental issue, and a human and civil rights concern, thereby expanding the motivational base for policy support (Ferré Garcia, 2022). Mobilizations such as the 2009 International Day of Climate Action and public demonstrations during COP15 in Copenhagen revealed increasing civic pressure on governments to adopt ambitious and equitable climate measures.

By embedding climate risks within broader narratives of justice and responsibility, public perception during this period greatly increases the policy support. The framing of climate change as scientifically urgent and socially relevant helped catalyze the normative and political legitimacy necessary for advancing more inclusive climate governance frameworks.

4.2.2. Role of Economic Considerations in Climate Policy Support

From the mid-2000s through the early 2010s, economic reasoning became a central axis in climate policy discourse, significantly altering public and political support dynamics. The shift from predominantly moral or scientific appeals toward cost-benefit analysis and market-based logic allowed climate action to be framed as an environmental necessity and as an economically rational investment. This reframing helped integrate climate policy into mainstream political agendas and widened its appeal across ideological lines (Dangar & Mishra, 2024).

A pivotal moment in this transition was the publication of the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (2006), which argued that the economic costs of inaction could reach up to 20% of global GDP annually, while mitigation efforts would cost approximately 1–2% of GDP. By quantifying the risks of inaction and the benefits of timely intervention, the Stern Review provided policymakers with a compelling economic rationale for climate action, thereby increasing its political legitimacy and public support (Garth & Roberts, 2022).

In parallel, the concept of the "green economy" began to gain traction. Climate policy was increasingly portrayed not as a constraint on economic growth but as a driver of innovation, job creation, and competitiveness. Initiatives such as Germany's Energiewende demonstrated how feed-in tariffs and subsidies for renewables could stimulate domestic industries and enhance energy security. Similarly, China's strategic integration of renewable energy targets into its national Five-Year Plans has significantly advanced solar and wind energy development, positioning the country as a key player in the global transition to clean energy (Chen & Ji, 2024).

The expansion of climate finance mechanisms, particularly through institutions like the World Bank and the establishment of the Green Climate Fund in 2010, further reinforced the view of climate action as a strategic investment, especially in the Global South. These mechanisms highlighted co-benefits such as improved air quality, health outcomes, and economic diversification, which enhanced the political viability of climate initiatives in both developed and developing contexts (Chan, 2024).

This economic reframing contributed to broader public acceptance of climate policy by aligning environmental goals with tangible economic incentives. By demonstrating that decarbonization could coexist with economic growth and welfare, economic arguments provided a unifying narrative that helped depoliticize climate action to some extent. Nonetheless, critiques concerning distributional equity and structural dependency on fossil fuels persisted; underscoring that economic framing alone could not fully resolve the deeper socio-political tensions embedded in climate governance.

4.2.3. Institutional and Political Drivers

During the 2000–2015 periods, political and institutional developments at the international level significantly influenced the degree of support for climate policy. Rather than producing binding commitments, key summits such as COP15 in Copenhagen (2009) and COP16 in Cancun (2010) shaped support through their signaling power, inclusivity, and evolving governance frameworks.

The Copenhagen Accord, though politically controversial for its non-binding outcome, marked a turning point in the structure of climate governance. Its emphasis on voluntary national pledges introduced a bottom-up approach that enabled states to align international commitments with domestic political feasibility. This flexibility enhanced policy ownership, allowing countries to define contributions within national constraints, thereby increasing political support in diverse contexts.

Furthermore, Copenhagen and Cancun institutionalized the scientific 2°C target and solidified the principle of

Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). These institutional signals, linking equity with ambition, were critical for maintaining the participation and support of both industrialized and developing countries. The Cancun Agreements, in particular, helped restore trust in multilateral processes through concrete mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund (GCF), REDD+, and the Technology Mechanism. These instruments translated abstract climate goals into tangible forms of cooperation, fostering greater legitimacy and political buy-in from the Global South.

Public mobilization also played a reinforcing role. The large-scale demonstrations around COP15 demonstrated growing societal pressure on political institutions to act, signaling to negotiators that climate governance was subject to increasing political scrutiny. This politicization of climate diplomacy contributed to climate policy becoming a central topic in national political debates in the years that followed.

In sum, the political and institutional evolution of the climate regime during this period did not produce legally binding outcomes but succeeded in reshaping the conditions for policy support. By lowering entry barriers, accommodating national circumstances, and reinforcing principles of equity and cooperation, these frameworks laid the groundwork for broader political consensus and increased legitimacy for future climate action.

4.2.4. Media Narratives and Public Support for Climate Policy

Between 2000 and 2015, media played a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of climate change, thereby influencing the degree of public support for climate policy. On one hand, the mainstream media significantly expanded climate coverage in both volume and depth. High-impact documentaries such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) helped communicate scientific consensus and future risks to a mass audience through emotionally compelling and morally urgent framing. Major outlets like *The Guardian*, *BBC*, and *The New York Times* increasingly institutionalized environmental reporting, while scientific journals produced climate-focused special issues, fostering a more informed public discourse.

Simultaneously, however, the media landscape became increasingly polarized, particularly in Anglophone countries. Right-leaning news organizations, such as Fox News and certain talk radio networks, actively undermined public trust in climate science. Through selective amplification of scientific uncertainty, economic fearmongering, and ideologically charged narratives, these outlets contributed to a perception of climate change as politically controversial rather than scientifically established.

The dual function of the media, as an amplifier of scientific urgency and a conduit for climate skepticism, revealed its capacity to either mobilize or suppress public support. In contexts where media aligned with scientific and policy consensus, support for mitigation was enhanced. In contrast, where media fostered doubt and ideological polarization, public support was fragmented, reducing the perceived legitimacy of policy proposals.

4.3. Contemporary Drivers (Post-2015)

4.3.1. Perception of Climate Change and Policy in the Post-2015 Era

Since 2015, public support for climate policy has remained strongly shaped by how individuals perceive climate change, its risks and the design of climate instruments. Empirical studies show that psychological factors such as belief in the anthropogenic nature of climate change, perceived urgency, or concern, have reinforced citizen willingness to support mitigation policies (Drews & Van den Bergh, 2016; Bumann, 2021). These perceptions are filtered through political ideology and cultural worldviews.

Furthermore, citizens increasingly scrutinize the fairness and effectiveness of climate policies themselves. Support is higher when policies are perceived as equitable in distributing costs and benefits, when they promise clear environmental returns, and when revenues such as those from carbon pricing are transparently reinvested in climate or social programs (Harring et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2019). The post-2015 momentum toward carbon pricing and subsidy reforms has therefore encountered mixed public responses, often reflecting the salience of these design features. Thus, public support in the post-Paris era is contingent on climate beliefs and on the perceived legitimacy and distributive logic of specific policy instruments.

4.3.2. Political and Institutional Drivers of Climate Policy Support

The Paris Agreement reconfigured international climate governance by decentralizing target-setting through nationally determined contributions (NDCs). While this bottom-up model broadened participation, especially among developing economies, it placed the burden of implementation and legitimacy squarely on national political institutions. As a result, public support for climate policy in the post-2015 period has increasingly depended on domestic political leadership, institutional credibility, and policy continuity.

Cases such as the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in 2017 illustrate how political reversals can undermine international coordination and domestic public confidence (Hersher, 2020). More broadly, institutional variables such as the level of democratic quality, policy stability, and transparency, condition the social legitimacy of climate action. For example, higher democratic accountability has been linked to stronger public endorsement of ambitious climate measures, due to the perceived responsiveness of institutions and procedural fairness (Pohjolainen et al, 2024).

The diffusion of authority in the post-Paris period has further complicated the political landscape. Non-state and subnational actors (cities, businesses, and transnational networks) now complement national governments in implementation. While this polycentric model enhances flexibility and resource mobilization, it also raises concerns over coherence and accountability. The interplay between institutional design, political leadership, and the credibility of climate commitments remains central to understanding variations in public support across the post-2015 climate governance landscape.

4.3.3. The Evolving Role of Media in Shaping Climate Policy Support in the Post-2015 Era

In the post-2015 period, the media has continued to be a significant driver of public support for climate policy. Unlike earlier decades marked by inconsistent and scientifically ambiguous messaging, today's media more actively shape how individuals perceive climate change through faster and more accessible channels, such as online searches and social media platforms.

Recent evidence suggests that the public now actively seeks climate-related information, particularly in response to extreme weather events. For instance, Li et al (2023) found that in China, individuals significantly increased their internet searches for climate change information on days with abnormally high temperatures. However, this surge in interest was mainly directed toward adaptation strategies and general climate knowledge, rather than mitigation behaviors. This indicates a shift in media's influence: while it can successfully raise awareness and concern through temperature-related salience, it is less effective at motivating collective long-term action unless the messaging is tied to personal relevance or perceived risk. This evolution enhances public awareness and engagement, translating that concern into sustained support for ambitious climate policy but still requires deliberate media strategies that connect climate risks with actionable and collective solutions.

4.4. Temporal Trends and Shifts

4.4.1. Contextual factors Shifts

- Dominant Discourse Shifts

Initially climate stories were rank technocratic and focused heavily on regulatory mechanisms of control related to emissions targets, modelling the atmosphere, and regulating technological solutions led primarily by policy-makers and scientists. Since 2010, climate discourse has transitioned away from a description that only advocated narrow technocratic action and started to develop social, political, and ethical knowledge. The advent of climate justice helped question the hegemonic ideology of climate action being based on regulatory actions associated with the historically privileged (i.e., the public, scientists, corporations) while ignoring the global, systemic injustices that give rise to climate change. This expansion of climate discourse is evident in the continued emergence of the terms "equity", "just transition", and "loss and damage" within IPCC and UNFCCC texts.

The emergence of these evolutions of climate policy framing can also be observed in the shift away from a technical regulatory regime to an emphasis on governance, inclusivity, and accountability. Public concern has further demanded transparency and an inclusionary process in the formulation of policy frameworks, rendering climate policy as politically contested and negotiated space involving an amalgamation of stakeholders (beyond the elite consensus).

- Shift from Economic to Moral Framing

Economic framing is not a new phenomenon, having gained momentum in the early part of the 21st century as a key pillar of arguments around climate policy. The Stern Review has been a prominent report in this framing, mentioning that the immediate costs of mitigation are clearly lower than later costs to society. Climate policy has thus been framed historically as a consequence of prudential economic policy. In more recent years, however, the framing of climate change as a moral crisis, a crisis of intergenerational justice, has gained traction. Climate change is increasingly framed in the language of morals and ethics (Dehnhardt et al, 2022). Many youth movements, for example, view climate action as economically rational and morally necessary, it is morally irresponsible to do nothing. In a similar human rights way, many groups (especially indigenous) argue about the rights of peoples, along with justice, when it comes to climate action.

As such, a dual-pronged approach frame climate action, the economic and the moral/ethical. While some business leaders are driven by narratives about green growth, some activists and community leaders employ vocabulary that frames climate policies in terms of rights and justice (Dwivedi et al, 2022). These new conversations signify a merging of many values and motivations for climate action, marking a shift from the more singularly focused 'green' advocacy over the past three to four decades.

- Evolving Actors

While the number and types of actors involved in influencing climate policy have changed significantly over the decades, the early on guiding the climate agenda was primarily limited to intergovernmental organizations, scientific panels (i.e., IPCC), and national governments. NGOs like Greenpeace and WWF also had major influences and played supporting roles, often as oversight actors (Youssef, 2024). In the 2000s, transnational NGOs became more significant by providing technical expertise, advocacy, and building global coalitions.

Nowadays, a more complex set of actors have changed climate governance, generating diversity amongst new actors and enabling resilience with multi-scaled actors thus creating second-order policy tools for experimentation and innovation among worlds of governance. The emergence of the Paris Agreement has resulted in an even broader variety of actors involved in climate action and related decisions: Youth movements like Fridays for Future have been able to reframe climate and emissions reductions within more urgent timelines of accountability and long-term downscaling responsibility. Grassroots groups ranked organizations, particularly in Global South regions, are working to elevate local knowledge using approaches that focus on adaptation to climate change to ensure climate resilience. Private sector actors shifted dramatically from being rebellious on climate action to making commitments to net-zero networks. Large financial institutions fully endorsing any form of sustainable investing, BlackRock and HSBC become important actors acknowledging climate action. Cities and other subnational actors like C40 Cities, and other organizations developed into spaces for experimentation where cities and other actors evolved to take robust climate action more ambitious and efficient than their counterparts in national governments.

4.4.2. Comparative Analysis

When thinking back to the pre-2000s, virtually all discussion was focused on elite, science-based, elite-driven explanations, treating climate change simply as an environmental and technical problem. Public awareness was minimal, most political exchanges in climate politics happened in the context of an international diplomatic meeting, at places like the Kyoto Protocol (1997). In the mid-period (2000s–2015), the focus widened. The economic arguments gained traction, thanks in part to reports like the Stern Review (2006), which discussed the cost-benefit value of climate action. Global mobilization, although not without a measure of success, and new public sentiment emerged in moments like Copenhagen (2009) and Cancun (2010), perhaps illustrating how far could be collectively go about glossy shared ambitions and how far would it fail to cooperate in future. Media coverage increased, and increasingly, climate change discussions penetrated the mainstream. In the post-2015 period, where the Paris Agreement clearly achieved a focal point in the development of climate policies and actions, the landscape dramatically changed to one that was more intersectional, multi-level and had a greater pluralism of key actors in society like businesses, indigenous groups, youth activists, and civil society organizations (Freimuth et al, 2022). The landscape of climate policy support has also undergone considerable changes in the past three decades.

In the pre-2000s, support for climate policy was shaped by a set of early yet limited drivers. Public perceptions of climate change were largely defined by its framing as a distant and technical issue, which hindered widespread engagement. Communication strategies frequently failed to translate complex scientific findings into accessible and relatable narratives, thereby limiting public understanding. The mass media played an inconsistent role, often lacking coherence and scientific accuracy in its coverage, which further constrained public awareness and weakened policy support. Politically, early climate initiatives were primarily driven by emerging environmental values among elites, resulting in policies that lacked bottom-up legitimacy, public accountability, and broad societal pressure for ambitious implementation.

Between 2000 and 2015, climate policy support was driven by a growing convergence of risk perception, economic reasoning, and changing political and institutional conditions. The increasing visibility of climate-related risks, such as extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and glacial retreat, amplified public perception of climate change as an immediate and escalating threat, enhancing receptivity to mitigation and adaptation measures (Shi et al., 2025). Concurrently, economic considerations gained prominence, as climate action was increasingly framed through market-based logic and cost-benefit analyses, broadening its political appeal and embedding it within mainstream policy discourse (Dangar & Mishra, 2024). The political and

institutional drivers of this period, while not producing binding agreements, introduced more flexible and inclusive approaches that acknowledged national differences and emphasized principles of fairness. These developments contributed to broader political support and enhanced the legitimacy of future climate action.

Since 2015, support for climate policy has been shaped by a complex interplay of psychological, political, and communicative factors. Public perception remains central, with studies showing that belief in human-caused climate change, heightened concern, and a sense of urgency all contribute to stronger support for mitigation efforts (Drews & Van den Bergh, 2016; Bumann, 2021). Politically, the Paris Agreement marked a shift toward decentralized climate governance, placing greater responsibility on national institutions to maintain public trust and policy credibility through consistent leadership and implementation. Meanwhile, the media has become a more effective vehicle for influencing public attitudes, using fast and accessible platforms, such as social media and online search, to shape how individuals understand and respond to climate risks.

5. Theoretical, Methodological and Regional Variations in the Literature

A range of theoretical frameworks has been employed to examine the determinants of public support for climate policy and pro-environmental behavior. Among the most prominent are the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and the Protection Motivation Theory (PMT). The VBN theory (Stern et al, 1999) links individual values, environmental beliefs, and personal norms to behavior. It has been applied to assess support for energy and climate policies (e.g., Steg et al., 2005), with extensions of variables such as trust and information (Dietz et al, 2007). The TPB (Ajzen, 1988; 1991) explains intention through attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control and has been widely applied across environmental contexts, including recycling (Aboelmaged, 2021), green consumption (Miller et al, 2015), and sustainable tourism (Fauzi et al, 2024; Han, 2015). PMT (Rogers, 1983; Rogers, 1975), increasingly used in climate research, focuses on threat and coping appraisals, individual assessments of climate risk severity and their capacity to respond. Empirical studies have validated PMT's predictive value in explaining climate-related behavior, including policy support (Lam, 2015) and individual adaptation strategies (Church et al, 2018; Grothmann & Patt, 2005; Wang et al, 2019).

Studies of support for climate policies largely reflect variations in research capacities, political realities, and disciplinary expectations that are shaped by region and context. The large majority of studies, especially those using quantitative methodology, are based in the Global North, with the authors located primarily in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada. By contrast, studies from the Global South, comprising Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, appear to be quite rare and primarily favored qualitative designs, including interviews, ethnographies, and participatory designs. These studies also often focused on topics related to community governance, local adaptation, and climate justice in face of limited institutional trust or state capacity. For example, the International Institute for Environment and Development conducted community-based focus groups in Bangladesh and Kenya from 2011-2015 to evaluate their public and community engagement with climate resilience initiatives and found that policy support in the context of climate resilience largely correlated with socio-economic vulnerability and access to basic services.

Moreover, there is significant variation in how "support" for climate policy is defined and operationalized across studies. While some studies operationalize support as willingness to pay for climate mitigation, others do so by examining voting behavior, or preferences for varying policy options, or participation in climate activism behaviors. Therefore, given these differences in definitions of operational measures of support, such differences make comparisons across studies difficult and may inhibit the generalizability of findings. Employing mixed-method designs that expanded to other geographical contexts (particularly underrepresented regions) would also encourage a more nuanced and broader understanding of support for climate policy across the globe when considering the variation in definitions of support for climate policy across studies.

6. Gaps and Challenges in the Literature

While research on the factors that drive climate policy support is growing, there are important gaps in prior research that more broadly reduce the depth and relevance of prior work. One challenge is the often-extant geographical and demographic bias which has meant that, in particular, research examining climate policy support disproportionately comes from North America and Europe, not major regions in the Global South. Even though these regions are extremely climate vulnerable and have different socio-demographic, economic, and political contexts which may influence the support dynamics, they may also yield policy recommendations that

are misaligned or ineffective at the local level.

Additionally, the existing literature is dominated by cross-sectional and discipline-specific research, which fails to recognize the developmental nature of support drivers in terms of time and domain. Climate policy support examines attitudes and subsequent engagement as a single-event with case studies or economic cost-benefit analyses, with no longitudinal data to support hypotheses or examine the effect/impact stages in climate policy support in respect of consistent changes to public attitudes arising from extreme weather events, political transitions, and novel misinformation campaigns. In the case of extreme weather events, the Australian bushfires (2020) and European heatwaves (2022) have "turned up" climate awareness for a 'moment,' yet most studies have failed to understand whether this climate awareness (salience) in the community persists, recedes, or transforms over time.

In addition, the frameworks for examining support drivers currently in use are predominantly static or linear and therefore don't adequately respond to the more complex, contingent nature of climate policy dynamics today. Existing models fail to recognize adaptive and emergent characteristics, even as they apply to social media-fuelled disinformation, political turn-ons and turn-offs, or other unpredictable cascading climate impacts. The potential of emerging computer modeling and agent-based modeling to model these nonlinear interactions is largely untapped in the climate policy research context.

Bridging these gaps is essential for creating effective, locally adapted frameworks that align public support with long-term climate goals, especially in the face of environmental and political uncertainty. Thus, this article seeks to address these gaps in the literature by providing a temporally review of the drivers of climate policy support. The paper takes a longitudinal perspective, tracing how different drivers have emerged, interacted, and shifted across successive policy eras from the pre-2000 period to the post-Paris Agreement context. It also adopts a multidimensional lens to capture the diverse political, economic, psychological, and communicative factors that shape support within varying socio-political settings and media environments. Mapping these developments over time and across world regions contributes to bridging the temporal and contextual gaps in previous literature and informs the design of more adaptive, culturally attuned strategies to sustain public support for long-term climate policy.

7. Implications for Policy and Communication

An accurate understanding of how public support for climate policy changes over time is important for creating clear communication strategies and making informed policy decisions. Support drivers over the last three decades have moved from elite scientific consensus and technocratic policy design to socially embedded, politically contested, and emotionally resonant narratives. Awareness of this change enables policymakers to adapt their messages and interventions to today's public. For instance, whereas previous campaigns were overdependent on science warnings and long-term forecasts, post-2015 tactics place greater emphasis on localized effects, climate justice, and intergenerational fairness narratives, which have been more appealing, especially with youth and vulnerable communities.

In practice, this involves aligning climate policy with economic rationality but also with cultural values, emotional connection, and political identity. Findings from Yale Program on Climate Change Communication (2023) indicate that community co-benefits messages (e.g., clean air, new jobs) far surpass abstract messages about climate risks. To be successful, climate policy communication should be flexible, based on evidence, and grounded in stories that people can relate to locally.

In addition, resilience against politicization and misinformation must be fostered in an age characterized by partisan cleavages and social media echo chambers. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report clearly states that intentionally biased framing distortions and misinformation, particularly facilitated through online channels, can undermine public trust and prolong climate action. Policies should thus include media literacy initiatives, open public participation processes, and strategic partnerships with credible messengers (e.g., educators, religious leaders, local opinion leaders) to protect the integrity of climate conversation and secure widespread, enduring support for long-term change.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Summary of Key Findings

Support for climate policy has evolved as public attitudes, political dynamics, and institutional frameworks have

changed over time. In the pre-2000 period, support was limited, as climate change was framed as a technical issue managed by experts, with little public engagement or bottom-up pressure. From 2000 to 2015, support grew as climate risks became more visible and were increasingly linked to economic arguments, such as green growth and cost-benefit considerations. Flexible international frameworks and increased media coverage helped integrate climate policy into mainstream discourse, enhancing public acceptance. Since 2015, support has been shaped by greater public concern about fairness, urgency, and justice, along with decentralized climate governance. Digital media and youth-led activism have played a key role in mobilizing support, although the spread of misinformation also presents new challenges. Across all periods, climate policy support has remained sensitive to how climate change is communicated, perceived, and politically managed, making it essential for future strategies to align public understanding with effective, inclusive action.

8.2. Significance of Ongoing Research Across Disciplines and Regions

Due to the number and changeable nature of the support for climate policies' driver, cross-sectional interdisciplinary research is needed to bring together perspectives from political science, sociology, behavioural economics, environmental psychology, and communication studies. Comparative research will be particularly useful when conducted in multiple geopolitical contexts, with a particular focus on the Global South, where support may be tied more closely to developmental priorities, governance arrangements, and direct experiences of climate risk. As an example, while European countries are often focused on mitigation and green innovation, many countries in Africa and South Asia are focused on adaptation and climate finance. Cross-regional, multi-method studies of support using longitudinal surveys, discourse analysis and social media analysis can provide new context-specific and equitable climate policy interventions.

8.3. Final Thoughts on Aligning Support with Long-Term Climate Objectives

Achieving long-term climate goals requires more than developing new technologies or providing financial incentives. Encouraging adaptive governance, participatory communication strategies, and institutional innovation are equally as important. As a consistent theme throughout this paper, governing climate-related issues requires cooperation amongst diverse stakeholders, where policymakers need authoritarian or bureaucratic directives, and participatory governance, co-creating goals with communities, and capacity building. Mobile support for climate action has a much better chance of achieving meaningful support within communities when climate responsibilities align with human dignity, social justice, and intergenerational equity.

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