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Abstract

Polarization of Opinions on Political Measures in German-Speaking Countries – A Comparison between the COVID-19 Crisis and the Climate Crisis

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The world is currently facing two major issues – the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis – both are polarizing. Policymakers focus now primarily on implementing protective measures to contain the virus, but will also need to address climate change. Considering public reactions to these crises and measures, we see two opposed reactions: Protests against COVID-19 measures and protests for climate action. The successful combating of the pandemic and the climate crisis ultimately depends on the acceptance and adoption of those measures by the population. In this paper, we investigate the polarization of opinions on selected COVID-19 measures (compulsory vaccination, contact tracing, wearing of face masks) and on various environmental protection measures (paying higher taxes and prices, cutting back on living standards) in the DACH-region, i.e., Germany, Austria, and parts of Switzerland. Our analysis is based on a representative online survey in said countries (n = 2560), which was fielded in 2020. We examine predictors of support for these measures, particularly general concern due to the pandemic or the climate crisis, assessment of future consequences at country-level, and attitudes towards the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus or the reasons for climate change. Our analysis shows a higher public polarization regarding COVID-19 measures than regarding climate protection measures. Furthermore, we also consider the tweets of all respondents who shared their Twitter handles with us to compare opinions on measures between the two data sources. The Twitter analysis indicates a strong overlap between opinions expressed in the survey and on Twitter regarding COVID-19 measures.

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