

The Behavioral Effects of Carbon Taxes – Experimental Evidence

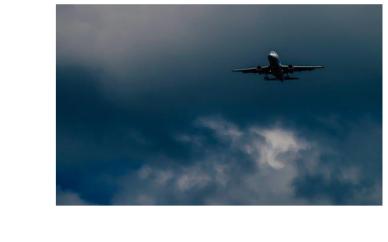
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- Production and consumption of many types of goods and services cause negative externalities
- CO2 emissions (e.g., related to energy consumption, food, transport, etc.) particularly relevant b/c of climate change
- Climate Targets (example Switzerland): (BAFU, 2022)
 - By 2030: Reduction of GHG-emissions by 50% (compared to 1990) according to the Paris Agreement (status 2020: -19.6%)
 - By 2050: Net zero

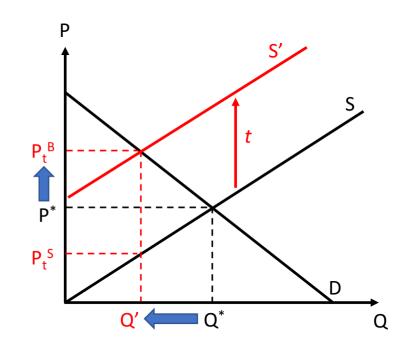






CO2 Taxes: Standard Perspective

- First-best solution for negative externalities: Internalization by means of a Pigou tax
 - Exact internalization in the sense of Pigou is usually not possible (Baumol & Oates, 1971)
 - However, environmental taxes with a "steering function" are frequently used policy instruments
- Goal: Reduction of consumption and thereby reduction of environmental damage (emissions)
- To reach net zero, we likely need changes in consumption patterns.





Behavioral Perspective: Crowding out of Pro-environmental Motivation?

- Crowding-out hypothesis: tangible incentives can crowd out intrinsic motivation (e.g., Titmuss, 1970, Frey & Oberholzer-Gee, 1997; many others)
- Crowding effects depend on the level of intrinsic motivation (d'Adda, 2011)
- Environmental policy might be particularly prone to crowdingout effects since intrinsic motivation is often high (Reeson et al., 2008)



Behavioral Perspective: Crowding out of Pro-environmental Motivation? (2)

- A carbon tax could crowd out consumers' intrinsic motivation to avoid negative externalities in their consumption decisions (e.g., Steg, 2016; Turaga et al., 2010)
- If a tax reduces people's felt responsibility for or guilt about the externality ("moral licensing"), it can decrease such intrinsic motivation (Bowles & Hwang, 2008; Frey, 1999; Nyborg et al., 2006; Nyborg, 2010; see also Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000a,b; Pellerano et al., 2017 for empirical evidence on crowding-out)

 \rightarrow May impair the demand-reducing effect of the carbon tax



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Manuel Grieder – Behavioral Effects of Carbon Taxes

Tax Design and Perception

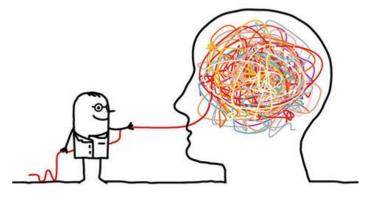
- The extent to which a tax causes crowding out effects may depend on how the tax is perceived by consumers, which in turn depends on the design of the tax
- We focus on the way the tax revenue is used
- Typical uses:
 - Revenue goes into general gov't budget, which allows to reduce other taxes → efficient (if overall tax distortions are reduced)
 - Redistribution to tax payers \rightarrow avoids increase in total tax burden
 - *Earmarking for green purposes* → popular with voters and politicians (e.g., Beiser-McGrath & Bernauer, 2019; Dechezleprêtre et al., 2022; Kallbekken et al., 2011;)
- → Earmarking could strengthen crowding-out / moral licensing and thus reduce the impact of the tax on consumption



Research Questions

Do behavioral (psychological) forces matter for the effects of a carbon tax on demand?

If so, what does this mean for the design of carbon taxes?





Use of Lab Experiments

- Lab experiments as "wind channels" for testing new policies
 - Ability to test and compare different policy designs
 - Ability to measure effects and mechanisms (also "psychological)
 - Under strong experimental control to ensure clean ceteris paribus comparisons
- Weaknesses:
 - External validity:
 - Non-representive samples
 - Small stakes
 - ...
- Focus on investigating / testing potential effects and hypotheses
- Focus on qualitative results rather than quantitative estimates







Experimental Set-Up: Basics

- Participants can buy an abstract good that has consumption value to the buyer and a negative externality in the form of an increase in CO2 emissions
- Implementation of the externality in the lab: (see also Berger & Wyss, 2021)
 - For the experiment we committed to buy a certain number of CO2 certificates on the EU Market for Emission Trading
 - If participants had bought no goods at all in the experiment, we would have retired all of these certificates, and thus reduced overall CO2 emissions
 - However, for each purchase that was made in the experiment we bought ¼ of a certificate less (corresponding to 0.25t of CO2)
 - → Each purchase in the experiment increased CO2 emissions by 0.25t



Experimental Set-Up: Details

- Consumption value of the good: 50 CHF (\approx 50 EUR)
 - Participant profit = 50 CHF price paid (incl. tax)
 - Tax (in tax conditions only): 5 CHF
 - No consumption outside option: 15 CHF
- 10 rounds \rightarrow one randomly selected for payout
- Experiments conducted at ETH Decision Science Laboratory in November 2019
- Computerized via zTree (Fischbacher, 2007)
- Student participants (mainly students from ETHZ / UZH)
 - 56.7% women; mean Age: 22.47 years
- Average payout: 32 CHF (incl. 10 CHF show-up fee)

Experimental Manipulations

- 1 baseline + 3 tax treatments:
 - Base: no tax
 - Burnt: tax simply deducted from participants' profits
 - *Redistributed*: tax receipts fully redistributed within group of 9 participants
 - *Earmarked*: tax receipts donated to an NGO ("myclimate") for CO2 compensation projects
- 2 decision set-ups:
 - Individual decision making
 - WTP elicitation in price-list format using BDM mechanism
 - Competitive market
 - double auction with 5 sellers and 4 buyers (see also Kirchler et al., 2016; Falk & Szech, 2013)

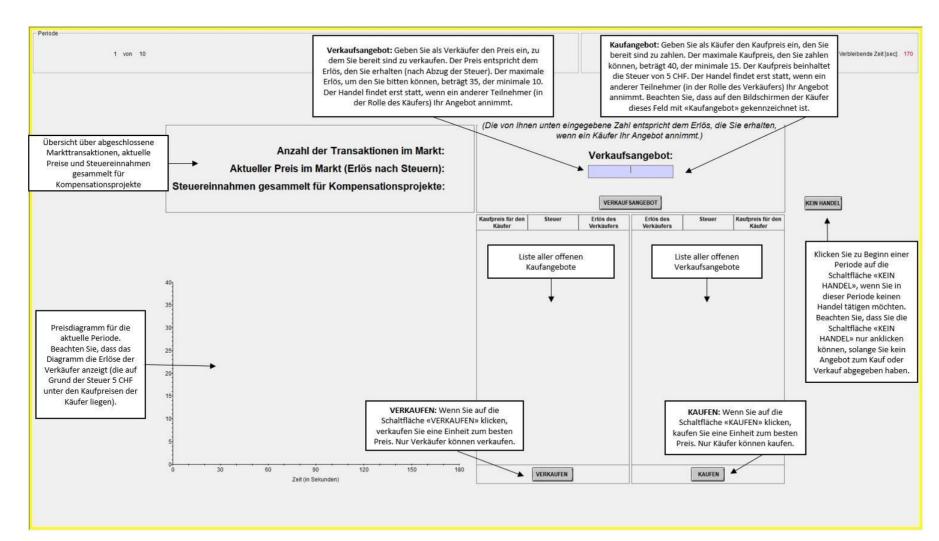


zTree: Price List: Example Screen

Option A #0-#25 Zeigt Ihren Gewinn und Ihre CO2-Emissionen, wenn Sie diese Auswahl tätigen.		Option B #0-#25 Zeigt Ihren Gewinn, Ihre CO2-Emissionen und die Steuereinnahmen für CO2- Kompensationsprojekte, wenn Sie diese Auswahl tätigen.		Hier können Sie Ihre Auswahl tätigen. Mit anderen Worten, Sie geben an, ob Sie Option A oder B bevorzugen.			en, Sie		
	¥			1			¥		
#	Option A: Nicht-Kauf Gewinn / Emissionen:	Ihre Entscheidung	Option B: Kauf Preis + Steuer:	Option B: Kauf Ihr Gewinn / Emissionen:	#	Option A: Nicht-Kauf Gewinn / Emissionen:	Ihre Entscheidung:	Option B: Kauf Preis + Steuer	Option B: Kauf Ihr Gewinn / Emissionen:
#0	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	35 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 10 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#13	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	22 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 23 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
#1	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	34 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 11 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#14	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	21 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 24 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
#2	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	33 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 12 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#15	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	20 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 25 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
#3	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	АССВ	32 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 13 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#16	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	19 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 26 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
¢4	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	31 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 14 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#17	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	18 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 27 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
¥5	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	А СС В	30 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#18	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	17 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 28 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
₹6	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	АССВ	29 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 16 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#19	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	АССВ	16 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 29 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
₽7	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	28 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 17 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#20	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	АССВ	15 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 30 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
8	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	А СС В	27 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 18 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#21	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	А СС В	14 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 31 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
# 9	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	А СС В	26 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 19 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#22	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	13 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 32 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
#10	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	25 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 20 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#23	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	12 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 33 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
¥11	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	24 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 21 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#24	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	11 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 34 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF
ŧ12	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	АССВ	23 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 22 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF	#25	Ihr Gewinn: 15 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0t	A CC B	10 CHF + 5 CHF	Ihr Gewinn: 35 CHF CO2-Emissionen: 0.25t Steuer zweckgebunden für CO2-Kompensation: 5 CHF

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zTree: Double Auction: Example Screen



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Manuel Grieder - Behavioral Effects of Carbon Taxes

Overview of Design

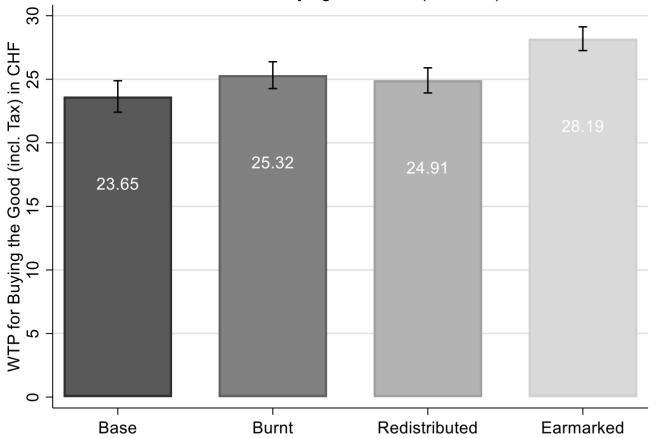
	Individual Decisions (n = 215)	Competitive Market (n = 279)		
Base	Price List (PL)	Double Auction (DA)		
Burnt	PL Tax deducted and destroyed	DA Tax deducted and destroyed		
Redistributed	PL Tax revenue evenly redistributed to all	DA Tax revenue evenly redistributed to all		
Earmarked	PL Tax donated to CO2 compensation projects	DA Tax donated to CO2 compensation projects		



Utility Framework

- To facilitate the interpretation of the results, consider the following utility function (capturing consumption utility): $U_{Cons} = v p t \theta x$
 - *v*: consumption value ($v \ge 0$)
 - p: price paid ($p \ge 0$)
 - *t*: tax (*t* ≥ 0)
 - θ : parameter capturing concern about externality ($\theta \ge 0$)
 - *x*: negative externality $(x \ge 0)$
- Possible effects of an (earmarked) tax:
 - Standard price effect: $t \uparrow \rightarrow U_{Cons} \downarrow$
 - Behavioral effect: $\theta \downarrow \rightarrow U_{Cons} \uparrow$
- The decrease in θ (b/c of earmarking) increases people's WTP for the good, which (partly) offsets the price increase caused by the tax, and thus weakens the consumption-reducing effect

Results Individual Decision Making: WTP

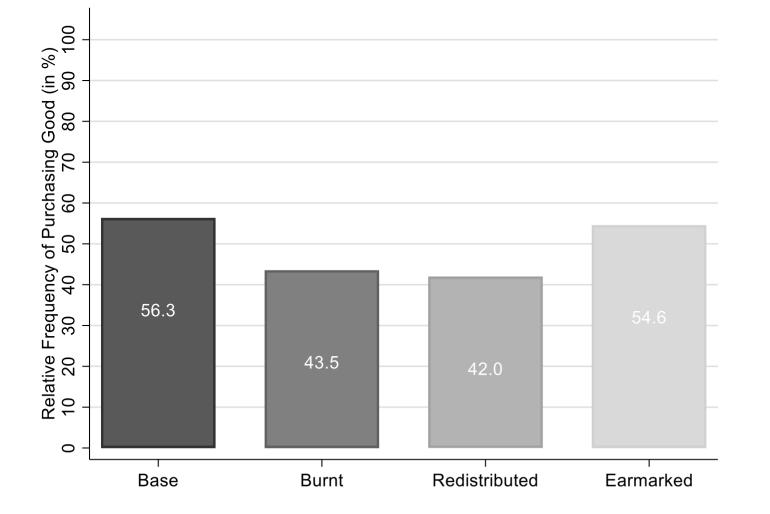


WTP for Buying the Good (incl. Tax)

- Earmarked tax significantly increases WTP for the taxed good
 - (*p*=.003 compared to Base; *p*=.041 compared to Burnt; *p*=.016 compared to Redistributed)



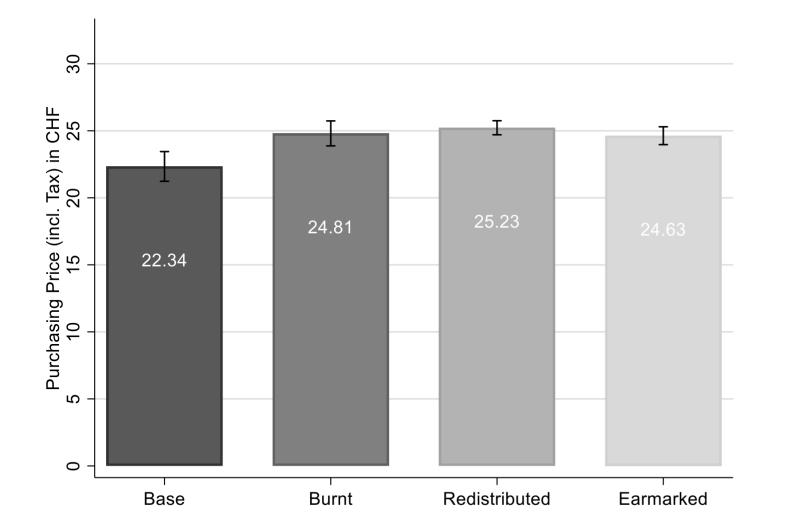
Results Individual Decision Making: Consumption



- Burnt (p=.040) and redistributed tax (p=.018) lead to consumption reduction compared to Base
- Earmarking makes the tax ineffective (*p*=.767 compared to Base)



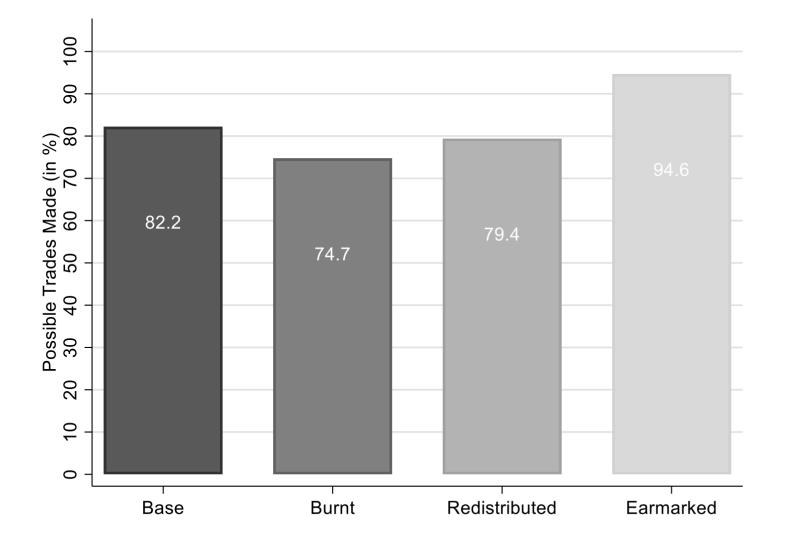
Results Markets: Prices Paid



- Purchasing price increases in all tax treatments (*p*<.10)
 - (by less than t=5, as sellers carry part of the tax burden)



Results Markets: Consumption



- Burnt (p=.349) and redistributed tax (p=.735) lead to a directional but nonsignificant reduction in consumption compared to Base
- Consumption in earmarked actually increases compared to Base (*p*=.012)



Summary & Conclusions

- Earmarking a carbon tax for green spending (offset projects) impairs the demand-reducing effect of the tax
- Relevant finding b/c earmarking is a popular option among voters (e.g., Beiser-McGrath & Bernauer, 2019; Dechezleprêtre et al., 2022)
- Net effect on CO2 emissions depends on efficiency of offset measures
 - If offsetting technology is very efficient, the lower elasticity of demand due to earmarking is actually positive (as it increases tax revenue)
- But: why not offset without direct earmarking?
 - Finance green investments through other channels
 - Maximize tax effect on consumption by not earmarking
- Unlikely to reach net zero without adjustments in consumption



Thank you for your attention!

Questions or comments?

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