Buy-in for Buyouts

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A US Coal Buyout Estimate

The Canadian province of Ontario resorted to a buyout when it shut down its last coal plant in 2014. The province of Alberta then followed suit, modelling its phase-out on Ontario's. An election that brought Conservatives into power then scuttled this deal, but Alberta's calculations nonetheless provide a useful to assess the cost of an equivalent buyout of US coal-fuelled power plants would cost. Using this approach, we arrive at a figure of USD 80 billion, which we use in the survey experiment.

Alberta agreed to pay the 6 of its 18 plants that would have remained operating after the 2030 mandated phase-out 97 Million CAD annually for 14 years to cease activity by 2030. In 2016, the US produced 1,239,149 GWh of energy from coal. The Alberta buyout paid their six coal producers 73,465 CAD for each GWh of annual energy produced. Multiplying this figure by the annual amount of energy from coal in the US amounts to CAD 91 billion, or about USD 72 billion. Updated for inflation, and taking into account the compensation that would be required of the freight rail industry that has also lobbied against shut down of coal plants (70% of current rail traffic in the US is devoted to coal (Council et al., 2010)), we arrive at a highly approximate figure of USD 80 billion. For perspective, an estimate in 2014 put that number at USD 50 billion (Gil Friend, Felix Kramer. 2014. "Deal of the Century: Buy Out the US Coal Industry for $50BN" The Guardian.) A re-examination two years later noted that this amount did not include miners' pensions.[32]

These estimates suggest the right order of magnitude, though precise calculations of how much it would cost to render the coal industry "whole" are highly contingent on modelling assumptions. Relevant to our theoretical discussion, the actual cost of a buyout is ultimately the outcome of bargaining between a government and an interest group.

B Reasons to Oppose a Buyout

1. Industries that block beneficial reforms do not deserve compensation from taxpayer dollars.
2. Industries that harm society do not deserve compensation from taxpayer dollars.
3. Compensating one industry will encourage other industries to block beneficial reforms in the future.
4. By making large payments to industries, the government is interfering too much with the economy.
5. This industry, and the jobs it represents, deserve government protection.
6. Other reason [write-in]

[32] See: "The federal government should buy coal plants, shut them down and pay to retrain their employees" Washington Post. Stephen L. Kass. June 3, 2016. "A not-so-modest climate proposal: why not just buy out the US coal industry?" Vox. Brad Plumer. Jun 7, 2016.

C Correlations in Buyout Preferences

Table 3: Correlations between individual-level support for buyouts across three policy domains.

	Coal	Tax	Amnesty
Coal	1	.	.
Tax	0.55	1	.
Amnesty	0.36	0.41	1

D Survey Administration

To measure the level and determinants of support for buyout programs, we conducted three online surveys, each with a sample of 2000 American adults, which we recruited to meet population quotas by age, gender, Census region, and education, covering a total of 6000 respondents.

The first survey, which sought to get at overall approval rates for buyouts, was conducted between May 31st and June 4th 2021 by the survey firm Dynata. A second follow-up survey sought to address a corollary question, and was fielded through the same firm between August 9th and 20th (see Section G). A third survey focused on the underlying reasoning behind rates of approval for buyouts, and was fielded through the survey firm Prolific between August 29th and Sept 1st 2022. In all cases, respondents who failed an attention check were excluded from the survey.

E Novel policy instrument

Does learning about the possibility of a buyout affect people's approval of the underlying reform?

In a follow-up to our first study, we asked whether being asked to consider the proposal of buying out the coal industry might have an effect on individuals' approval for the underlying reform—that is, phasing out coal energy. Buyouts are an unfamiliar policy idea to most respondents, and they bring into stark relief the social cost from blocked reforms. Is this enough to change people's minds about the need for reform in the first place?

To get at this possibility, we randomized the stage at which respondents were asked about their approval for the reform. All respondents were offered the same contextual information about the social costs of coal production, and lobbying by the coal industry. Then, half of survey respondents were randomly assigned to the *Early buyout mention* treatment condition, in which we mentioned the buyout proposal plan, and its costs and benefits, as in the first experiment, above. The *Late buyout mention* group saw no mention of buyouts at first. All respondents were then asked their views about the desirability of phasing out coal. This allowed us to test whether exposing respondents to the very concept of a buyout, and its Pareto-improving quality, might affect their views about social costs of coal, and make them think more favorably about phasing out coal through any means necessary.

In the same study, and following some of the written-in explanations respondents offered in Study 1, we added two questions about government redistribution, since many respondents appeared to view buyouts in terms of redistribution of income, rather than as a means of securing beneficial reforms. First, we used a standard question to elicit respondents' support for income redistribution. Secondly, we asked a random subset of respondents whether they had received a Covid relief check during the pandemic. In each case, the aim is to test whether attitudes towards redistribution drive beliefs about buyouts. If so, then we would expect that controlling for demographic traits and political partisanship, those more in favor of redistribution, or those who were reminded of having benefited from government support during the pandemic, would also be more in favor of buyout proposals.

F Are Buyouts a Means of Reform or Redistribution?

We are interested in whether buyouts are perceived as policy instruments aimed at passing welfare-enhancing reforms, or as redistributive programs. That is, do domestic audiences interpret buyouts through the means used, or the end sought?

All aforementioned proposals for buyout schemes in agriculture (e.g. the Boschwitz-Boren proposal in 1985), trade (e.g. the proposals floated during the debates over the British Corn Laws), and coal-fuelled power (e.g. Friend and Cramer's "deal of the century" to buy out the US coal industry) view compensation of the affected parties as a means of securing welfare improvements. Similarly, the primary intent of buying out the ship building industry in exchange of repealing the Jones Act would be to attain the resulting efficiency, rather than transferring tax revenue to a declining US industry—even as doing so might have merit on grounds of fairness or equity.[33] More plainly still, drawing on our third vignette in Study 1, offering amnesty to dictators is intended to quell a civil conflict, rather than allowing brutal political leaders a comfortable retirement. In sum, compensation in most buyout schemes would not be offered if there were a means of passing the underlying welfare-enhancing reform without it. In this understanding, buyouts are defined by their end (welfare improvement), rather than their means (compensation).

Yet the written-in comments to our first survey, which we detail below, offer reason to believe that large government transfers, no matter their professed intent or effective outcome, are often viewed on the basis of moral desert, whereby voters evaluate whether the recipients "deserve" compensation. In other words, buyouts may be viewed primarily through the lens of redistribution. This matters, insofar as individual attitudes on redistribution vs. efficiency tend to align with ideological positions along a left-right political spectrum. So which view dominates when it comes to buyouts?

We get at this question in two different ways. First, we test whether rates of approval for buyouts correlate with support for a broadly formulated question about government redistribution.[34] Secondly, we ask a random selection of our respondents whether they received a "Covid-19 check" during the pandemic. The mention of Covid checks is meant to prime respondents to think about redistribution; those that received it may grow more open to redistribution, while those that did not may become less open. We thus compare the rate of approval of buyouts among respondents who received a check and those who did not with the control group that was not primed with the Covid-19 check question.

Buyouts are designed to achieve welfare-enhancing reforms, yet any large compensation package may instead be seen as a means of redistribution. Since views about redistribution are highly polarized, we take a closer look at how much attitudes towards redistribution are driving beliefs about buyouts.

First, and most simply, we asked all respondents whether they favored fiscal redistribution, using the following standard question, with responses on a scale from 0 to 10:
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Government should try to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.

The bivariate correlation alone (0.51) suggests the high relation between elicited views about redistribution and approval for the coal buyout. This association is statistically significant in a regression, the estimates of which are shown in Figure F.1, and remains unaffected by the inclusion of a "Democrat" indicator

[33] Addressing the issue on normative grounds raises a number of other considerations. Among these, one might ask what expectations an interest group had at the outset, and how they came to be "vested with their interests" in the first place. Investment law takes a similar approach when it asks whether an investor's "legitimate expectations" have been breached. This line of argument has been frequently pursued in the last decade under the fair and equitable treatment (FET) standard. See Potestà (2013).

[34] Following the formulation of similar redistribution questions in nationally representative surveys, we ask respondents: *How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Government should try to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.*

variable of political ideology. In fact, the association between political ideology shown in the descriptives above seems largely driven by views on redistribution, insofar as it has no significant effect when included simultaneously in the model.

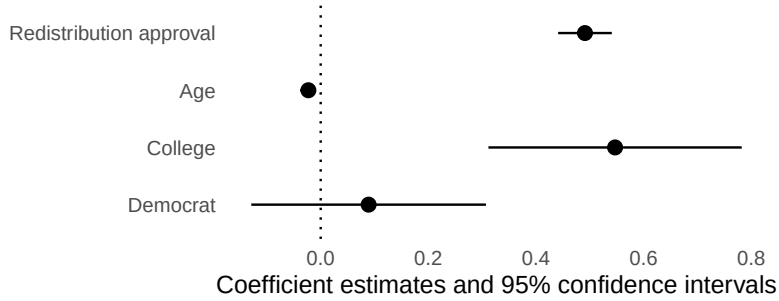

Figure F.1: Approval for fiscal redistribution and support for coal buyout

Secondly, before eliciting their views about buyouts, a random subset of our respondents were asked whether they received a Covid-19 stimulus check from the government at any point during the pandemic. The question reads:

The US government sent checks to millions of Americans who lost income during the Covid pandemic. Did you personally receive any Covid relief funds during the pandemic?

Looking at the results, 71% of respondents who were presented with the Covid question indicated that they received a Covid stimulus check; 29% said they had not. In the ideal experimental setting, we would randomize whether someone received government stimulus. Given the impracticality of doing this, our random priming of respondents to think about whether they received relief funds is a weaker treatment, and a necessarily second-best approach. It also means we cannot rule out the possibility of bias. In particular, those who oppose government intervention may be less likely to declare that they have received a relief payment. Nevertheless, the findings remain telling of the association between views on redistribution and views on buyouts.

Figure F.2 shows the estimates in a regression setting, where estimates of recipients vs. non-recipients of Covid-19 government relief are shown, with the control group the omitted category, and controls for the same demographic variables as above. These results indicate that respondents primed to think about how they benefited from government relief became more likely to approve a coal buyout; but the much stronger effect was in the opposite direction: respondents primed to think about how they did *not* receive a Covid check became markedly *less* favorable to a coal buyout. The effect in substantive terms is akin to the shift in attitudes associated with going from a Democrat to a non-Democrat.

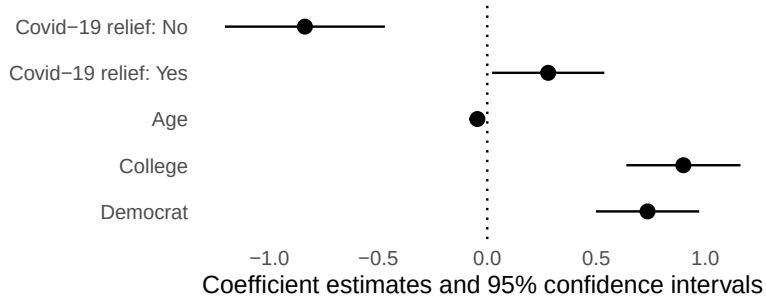

Figure F.2: Covid relief recipients and support for coal buyout

Taken together, these disparate pieces of evidence suggest that respondents view buyout schemes through

the lens of fiscal redistribution. Whether it is buyouts of coal workers to phase out coal plants, or buyouts of tax software companies to simplify tax filing, respondents view these primarily as means of propping up those on the losing side of an eventual reform, rather than as the necessary condition for that reform. Accordingly, views about buyouts largely align with preferences over redistribution.

G Mobilizing Potential

Do buyout proposals have a mobilizing potential?

Might the mere mention of a buyout option sway public opinion about the underlying reform? Buyouts are an unfamiliar policy proposal to most respondents, and they bring in stark relief the social cost from blocked reforms: by demonstrating how even given a very large money transfer to holdouts, policy reform would still bring benefits, they illustrate the magnitude of the existing efficiency loss. Buyout proposals, by themselves, may thus lead respondents to update their priors about the primary reform in question. If so, such an effect might be a threat to inference, but it would also hold significant policy implications. The updating effect of proposing a buyout might be enough to increase the odds of passing the underlying reform.

To explore this possibility, we conducted a follow-up survey experiment. We offered all respondents the same contextual information about the social costs of coal production, and lobbying by the coal industry. Then, half of survey respondents were randomly assigned to the *Early exposure* treatment condition, in which we mentioned the buyout proposal plan, and its costs and benefits, as in the first experiment, above.[35] The *Late exposure* group saw no mention of buyouts at first. All respondents were then asked their views about a forceful coal phase-out:

In general, do you agree that the US government should do everything it can to shut down coal-burning energy plants in the coming decade?

If the distribution of answers differs significantly between our treatment conditions, we could conclude that the mere fact of introducing a proposal for a buyout—with all that it implies about the social cost of stalled reform, and the unlikelihood of passing this reform without first addressing the associated political economic standoff—might itself affect public opinion. In other words, information about interests groups successfully mobilizing against beneficial change over an extended period might make the individual citizen value change more highly. Figure G.3 shows that, for better or worse, this does does not appear to be the case: the distribution of views for each treatment group appears highly similar, with the *Early exposure* group slightly more favorable to the reform. A regression approach suggests the same: the mere mention of a buyout, and querying respondents about their views on it, does have a positive effect on individual attitudes towards the underlying reform, but it falls short of statistical significance (p=0.16).

[35] The text reads: *Some people say that because of how powerful the coal industry is, the only way to close coal-burning energy plants is to compensate the coal industry for its eventual losses. This would cost about $80 billion dollars now, but it would end up saving Americans money on healthcare.*

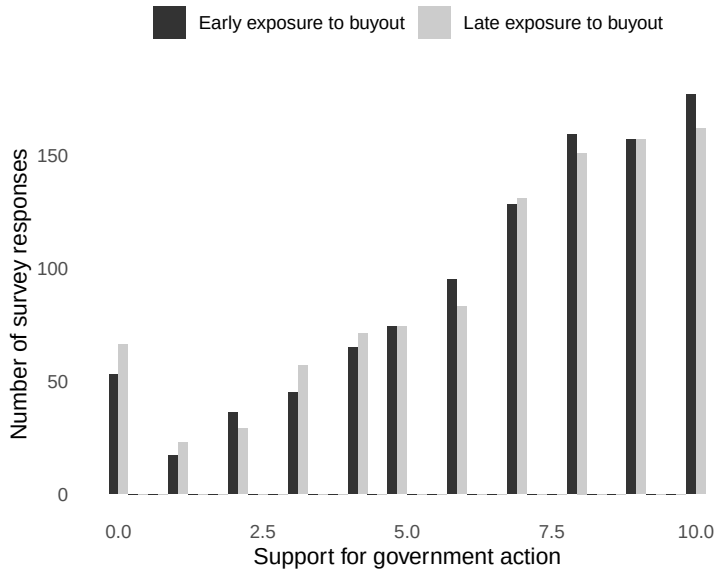

Figure G.3: *In general, do you agree that the US government should do everything it can to shut down coal-burning energy plants in the coming decade?*

H Deontological vs. Consequentialist Scales

To measure respondents deontological and consequentialist orientations, we ask a series of 8 questions on a 0 to 10 scale from “Completely Disagree” to “Completely Agree.” Deontological:

- It is never justified to cause harm or suffering to anyone.
- Some rules should never be broken, even if breaking them allows for a greater good.
- Some principles are universal: they do not depend on circumstances.
- A person’s life is sacred, and killing is always wrong.

Consequentialist:

- If causing harm or suffering to a person makes it possible to achieve greater good for a greater number of people, then it is justifiable.
- There are circumstances that justify breaking some rules, especially when breaking them enables achieving a greater good.
- Sometimes the ends justify the means.
- If sacrificing one person means saving many more, then it is permitted.

I Descriptive statistics

Table 4: Estimated average treatment effects in the Coal, Tax, and Dictator vignettes.

	Coal	Tax	Dictator
(Intercept)	5.556	4.605	4.899
	(0.129)	(0.135)	(0.116)
Government intervention	−0.237	0.223	
	(0.160)	(0.167)	
Moral hazard	−0.577	0.185	0.174
	(0.154)	(0.162)	(0.161)
Workers	0.704	0.436	
	(0.128)	(0.135)	
Moral principle			−0.126
			(0.162)
Num.Obs.	2001	2001	2001
R2	0.021	0.006	0.002
R2 Adj.	0.020	0.005	0.001
AIC	9905.3	10 096.3	9990.2
BIC	9933.3	10 124.3	10 012.6
Log.Lik.	−4947.671	−5043.141	−4991.117
F	14.682	4.196	1.807
RMSE	2.87	3.01	2.93
Std.Errors	HC1	HC1	HC1

	Unique	Missing Pct.	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Income	12	1	5.1	2.3	0.0	5.0	10.0
Tax: Support	11	0	5.0	3.0	0.0	5.0	10.0
Coal: Support	11	0	5.6	2.9	0.0	6.0	10.0
Dictator: Support	11	0	4.9	2.9	0.0	5.0	10.0
		N	Age	18-34	606	30.3	
	35-54	649	32.4				
	55+	746	37.3				
Gender	Man	968	48.4				
	Woman	1027	51.3				
	Other	6	0.3				
Education	Less than high school graduate	251	12.5				
	High school graduate	709	35.4				
	Some college or associate s degree	382	19.1				
	University completed or higher	659	32.9				
Party ID	Independent	516	25.8				
	Democrat	763	38.1				
	Republican	591	29.5				
Tax: Argument	Control	668	33.4				
	Government intervention	667	33.3				
	Moral hazard	666	33.3				
Tax: Recipient	Corporations	1002	50.1				
	Workers	999	49.9				
Coal: Argument	Control	673	33.6				
	Government intervention	663	33.1				
	Moral hazard	665	33.2				
Coal: Recipient	Corporations	997	49.8				
	Workers	1004	50.2				
Dictator: Argument	Control	664	33.2				
	Moral hazard	668	33.4				
	Moral principle	669	33.4				

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for categorical variables collected in the May 2021 survey.

		N	%
Age	18-34	606	30.3
	35-54	649	32.4
	55+	746	37.3
Gender	Man	968	48.4
	Woman	1027	51.3
	Other	6	0.3
Education	Less than high school graduate	251	12.5
	High school graduate	709	35.4
	Some college or associate s degree	382	19.1
	University completed or higher	659	32.9
Party ID	Independent	516	25.8
	Democrat	763	38.1
	Republican	591	29.5
Tax: Argument	Control	668	33.4
	Government intervention	667	33.3
	Moral hazard	666	33.3
Tax: Recipient	Corporations	1002	50.1
	Workers	999	49.9
Coal: Argument	Control	673	33.6
	Government intervention	663	33.1
	Moral hazard	665	33.2
Coal: Recipient	Corporations	997	49.8
	Workers	1004	50.2
Dictator: Argument	Control	664	33.2
	Moral hazard	668	33.4
	Moral principle	669	33.4

	Unique	Missing Pct.	Mean	SD	Min
Support: “buyout”	11	0	6.4	2.8	0.0
Support: “do everything”	11	0	6.6	2.9	0.0
		N	Buyout plan	Gradual	100
	Immediate	1006	50.0		
Covid check	No	278	13.8		
	Yes	725	36.1		
	NA	1007	50.1		
Education	Less than high school graduate	187	9.3		
	High school graduate	413	20.5		
	Some college or associate s degree	710	35.3		
	University completed or higher	700	34.8		
Gender	Man	967	48.1		
	Woman	1040	51.7		
	Other	3	0.1		
Age	18-34	649	32.3		
	35-54	761	37.9		
	55+	600	29.9		
Income	Less than USD 24,900	267	13.3		
	From USD 25,000 to USD 34,900	234	11.6		
	From USD 35,000 to USD 49,999	254	12.6		
	From USD 50,000 to USD 74,999	301	15.0		
	From USD 75,000 to USD 99,999	275	13.7		
	From USD 100,000 to USD 149,999	273	13.6		
	From USD 150,000 to USD 200,000	303	15.1		
	Over USD 200,000	103	5.1		
Party ID	Independent	399	19.9		
	Democrat	792	39.4		
	Republican	728	36.2		

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for categorical variables collected in the August 2021 survey on coal buyouts.

		N	%
Buyout plan	Gradual	1004	50.0
	Immediate	1006	50.0
Covid check	No	278	13.8
	Yes	725	36.1
	NA	1007	50.1
Education	Less than high school graduate	187	9.3
	High school graduate	413	20.5
	Some college or associate s degree	710	35.3
	University completed or higher	700	34.8
Gender	Man	967	48.1
	Woman	1040	51.7
	Other	3	0.1
Age	18-34	649	32.3
	35-54	761	37.9
	55+	600	29.9
Income	Less than USD 24,900	267	13.3
	From USD 25,000 to USD 34,900	234	11.6
	From USD 35,000 to USD 49,999	254	12.6
	From USD 50,000 to USD 74,999	301	15.0
	From USD 75,000 to USD 99,999	275	13.7
	From USD 100,000 to USD 149,999	273	13.6
	From USD 150,000 to USD 200,000	303	15.1
	Over USD 200,000	103	5.1
Party ID	Independent	399	19.9
	Democrat	792	39.4
	Republican	728	36.2

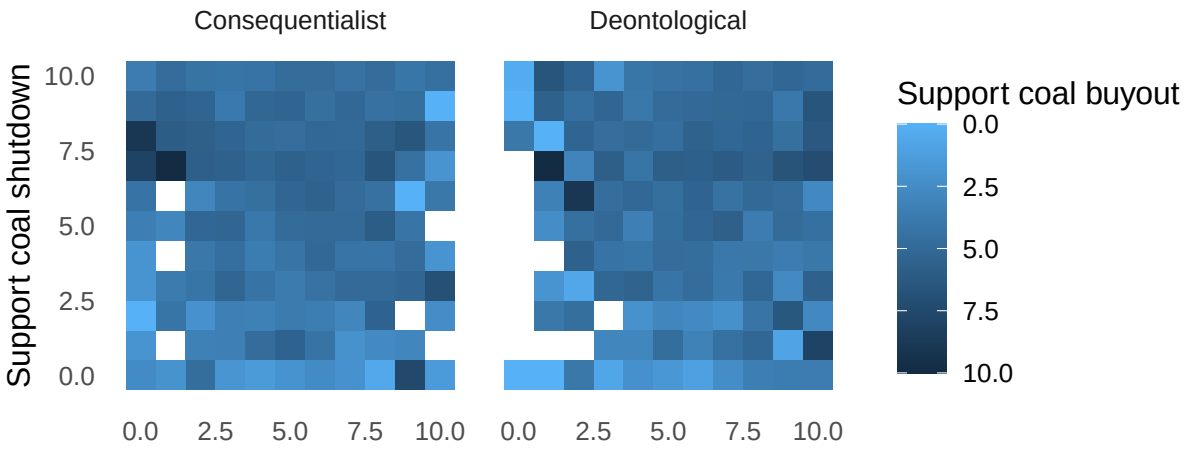

Figure I.4: Support for coal buyouts, by level of baseline support and moral dimension.

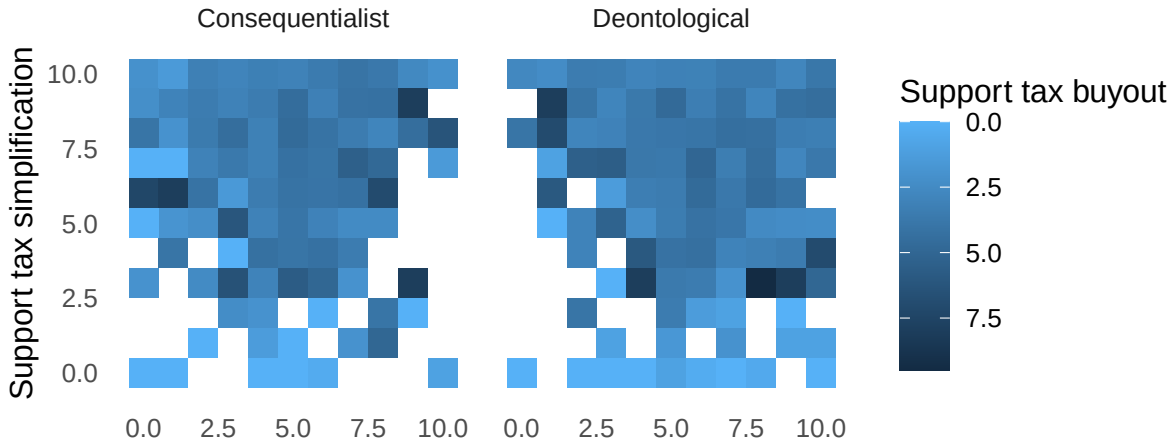

Figure I.5: Support for tax buyouts, by level of baseline support and moral dimension.

J Quotas, Weights, and demographic controls

Table 7 compares the composition of our three survey samples to proportions from US Census data. Since our samples are close to but not identical to Census proportions, in Tables 9 and 10, we replicate the main models reported in the text, including demographic controls and survey weights to approach Census proportions. We construct weights using software by Lumley (2023).

Table 7: Comparison of demographic characteristics from the US Census to realized precentages in three survey samples.

Group	Census	May 2021	August 2021	August 2022
Gender				
Man	49	49	48.2	47
Woman	51	51	51.8	53
Age				
18-34	29	30	32.3	33
35-54	32	32	37.9	36
55+	39	37	29.9	31
Education				
Less than high school graduate	14	13	9.3	2
High school graduate	27	35	20.5	33
Some college or associate s degree	26	19	35.3	25
University completed or higher	33	33	34.8	41

Table 8: Determinants of support for buyout proposals, controling for baseline level of support, age, gender, education, and party id.

	Coal		Tax	
	I	II	III	IV
(Intercept)	5.166	5.935	4.908	5.252
	(0.756)	(0.761)	(1.085)	(1.110)
Baseline	0.100	0.104	−0.025	−0.025
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Consequentialist		0.045		0.078
		(0.040)		(0.039)
Deontological	0.180		0.138	
	(0.038)		(0.037)	
Republican	−0.742	−0.716	−0.384	−0.376
	(0.252)	(0.252)	(0.239)	(0.240)
Democrat	−0.183	−0.250	0.187	0.125
	(0.227)	(0.229)	(0.219)	(0.220)
High school	−1.433	−1.450	−0.740	−0.720
	(0.706)	(0.692)	(1.013)	(1.033)
Some college	−1.647	−1.636	−0.891	−0.851
	(0.712)	(0.698)	(1.015)	(1.035)
University completed or higher	−1.613	−1.682	−1.061	−1.092
	(0.704)	(0.690)	(1.012)	(1.031)
35-54	−0.788	−0.684	−1.479	−1.375
	(0.172)	(0.174)	(0.176)	(0.177)
55+	−1.161	−0.943	−2.476	−2.268
	(0.175)	(0.179)	(0.177)	(0.180)
Woman	0.359	0.421	0.400	0.468
	(0.142)	(0.144)	(0.141)	(0.142)
Num.Obs.	1972	1972	1972	1972
R2	0.066	0.054	0.111	0.106
Std.Errors	HC3	HC3	HC3	HC3

K Issue Polarization

In Table 2, we showed that the baseline level of support for coal phase out was positively related to the predicted level of support for reneging on a buyout commitment. However, this did not appear to be the case for tax reform, as the coefficient associated with baseline support was not statistically distinguishable from zero. One likely explanation for this pattern is that the issue of coal phase out is more polarized than the issue of tax simplification. Indeed, if some respondents feel *very* strongly that coal should not be phased out of the energy sector, they are unlikely to support reneging on a promise made by government to the coal sector.

To explore this possibility, we sort responses to the baseline support variable into bins: Strong opposition $[0, 2.5[$; Weak opposition $[2.5, 5[$; Neutral 5; Weak support $]5, 7.5]$, Strong support $]7.5, 10]$. Then, we estimate two linear regression models with two interactions: Baseline Support $\times$ Deontological and Baseline Support $\times$ Consequentialist. Finally, for each model, and for each bin, we compute the predicted level of support for reneging.

Figure K.6 suggests that polarization may indeed account for part of the pattern. Specifically, the group of respondents in "Strong Opposition" to a Coal Phaseout also appear to be *much* less supportive of reneging on a buyout promise. The other end of the spectrum shows an opposite pattern, albeit in a milder form: respondents who are strongly in favor of the phase-out are more likely to support reneging. Preferences around reneging do seem to be driven in large part by survey respondents who are most polarized on the underlying issue.

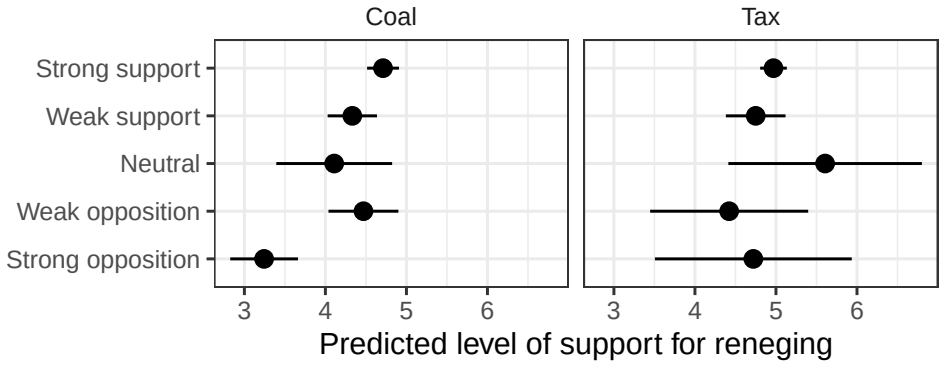

Figure K.6: Predicted level of support for reneging on a buyout promise, as a function of (binned) baseline support for phase out.

L Software Bibliography

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M Conformity with pre-registration

The following tables and figures were not pre-registered and should thus be treated as exploratory:

- Table 3: Correlations between individual-level support for buyouts across three policy domains.
- Figure 2: The association between socio-demographic characteristics and support for buyout and amnesty plans.
- Figures 4a and 4b: Support for coal and tax buyouts, by level of baseline support and moral dimension.
- Table 2: Determinants of support for reneging on a buyout promise, controlling for partisan identification.

The following analyses were pre-registered but are not reported in the main text. They are reported in appendix and the results contained therein do not affect our substantive conclusions.

- Table 11 shows the level of support for buyouts by partisan identification.
- The estimates in Figure M.7 are nearly identical to those in Figure 3: The former are estimated by interacting each of the treatment indicators with our demographic controls (age, education, gender), and then taking the average contrast between each treatment arm (following Lin 2013). The reported standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC3).

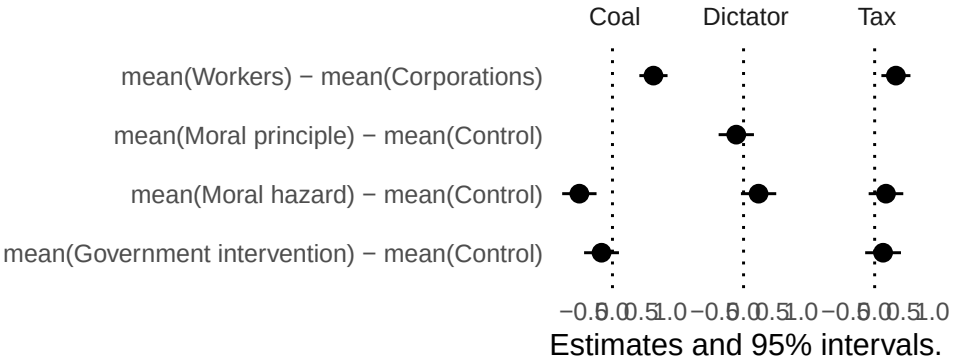

Figure M.7: Estimated average contrasts between treatment groups in the Coal, Tax, and Dictator vignettes. Treatment indicators are interacted with demographic variables: education, age, and gender.

Minor departure from pre-registration:

- For simplicity, Table 1 in the text does not include socio-demographic controls. As Table 9 shows, these controls do not make a meaningful change in the substantive results.

Table 9: Determinants of support for buyout proposals, using survey weights.

	Coal		Tax	
	I	II	III	IV
(Intercept)	2.833	2.794	2.816	2.506
	(0.366)	(0.361)	(0.765)	(0.798)
Baseline	0.189	0.178	0.030	0.040
	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.081)	(0.090)
Consequentialist		0.154		0.144
		(0.056)		(0.091)
Deontological	0.109		0.083	
	(0.044)		(0.069)	
Num.Obs.	1972	1972	1972	1972
R2	0.038	0.043	0.003	0.008

Table 10: Determinants of support for reneging on a buyout promise, using survey weights.

	Coal		Tax	
	I	II	III	IV
(Intercept)	4.014	2.528	4.284	2.519
	(0.495)	(0.479)	(0.878)	(0.875)
Baseline	0.160	0.145	0.161	0.165
	(0.046)	(0.045)	(0.093)	(0.105)
Consequentialist		0.169		0.180
		(0.076)		(0.085)
Deontological	−0.114		−0.127	
	(0.055)		(0.066)	
Num.Obs.	1972	1972	1972	1972
R2	0.025	0.031	0.013	0.019
Std.Errors	HC3	HC3	HC3	HC3

Table 11: Republicans are less likely to support coal shutdown than Democrats. Democrats and Republicans support tax simplification in about equal measure.

	Independent		Democrat		Republican			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Coal shutdown	6.45	2.89	8.01	2.16	4.30	3.23	6.85	3.02
Tax simplification	8.62	1.71	8.79	1.74	8.39	2.19	8.66	1.87

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Attitudes toward large-scale buyouts in the tax and coal industries (#67024)

Created: 05/27/2021 08:15 AM (PT)

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1) Have any data been collected for this study already?
No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?
Is mass support for large-scale industry buyouts affected by the identity of the compensated group (workers or companies)? Is mass support for large-scale industry buyouts affected by arguments against such government-backed reforms (moral hazard or excessive government intervention)?

3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.
Do you agree that the government should compensate [tax software companies / workers in the tax industry] for their losses in order to simplify tax filing?

Do you agree that the government should compensate [the coal industry / coal workers] for their losses in order to shut down coal plants?

Strongly disagree 0; Strongly agree 10

4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?
Respondents will read two vignettes: one about tax filing reform and one about coal energy phase-out. Each vignette includes the same two dimensions of treatment. There are 6 conditions (2 x 3). The order of the coal and tax vignettes is randomized.

Experiment 1 Treatment 1: The "industry/companies" are blocking reform and would receive compensation.
Experiment 1 Treatment 2: "Workers" are blocking reform and would receive compensation.

Experiment 2 Treatment 1: No other information is given (control)
Experiment 2 Treatment 2: Buyout creates moral hazard
Experiment 2 Treatment 3: Buyout would be excessive government intervention

5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.
We estimate a linear regression model via ordinary least squares with heteroskedasticity consistent standard errors:

$Y = b0 + b1\ X + b2\ W_1 + b3\ W_2 + e,$

where Y is the outcome variable on a scale of 0 to 10; X is equal to 1 for respondents in the "Industry" condition and 0 for respondents in the "Workers" condition; W_1 is a binary variable equal to 1 for respondents in the "Moral Hazard" condition; W_2 is a binary variable equal to 1 for respondents in the "Government Intervention" condition; and the omitted category refers to people in the control condition who read no counter argument to the buyout plan.

The quantities of interest are the b1, b2, and b3 coefficients, and we will test if they are statistically different from zero.

6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.
An attention check is administered immediately after the consent form. Respondents who fail this check are excluded from the survey.

7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.
We will recruit 2,000 American adults to answer our survey. Respondents will meet population quotas for age, gender, Census region, and education.

8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)
To improve the efficiency of our estimates, we will consider an alternative model with a full set of multiplicative interactions between the treatment variables and de-meaned control variables (age, gender, education), following the suggestion in Lin (2013, Annals of Applied Statistics).

We ask an (optional) open question after each vignette where respondents can explain their choice. We analyze responses to these questions qualitatively.

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The politics of buyout programs (August 2022 v2) (#105692)

Created: 08/29/2022 07:49 AM (PT)

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1) Have any data been collected for this study already?
No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?
There is a positive correlation between consequentialist thinking and support for coal and tax industry buyouts. There is a negative correlation between deontological thinking and support for coal and tax industry buyouts.

3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.
The government should compensate the coal industry for its losses in order to shut down coal plants.
The government should compensate the tax industry for its losses in order to simplify tax filing.
Strongly disagree 0; Strongly agree 10.

4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?
We measure consequentialist and deontological thinking using two sets of 4 questions on 0-10 scales. We create two indices by taking the respondent-level means of each set of questions.

Consequentialist questions: If causing harm or suffering to a person makes it possible to achieve greater good for a greater number of people, then it is justifiable. There are circumstances that justify breaking some rules-especially when breaking them enables achieving a greater good. Sometimes the ends justify the means. If sacrificing one person means saving many more, then it is permitted.

Deontological questions: It is never justified to cause harm or suffering to anyone. Some rules should never be broken, even if breaking them allows for a greater good. Some principles are universal: they do not depend on circumstances. A person's life is sacred, and killing is always wrong.
Strongly disagree 0; Strongly agree 10.

5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.
We estimate four bivariate linear regression models with support for tax/coal buyouts as outcome variables, and consequentialist/deontological scales as explanatory variables. Statistical significance is assessed at the 0.05 level against the null of zero coefficients, using heteroskedasticity consistent standard errors.

We will also estimate four multiple linear regression models with support for tax/coal buyouts as outcome variables, consequentialist/deontological scales as explanatory variables, baseline level of support for reform as control, and sociodemographic controls: age, gender, education, income, party id, and census region.

6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.
Two attention checks are administered in the early section of the survey. Respondents who fail both checks are excluded from the survey.

7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.
The sample comprises 2,000 US respondents recruited on the Prolific platform to meet population quotas for gender, age group, and education level. We construct survey weights to correct for residual imbalances across these demographics as well as to rectify imbalances across racial groups and Census regions.

8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)
Before describing the buyout programs, we will establish the baseline level of support for shutting down the coal industry and for tax filing reform. We will ask if respondents would support a government who decides to break its commitment to compensate an industry after the fact, when a buyout deal is struck, the policy is implemented, and the reform has taken place.

We will report histograms with the full distributions of answers to each of those questions.

We will report cross-tabs to show the average responses to each of those questions separately for Democrats and Republicans.

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Attitudes toward amnesties for dictators (#67047)

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1) Have any data been collected for this study already?
No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?
Our goal is to measure public attitudes towards the possibility of granting amnesty to dictators. What are the effects of moral hazard or principles-based arguments on attitudes toward such an amnesty?

3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.
Imagine that a foreign dictator is willing to give up power and put an end to a civil war. In exchange, he wants to avoid prison and retire safely in Switzerland. Should the United States support this kind of deal?

"Strongly oppose" (0) "Strongly support" (10).

4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?
Vignette:

"In many countries, dictators brutally repress their citizens in order to stay in power. When dictators lose power, they are often sent to prison or killed. Some people say that if we allowed dictators to retire safely, they would be less desperate to stay in power, and would use less violence to crack down against their citizens."

Three conditions:

(1) Control: No counter argument
(2) Moral hazard argument: Others say that letting dictators avoid legal consequences encourages other leaders to resort to violent repression.
(3) Moral principle argument: Others say that it is wrong to let dictators get away with their crimes.

5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.
Linear regression model estimated by ordinary least squares with heteroskedasticity consistent standard errors: $Y = b0 + b1\ W1 + b2\ W2 + e$

where Y is the outcome variable on a scale of 0 to 10; W1 is a binary variable equal to 1 for respondents in the "Moral Hazard" condition; W2 is a binary variable equal to 1 for respondents in the "Moral Principle" condition; and the omitted category refers to people in the control condition in which respondents read no counter argument.

The primary quantities of interest are the b1 and b2 coefficients, and we will test if they are statistically different from zero. We will also conduct a Wald test to check if b1 and b2 are statistically distinguishable from each other.

6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.
An attention check is administered immediately after the consent form. Respondents who fail this check are excluded from the survey.

7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.
We will recruit 2,000 American adults to answer our survey. Respondents will meet population quotas for age, gender, Census region, and education.

8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)
To improve the efficiency of our estimates, we will consider an alternative model with a full set of multiplicative interactions between the treatment variable and de-meaned control variables (age, gender, education), following the suggestion in Lin (2013, Annals of Applied Statistics).

At the end of the experiment we ask an (optional) open question where respondents can explain their choice. We analyze responses to these questions qualitatively.