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# Does environment pay for politicians?

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## Abstract

We econometrically assess how elections affect environmental performance, namely climate policy, using a sample of 76 democratic countries from 1990 to 2014. Three key results emerge from our system-GMM estimations. First, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions increase in election years, suggesting that incumbents engage in fiscal manipulation through the composition of public spending rather than its level. Second, the effect has weakened over recent years and is present only in established democracies. Third, higher freedom of the press and high income that can proxy high environmental preferences from citizens reduce the size of this trade-off between pork-barrel spending and the public good, namely environmental quality. Deteriorating environmental quality can bring electoral benefits to politicians.

**Keywords** CO<sub>2</sub> emissions · Electoral cycles · Environmental policy · Panel data

**JEL Codes** D72 · E62 · O13 · Q54

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## Highlights

- Politicians balance pork barrel expenditures against the provision of public goods;
- CO<sub>2</sub> emissions increased in election years in democratic countries from 1990 to 2014;
- Freedom of the press and environmental preferences fade environmental political cycles;
- Elections can have a visible influence on countries' environmental performance;
- Adversely impacting the quality of the environment brings an electoral benefit.

# 1 Introduction

Voters generally value better economic performance and material wellbeing (Franzese, 2002). Incumbents have, therefore, a vested interest in fostering expectations on economic performance when they run for election or re-election. This can be achieved by manipulating fiscal policy before elections, which is the motivation of the Political budget cycles (PBC) literature (Nordhaus, 1975; Rogoff, 1990).

There is a bulk of econometric studies that have predicted opportunistic behavior from politicians in election years. Over time, results have covered a broader set of countries and evidenced that the magnitude of the cycles is greater in developing countries (Shi and Svensson, 2006). Several studies have focused on the heterogeneity of PBCs and provided support for conditional PBCs (De Haan and Klomp, 2013). Other studies have shown that incumbents can either play on the level of fiscal outcomes, or their composition (Brender and Drazen, 2013). The literature on compositional budget cycles also attracted attention on how fiscal manipulation is operated. For instance, a trade-off may appear between election-motivated expenditure or the provision of public goods (Lizzeri and Persico, 2001) or between the social and military expenditures (Bove et al., 2017).

Another and more recent strand of the literature underlines that policy-makers increasingly target subjective well-being indicators as a major policy goal (Ward, 2019). Besides, some scholars suggest that subjective well-being indicators such as happiness data may contribute to the evaluation of environmental policies (Welsch, 2009). Public opinions seem to support stronger environmental policies while politicians have exhibited an interest in alternative metrics of economic performance incorporating the quality of the environment (Durand, 2018). We assume that voters' subjective well-being strongly correlates to environmental performance. For instance, the 2022 mid-term elections in the USA showed support for more climate action at the state and local levels. Likewise, voters turned away from the Liberal party in the 2022 federal elections

in Australia. The blame was seemingly on the government’s climate inaction. However, incumbents can depart from their environmental promises. This study precisely aims to investigate whether such opportunistic behaviour exists. It explores environmental political cycles whereby politicians balance “pork-barrel” expenditures<sup>1</sup> (Drazen and Eslava, 2006) against the provision of (environmental) public goods.

There is much literature on the relationship between the characteristics of democracies and environmental performance (see e.g. the recent survey of Escher and Walter-Rogg (2020)). Several authors wonder whether elections affect environmental policies and outcomes. In the USA, List and Sturm (2006) theoretically and econometrically found evidence that environmental policy choices differ between governors’ election and non-election years. However, while elections seem to have a visible influence on the public positions taken by politicians, they eventually have little influence on environmental outcomes (Bergquist and Warshaw, 2020). Few other studies investigate deforestation or land use political cycles. Rodrigues-Filho et al. (2015) and Paillet (2018) found evidence of deforestation political cycles in Brazil. Election years are characterised by high deforestation rates, which shows that politicians support the provision of private goods to their supporters to the detriment of long-term public goods namely protected areas (Sanford, 2021). Another example is Cisneros et al. (2021) who econometrically evidence mutually reinforcing economic and political drivers of forest loss and land conversion for oil palm cultivation in Indonesia. D’Amato et al. (2019) also enlighten land use political cycles in Italy taking the issuance of building permits as the environmental indicator.

This study contributes to the environmental political cycles literature in different respects. Instead of focusing on one country, we rather rely on a cross-country econometric study. To estimate the impact elections have on environmental degradation

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<sup>1</sup>Pork barrel spending can be defined as spending targeted at categories of voters for reasons of political opportunism. This generally involves high-profile infrastructure spending concentrated in one region or transfers targeted on specific groups.

measured with CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, we rely on a dataset made of 76 democracies over the period 1990-2014<sup>2</sup>. We find evidence of a pollution-increasing effect in elections years, which tends to be weaker over the recent years. We highlight some factors that shape this relationship. Some of them are conditioning factors of PBCs (Brender and Drazen, 2005; Shi and Svensson, 2006) while other factors are linked to environmental preferences in countries under consideration.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews previous research and discusses how our paper contributes to the literature on PBCs and research on environmental degradation. Section 3 describes the data and methodology used, section 4 presents our main results and some robustness checks. The final section offers the conclusions.

## 2 Background

The well-being of voters is largely dependent on environmental performance and, in particular, the effects of climate change. Climate change can have an impact on well-being both through wealth and income and directly by affecting amenities. It is true that there is still no consensus on the exact extent of the climate change-related damages, despite the growing literature concerning, in particular, the calculation of the social cost of carbon in integrated assessment models (for two recent surveys, see Auffhammer (2018); Rising et al. (2022) and Pindyck (2017) for a critical analysis). The complexity of the effects of climate change on ecosystems (e.g. the existence of "tipping points" cumulative and non-linearities effects) and the uncertainties about society's capacity to mitigate and adapt may explain this situation. We also know that climate change will undoubtedly generate new financial risks of a systemic nature, but it is difficult to accurately predict their scales (Batten et al., 2020; Semieniuk et al., 2022; Daumas, 2023).

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<sup>2</sup>The time coverage has mainly been constrained by the elections data, preventing us to include more recent years.

Furthermore, the monetary valuation of the loss of biodiversity, the disappearance of island cultures threatened by rising sea levels or even the deterioration in the health of individuals can raise many problems that are not only practical but also ethical. Modelling global externalities related to climate change is a huge challenge for economics (Nordhaus, 2019). But there is general agreement in the international community on the economic damages that climate change will cause. For instance, COP27, which has just ended in Egypt, made a major breakthrough with the creation of a financial fund to cover the irreparable and unavoidable costs caused by climate change, mainly in countries that have historically contributed little to climate change. Another aspect of this general agreement is the emergence of debates on the reparations that fossil fuel producers should have to bear (Grasso and Heede, 2023). The main problem is that the environmental effects will mainly be felt over the long term. This horizon exceeds the length of political mandates and economic cycles. This situation which has been described as the "Tragedy of the horizons" (Carney, 2015) explains the interest in the influence of the electoral process on environmental performance. In this section, we will first present the literature on the political budget cycles (Section 2.1) and then look at its implications for the environment (Section 2.2).

## 2.1 About political budget cycles

A growing literature suggests that elections have distortionary effects on economic policy. A small body of it consists of 'partisan' models, which focus on the behavior of ideologically motivated politicians. Another more substantive part of this literature focuses on the incentives of office-motivated politicians to manipulate economic variables for re-election purposes. This latter theoretical argument has firstly been formulated by Nordhaus (1975). Assuming that voters are backward looking, governments have incentives to use expansionary fiscal policies to stimulate the economy in the late years of their term in office. Other studies have addressed this argument both in adverse

selection models (Rogoff, 1990) as well as in moral hazard models (Shi and Svensson, 2006; Persson and Tabellini, 2012).

Despite clear-cut theoretical insights, empirical studies on political budget cycles deliver contrasted results. It appears that the magnitude or even the existence of such cycles depends on different factors. De Haan and Klomp (2013) provide an in-depth review of these potential conditioning variables. Some of them include variables such as democracy characteristics, quality of institutions or the level of development.

Regarding democracy characteristics, Brender and Drazen (2005) for instance show that such cycles are more a phenomenon of new democracies, in which voters lack experience with an electoral system. They further argue that over time, as countries gain experience in competitive electoral processes, PBCs are less likely. Such conclusions do not, however, imply that there is no fiscal manipulation in established democracies since they solely focus on the dynamics of the overall budget. In established democracies, voters are better informed and, therefore, aware of fiscal policy manipulation for re-election purposes. Voters also tend to punish governments running public deficits (Brender and Drazen, 2008); thus, opportunistic politicians can change the composition of public spending while avoiding an increase in the overall budget deficit (Brender and Drazen, 2005; Vergne, 2009). To this end, they can shift away from capital expenditures towards current ones that are more visible (Rogoff, 1990; Katsimi and Sarantides, 2012), or even target particular groups of voters. Recent studies lend support to this prediction; Bove et al. (2017) show for instance that governments bias outlays towards social expenditure and away from military expenditure at election times. They can also reduce taxes or increase subsidies for particular goods such as fossil fuels.

In a similar vein, it appears that media access also affects the magnitude of PBCs. Indeed, politicians behave opportunistically when information is scant. Studies find empirical evidence that electoral fiscal manipulation is more prevalent in countries where voters have limited access to free media (Shi and Svensson, 2006; Alt and Rose, 2009;



Vergne, 2009; De Haan and Klomp, 2013). Therefore, good access to free media dampens the cycle, as external flows like remittances do for developing countries (Combes et al., 2015). Another factor that deserves to be mentioned is the level of non-economic voting: the magnitude of electoral fiscal cycles is negatively correlated with it, as shown by Efthyvoulou (2012). The higher the level of non-economic voting, the weaker the incentives for fiscal manipulation; then, politicians rather choose policies to signal they have the same concerns<sup>3</sup> as voters.

However, one should be careful with the magnitude of these cycles, since recent research points out a research bias regarding them. Indeed, a meta-analysis led by Mandon and Cazals (2019) suggests that leaders manipulate fiscal tools for re-election, but to an extent that is exaggerated by researchers.

## 2.2 Implications for environment

As explained in the previous section, during election periods, politicians manipulate public spending in order to boost their popularity and secure votes. They do this by either increasing overall expenditure or changing their composition (Brender and Drazen, 2013). They can shift expenses from one category to another, or even among sectors by shifting outlays from sectors in which benefits are not immediately visible to other sectors where it is the case. It is therefore likely that environment could be affected; environmental protection is a public good, for which benefits are not readily visible. Moreover, environmental benefits cannot be targeted to voters as easily as pork-barrel spending (Lizzeri and Persico, 2001), leading to a trade-off: the higher the spending for pork-barrel projects, the lower the available funding for the provision of public goods such as the environment, resulting in an under-provision. Apart from a modification in the structure of public spending, manipulating the tax structure can

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<sup>3</sup>One example is the case of environmental policies. In countries with strict environmental policies, where voters more value environmental protection, the incumbent has no incentive to reduce the budget share devoted to environment, in order to re-allocate it to other sectors.

also foster re-election chances and lead to a higher environmental degradation. A tax cut or an increase of subsidies on fossil fuels can lead to higher consumption of these and thus result in higher CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Most of the studies that have predicted opportunistic behavior from politicians in election years only focused on fiscal outcomes, probably because of lack of data on expenses for environmental protection or environmental taxes. Then, one way to test the effect elections have on the environment is to analyze the impact on environmental degradation, rather than looking at either the composition of public expenditure or the tax structure<sup>4</sup>. The idea behind this approach is that environmental outcomes could reflect more or less the stringency of environmental policies. Empirical studies are however scarce and the few ones have been led on deforestation in Brazil (Rodrigues-Filho et al., 2015; Pailler, 2018). They find high that deforestation rates observed in the Brazilian amazon during elections are correlated with administrative shifts that lead to weak institutional constraints; the result is either a manipulation of forest resources or an inability to fight illegal deforestation.

Election years are also characterized by intensive pressure on the environment through resource plundering. Klomp and de Haan (2016) find that natural resources rents (including forest rents) are higher during election years because incumbents use them to expand public spending and reduce taxes. Relatedly, Laing (2015) finds that the government of Guyana issues less mining rights after election years, while the number of canceled rights rises.

Faced also with the lack of data on environmental expenditure, we assess the impact of elections on environment, using CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. To some extent, CO<sub>2</sub> can be interpreted as a proxy of environmental policy, particularly climate change policy, if its structural determinants are controlled for. Moreover, climate change is at the top of

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<sup>4</sup>One can also focus on the interactions between citizens' environmental awareness and electoral outcomes (for a survey on this see e.g. Boly et al. (2022)).

the environmental agenda in most countries.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, since CO<sub>2</sub> emissions mainly result from the use of fossil fuels, changes in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions therefore reflect changes in fossil fuels consumption, which is known to be affected by energy taxes and subsidies. For instance, an increase in subsidies to fossil fuels during election years will result in lower prices and higher consumption of these products, leading to higher CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in these years.

The innovation of our work lies in the fact that it performs a retrospective empirical analysis, based on a set of countries and not on a single country as previous works (Rodrigues-Filho et al., 2015; Pailler, 2018). In addition, since the magnitude of PBCs may differ depending on the age of democracy (Brender and Drazen, 2005) and thus on the level of democratic capital (Fredriksson and Neumayer, 2013), access to information (Shi and Svensson, 2006), and the level of non-economic voting (Efthyvoulou, 2012), we also test whether such factors condition the environmental impact of elections.

### 3 Econometric setup

Elections could affect environmental quality in different ways. For instance, electoral discipline might be higher in such periods, particularly if voters are sensitive to environmental issues; this resulting in a more stringent behavior in the management of each sector, including the environment. Alternatively, short-time horizons or election campaigns financing needs could also incentivize a reallocation of funds and efforts away from environmental purposes to the benefit of other expenditure items that secure rapid and visible outcomes. To evaluate our theoretical intuitions, we formulate and test the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Considering that benefits generated by environmental-friendly decisions cannot accrue to incumbents before the end of their office, politicians fall prey to the tempta-

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<sup>5</sup>We recognise that other forms of pollution (such as air or water quality) can be influenced by electoral manipulation. However, data on local pollutants do not have sufficient temporal depth (e.g. the WHO database on air quality) and geographical coverage to highlight political cycles.

tion of completely ignoring environmental issues. They instead prioritize boosting the economy by any means, thus enhancing environmental degradation in electoral years. However, due to growing awareness of climate change issues over the recent years, this phenomenon could be more present in the past compared to recent periods.

**H2:** The previous effect can vary in magnitude or even in sign. It depends on factors, such as democracy age, citizens' access to free media or the level of development that positively correlates to environmental preferences, which limit the incumbent's leeway or oblige him to align with voters' preferences.

This section explores these two hypotheses while relying on a dynamic panel estimator on a sample of 76 democratic countries over the period 1990-2014. We depart from the Green Solow model (Brock and Taylor, 2010) and take the emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> per capita as our dependent variable. We enrich the model while including elections variables. In the following, we provide stylized facts on how countries support carbon-intensive activities.

## 3.1 Data and stylized facts

### 3.1.1 Pass-through elasticities of fossil fuels and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

Energy is a critical productive input whose contribution to economic growth has been underestimated (Kümmel et al., 2010). Politicians often give to energy issues a prominent place in their statements (see e.g. Littlefield (2013)). We argue that the support for fossil fuels is a key factor in environmental outcomes such as CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. To measure countries' support for fossil fuels, we consider the pass-through of crude oil price shocks to retail fuel prices in each country. We compute the pass-through elasticity as the percentage retail price change relative to the percentage change in crude oil price. For country  $i$  and year  $t$  this proxy is defined as:

$$PT_{i,t}^f = 100 * \frac{\Delta P_{i,t}^f}{\Delta P_t^*} * \frac{P_{t-1}^*}{P_{i,t-1}^f} \quad (1)$$

Where  $PT$  is the pass-through elasticity in percentages

$f$  is an index for the fuel product considered

$\Delta P_{i,t}^f$  is the absolute change in retail fuel prices, between years  $t - 1$  and  $t$ .

$\Delta P_t^*$  is the absolute change in crude oil price, between years  $t - 1$  and  $t$ .

Prices are expressed in US dollars.

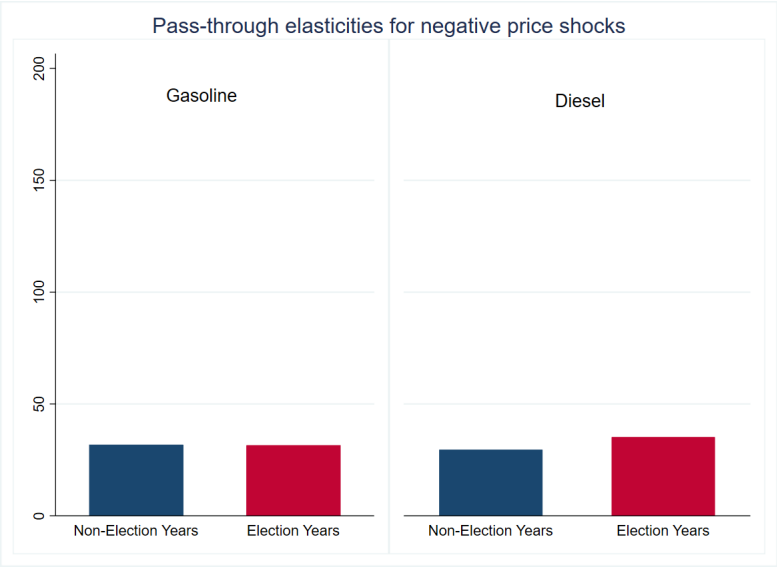
We use a new dataset on retail fuel prices introduced and discussed in Kpodar and Abdallah (2017) which provides monthly data on retail fuel prices for a large set of countries and covers four different fuel products: gasoline, diesel, kerosene and LPG. Data is available for most countries starting from the early 2000s and the majority of observations are constituted by diesel and gasoline prices. We use this dataset to calculate annual pass-through elasticities of diesel and gasoline, for the countries in our sample.

The intuition behind interpreting pass-through elasticities as proxies of support for fossil fuels, and thus of climate change policy, is the following: if we assume that other elements of the price structure (i.e transportation costs and margins) are fairly stable, any change in crude oil prices that is not reflected in retail fuel prices is likely to be driven by changes in fuel taxes and subsidies.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, for a positive change in international oil prices, a pass-through elasticity lower than 100 percent suggests that the net fuel tax has been reduced or a subsidy has increased. Inversely, a pass-through elasticity higher than 100 percent implies a constant or higher net fuel tax. In the event of a drop in international prices, the interpretation of the pass-through elasticity differs: an elasticity higher than 100 is interpreted as a stronger support for fossil fuels (i.e lower fuel taxes) while a coefficient lower than 100 indicates higher taxes. Care

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<sup>6</sup>In the absence of an automatic pricing mechanism, or when prices are not liberalized, fuel taxes and subsidies are the main tools allowing governments to keep control on retail prices.

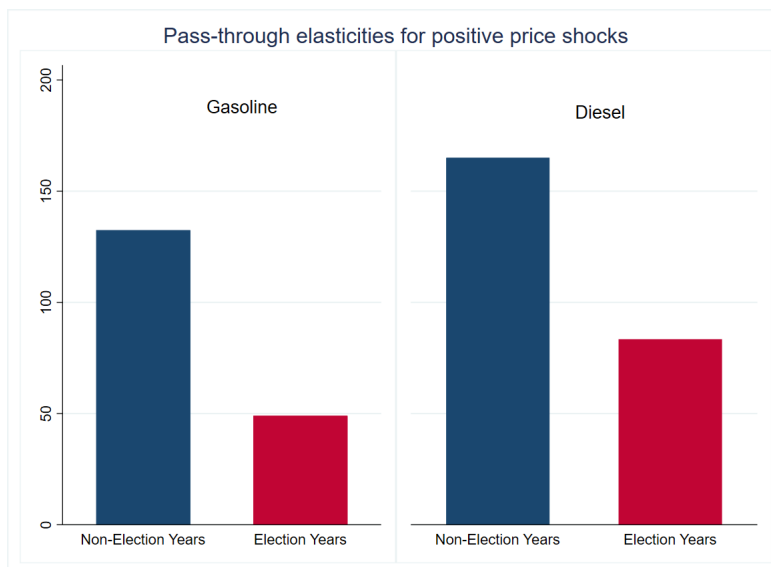
should therefore be taken to distinguish positive and negative shocks in international prices while analyzing pass-through elasticities. We decide to compare pass-through elasticities in election years to those in non-election years, to get an intuition on how support to oil products, and so climate policy, changes according to the electoral cycle. When the price shock is negative, pass-through elasticities should be similar<sup>7</sup> or stronger in election years to confirm the presence of lax environmental policies during such periods. For positive shocks in international prices, the elasticities should be smaller in elections years to confirm support for fossil fuels in such periods.



**Figure 1:** Pass-through elasticities for negative price shocks of crude oil

Figures 1 and 2 respectively show pass-through elasticities for positive and negative price shocks of crude oil. Figure 1 suggests that negative shocks in international prices are always partially passed-through to domestic consumers, independently from whether we are in elections periods or not, given that they always remain below 100.

<sup>7</sup>It is possible for pass-through elasticities to be similar or just slightly different for both elections years and non-election years, especially in the case of negative oil price shocks, given that negative shocks in international prices are always partially passed-through to domestic consumers by governments. Indeed, retailers are reluctant to immediately decrease retail prices after a decrease in their input costs, in pursuit of more benefits (Sun et al., 2019).



**Figure 2:** Pass-through elasticities for positive price shocks of crude oil

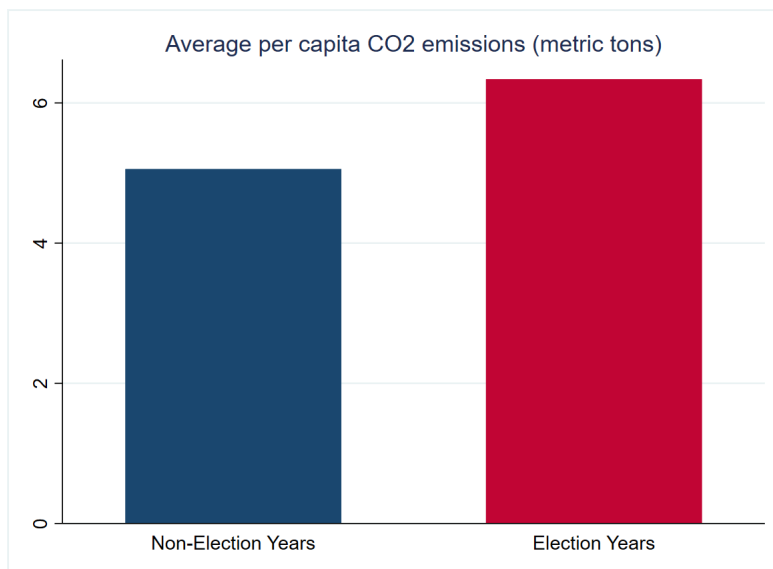
Regarding support for fossil fuels, we observe a very small increase in the pass-through for diesel in election years but not for gasoline. Regarding positive shocks, we see in figure 2 that the elasticities are indeed smaller for both products during election years, suggesting a lax climate change policy. This difference is noteworthy because the elasticities are not just smaller in election times: in average, they drop below 100 in election years, while they are above 100 during other years. This means there are significant changes in fuel taxation in election times: positive shocks in international prices are partially passed-through to domestic consumers in election years, while they are fully or more than proportionally passed-through during non-election years. It is important again to highlight that the data points used to compute the pass-through elasticities are available from the 2000s, thus making it difficult to use the elasticities in a regression framework<sup>8</sup> as this would result in losing approximately more than half of our sample, especially since one has to consider positive and negative shocks separately. Given that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are mostly stemming from the burning of fossil

<sup>8</sup>Even if they are not included in a regression, using them for descriptive purposes is not completely useless to the extent that this justifies the choice of CO<sub>2</sub> as dependent variable in what follows.

fuels and that CO<sub>2</sub> data are much more available, we therefore decide to use them as dependent variable instead of the pass-through elasticities.

### 3.1.2 Elections

Figure 3 presents average CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in election years versus non-election years; as expected, it shows that in election years where there is higher support to fossil fuels consumption, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are in average higher.



**Figure 3:** Average CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and intensities in election versus non-election years

We use data on emissions per capita from the World Bank Development Indicators (WBDI). CO<sub>2</sub> is measured in terms of metric tons per capita. We take it in our regressions in terms of logged grams per capita, since this measure exhibits close to a gaussian distribution.

Data on elections come from the National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset compiled and discussed in Hyde and Marinov (2015). The database includes detailed information on all election events from 1945 to 2012, both for democracies and non-democracies. According to Brender and Drazen (2005), fiscal



manipulation is used to improve an incumbent's re-election chances and thus makes sense in countries in which elections are competitive. We therefore decide to consider countries and elections for which there are incentives for fiscal manipulation. We first apply a filter for the level of democracy, the polity2 filter<sup>9</sup>, leading us to restrict our sample to 76 democratic countries. Second, we only keep elections for which the incumbent or ruling party declared their intention to run for re-election. Following Shi and Svensson (2006), we take executive elections for countries with presidential systems and legislative elections for countries with parliamentary systems. Also, to mitigate the endogeneity bias from reverse causation<sup>10</sup> or from omitted variables<sup>11</sup>, we only consider elections whose timing is pre-determined as discussed in Brender and Drazen (2005) and Shi and Svensson (2006). For this, we look at the constitutionally scheduled election interval; the elections we considered as pre-determined were those which were held at this fixed interval or within the expected year of the constitutionally fixed term. Following the definition used in the database, we check whether elections were held early or late relative to the date they were supposed to be held according to the scheduled interval. We then keep "exogenous" elections, which are those that occur at the constitutionally set date.

It is common in this type of research to use a dummy that takes the value of one in election years and zero otherwise, which could be subject to measurement error. We rather use an election variable suggested by Franzese (2000) that takes the timing of an election into account. It is calculated as  $\frac{M}{12}$  in an election year and  $\frac{12 - M}{12}$  in a pre-election year, where M is the month of the election. In all other years its value is set to zero. This variable presents a greater advantage compared to a simple dummy variable, because it more accurately accounts for the timing of the election. It indeed

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<sup>9</sup>This filter is taken from the POLITY IV project, conducted at the University of Maryland. Each country is assigned a value that ranges from -10 (autocracy) to 10 (the highest level of democracy). We keep countries for which the average polity2 score remains strictly positive over the period.

<sup>10</sup>Some incumbent politicians might strategically choose the timing of elections conditional to economic (and thus environmental) outcomes.

<sup>11</sup>Such as shocks affecting both the election date and environmental degradation.

allows to better capture what happens over the 12 months preceding an election, thus reducing measurement error. For elections happening early in the year, the variable takes a higher value for the preceding year, given that much of the election effect would be observed during that preceding year rather than the election year itself (e.g : for an election occurring in January of a particular year, the value of our election variable will be 1/12 for that year and 11/12 the year before; while a simple dummy would simply code the election year as 1 and completely ignore the preceding year).

### 3.1.3 Control Variables

We control for the structural determinants of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, used by Brock and Taylor (2010). These include domestic investment, as a share of GDP, and the population growth rate. Also, to make sure that changes in emissions during election years are not a by-product of increased economic activity in such periods rather than a change in environmental policies, we control for GDP per capita. Data on GDP per capita, and population growth come from the WBDI and data on domestic investment come from the IMF World Economic Outlook database. We consider that once the main structural determinants of CO<sub>2</sub> are controlled for, the remaining variation in emissions can be considered as changes in environmental policies<sup>12</sup>.

## 3.2 Dynamic panel specification

The data generating process is borrowed from the green Solow model (Brock and Taylor, 2010), which we augment to take elections into account.

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are modeled as:

$$\text{Log}(CO_2)_{it} = \phi \text{Log}(CO_2)_{it-1} + \beta_1 \text{Elections}_{it} + X_{it} \beta_2 + \mu_i + \tau_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

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<sup>12</sup>See Combes et al. (2016) on the measurement of performances.

Where  $\text{Log}(CO_2)_{it}$  represents the logarithm of per capita  $CO_2$  emissions for country  $i$  during year  $t$ .  $\phi$  is the coefficient of lagged per capita carbon dioxide.  $CO_2$  emissions are attributed to fossil fuel combustion that is critical to a wide array of economic activities. The  $CO_2$  emissions variable is, therefore, the proxy of environmental degradation that is widely employed in the literature (Arvin and Lew, 2009). It is worth to notice that, compared to other pollution measures, data on  $CO_2$  emissions are widely available for many countries and over relatively long periods.  $Elections_{it}$  is the election variable;  $X_{it}$  represents the vector of control variables. These include the logarithm of domestic investment, as well as the logarithm of population growth and the logarithm of GDP per capita. As in a Solow growth model, investment drive capital accumulation and is expected to have a positive effect on  $CO_2$  emissions as well as for GDP per capita. In the Green Solow model framework, population growth is expected to have a negative impact on  $CO_2$ ;  $\mu_i$  and  $\tau_t$  are the country and time fixed effects.  $\epsilon_{it}$  is the error term.

To test our hypothesis, we focus on the coefficient associated to  $Elections_{it}$ . A positive coefficient on  $Elections_{it}$  would provide support for our assumption, meaning that electoral periods are associated with a lower stringency in climate change policy and a higher environmental degradation (measured by  $CO_2$  emissions).

Because of lagged  $CO_2$  among the regressors, to avoid our results suffering from the Nickell bias (Nickell, 1981) in fixed effects regressions, we rely on the GMM-system estimator (Blundell and Bond, 1998) to estimate Equation 2. We use it in its two-step version, which is more efficient. We also limit the lags length, to avoid instruments proliferation (Roodman, 2009) given our relatively large time period <sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup>Given this relatively long period, unit-root tests were performed on  $CO_2$  emissions and reject the presence of a unit-root. Results available upon request.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Baseline

Table 1 provides the baseline results. The use of the system-GMM estimator is comforted by the Hansen test and the presence (absence) of first-order (second-order) autocorrelation in the residuals. Column 1 presents results obtained on the whole period for CO<sub>2</sub> per capita. The control variables exhibit the expected signs, even though the effects for some of them are non-significant. The results show that election years are characterized by higher environmental degradation compared to non-election years. Regressions on the whole sample suggests that per capita emissions increase by 8.6% over the 12 months preceding an election.

**Table 1:** Determinants of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

Dependent Variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)		
	Whole Period	Pre-Kyoto	Post-Kyoto
Lagged D.V	0.789*** (0.123)	0.829*** (0.154)	0.961*** (0.0432)
Elections	0.0858*** (0.0256)	0.146** (0.0675)	0.0396 (0.0478)
Investment (Log)	0.123** (0.0560)	0.0430 (0.0716)	0.0908** (0.0401)
Population growth (Log)	-0.0741 (0.132)	-0.100 (0.289)	-0.0775 (0.0590)
GDP per capita (Log)	0.224 (0.143)	0.251 (0.177)	0.0247 (0.0413)
Constant	-2.196* (1.228)	-2.076* (1.177)	-0.361 (0.369)
Time dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1724	509	1215
Countries	76	76	76
Instruments	48	33	33
AR1 pvalue	0.000	0.004	0.000
AR2 pvalue	0.344	0.739	0.532
Hansen pvalue	0.107	0.754	0.223

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

However, we think this pollution-increasing effect of electoral cycles should be less important over recent periods. This could be explained in two ways: first, as voters gain experience in competitive electoral processes, fiscal manipulation tends to diminish as mentioned by Brender and Drazen (2005); second, there is an awake of consciousness regarding environmental issues, which increasingly attracted attention over the recent years. Thus, the pollution-increasing effect should be weaker in recent periods. To test this latter intuition, we split our sample into two sub-periods: we use the year 1998 as cutoff period, as it is the year just after the Kyoto agreement.<sup>14</sup> The purpose is not to test heterogeneity between Annex I and Annex II countries of the Kyoto Protocol. Instead, it is about looking for a worldwide structural breakdown in climate change awareness.

Column 2 shows the results over the pre-Kyoto period. As expected, we find a positive and statistically significant effect of elections for pre-Kyoto years, with emissions increasing by about 14.6% in election years. We find no significant effect in column 3, which corresponds to the post-Kyoto period. These findings confirm our first hypothesis: politicians ignore environmental issues and focus on economic growth, resulting in higher environmental degradation in such periods. But it seems that this effect, which was more important in the past, tends to vanish over the recent years. This is why we find a higher pollution-increasing effect of elections over the pre-Kyoto period, compared to the one we obtain on the whole period. Therefore, world after the Kyoto Protocol is not the same as the world before.

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<sup>14</sup>The agreement was in December 1997, so we consider the year 1997 as part of the Pre-Kyoto period.

## 4.2 Conditioning factors

### 4.2.1 Experience in democracy

The effect we found in Table 1 might depend on some factors; one of them is the age of democracy. According to Brender and Drazen (2013), new democracies increase their overall level of expenditure in elections years; this, in opposition with established democracies in which voters have greater experience in electoral processes. For the latter, they find important changes in expenditure composition. Therefore, as the overall level of spending increases in such periods for new democracies, we expect environmental spending like abatement expenditure will increase as well as other kind of expenditure (such as subsidies for oil products). The effect of elections on CO<sub>2</sub> should then be weaker or even absent in new democracies, while we should observe a pollution increasing effect for established democracies.

We test this issue in Table 2, by estimating the equation on sub-samples of established and new democracies<sup>15</sup>. Column 1 corresponds to established democracies and suggest that emissions per capita are 7.8% higher in elections years. We find no statistically significant effect for the sub-sample of new democracies, confirming our previous intuitions which are in line with the work of Brender and Drazen (2005) and Brender and Drazen (2013).

In established democracies, since incumbents avoid increasing public deficits, the trade-off between pork-barrel spending and environmental protection is higher. In an electoral period, politicians' spending are targeted. They precisely rise the budget share of sectors where economic benefits are visible in the short-term, to the detriment of sectors such as the environment, for which benefits are observed in the long-term.

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<sup>15</sup>We follow Brender and Drazen (2005), using the POLITY filter to separate established and new democracies. In our approach, we consider the polity2 score since the 1960s and count the number of years for which each country received a positive score for this indicator. We then compared this number of democratic years to the sample median (40 years) and countries with a number of years lower than this median are considered as "young" (or instable) democracies. Additional robustness is made using the mean as split value rather than the median; the results are presented in Table A.5.

**Table 2:** The role of democracy age

Dependent variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)	
	Established	Young
Lagged D.V	0.864*** (0.113)	0.866*** (0.124)
Elections	0.0781** (0.0319)	0.00816 (0.118)
Investment (Log)	0.179*** (0.0667)	0.139* (0.0752)
Population growth (Log)	-0.169 (0.114)	-0.112 (0.181)
GDP per capita (Log)	0.168 (0.122)	0.111 (0.161)
Constant	-1.791* (0.929)	-1.197 (1.511)
Time dummies	Yes	Yes
Observations	804	920
Countries	35	41
Instruments	32	34
AR1 pvalue	0.000	0.000
AR2 pvalue	0.916	0.647
Hansen pvalue	0.248	0.253

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

In new democracies, we obtain no effect because politicians increase the overall spending, for all sectors, including environmental protection. As a result, pollution induced by the increase of some expenses is offset by the increase in the budget allocated to environment.

#### 4.2.2 Access to information

Information is essential to political, social and democratic issues. Previous research find that fiscal manipulation is more prevalent when information is scant, and that a better access to good information for voters allows to dampen PBCs (Shi and Svensson, 2006; De Haan and Klomp, 2013; Klomp and de Haan, 2016). Moreover, information plays an important role in democratization processes; and democracy has a good effect

on environmental quality according to recent studies (Policardo, 2016). We therefore assess the pollution-increasing effect of elections, conditional on access to free media, using sub-samples.

We use the Freedom House’s annual press [freedom index](#)<sup>16</sup>. It lies between 61 and 100 for countries where the press is considered as "not free", and between 31 and 60 when this freedom is partial. Countries where the press is totally free get a score that ranges between 0 and 30.

**Table 3:** Freedom of the press

Dependent Variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)	
	Partially or Not Free	Totally Free
Lagged D.V	0.662*** (0.149)	0.968*** (0.0671)
Elections	0.215** (0.109)	0.0578** (0.0278)
Investment (Log)	0.0795 (0.0756)	0.0165 (0.0668)
Population growth (Log)	-0.0606 (0.154)	-0.0350 (0.0677)
GDP per capita (Log)	0.395** (0.167)	-0.0341 (0.0312)
Constant	-3.535** (1.452)	0.391 (0.363)
Time dummies	Yes	Yes
Observations	886	838
Countries	72	55
Instruments	56	47
AR1 pvalue	0.001	0.000
AR2 pvalue	0.105	0.844
Hansen pvalue	0.342	0.370

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

The results are displayed in Table 3 and are in line with previous findings: in election years, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are 21.5% higher for country-years where the press is considered

<sup>16</sup>We also run estimates on sub-samples, using the percentage of population having access to internet, from the WBDI. The results are similar and available upon request.



as "partially free" or "not free". We get a weaker effect of about 5.8% for country-years that have a high freedom of the press. Thus, a better access to free-media allows to dampen fiscal manipulation and, at the same time, its resulting environmental damages.

### 4.2.3 The role of GDP per capita

As Efthyvoulou (2012) mentioned, the size of electoral fiscal cycles negatively correlates with the level of non-economic voting. So the higher the level of the non-economic vote, the weaker the incentives for fiscal manipulation. When the voters are less sensitive to electoral booms in welfare expenditures, there are stronger incentives for the politicians to adopt non-economic policies close to voters' concerns. For instance, the spending bias away from military expenditure and toward social expenditure, as Bove et al. (2017) predicted, is dampened in countries involved in a conflict. It is because voters value security more than material well-being in such periods.

Similarly, it is likely that in countries with stricter environmental policies, the pollution-increasing effect of elections tends to be weaker since citizens give greater importance. To assess these issues, we use the GDP per capita. GDP per capita can represent environmental preferences: as countries experience greater prosperity, there is a higher demand from citizens for attention to non-economic aspects of their lives, such as the quality of the environment (Grossman and Krueger, 1995). The GDP per capita indicator captures other effects, such as education that correlates positively with the demand for environmental quality. On the supply side of environmental policies, it is also likely that the effectiveness of environmental policies increases with GDP per capita. Finally, GDP per capita may also reflect the weight of services in the economy. As the service sector is less capital-intensive, it may emit less CO<sub>2</sub>.

We rely on the median GDP per capita to split our sample into two subgroups.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Additional robustness is made using the mean as split value rather than the median; the results are presented in Table A.5.

**Table 4:** GDP per capita

Dependent Variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)	
	GDPpc Below median	GDPpc above median
Lagged D.V	0.503* (0.287)	0.908*** (0.0769)
Elections	0.209* (0.116)	0.0523 (0.0319)
Investment (Log)	0.0331 (0.0783)	0.174** (0.0700)
Population growth (Log)	-0.119 (0.345)	-0.115 (0.0712)
GDP per capita (Log)	0.541** (0.275)	0.103 (0.110)
Constant	-4.597* (2.632)	-1.284 (1.071)
Time dummies	Yes	Yes
Observations	892	832
Countries	39	37
Instruments	35	32
AR1 pvalue	0.018	0.000
AR2 pvalue	0.340	0.162
Hansen pvalue	0.448	0.584

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

The results presented in Table 4 confirm our intuition<sup>18</sup>: for countries below the median GDP per capita in column 1, emissions per capita rise by up to 21% during election periods. We find no significant effect for countries above the median GDP per capita. This result suggests that a higher development level allows for a dampening of the cycle. A high GDP per capita limits incumbents' leeway and obliges them to align with citizens' environmental preferences.

It is important to note that the electoral manipulation of environmental policies can take a different form from that analysed in our study. Agricultural countries can indeed relax environmental standards in different ways, thereby encouraging the conversion of

<sup>18</sup>We also consider inequalities, measured through the gini index from the SWIID dataset, as proxy of environmental preferences since it has been shown that high inequalities are associated with lower environmental preferences (Magnani, 2000). The results are presented in Table A.7.

forest land to farmland. These practices can generate other forms of environmental damage that are beyond the scope of our analysis. On the one hand, specific political-environmental cycles, such as the one concerning forests, have already been dealt with in the literature (Pailler, 2018; Balboni et al., 2021; Ruggiero et al., 2021; Sanford, 2021).

## 4.3 Robustness Checks

### 4.3.1 Excluding high emitters

To assess whether the previous results are not influenced by the major polluters, we alter our sample by removing the top emitters. As for GDP per capita, we consider the average per capita emissions over the period and we remove successively the top 5%, 10% and 25% emitters, using the 95th, 90th, and 75th percentiles respectively as cutoff values. The results, similar to those obtained previously, are presented in table [A.2](#), table [A.3](#) and table [A.4](#) respectively.

### 4.3.2 Additional Controls

We include additional controls in table [A.6](#). Since aid is not environmentally neutral (Lim et al., 2015) and is also affected by electoral cycles (Faye and Niehaus, 2012), we include environmental aid per capita in column 1 and as a share of GDP in column 2; it is computed thanks to data from the AidData<sup>19</sup> web portal on which we applied a coding methodology based on the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) purpose codes (Hicks et al., 2008; Boly, 2020). We still find a pollution-increasing effect of elections. We also control for government expense, as a share of GDP, in columns 3 and 4. The data are from the WBDI. In column 3, we omit GDP per capita since the effect of elections that is working through fiscal policy might be already captured by it. We however include both GDP per capita and government expense in column 4; the result

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<sup>19</sup>AidData’s Core Research Release 3.1

remains the same, regarding the impact of elections.

### **4.3.3 Using a dummy variable for election years and controlling for democracy**

Despite its advantages relative to a simple dummy variable, the election variable we use is not very common in the literature. Most studies rather use a dummy variable that takes the value 1 in election years and zero otherwise, despite the potential measurement errors of such an approach. To further test the robustness of our findings, we also run estimates using a dummy variable for elections, rather than our preferred variable. We also add the level of democracy, measured by the Polity2 score, as additional control. This takes into account the fact that democracy can have a direct impact on CO2 emissions, regardless of the electoral calendar. The results of those specifications are very similar to the previous and presented in Table [A.7](#) in appendix.

## 5 Conclusion and discussion

The manipulation of fiscal and monetary policy instruments often results in political cycles. In this paper, we argue that that politicians might also reap benefits from the manipulation of environmental policies. Using electoral data for 76 democratic countries (34 established and 42 new democracies), we find evidence that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are higher over the year preceding an election. This effect is becoming weaker over the recent years, as voters gain experience with competitive electoral processes and as awareness about climate change issues is increasing.

Further, we test whether the size of our effect is conditioned by traditional conditioning factors of PBCs (such as democracy age and access to free media), as well as GDP per capita that can proxy the environmental preferences, the level of education or the sectoral composition of the economy. We find that this effect is present in established democracies, where incumbents are punished by voters in case of deficit-spending. In such countries, leaders change the expenditure composition rather than its level: they increase the budget share of pork-barrel spending and under-provide public goods in election periods, which results in higher environmental degradation.

We finally find evidence that better access to free media, and stringent environmental policies are associated with a lower size of the pollution-cycle, as they reduce the level of economic voting from citizens. As a consequence, incumbents will then have weak incentives to manipulate fiscal policy and will choose the appropriate set of policies that match voters' concerns.

The findings still hold when we sequentially remove the 5%, 10%, 25% top CO<sub>2</sub> emitters, as well as when we control for government spending and environmental aid. The manipulation of environmental policies for electoral purposes is not just about taxes and subsidies on fossil fuels. In agricultural countries, the conversion of forest land to farmland generates other forms of pollution (deforestation, loss of biodiversity, water pollution, soil erosion, etc.) that are beyond the scope of our analysis and which

further studies could shed light on.

Further research could also investigate in more details how incumbents incentives are shaped by external actors, through external financial flows like foreign aid. Since previous research show that bilateral donors use aid volume to influence elections outcomes in recipient countries (Faye and Niehaus, [2012](#)), it would also be interesting to look at how aid composition (e.g. environmental aid vs others types) changes in election times.

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# Appendices

**Table A.1:** Descriptive Statistics and sources of data

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Source
CO <sub>2</sub> per capita (metric tons)	1724	4.8846	4.7956	0.0487	27.4314	<a href="#">World Bank Development Indicators</a>
Election Variable	1724	0.0653	0.2008	0	1	<a href="#">National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA)</a>
Domestic investment (% of GDP)	1724	23.4462	7.1087	0.552	66.322	<a href="#">IMF World Economic Outlook</a>
Population growth (%)	1724	1.1747	1.013	-2.2585	6.017	<a href="#">World Bank Development Indicators</a>
GDP per capita (constant 2011 \$)	1724	17457.02	15977.26	916.6775	96711.05	<a href="#">World Bank Development Indicators</a>
Environmental aid (2011 \$ per capita)	1276	4.9321	14.7266	0	296.4061	<a href="#">AidData's Core Research Release 3.1</a>
Environmental aid (% of GDP)	1276	0.1047	0.2857	0	4.8479	<a href="#">AidData's Core Research Release 3.1</a>
Government expense (% of GDP)	1283	26.706	12.7366	1.8777	134.7713	<a href="#">World Bank Development Indicators</a>
Polity2 score	1724	7.70	3.003	-7	10	<a href="#">POLITY IV project</a> , University of Maryland
Gini index (%)	1653	38.823	9.297	21	62.4	<a href="#">Standardized World Income Inequality Database</a>
Freedom of the press score	1585	34.153	17.989	5	93	<a href="#">Freedom house</a>

*Note:* Descriptive statistics are based on the sample used in first column of table 1

**Table A.2:** Removing top 5% Emitters

Dependent Variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)						
	Baseline	Democracy age		Freedom of press		GDP per capita	
		Old	Young	Low	High	Low	High
Lagged D.V	0.754*** (0.138)	0.882*** (0.0739)	0.701*** (0.167)	0.337** (0.159)	0.968*** (0.0660)	0.503* (0.287)	0.736*** (0.180)
Elections	0.0861*** (0.0269)	0.0906*** (0.0298)	0.0199 (0.126)	0.174** (0.0844)	0.0686*** (0.0265)	0.209* (0.116)	0.0507 (0.0325)
Investment (Log)	0.136** (0.0583)	0.174** (0.0710)	0.136* (0.0773)	0.00948 (0.0785)	0.0102 (0.0710)	0.0331 (0.0783)	-0.0480 (0.287)
Population growth (Log)	-0.107 (0.139)	-0.199 (0.144)	-0.138 (0.303)	-0.238 (0.235)	-0.0254 (0.0778)	-0.119 (0.345)	-0.167 (0.159)
GDP per capita (Log)	0.270* (0.163)	0.148* (0.0792)	0.373* (0.215)	0.713*** (0.170)	-0.0338 (0.0424)	0.541** (0.275)	0.115 (0.304)
Constant	-2.587* (1.407)	-1.562** (0.612)	-3.456* (2.017)	-5.738*** (1.553)	0.397 (0.465)	-4.597* (2.632)	-0.313 (3.243)
Time dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1678	735	943	882	796	892	786
Countries	74	32	42	70	53	39	35
Instruments	48	31	31	39	39	35	29
AR1 pvalue	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.024	0.000	0.018	0.001
AR2 pvalue	0.333	0.827	0.489	0.104	0.812	0.340	0.104
Hansen pvalue	0.101	0.824	0.148	0.846	0.482	0.448	0.243

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Median value used to split sample for democracy age and GDP per capita.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.3:** Removing top 10% Emitters

Dependent Variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)							
	Baseline		Democracy age		Freedom of press		GDP per capita	
	Yes	Old	Young	Low	High	Low	High	
Lagged D.V	0.764*** (0.196)	0.874*** (0.0716)	0.854*** (0.171)	0.664*** (0.157)	0.961*** (0.0814)	0.503* (0.287)	0.886*** (0.107)	
Elections	0.100*** (0.0360)	0.112*** (0.0419)	-0.00845 (0.112)	0.202** (0.101)	0.0739** (0.0352)	0.209* (0.116)	0.0447 (0.0373)	
Investment (Log)	0.140** (0.0597)	0.157** (0.0763)	0.157* (0.0898)	0.0874 (0.0778)	0.000285 (0.106)	0.0331 (0.0783)	0.148 (0.0978)	
Population growth (Log)	-0.124 (0.121)	-0.162 (0.138)	-0.105 (0.162)	-0.0134 (0.146)	-0.0185 (0.0664)	-0.119 (0.345)	-0.157* (0.0868)	
GDP per capita (Log)	0.242 (0.211)	0.154** (0.0679)	0.121 (0.239)	0.410** (0.189)	-0.0327 (0.0384)	0.541** (0.275)	0.133 (0.102)	
Constant	-2.322 (1.853)	-1.614*** (0.581)	-1.351 (2.276)	-3.797** (1.678)	0.412 (0.511)	-4.597* (2.632)	-1.409 (1.141)	
Time dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Observations	1592	689	903	857	735	892	700	
Countries	70	30	40	67	50	39	31	
Instruments	44	24	36	49	39	35	26	
AR1 pvalue	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.0007	0.018	0.000	
AR2 pvalue	0.383	0.736	0.767	0.104	0.965	0.340	0.738	
Hansen pvalue	0.107	0.821	0.417	0.545	0.451	0.448	0.474	

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Median value used to split sample for democracy age and GDP per capita.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



**Table A.4:** Removing top 25% Emitters

Dependent Variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)						
	Baseline		Democracy age		Freedom of press		
	Yes	No	Old	Young	Low	High	
Lagged D.V	0.727*** (0.233)	0.807*** (0.0898)	0.905*** (0.0923)	0.581** (0.271)	0.901*** (0.178)	0.664** (0.293)	0.914*** (0.0818)
Elections	0.127** (0.0588)	0.184*** (0.0620)	-0.0250 (0.106)	0.173** (0.0853)	0.0817** (0.0320)	0.203* (0.112)	0.0298 (0.0196)
Investment (Log)	0.133* (0.0776)	0.0897 (0.0714)	0.139** (0.0563)	0.00206 (0.0563)	-0.193 (0.223)	0.0744 (0.0795)	0.222* (0.133)
Population growth (Log)	-0.0334 (0.149)	-0.146 (0.166)	-0.0114 (0.112)	-0.0304 (0.280)	-0.0295 (0.269)	-0.336 (0.443)	-0.0539 (0.0734)
GDP per capita (Log)	0.294 (0.276)	0.190** (0.0900)	0.0631 (0.181)	0.428* (0.237)	-0.0937 (0.158)	0.308 (0.262)	-0.0159 (0.0974)
Constant	-2.905 (2.639)	-1.687** (0.742)	-0.949 (1.668)	-3.618** (1.634)	1.684 (1.937)	-2.359 (2.339)	-0.325 (1.183)
Time dummies	Yes 1316	Yes 459	Yes 857	Yes 819	Yes 497	Yes 869	Yes 447
Observations	58	20	38	55	38	38	20
Countries	44	18	32	48	29	36	18
Instruments	0.002	0.001	0.000	0.033	0.001	0.010	0.005
AR1 pvalue	0.355	0.898	0.780	0.113	0.839	0.473	0.405
AR2 pvalue	0.247	0.412	0.220	0.454	0.621	0.424	0.147

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Median value used to split sample for democracy age and GDP per capita.  
 \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.5:** Conditioning factors (using mean as split threshold)

Dependent variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)			
	Democracy age		GDP per capita	
	Established	Young	Low	High
Lagged D.V	0.837*** (0.137)	0.864*** (0.129)	0.504* (0.294)	0.881*** (0.0789)
Elections	0.0805** (0.0314)	-0.000803 (0.115)	0.217* (0.126)	0.0504 (0.0315)
Investment (Log)	0.172** (0.0731)	0.144* (0.0773)	0.0372 (0.0821)	0.169** (0.0700)
Population growth (Log)	-0.199 (0.151)	-0.110 (0.174)	-0.106 (0.379)	-0.119 (0.0784)
GDP per capita (Log)	0.198 (0.153)	0.109 (0.169)	0.543* (0.298)	0.136 (0.122)
Constant	-1.985* (1.104)	-1.202 (1.625)	-4.639 (2.903)	-1.556 (1.175)
Time dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	781	943	869	855
Countries	34	42	38	38
Instruments	32	34	35	32
AR1 pvalue	0.000	0.000	0.019	0.001
AR2 pvalue	0.828	0.674	0.212	0.653
Hansen pvalue	0.343	0.253	0.415	0.444

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.6:** Controlling for environmental aid and government expenditure

Dependent Variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)			
	Control for Env. Aid		Control for Gov. Exp.	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lagged D.V	0.675*** (0.169)	0.822*** (0.128)	0.890*** (0.0978)	0.642*** (0.176)
Elections	0.139** (0.0602)	0.144** (0.0639)	0.0863** (0.0397)	0.0574** (0.0271)
Investment (Log)	0.0392 (0.0658)	0.0169 (0.0524)	-0.165 (0.231)	-0.0716 (0.138)
Population growth (Log)	-0.293 (0.379)	-0.162 (0.203)	-0.151 (0.181)	-0.281 (0.172)
GDP per capita (Log)	0.378** (0.190)	0.189 (0.142)		0.332* (0.174)
Government expenditures (% of GDP)			-0.001 (0.0017)	-0.0017 (0.0024)
Environmental Aid per capita (Log)	0.005 (0.006)			
Environmental aid as share of GDP (%)		0.0212 (0.0338)		
Constant	-2.911* (1.605)	-1.415 (1.107)	0.908 (1.029)	-2.085* (1.201)
Time dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1302	1276	1283	1283
Countries	74	73	71	71
Instruments	38	49	42	62
AR1 pvalue	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001
AR2 pvalue	0.350	0.355	0.432	0.521
Hansen pvalue	0.530	0.762	0.201	0.410

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.7:** Using election dummy variable and controlling for Polity2 score

Dependent Variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)							
	Baseline		Democracy age		Freedom of press		GDP per capita	
	Yes	Yes	Old	Young	Low	High	Low	High
Lagged D.V	0.786*** (0.130)	0.882*** (0.132)	0.669** (0.271)	0.771*** (0.155)	0.988*** (0.0485)	0.490** (0.225)	0.867*** (0.104)	
Elections	0.112** (0.0510)	0.0832*** (0.0277)	-0.150 (0.245)	0.613** (0.276)	0.0737*** (0.0263)	0.622*** (0.146)	0.0395 (0.0342)	
Investment (Log)	0.101 (0.0630)	0.0528 (0.0897)	-0.312 (0.442)	0.0584 (0.0519)	0.00486 (0.0599)	0.0797 (0.0512)	0.202* (0.104)	
Population growth (Log)	-0.115 (0.132)	-0.142 (0.290)	0.134 (0.288)	0.216 (0.393)	-0.0389 (0.0894)	0.166 (0.233)	-0.241** (0.114)	
GDP per capita (Log)	0.246* (0.148)	0.0954 (0.149)	0.521 (0.414)	0.321* (0.194)	-0.000336 (0.0364)	0.619*** (0.199)	0.331** (0.130)	
Polity2 score	0.00555 (0.00471)	0.00414 (0.00891)	0.0415 (0.0525)	-0.00158 (0.00444)	-0.0311 (0.0309)	0.000513 (0.00624)	-0.00569 (0.0182)	
Constant	-2.326* (1.326)	-0.776 (1.164)	-4.045 (3.169)	-3.313* (1.751)	0.348 (0.360)	-5.844*** (1.882)	-3.426*** (1.180)	
Time dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Observations	1724	781	943	886	838	892	832	
Countries	76	34	42	72	55	39	37	
Instruments	44	33	33	39	42	38	34	
AR1 pvalue	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.018	0.000	0.001	0.000	
AR2 pvalue	0.256	0.868	0.325	0.113	0.754	0.384	0.182	
Hansen pvalue	0.266	0.602	0.139	0.724	0.163	0.639	0.451	

Robust standard errors in parentheses. A test of difference in coefficients of the election variable in columns 4 and 5 has been performed and reveals that both coefficients are significantly different from each other. Median used to split sample for democracy age and GDP per capita.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.8:** Environmental preferences (measured through inequalities)

Dependent Variable	Log of CO <sub>2</sub> (per capita)	
	Low pref.	High pref.
Lagged D.V	0.463* (0.245)	0.873*** (0.0630)
Elections	0.232*** (0.0810)	0.0470** (0.0206)
Investment (Log)	0.0533 (0.0617)	0.206*** (0.0764)
Population growth (Log)	-0.0704 (0.576)	-0.125* (0.0712)
GDP per capita (Log)	0.629* (0.368)	0.178 (0.113)
Constant	-5.512 (4.007)	-2.065* (1.097)
Time dummies	Yes	Yes
Observations	895	827
Countries	39	37
Instruments	36	36
AR1 pvalue	0.002	0.000
AR2 pvalue	0.105	0.429
Hansen pvalue	0.306	0.409

Robust standard errors in parentheses

Low preferences correspond to high inequalities.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.9:** List of countries

Argentina	Estonia	<b>Malaysia*</b>	Russia
<b>Australia*</b>	Fiji	Mali	Sierra Leone
<b>Austria*</b>	<b>Finland*</b>	<b>Mauritius*</b>	Slovenia
Bangladesh	<b>France*</b>	Moldova	<b>South Africa*</b>
<b>Belgium*</b>	Ghana	Mongolia	Spain
Benin	<b>Greece*</b>	Namibia	<b>Sri Lanka*</b>
Bolivia	Guatemala	Nepal	Suriname
<b>Botswana*</b>	Guyana	<b>Netherlands*</b>	<b>Sweden*</b>
Brazil	Honduras	<b>New Zealand*</b>	<b>Switzerland*</b>
Bulgaria	<b>India*</b>	Nicaragua	Thailand
<b>Canada*</b>	<b>Ireland*</b>	Nigeria	<b>Turkey*</b>
Cape Verde	<b>Israel*</b>	<b>Norway*</b>	<b>United Kingdom*</b>
Chile	<b>Italy*</b>	Pakistan	<b>United States*</b>
<b>Colombia*</b>	<b>Jamaica*</b>	Panama	<b>Uruguay*</b>
<b>Costa Rica*</b>	Korea South	Paraguay	<b>Venezuela*</b>
<b>Cyprus*</b>	Latvia	<b>Peru*</b>	Zambia
<b>Denmark*</b>	Lesotho	<b>Philippines*</b>	
Dominican Republic	Lithuania	Poland	
Ecuador	<b>Luxembourg*</b>	<b>Portugal*</b>	
El Salvador	Madagascar	Romania	

\* Countries with a number of democratic years above the sample median of 40 years