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Everybody for Future?

Public support for the young climate movement and its political demands

English summary of “Everybody For Future? Gegenwart und Potenzial des jungen Klimaaufstands” by Sebastian Koos and Elias Naumann

It has been several months since the Fridays for Future climate protection movement has taken its fears and political demands to the streets in Germany and across the globe. The German public is eagerly awaiting the government’s announcement of the so-called “climate cabinet” and the UN climate change summit at the end of September. The proposed measures by decision-makers at home and in New York will show if the protests have had a tangible impact on the global political climate agenda. Yet, to which extent has the young climate movement already changed society and gathered popular support among the wider public? Based on unique survey data we analyse the public support for the Friday strikes in Germany allowing us to make conclusions about its mobilisation potential as well as its impact on people’s lifestyle and the public support for one its key political demands, the carbon emission tax.

The analyses show that Fridays for Future climate strikes receive wide public support. Almost 60% of the population voices sympathy with the Friday protesters. We find that the climate crisis is increasingly seen as a threat to the personal livelihood of people rather than a distant global issue. As a consequence, we find that a green mind shift is under way. Roughly 2 out of 10 respondents report significant changes of their lifestyle as a reaction to the young climate movement.

But is the public also willing to pay the price for climate change? In the survey we asked respondents for their support of a €180 per ton carbon dioxide emission tax. This is one of the key demands of the Fridays For Future movement. The results show that there is only a marginal difference between supporters and opponent of this carbon tax (35% vs. 39%). We also find that more than a quarter of respondents remain undecided (26%). There is also a considerable degree of political partisanship. The voters of the two governing parties appear to be split on this issue, posing a challenge to the grand coalition. The decision of the climate cabinet on Friday will be a reality check for the political demands of the movement.

In any case, the protests are unlikely to fade soon. Almost half of all respondents claim that they would quite likely attend a demonstration in the future. While most perceptions and attitudes are widely shared across all age groups, we do see a significant difference between old and young. Young respondents perceive climate crisis as a greater threat, are more supportive of the climate movement, and also more willing to support costly political measures. Thus, while there is great support for the Fridays For Future movement, spanning all age groups, and large potential to further broaden the movement’s support base, it is the young who remain the driving force in fighting for everybody’s future.

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