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Multidimensional public feasibility in policy packages: acceptability, effectiveness beliefs, and co-production across climate, artificial intelligence, and aging

Yuhao Ba[1,*], Yiyun Xia[1], Shanyue Wang[2]

[1]Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore
[2]Jeb E. Brooks School of Public Policy, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA
*Corresponding author: Y. Ba, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, 469C Bukit Timah Road, 259772, Singapore. Email: yba@nus.edu.sg

Abstract

When citizens evaluate proposed policy packages, do their judgments of acceptability, perceived effectiveness, and willingness to contribute to implementation move together, or do they capture distinct dimensions of public feasibility? Using a pre-registered conjoint survey experiment in the United States ($N = 1{,}506$), we examine how citizens evaluate policy packages combining taxes, regulations, subsidies, and information measures across 3 high-difficulty domains: electric-vehicle transition, AI regulation, and population aging. We distinguish push instruments, which impose costs or constraints, from pull instruments, which provide incentives or guidance, and we separate package-level composition from instrument-level marginal evaluations. 3 findings stand out. First, packages weighted toward pull instruments are more likely to be chosen and rated acceptable. Second, this package-level pattern does not produce a clean instrument-level hierarchy: baseline-referenced marginal effects favor subsidies and information, but marginal means show that absolute acceptability differs only modestly across instruments, and reactions to taxes and regulations depend on whether costs fall on individuals or on firms and employers. Third, perceived effectiveness and willingness to co-produce diverge from acceptability and vary systematically by domain and by whether contributions involve time or money. These results highlight that public feasibility is multidimensional and context-dependent: it cannot be inferred from acceptability alone but must be understood as a joint evaluation of whether packages are perceived as acceptable, effective, and implementable. The paper contributes to policy design theory by reframing public feasibility as multidimensional and clarifying how conjoint experiments can distinguish package-level composition from instrument-level evaluations.

Keywords policy design, policy packaging, public feasibility, public acceptability, survey experiment

Policy packaging is increasingly recognized as a critical strategy for governing complex policy challenges as it combines multiple instruments into a coordinated intervention rather than relying on a single tool (Howlett et al., 2015). Packaging allows policymakers to combine instruments with different

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functions, recalibrate them over time, and adapt policy design to changing real-world conditions (Howlett & Ramesh, 2023). It can also facilitate broader citizen and stakeholder involvement during design and implementation, strengthening perceived legitimacy and improving compliance (Hyysalo et al., 2019). For these reasons, policy packaging fits broader calls for adaptive and integrated policy design in domains where governance problems are uncertain, contested, and difficult to address through isolated interventions (Gunderson & Light, 2007).

Designing effective packages, however, is difficult because instruments differ not only in expected impact, but also in how citizens evaluate them. Instruments that impose direct costs or visible constraints such as taxes and regulations may be necessary for changing behavior yet can also generate resistance when burdens are salient or perceived as unfair (Andrews & Van De Walle, 2013; Ba et al., 2026; Heyen & Wicki, 2024; Hoyle & Rhodes, 2025). By contrast, subsidies and information campaigns often preserve choice and offer visible benefits, but may be insufficient if implemented alone (Givoni et al., 2013). This creates a core design tension: instruments that appear more effective may be less acceptable, while instruments that are easier to accept may not be enough to solve the problem by themselves.

This tension is especially salient in high-difficulty domains often described as wicked problems, including climate change, AI governance, and population aging (Peters & Tarpey, 2019; Taeihagh, 2021, 2025). These domains involve uncertainty, value conflict, distributional trade-offs, and the need for sustained cooperation (Alford & Head, 2017; Head & Alford, 2015; Peters, 2017). In such settings, citizens' evaluations are not secondary to policy design: they can affect whether policies are adopted, implemented, and sustained (Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016). However, research on policy packaging still leaves three gaps. First, we have limited systematic evidence on how citizens evaluate multi-instrument bundles rather than isolated tools. Second, existing work often focuses on single metrics such as stated acceptability, leaving less evidence on other public-facing dimensions of feasibility, such as perceived effectiveness and willingness to contribute to implementation. Third, we know less about whether similar instrument mixes are evaluated differently across policy domains.

To address these gaps, we use a pre-registered conjoint survey experiment ($N = 1{,}506$) in which respondents evaluate policy packages in one of three domains: electric-vehicle (EV) transition, AI regulation, or population aging. Each package varies the intensity of four common instruments: taxes, regulations, subsidies, and information measures. This design allows us to examine package-level composition and instrument-level marginal evaluations across public acceptability, perceived effectiveness, and willingness to contribute time or money through co-production. Importantly, this study does not estimate the full set of complementarities or interdependencies among instruments. Instead, it examines how instruments are evaluated within policy packages and how overall package composition shapes citizens' evaluations.

Our findings show that packages with a stronger pull orientation are more likely to be chosen and receive higher acceptability, but this package-level pattern does not translate into a simple instrument-level push–pull hierarchy. Pull instruments more often generate positive baseline-referenced marginal gains, while absolute differences across instruments are more limited and responses to push instruments vary with cost incidence, domain context, and participation mode. The paper makes three contributions to policy design and policy packaging research. First, it conceptualizes public feasibility as multidimensional rather than synonymous with stated acceptability. In doing so, we distinguish among public acceptability, perceived effectiveness, and willingness to contribute to implementation through co-production. This distinction is especially important for high-difficulty policy domains where implementation often depends not only on passive approval, but also on perceived credibility, compliance, and voluntary public effort. Second, our study clarifies the distinction between package-level composition and instrument-level marginal evaluations, aligning the concept of policy packaging with the empirical quantities estimated in conjoint designs that are increasingly popular in policy research. Third, our study refines the push-pull distinction by showing that citizens' evaluations depend not only on broad instrument categories, but also on burden visibility, policy context, and the form of public participation being mobilized. This suggests that instrument choice, calibration, and communication about mechanisms and expected impacts are integral to designing packages that are both publicly feasible and implementable.

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Theoretical framework: multidimensional public feasibility in policy packages

The concept of "wicked problems" motivates the selection of high-difficulty domains. Such problems are marked by uncertainty, complexity, value conflict, and contested trade-offs, and they often require iterative, multi-actor policy design rather than single technical fixes (Bannink & Trommel, 2019; Head & Alford, 2015; Howlett, 2019; Peters, 2017; Termeer & Dewulf, 2019; Termeer et al., 2019; Turnbull & Hoppe, 2019). Policy packaging responds to this challenge by combining instruments that serve different functions. Existing literature classifies policy instruments in several ways, including market-based vs. command-and-control tools, sticks, carrots, and sermons, and broader distinctions among authority, incentives, and capacity-building measures (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 1998; Kallbekken & Sælen, 2011; Salamon, 2001; Sterner & Robinson, 2018). Building on prior work on policy instruments, this study focuses on push and pull measures. Push instruments, such as taxes and regulations, impose costs or constraints and may generate stronger behavioral change, but they often raise concerns about fairness, coercion, and burden distribution. Pull instruments, such as subsidies and information, preserve autonomy and provide incentives or guidance, but may have weaker effects if used alone (Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Eriksson et al., 2006; Givoni et al., 2013; Jacobs & Matthews, 2012; Rhodes et al., 2014). Carefully composed packages can therefore combine instruments with different strengths and liabilities.

The central concept in this study is public feasibility. We use this term to describe citizens' evaluations of proposed policy packages along three implementation-relevant dimensions: whether a package is acceptable, whether it is perceived as likely to work, and whether citizens are willing to contribute resources to its implementation. This multidimensional approach follows a broader governance logic: evaluative constructs that appear singular may contain distinct dimensions that do not necessarily move together (Coupet & Ba, 2025). Additionally, this concept is deliberately narrower than policy feasibility in general (Ren & Klausen, 2026). That is, factors such as administrative capacity, legal authority, fiscal cost, stakeholder bargaining, and observed compliance remain outside the scope of the present design (e.g., Andrews & Van De Walle, 2013; Ba, 2026; Ejelöv et al., 2022). This study focuses instead on the public-facing dimension of feasibility: how citizens evaluate policy packages before implementation. Within this framework, public acceptability refers to citizens' attitudinal evaluation of proposed policy packages (Häusermann et al., 2019; Termeer et al., 2019). It differs from policy acceptance, which usually refers to reactions to policies already in place, and from policy support in a behavioral sense, which refers to active expressions of support for or opposition to a policy (Dreyer et al., 2015, 2017; Kojo et al., 2022). Although our survey uses the word "support" for respondent comprehension, we interpret the item as an indicator of public acceptability because it captures self-reported attitudes toward proposed packages rather than observed behavior.

Importantly, public feasibility is not determined by acceptability alone. Citizens may also judge whether a package is likely to achieve its intended goals and whether they themselves are willing to contribute to its implementation. Perceived effectiveness captures beliefs about policy impact rather than costs or fairness, and prior work shows that such beliefs can shape policy attitudes and behavioral intentions (Andrews & Van De Walle, 2013; Hornsey et al., 2006; Wan et al., 2014). In addition, citizens may be willing to contribute time, effort, or money to policy implementation (Bovaird et al., 2015; Kallbekken & Sælen, 2011). This dimension is especially relevant for complex policy problems, where implementation often depends on public cooperation rather than passive approval alone (Bannink et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024). The co-production literature emphasizes citizens' active roles in producing public outcomes (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Voorberg et al., 2015) and points to both attitudinal antecedents (perceived value and/or efficacy) and concrete resource commitments (Voorberg et al., 2015).

Empirically, we focus on four common policy instruments: taxes, regulations, subsidies, and information measures (Coleman et al., 2023). Following prior work (Ejelöv et al., 2022; Givoni et al., 2013; Jacobs & Matthews, 2012), we classify taxes and regulations as push instruments and subsidies and information as pull instruments. Our empirical design varies the intensity of each instrument within multi-instrument packages to create realistic combinations that trade off expected effectiveness and feasibility. The theoretical framework therefore links policy packaging to public feasibility at two analytical levels. At the package level, we examine whether the overall balance of push and pull instruments

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shapes evaluations of the bundle as a whole. At the instrument level, we examine whether push and pull instruments receive different evaluations across domains. The following sections present the pre-registered hypotheses on acceptability and willingness to co-produce, alongside an exploratory analysis of perceived effectiveness as an additional dimension of public feasibility.

Public acceptability

Citizen evaluations of instruments reflect perceived costs and benefits (Bernauer, 2013; Carattini et al., 2018, 2019; Coleman et al., 2023). Pull instruments are often viewed as less intrusive because they offer incentives or information without imposing direct constraints. Push instruments, by contrast, can highlight immediate losses and therefore often face stronger resistance, especially when costs are visible or perceived as unfair (Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Eriksson et al., 2006, 2008; Rinscheid et al., 2020). At the package level, however, supportive pull elements may offset some resistance to cost-imposing push elements (Häusermann et al., 2019). Because the push–pull distinction may operate differently at the package and instrument levels, we distinguish between expectations about overall package composition and expectations about instrument-level evaluations:

H1a: Acceptability will be higher for policy packages that emphasize pull measures, such as subsidies and information, than for packages that emphasize push measures, such as taxes and regulations.
H1b: Pull instruments will receive higher acceptability than push instruments across policy domains.

Perceived effectiveness

Perceived effectiveness refers to citizens' evaluations of whether a policy package can achieve its intended outcomes. In this study, perceived effectiveness is measured through respondents' assessments of how likely each policy package is to address the targeted problem. Such assessments may depend on the intensity of intervention and the perceived fit between the instrument and the policy context (Andrews & Van De Walle, 2013). From a policy design perspective, taxes and regulations are often expected to influence behavior more directly by changing incentives or imposing enforceable constraints (Goulder & Parry, 2008; Li & Ba, 2025). Citizens may therefore perceive stronger push instruments as more effective when the mechanism of action is visible and credible. However, perceived effectiveness may also depend on domain context because citizens may evaluate the potential effectiveness of an instrument differently across climate, AI, and aging domains. Pull instruments may also be perceived as effective when they reduce barriers, provide resources, or make implementation more accessible and/or understandable (Häusermann et al., 2019; Hoyle & Rhodes, 2025). We therefore examine perceived effectiveness as an exploratory dimension of public feasibility, assessing how evaluations vary across instruments and domains.

Willingness to co-produce

Willingness to co-produce captures whether citizens are prepared to contribute their own resources to policy implementation, including time, effort, or money (Bovaird et al., 2015; Kallbekken & Sælen, 2011). When evaluating policy packages, willingness to co-produce may respond to two competing logics. A compensatory engagement logic suggests that citizens may become more willing to contribute when they perceive stronger government intervention as a signal that the problem is serious or that implementation requires additional public effort. Under this logic, push instruments may increase willingness to co-produce because taxes and regulations communicate urgency, commitment, or enforcement capacity (He & Ma, 2021). By contrast, an enabling engagement logic suggests that citizens may become more willing to contribute when policy instruments lower barriers to participation or make personal contribution seem useful and attainable (Alford & Yates, 2016). Under this logic, pull instruments such as subsidies and information may increase willingness to co-produce by providing resources,

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guidance, and a more supportive implementation environment. Because both logics are theoretically plausible and may operate differently for time and monetary contributions, we specify rival hypotheses:

H2a: At the instrument level, willingness to co-produce will be higher for push measures than for pull measures.

H2b: At the instrument level, willingness to co-produce will be higher for pull measures than for push measures.

Methodology

Research design

To examine public attitudes toward alternative policy packages, we fielded a pre-registered conjoint survey experiment, following best practice in multidimensional preference measurement (Bansak et al., 2021; Gallego & Marx, 2017; Hainmueller et al., 2014) and drawing on recent applications (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2021; Treger, 2025). The design is well-suited to decomposing complex policy bundles into attributes and levels and estimating how instrument levels shape respondents' evaluations.

The pre-registered design, including the policy domains, randomized attributes and levels, sample, and outcome items, is retained in the final manuscript. During revision, we clarified the theoretical status and interpretation of several analyses, especially the distinction between pre-registered hypotheses, exploratory analyses, and descriptive contextual comparisons. Supplementary Appendix A explains how the pre-registered design relates to the final analytical presentation.

We implemented the design across climate change/EV transition, AI regulation, and population aging. These domains were selected because each is a high-difficulty setting in which policy packages are relevant, being represented through the same four instrument families: taxes, regulations, subsidies, and information (Fong et al., 2025; Taeihagh, 2021). At the same time, these domains also differ in features that may shape citizens' evaluations. EV transition involves visible individual costs and distributional conflict; AI regulation involves technical opacity and firm-centered governance; and population aging is more personally familiar for many respondents (Ba & Galik, 2022; Head & Alford, 2015; Lazarus, 2009; Marier & Van Pevenage, 2017).

Specifically, we used psychological distance and complexity as two contextual lenses to interpret possible cross-scenario variation. Psychological distance is the felt remoteness of an issue in time, space, or social relevance (Trope & Liberman, 2010). When an issue is perceived as psychologically distant, policy benefits may appear abstract or deferred, while immediate costs remain salient. Problem complexity involves both technical and political dimensions (Head & Alford, 2015; Peters, 2017). Technical complexity concerns the difficulty of understanding and governing an issue, whereas political complexity concerns value conflict, distributive trade-offs, and stakeholder contestation. Greater complexity may increase uncertainty about policy outcomes and shape how citizens evaluate policy instruments and expected effectiveness (Duit & Galaz, 2008; Head, 2019; Rittel & Webber, 1973). Here, since psychological distance and complexity were not directly measured or experimentally manipulated, the study does not identify their causal effects. Moreover, the domains vary simultaneously across several dimensions, meaning that observed cross-domain differences cannot be attributed to any single domain characteristic. We therefore treat domain variation as descriptive contextual variation and use psychological distance and complexity only as tentative interpretive lenses. A comparative mapping of the domains is provided in Table C1 (see online supplementary material).

Experiment design

Policy package design

We define a policy package as a coordinated set of instruments targeting one or more objectives (Givoni et al., 2013). Instruments were chosen because they are commonly deployed and map cleanly onto our theoretical distinction between push and pull measures (Eriksson et al., 2006). Intensity levels were calibrated to

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Table 1 General design of policy packages.

Attribute	High level	Medium level	Status quo (baseline)
Tax	Additional tax increase (10% gasoline/1% sales tax)	Moderate tax increase (5% gasoline/0.5% sales tax)	No new tax
Regulation	Strong regulatory requirement (3 days/week limit or semi-annual audit)	Moderate regulatory requirement (1 day/week or annual audit)	No new regulatory requirement
Subsidy	Subsidy covering 30% of cost	Subsidy covering 15% of cost	No subsidy
Information	Monthly workshops or outreach activities	Quarterly workshops or outreach activities	No events

ensure realism, while the status-quo level consistently serves as the comparison baseline (Fesenfeld et al., 2020). Scenario wording was customized while preserving the same attribute structure across domains. Table 1 summarizes the design; full descriptions appear in Tables B1–B3 (see online supplementary material).

Experimental procedure

The study received approval from the IRB at one author's institution. After completing socio-demographic questions (gender, age, income, education), respondents were randomly assigned to one of three policy domains (between-subjects). They then received concise background information and standardized descriptions of the four instruments, followed by a mandatory 10-s reading period to support comprehension. To minimize respondent burden and ensure sufficient statistical power, we followed prior conjoint work in limiting each profile to four attributes and each respondent to five tasks, a design shown to balance information with cognitive load (Chu et al., 2024; Fesenfeld et al., 2020). In each of five choice tasks, respondents viewed two policy packages side-by-side within their assigned domain. The Supplementary Appendix provides further details of the survey design and a priori power analysis.

Sample

Data were collected via Prolific from a US sample using quota targets for gender, age, and region. Respondents were assigned to a single domain. The final sample comprised 1,506 respondents (climate: 494; AI: 514; aging: 498), yielding 7,530 forced choices and 15,060 profile-level observations overall. The ex-ante power analysis indicated at least 80% power ($\alpha = 0.05$) to detect average marginal component effects (AMCEs) of 0.05 or larger.

Data analysis

Variables

The conjoint design generates both profile-level and package-level variables. The binary outcome *Chosen* equals 1 if a profile was selected in a given task and 0 otherwise. Instrument-level independent variables correspond to the randomized attribute levels for taxes, regulations, subsidies, and information. To characterize package composition, we assigned intensity scores to each attribute level (0 = status quo, 1 = medium, 2 = high) based on pre-specified design intensities. A push score sums the tax and regulation intensities; a pull score sums subsidy and information intensities. We defined *net_pullness* as pull minus push, with higher values indicating greater reliance on pull-oriented instruments. Additional outcomes include (a) public acceptability, measured with a survey item worded in terms of support for the proposed package; (b) perceived effectiveness, focusing on respondents' belief that the proposed package would address the targeted problem; and (c) willingness to co-produce (time and money), mainly measuring personal cost-bearing intention.

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Models

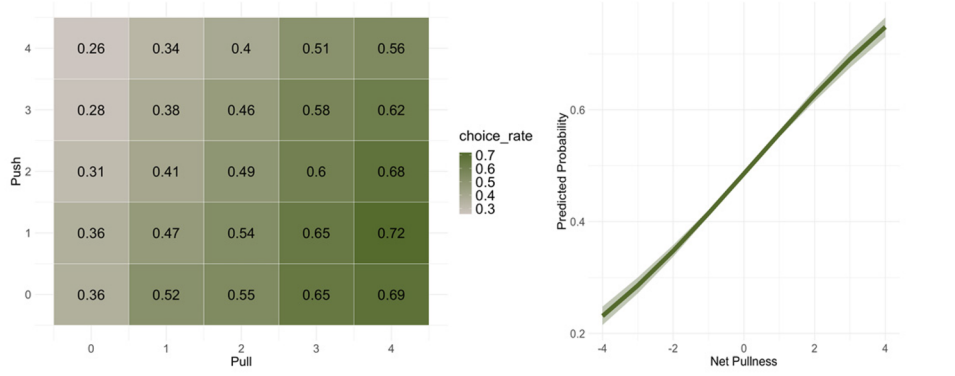
To examine package-level patterns, we estimated models linking overall package composition to respondents' choices and acceptability ratings. Package-level effects were estimated using logistic regression models for choice and OLS models for acceptability with respondent fixed effects. Predicted probabilities and marginal effects are reported for substantive interpretation.

To examine instrument-level evaluations, we estimated AMCEs using status-quo levels as the reference category and standard errors clustered by respondent (Hainmueller et al., 2014). AMCEs estimate how each instrument level changes the expected outcome relative to the status-quo level of the same attribute, averaged over the distribution of the other instruments in the bundle. They therefore capture contextualized instrument-level effects within packages, not the full set of interactions, complementarities, substitutions, or trade-offs among instruments. Analytically, our approach is best understood as an additive analysis of instruments evaluated within bundles, rather than an interactive analysis of internally interdependent package dynamics in which the effect of one instrument depends on the level of another. We also reported marginal means (MMs), which indicate the average outcome level among profiles containing each attribute level and provide the appropriate descriptive basis for comparing absolute outcome levels across instruments (Leeper et al., 2020; Treger, 2025). We interpret AMCEs and MMs together: AMCEs show baseline-referenced marginal changes within attributes, while MMs contextualize whether those marginal changes translate into meaningful differences in absolute evaluations across instruments.

Results

Package-level policy choice and acceptability

We begin by examining descriptive patterns in package-level choice. Figure 1A reports the mean probability that a policy package is chosen across combinations of push and pull intensity. The descriptive pattern reveals that packages with higher pull intensity and lower push intensity are chosen more frequently, suggesting a preference for more pull-oriented policy packages. To formally test this pattern, we estimate logistic regression models that relate package choice to *net_pullness*, accounting for repeated choices by the same respondent. The results show a strong and statistically significant positive association between *net_pullness* and the likelihood that a policy package is chosen (Table F1, see online supplementary material). Substantively, the estimated coefficient implies that a one-unit increase in



Panel. A: Mean Choice Probability by Push-Pull Configuration

Panel. B: Predicted Probability of Choice by *Net_Pullness*

Figure 1 Package-level policy choice by policy composition. (A) Mean choice probability by push–pull configuration. (B) Predicted probability of choice by *net_pullness*.

Note. Panel A shows the mean probability that a policy package is chosen across combinations of push and pull intensity. Each cell reports the observed choice rate for a given configuration of instruments, illustrating how revealed preferences vary with policy package composition. Panel B presents model-implied predicted probabilities of choosing a policy package as a function of *net_pullness*. Higher values of *net_pullness* correspond to packages that emphasize pull-oriented instruments relative to push-oriented instruments.

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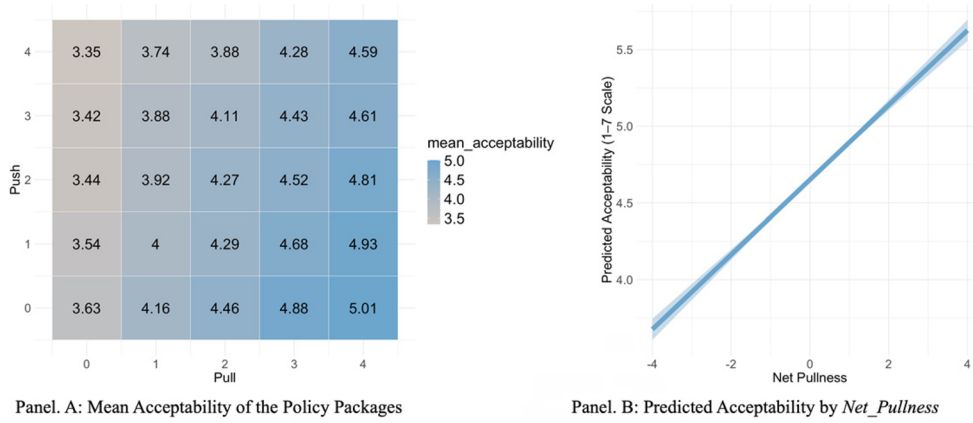

Figure 2 Package-level policy acceptability by policy composition. (A) Mean acceptability of the policy packages. (B) Predicted acceptability by *net_pullness*.

Note. Panel A displays mean acceptability levels on the 7-point scale across combinations of push and pull intensity. Each cell reports the observed level for a given configuration of instruments. Panel B shows predicted acceptability as a function of *net_pullness*. Higher *net_pullness* indicates greater reliance on pull-oriented instruments relative to push-oriented instruments.

net_pullness is associated with approximately 33% higher odds of a package being chosen (odds ratio ≈ 1.33, $p < .01$). Figure 1B further translates these estimates into predicted probabilities, showing that higher levels of *net_pullness* are associated with a large increase in the likelihood of being chosen.

A similar pattern is identified for self-reported acceptability. Figure 2 shows that mean acceptability rises steadily as policy packages become more pull-oriented, while packages with lower *net_pullness* receive consistently lower ratings. This relationship is further supported by regression models controlling for respondent fixed effects (Table F2, see online supplementary material). Substantively, the results indicate that a one-unit increase in *net_pullness* is associated with an increase of approximately 0.24 points on the 7-point self-reported acceptability scale ($p < .01$). Predicted values further indicate a strong positive association between *net_pullness* and policy acceptability, consistent with the regression results. Together, these results show that policy packages emphasizing pull measures are more likely to be chosen and receive higher levels of stated acceptability, providing support for H1a. However, these results reflect patterns in overall package composition rather than comparisons between individual instruments. That is, a package-level preference for pull-heavier bundles does not imply that each pull instrument is always preferred over each push instrument in absolute terms.

Instrument-level acceptability

Figure 3 reports AMCEs and MMs for public acceptability. AMCEs show that increases in subsidies and information generally produce positive marginal effects across domains, whereas responses to push instruments depend on cost incidence. Taxes reduce acceptability in every scenario, with larger negative effects at higher levels, likely because they impose direct and visible costs on individuals (Fong et al., 2025). Regulatory effects vary: climate regulations constrain individual behavior and reduce acceptability, while AI and aging regulations primarily target firms or employers and generate small positive effects. These AMCE results suggest that subsidies and information generate more consistently positive baseline-referenced marginal shifts than taxes and regulations.

However, the MMs provide a more direct assessment of H1b and show a different perspective by allowing comparisons across instruments. Across domains, absolute acceptability levels are often relatively similar across instruments. While subsidies and information sometimes appear at the upper end of the distribution and taxes at the lower end, these differences are generally modest and do not indicate a clear or consistent ranking of instruments. Together, these results provide only partial support for H1b and do not indicate a uniform preference for pull over push instruments at the level of absolute acceptability. Although respondents react more favorably to pull instruments at the margin, absolute

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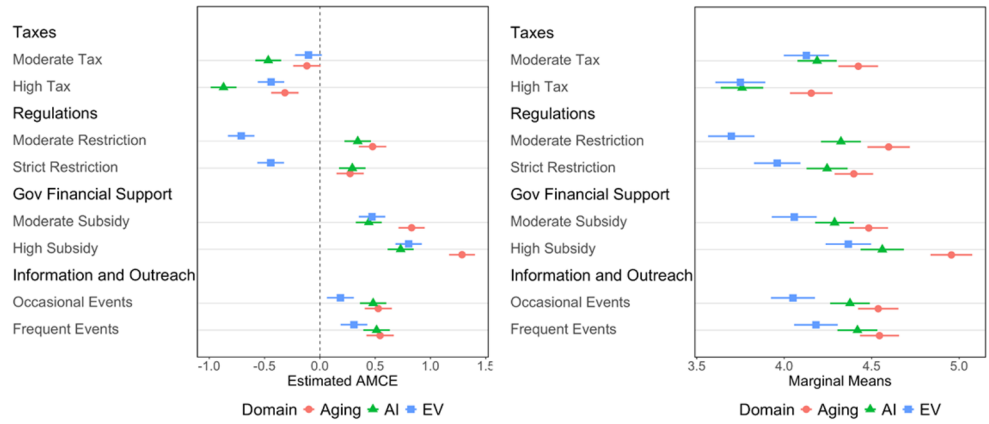

Figure 3 Instrument-level effects on public acceptability: AMCEs and MMs.

Note. Left panel reports AMCEs, defined as the change in expected acceptability relative to the status-quo level of each instrument. Right panel reports MMs, indicating the average predicted acceptability level (1–7 scale) for profiles containing each attribute level. Points denote point estimates and bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

differences in overall acceptability across instruments are more limited than implied by marginal effects alone. This indicates that acceptability depends on how instruments are designed and on who bears the costs.

Instrument-level perceived effectiveness

Figure 4 reports AMCEs (left panels) and MMs (right panels) for perceived effectiveness. As perceived effectiveness was not specified as a formal pre-registered hypothesis, we interpret these results as exploratory evidence on a second dimension of public feasibility. At the instrument level, pull instruments are consistently associated with positive shifts across the domains, with higher subsidies and more frequent information outreach generally increasing perceived effectiveness. However, push instruments produce more heterogeneous effects. For taxes, higher levels are associated with increased perceived effectiveness in the EV and aging scenarios, while the effects are more modest in AI. For regulations, stricter levels are positively linked with perceived effectiveness in EV and AI but not in aging. These patterns suggest that the perceived effectiveness of push instruments varies across policy domains and types of intervention, rather than following a uniform pattern.

The MMs indicate that absolute differences across instruments are more limited than the AMCEs alone might suggest. Some subsidy and information levels appear slightly higher in specific scenarios, but taxes and regulations do not consistently occupy either the highest or lowest positions. Across the three domains, the predicted effectiveness ratings of most instrument levels fall within a relatively narrow range and show substantial overlap. Overall, the exploratory results suggest that perceived effectiveness is shaped by instrument intensity, policy mechanism, and domain context rather than by a simple push-pull distinction.

Instrument-level willingness to co-produce

Figures 5 and 6 separate willingness to co-produce into time and money and report both AMCEs and MMs. AMCEs show that instrument design matters at the margin, but the pattern differs by contribution type. For time contributions, pull instruments show a clearer positive association, whereas the effects of push instruments are more conditional on domain. For monetary contributions, only subsidies are consistently associated with greater willingness to pay across domains, while the marginal effects of information outreach, taxes, and regulation vary more across policy contexts. These baseline-referenced comparisons suggest that pull instruments more reliably increase co-production at the margin, but respondents' reactions still depend strongly on both the policy domain and the form of contribution involved.

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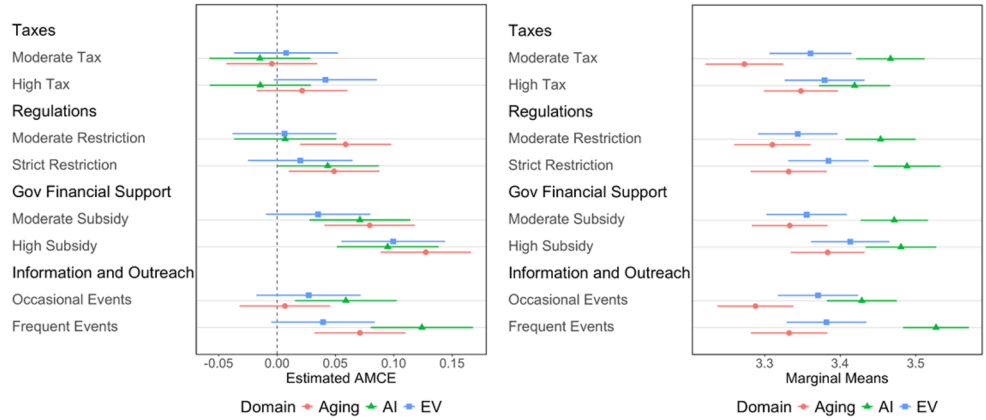

Figure 4 Instrument-level effects on perceived effectiveness: AMCEs and MMs.

Note. Left panel reports AMCEs, defined as the change in perceived effectiveness (on the original 5-point scale) relative to the status-quo level. Right panel displays MMs, indicating the predicted level of perceived effectiveness associated with each instrument intensity.

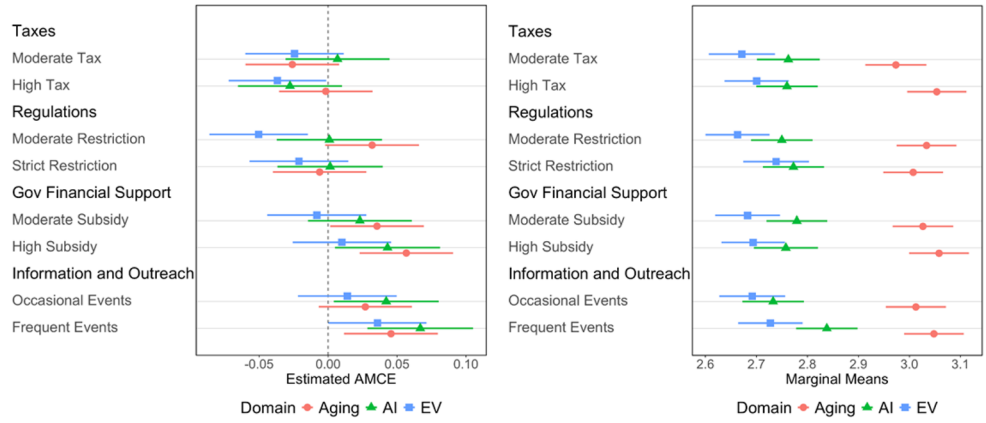

Figure 5 Instrument-level effects on willingness to co-produce (time): AMCEs and MMs.

Note. Left panel reports AMCEs, defined as the change in willingness to contribute time (5-point scale) relative to the status-quo level; points denote estimates and bars show 95% confidence intervals. Right panel reports MMs (5-point scale).

However, MMs reveal that absolute engagement levels are more structured by domain context. Within each domain, respondents' willingness to contribute time and money varies across instrument levels, but the differences are modest. The clearer separation is across domains rather than across instruments. This suggests that although some instruments generate stronger marginal gains, the MMs do not support a strong cross-instrument ranking. Overall, willingness to co-produce is shaped jointly by instrument design and domain context, with only limited evidence for a broad push–pull divergence in absolute terms. These patterns provide partial support for H2b, rather than H2a, in the AMCE results, especially for time contributions and for subsidies in monetary contributions. However, the MMs caution against interpreting this as a strong absolute push–pull hierarchy because willingness to co-produce is also strongly shaped by domain context and contribution type.

Discussion and conclusion

The central theoretical implication of this study is that public feasibility in policy packaging should be understood as multidimensional and context-dependent, rather than as a single attitude toward isolated instruments. Citizens may find a proposed package acceptable, believe that it is likely to work, or

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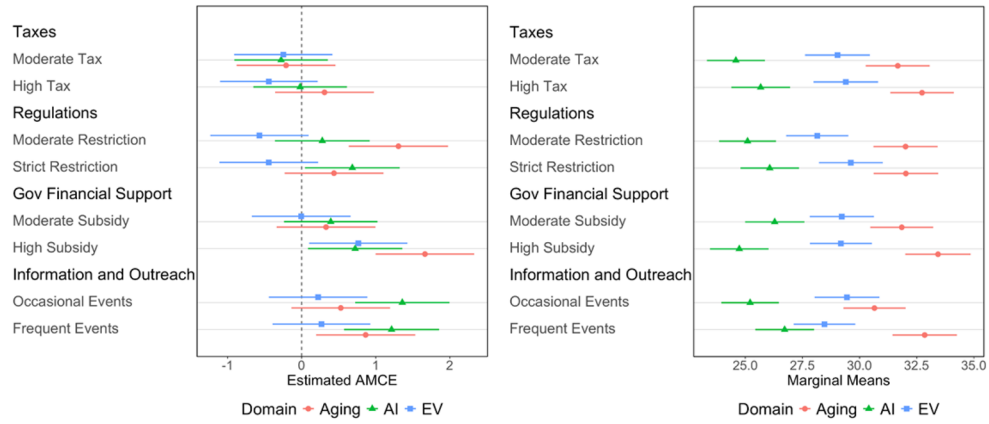

Figure 6 Instrument-level effects on willingness to co-produce (money): AMCEs and MMs.

Note. Left panel reports AMCEs, defined as the change in donation amount (USD, 0–100) relative to the status-quo level; points denote estimates and bars show 95% confidence intervals. Right panel reports MMs (USD, 0–100).

be willing to contribute to its implementation for different reasons. This distinction matters because policy packages are not only adopted or rejected as political proposals; they must also be perceived as credible, workable, and capable of mobilizing cooperation during implementation.

The results support this multidimensional view. At the package level, bundle composition matters: packages that place greater weight on pull-oriented instruments are more likely to be chosen and receive higher acceptability ratings. However, this package-level pattern does not translate into a simple instrument-level push–pull hierarchy. AMCEs show that pull instruments more often generate positive baseline-referenced marginal gains, but the MMs indicate more limited absolute differences across instruments. Push instruments are therefore not uniformly rejected, and pull instruments are not uniformly superior. For acceptability, the key distinction is not simply whether an instrument is push- or pull-oriented, but how costs are distributed and who is seen as bearing them. Taxes consistently reduce acceptability, while regulatory effects vary by domain, with less favorable responses when restrictions are imposed directly on individuals than when they primarily target firms or employers.

The results for perceived effectiveness and co-production further reinforce the need to distinguish among dimensions of public feasibility. Perceived effectiveness does not map neatly onto the push–pull distinction. Respondents do not treat taxes and regulations as uniformly ineffective; instead, they evaluate them in relation to the policy domain and the fit between the instrument and the problem. Co-production intentions show a similar pattern. Some instruments generate stronger marginal gains, especially pull instruments for time contributions and subsidies for monetary contributions, but absolute willingness to contribute is more strongly patterned by domain context and contribution type. Overall, these findings suggest that public feasibility depends not only on broad instrument categories, but also on burden visibility, domain context, and the kind of citizen response being requested.

The cross-domain patterns should be interpreted cautiously, but they are substantively suggestive. Broadly, the aging scenario tends to elicit more favorable responses, while reactions in the climate and AI scenarios are more conditional and, in some outcomes, more dispersed. One possible interpretation is that aging appears more personally proximate and familiar, climate policy involves sharper trade-offs between immediate costs and diffuse future benefits, and AI governance is evaluated under greater uncertainty. However, psychological distance and complexity were not directly measured or experimentally manipulated in this study. The observed domain differences should therefore be treated as descriptive contextual variation rather than evidence of causal effects of psychological distance or problem complexity.

The findings contribute to policy design and policy packaging research in three ways. First, they conceptualize public feasibility as a multidimensional evaluation of policy packages. Public acceptability remains important, but it is not equivalent to perceived effectiveness or willingness to contribute to

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implementation. This distinction helps explain why instruments that are acceptable may not necessarily be seen as effective, and why perceived effectiveness does not automatically translate into willingness to contribute. Second, the findings clarify the difference between package-level composition and instrument-level marginal evaluations. Package-level analyses show that pull-oriented bundles are more likely to be chosen and rated as acceptable, while instrument-level AMCEs and MMs show that this package-level pattern does not imply a simple absolute ranking of pull over push instruments. Third, the findings refine the push–pull distinction by showing that citizens' evaluations depend on burden visibility, cost incidence, domain context, and participation mode.

For policymakers and public managers, the results point to several design implications. First, where push measures are necessary, feasibility may depend on how visible and personally salient their burdens are. Taxes and regulations may be more difficult to sustain when they impose direct costs on individuals, but they may be more acceptable when burdens are shifted toward firms, employers, or other institutional actors. Second, pull measures can enhance acceptability, but they should not be treated as a universal solution. Subsidies and information may make packages easier to accept, but high acceptability does not necessarily imply high perceived effectiveness or sustained behavioral change. Third, communication is central to package design. Clear explanations of policy mechanisms, distributional implications, and expected outcomes are especially important in domains where benefits are uncertain, delayed, or difficult for citizens to observe. At the implementation stage, such communication may also need to be paired with proactive capacity-building among intermediary organizations and civil-society partners, especially where policy packages depend on sustained participation and adaptation over time (Kedia et al., 2025).

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge several limitations of our study. First, our analysis identifies marginal rather than interaction effects. AMCEs estimate how each instrument level is evaluated on average across bundled combinations, but they do not identify the full set of complementarities, substitutions, trade-offs, or interdependencies among instruments. In this sense, the study uses an additive analytical approach to instruments evaluated within bundles, rather than an interactive analytical approach to internally interdependent package dynamics. Future research could examine such dynamics directly using designs tailored to theoretically motivated pairings, such as whether information legitimizes regulation, whether subsidies reduce resistance to taxes, or whether regulations increase the perceived effectiveness of voluntary or informational measures. Second, the co-production outcomes capture stated intentions rather than observed behavior. Intention-behavior gaps may be especially important for costly or sustained forms of participation, such as donating money, volunteering time, or complying with burdensome requirements (Kallbekken & Sælen, 2011). Future studies could therefore combine conjoint experiments with incentivized behavioral measures, such as real donations, effort tasks, or costly commitments. Third, psychological distance and complexity are used here only as interpretive lenses. Future research could directly measure or experimentally manipulate these dimensions to test how perceived distance, uncertainty, and complexity shape evaluations of policy packages. Finally, field experiments and policy pilots could assess how package composition, cost incidence, communication, trust, institutional capacity, and local conditions interact in real implementation settings (Galik et al., 2023; Nair, 2022).

In conclusion, designing publicly feasible policy packages for complex governance problems requires attention not only to technical design, but also to public acceptability, perceived effectiveness, and the forms of participation that policies mobilize. The evidence points to a pragmatic approach: use pull elements to improve acceptability, incorporate push instruments where stronger intervention is needed, attend carefully to cost incidence and burden visibility, and communicate clearly about expected mechanisms and impacts. While the findings reflect how instruments are evaluated within policy bundles rather than fully interactive package dynamics, they show why public feasibility should be treated as a multidimensional design problem rather than as a single measure of stated acceptability.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material is available at *Policy and Society* online.

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Data availability

Data cannot be shared for ethical/privacy reasons; an anonymized summary is available on request.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors confirm that there are no financial or non-financial interests that are directly or indirectly related to the work submitted for publication.

Ethics approval

Ethics approval was obtained from NUS Institutional Review Board (NUS-IRB-2023-175).

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