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Government effectiveness, regulatory compliance and public preference for marine policy instruments. An experimental approach

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ABSTRACT

Democratic governance of natural resources requires democratic accountability. To explore the antecedence of public preference for marine policy instruments, this study revisit previous research findings linking inefficient political institutions to demand for more coercive policy tools. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigates the influence of 1) effectiveness of authorities and 2) regulatory compliance among resources users on the public preference for marine policy instruments. A 2×2 between-subject scenario experimental approach was utilised, where the effectiveness of authorities and regulatory compliance of shrimpers varied. Respondents were asked to rank three different marine policy instrument: 1) tougher penalties for noncompliance, 2) dialogue between authorities and resources users and, 3) tradable quotas. The results from the scenario experiment demonstrate that ineffective authorities increase the preference for tougher penalties. A potential explanation for this finding is that regulation implies less discretion, and hence regulation is preferred when public institutions are inefficient.

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1. Introduction

Political theorists are paying increased attention to the important role of the state in governing the commons [16]. Democratic governance of natural resources requires democratic accountability to the people, thus challenging researchers to explore further the explanatories of public policy preferences in common pool resource (CPR) management.

Decreasing fish stocks due to rule violation and excessive overfishing have challenged policy-makers to design new kinds of policy instruments to promote sustainable fisheries. The prior literature has explored resources users' preferences for steering by, for example, tougher penalties for non-compliance, promotion of dialogue between authorities and resource users, and tradable allowances [12]. There is also a large literature arguing that both horizontal trust between resource users and resource users' vertical trust in the authorities managing the resource can account for variations in compliance with policy regimes [13–15,19,2,21,22,24,4]. For a critical perspective, see [23].

However, marine resources belong to the public, and therefore steering instruments in fisheries should take the public interest into account [17]. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the important role of public preferences in governing marine resources. This means that despite the fact that public acceptance and legitimisation of any steering instrument is essential for democratic governance of natural resources, less is known about the factors influencing public preferences for marine policy instruments.

Results from previous studies investigating predictors of policy preferences in general among the public have given rise to an interesting puzzle. Several studies show that people living in the context of corrupt and inefficient political institutions demand more regulation and coercive policy tools, and scholars are intrigued by that: [3,6,7,20]:

"why do people in countries with bad governments want more government intervention?" ([3], 1018) The explanation provided is that the prevalence of *market failure* and *government failure* are highly correlated [1]. In societies where market actors generate negative consequences, such as CPR depletion, the government fails to provide or protect the CPRs. Facing both market failure and government failure, people tend to demand government intervention. The will to prevent the entrance of potential free riders and to punish market actors that defect is strong[1] and outweighs

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[1] That the will to punish defecting behavior is strong has been shown repeatedly in experiments. People dislike defecting behavior and are prepared to punish it even if such punishment is costly [8].

the ineffectiveness of the authorities actually implementing the policies [1,3].

This theory is advanced to explain cross-country variation in demand for regulation, but there is also individual level data to support this view. Aghion et al. [3] focus on people's perceptions of trustworthiness in their attitudes toward the regulation of business actors and Harring [10] focuses on people's perceptions of trustworthiness in their attitudes toward the regulation of both business actors and citizens in general. Both these studies show that people with low trust in other citizens (or interpersonal trust), low trust in market actors and low political trust tend to prefer punishing regulation [3,10].

These are interesting and important findings, but the prior studies suffer from three critical limitations:

1. Previous cross-section studies have been incapable of establishing causality, e.g. it is impossible to say *if ineffective/untrustworthy institutions have a causal effect on policy preference* or if it is merely a matter of association.
2. The causal mechanism linking ineffectiveness/untrustworthiness with policy preference is not put to a proper test. In survey analysis, different trust variables are often highly correlated [18,27]. People who perceive that implementing institutions are trustworthy also tend to trust other people in general. In order to say something about the effect of the tension between market failure and government failure on policy preferences, *the effect of trust in market actors and trust in authorities* needs to be isolated
3. Trust is a multidimensional concept, consisting of different components. According to Stern [25], 'social trust' is based on perceptions of shared values, identities and experiences and 'rational trust' is understood as evaluations of expected outcomes. Stern and Coleman [26] distinguish between dispositional, rational, affinitive and procedural components of trust. Understanding the role of trustworthy institutions in relation to policy preference requires a *focus on rational aspects of trust*. This is essential in order to test properly the mechanism suggested in the prior literature, namely, that trust in this context refers to perceived governmental effectiveness in preventing defectors from entering the market.

To address the limitations in the prior literature, the aim of this paper is to investigate the isolated influence of 1) the effectiveness of governmental authorities[2] and 2) regulatory compliance among fishermen on the public's preferences for marine policy instruments.

2. Two hypotheses

Building on the evidence in the prior literature demonstrating that dysfunctional authorities are associated with a preference for more regulation [3,6,7,20] and more coercive policy tools [10,11] the first hypothesis reads as follows:

H1. *Ineffective authorities increase the preference for command-and-control types of policy measure.*

H1 is rejected if there is no significant impact by government effectiveness on the preference for command-and-control forms of steering. However, prior research also claims that the explanation for the association between inefficient government intervention and demand for more coercive policy tools is the co-variation between ineffective authorities and distrust; hence, low trust in resource users results in a willingness to punish free riders. In order to confront the theorised mechanism with empirics, the second hypothesis reads as follows:

H2. *Ineffective authorities increase the preference for command-and-controls type of policy measures only when regulatory compliance is low among resource users.*

3. Methods and materials

3.1. Experimental procedure

In order to test the two hypotheses, a hypothetical scenario experiment was implemented. Scenario vignettes and related questions were handed out to a total of 252 undergraduate students at the Faculty of Education, University of Gothenburg. The response rate was 91%, comprising 231 completed scenario surveys. Participants were randomly assigned to one out of five different scenario vignettes. They were asked to read a scenario vignette and to answer the related questions during a break in their lecture; it took them about five minutes to complete. It was made very clear that participation was voluntary. In addition to a question about policy preferences (see below), the respondents were also asked questions about their environmental concerns, their position on the left-right political scale, and their gender.[3]

3.2. Experimental design

A post-test-only 2×2 full factorial design was utilised, in which the effectiveness of the responsible authorities and the regulatory compliance of Swedish shrimpers were between-subject factors (see Appendix A for the scenario vignettes).

First, scenarios diverge with regard to the description of the authorities. In half of the scenarios, it is stated that the authorities have been criticised for the manner in which they have worked on the issue of sustainable shrimp fisheries. In the other half, it is stated that the authorities have been praised for their work with sustainable shrimp fisheries. The vignettes thus capture whether the fishing authorities are effective or ineffective.

Second, scenarios diverge with regard to the description of the shrimpers. Half of the scenarios emphasised that Swedish shrimpers quite often practice high-grading, and in the other half of the scenarios, it is stated that high-grading is quite rare among Swedish shrimpers. High-grading is an illegal practice in which the shrimper throws back less profitable catches in the hope of landing catches that pay better. Whether this is rare or common among Swedish shrimpers thus captures whether shrimpers are complying with regulations or not. The combination of the two stimuli rendered four different conditions, as illustrated in Table 1.

In addition to the four scenario vignettes generated by the 2×2 design, a scenario was distributed without any information regarding either the authorities or the shrimpers.[4] Respondents assigned to this scenario comprised part of the control group.

3.3. Scenario and measurements

Respondents were asked to read a scenario vignette and then rank three different policies in line with their opinion concerning

[2] It is important to note that the focus is on trustworthiness as an assessment of whether authorities are effective, not whether the authorities are important as such.

[3] In the group, 85% are women, 61% consider themselves as being on the left politically and 29% regard themselves as very interested in environmental issues.

[4] After the experiment, the respondents were informed that the provided information was not entirely correct.

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