

Individual (political) responsibility for climate change

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Two notions of responsibility

Being responsible for one's blameworthy (harmful) actions (being "attributively responsible" (Scanlon); the responsible agent stands under backward-looking duties of, e.g., compensatory justice)

Being responsible to respond to a morally deficient state of affairs in such a way that future states will be less morally deficient or (more) just (being "substantively responsible" (Scanlon) or "remedially responsible" (Miller et al.); the responsible agent stands under forward-looking duties of, e.g., distributive justice)

Forward-looking duties

Individuals' duties in the context of climate change are mostly forward-looking duties. These duties reflect

- neither individuals' causal responsibility for climate change
- nor their blameworthiness for having brought about harmful and dangerous climate change.

They do reflect the idea of people being substantively responsible, that is, they are duty-bound to create and secure less morally deficient and more just conditions for all.

From forward- to backward-looking duties

Failure to fulfill forward-looking duties can be blameworthy. Arguably, many high emitters today can be shown to have failed to fulfill their forward-looking duties of justice (e.g., by not having reduced their leisure emissions). Then they are attributively responsible and, thus, stand under backward-looking duties (here under duties of compensatory justice for wrongful harm caused).

Main hypothesis I

Emissions-generating activities of private individuals in pursuit of their leisure activities are morally questionable at the very least (1) if those individuals generate more emissions than they are fairly entitled to, (2) insofar as their excessive emissions harm other people and (3) they are liable for knowing this, (4) moreover, if they can act differently and in a better way, and (5) with burdens that are reasonable for them to bear.

Main hypothesis II

Fulfilling duties to reduce private emissions can not only serve as a role model, but can also, at least in Western democracies, reduce the political costs of enforcing government mitigation measures. Assuming private individual responsibility for climate change can therefore also be a contribution to fulfilling citizens' obligations to promote the transformation to climate neutrality.

Non-ideal conditions

- Avoiding catastrophic climate change
- Limited global carbon budget
- No binding, fair and effective international regime

Paris Agreement in force since 4th November 2016

Article 2

1. This Agreement, in enhancing the implementation of the Convention, including its objective, aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty, including by: (a) Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change; (b) Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production; and (c) Making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.
2. This Agreement will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.

Article 4

1. In order to achieve the long-term temperature goal set out in Article 2, Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century, on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.

Main hypothesis I

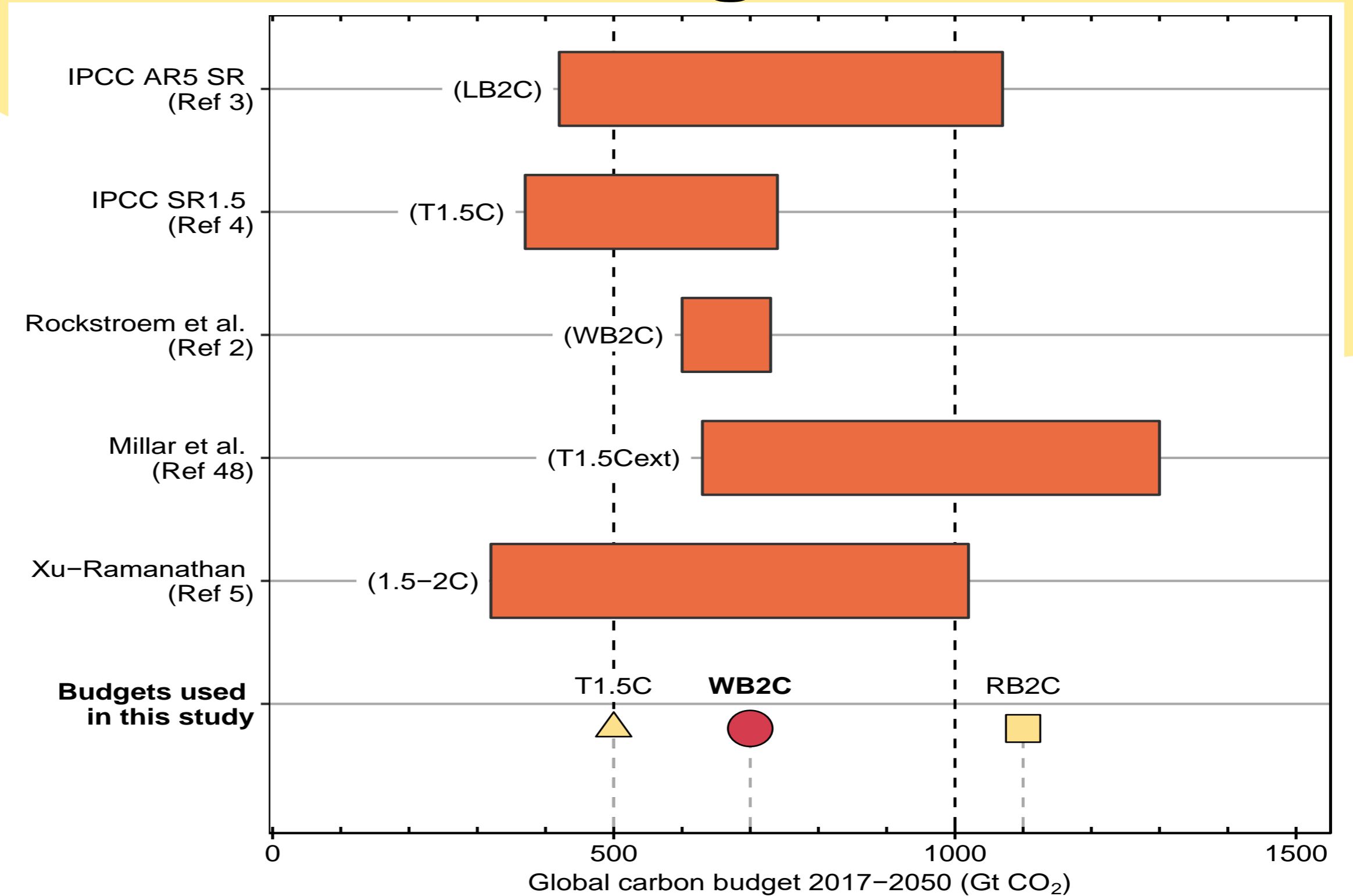
Emissions-generating activities of private individuals in pursuit of their leisure activities are morally questionable at the very least **(1) if those individuals generate more emissions than they are fairly entitled to**, (2) insofar as their excessive emissions harm other people and (3) they are liable for knowing this, (4) moreover, if they can act differently and in a better way, and (5) with burdens that are reasonable for them to bear.

(1) Fair distribution of the emissions budget

- Fair distribution of the global carbon budget
- Fair distribution of the national (or regional) budget
- Fair budget of individuals for the pursuit of their private leisure activities

The global carbon budget

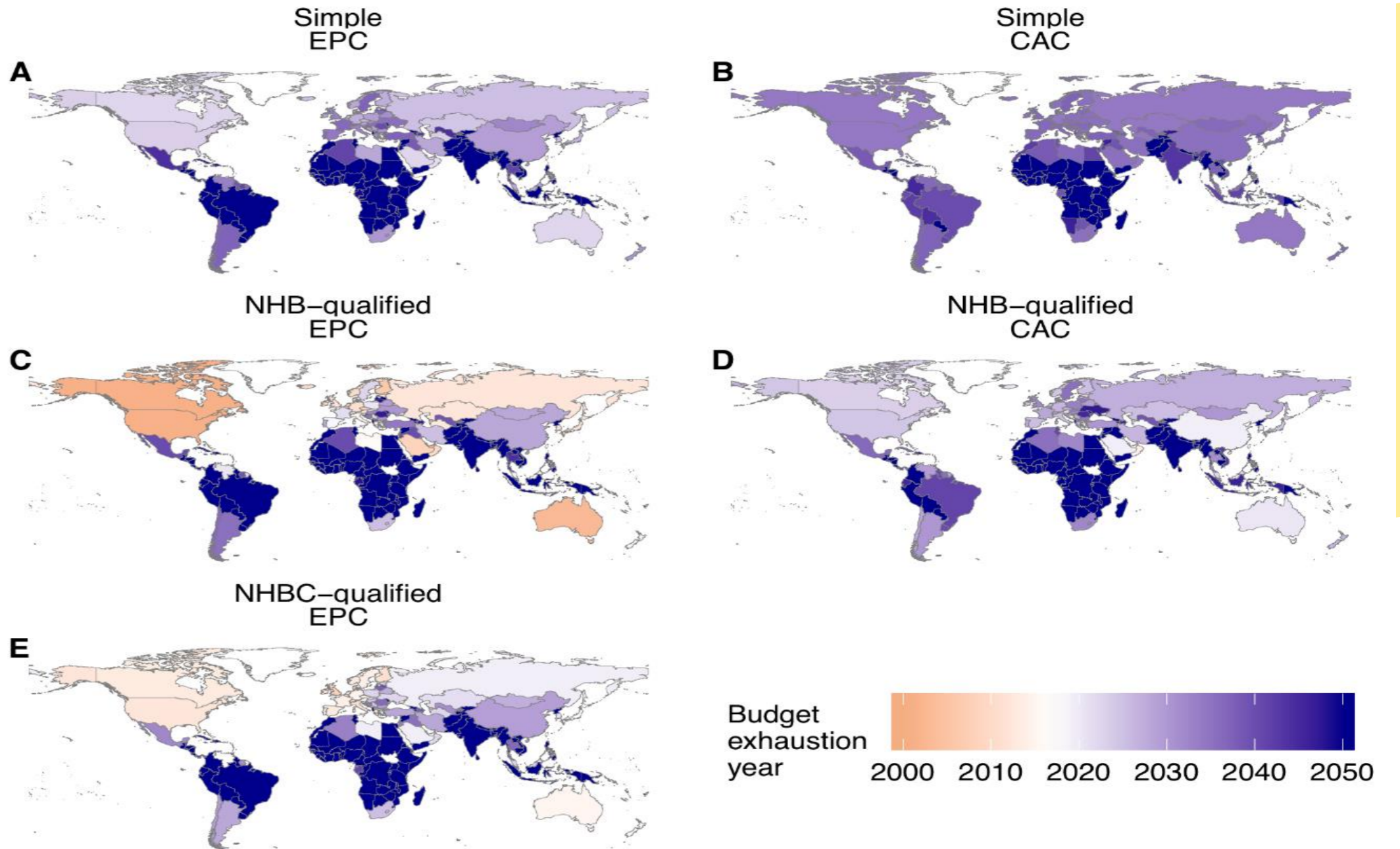
Identify an estimate for the remaining global carbon budget (GCB).



Fair distribution of GCB

Implications of NHB-qualified CAC (D) are similar to implications of simple EPC (A):

- Qualifying CAC through HDI thresholds results in states being allocated a budget similar to the budget under simple EPC
- Past emissions are so high that their inclusion (according to H and B) eliminates the difference between CAC and simple EPC for states below the HDI and most of the difference for historically high emitting states

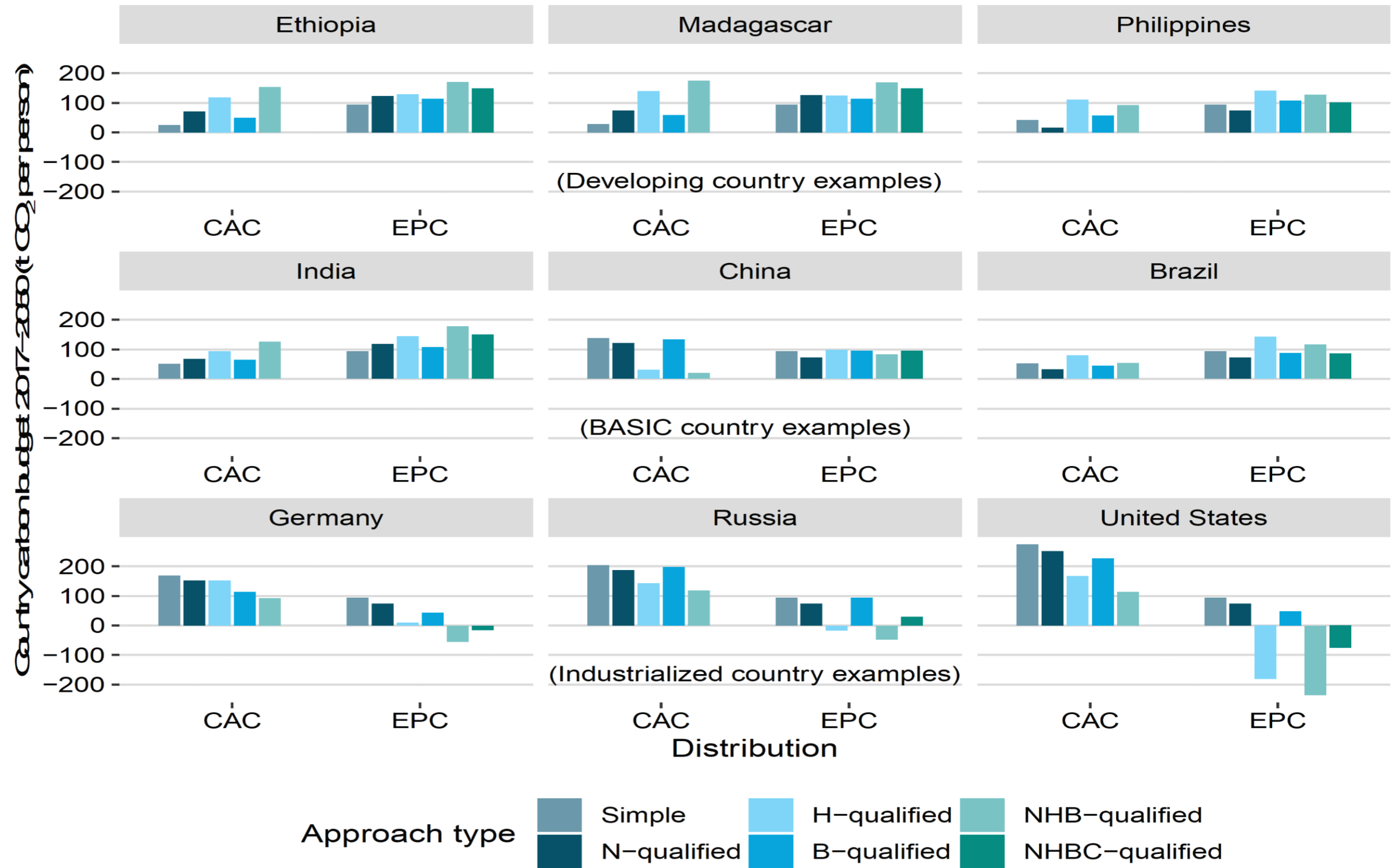


Mitigation costs of different budget allocations. Coloring shows years to budget depletion if states remain at their 2016 emissions levels. Blue shading shows budget depletions in the future. White shows that countries have exhausted their budget (2016), and orange shading shows countries that would have used up their budget before 2016 after such an allocation.

Fair distribution of GCB

Accounting for historical emissions (H-qualified) changes the budget most dramatically for most states (with Germany under CAC as an exception), more than adjusting the allocation to allow all to meet the HDI threshold (N-qualified).

For many states, fairness qualifications (N, H, B) influence the budget less in the EPC approach than in the CAC approach, but this is not true for G8 states.



Fair distribution of emissions budget

- Fair distribution of the national (or regional) budget
- Fair budget of individuals for the pursuit of their private leisure activities
- High private emitters

Fair distribution of emissions budget

- High private emitters
- The average annual per capita emissions in Germany are about 10t CO₂. According to CAC NHB qualified, they should not exceed an average of 4t for the period 2017 to 2050. According to EPC qualified, they are much lower.
- Germans consume on average about 18.5% of national total emissions for "free and leisure time", i.e. private leisure activities (to be distinguished from activities for the satisfaction of basic needs, for the care and maintenance of others e.g. in the family, and for work)
- According to the CAC NHB, emissions must therefore be reduced by at least 60% on average; simplifying assumption: this also applies to emissions that are a side effect of leisure activities. The fair limit is approx. $4\text{t}/100 \times 18.50 = 740\text{kg CO}_2$ per year.

Fair distribution of emissions budget

Source:

Federal Environment Agency

<https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/umwelttipps-fuer-den-alltag/gartenfreizeit/urlaubsreisen#gewusst-wie>

Cf.: For Austrians the Federal Environment Agency states for ski vacations in Austria: 33kg CO₂ per person and day (travel, and activities) on average (accessed on 24.05.2021.)

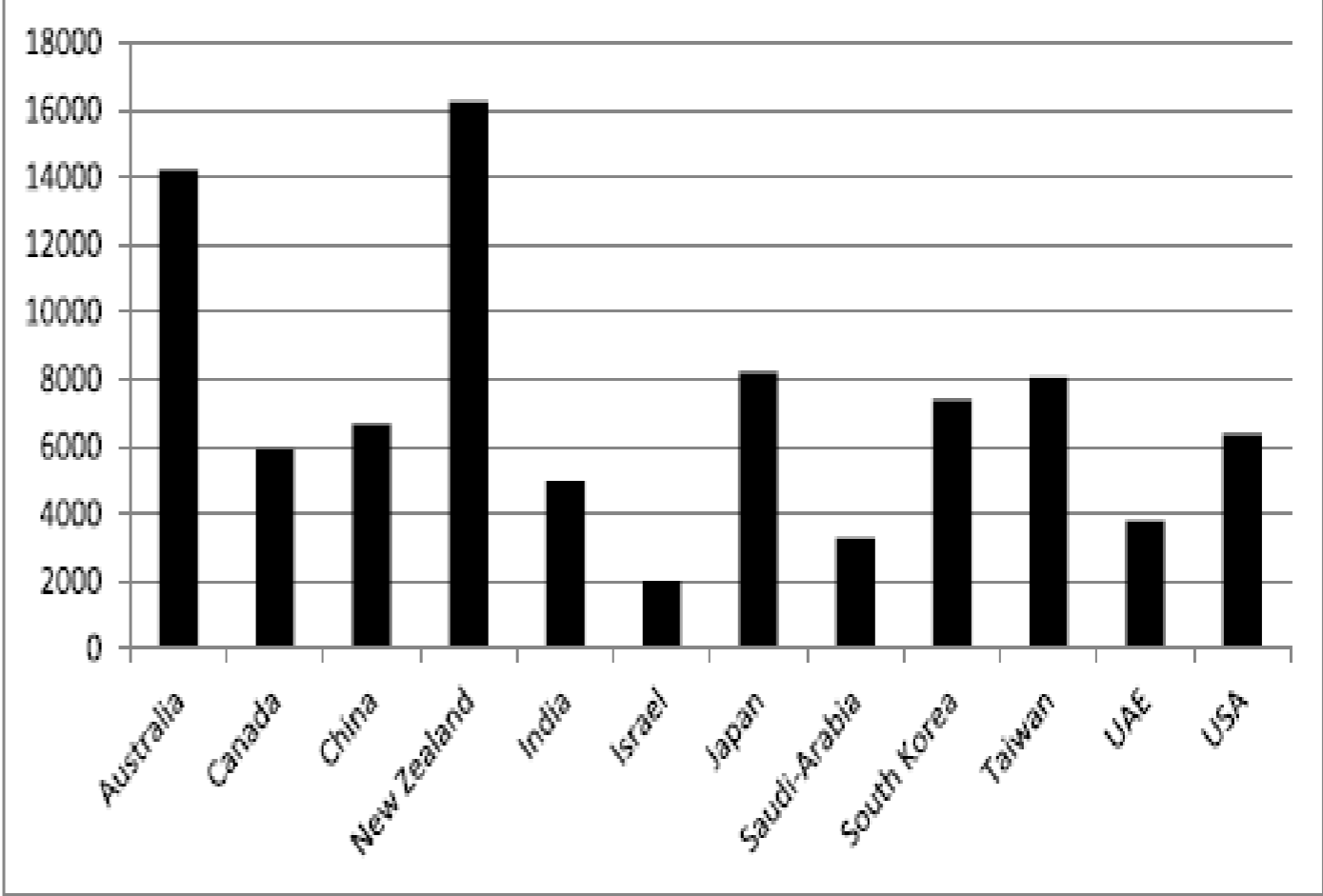
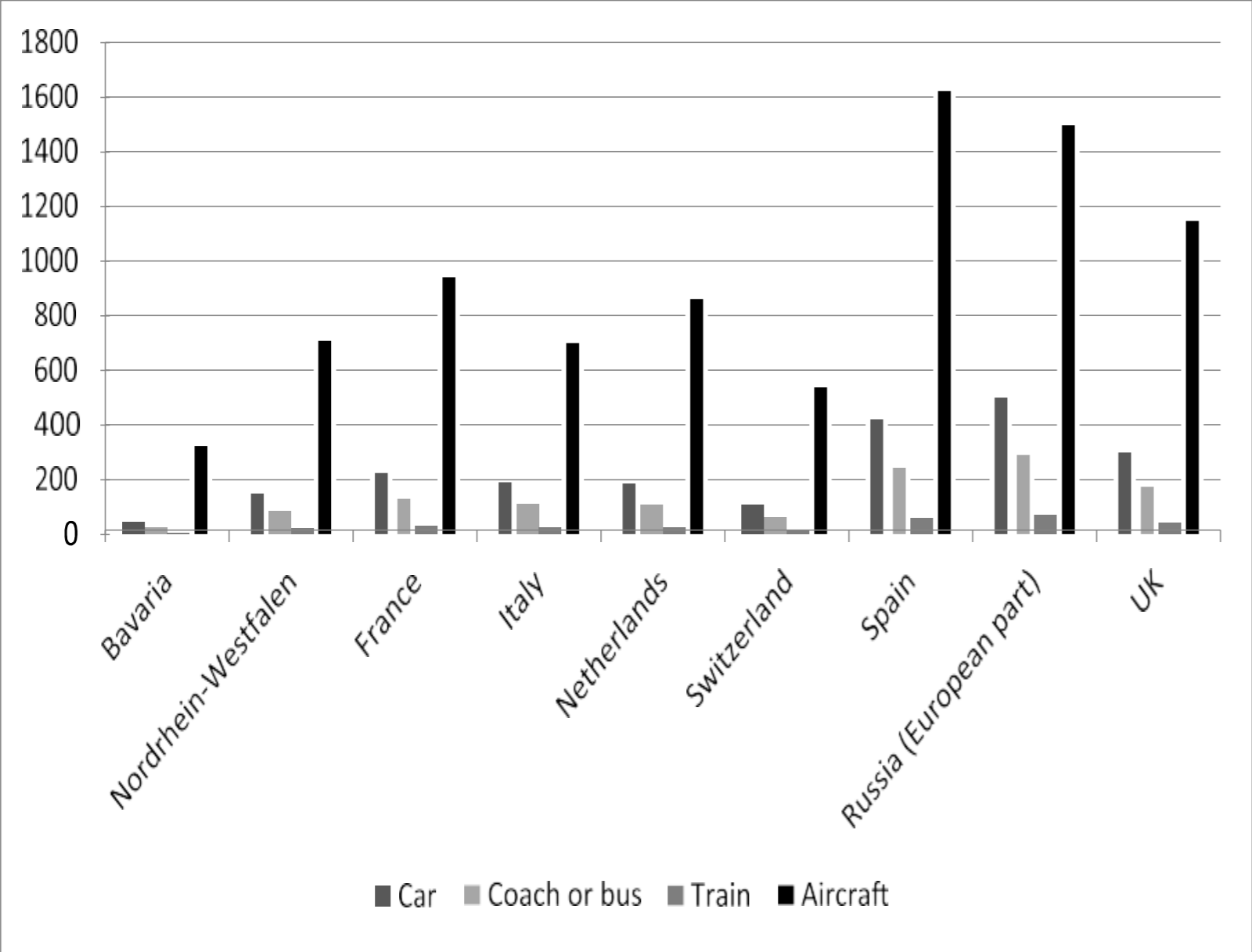
Tabelle 43: Beispielrechnung der mobilitätsbedingten THG-Emissionen für unterschiedliche Bardereisen

Beispielreise	Hauptverkehrsmittel (Hin- und Rückreise)	Reisedistanz (Hin- und Rückreise) [km]	Spezifische Emissionen [kg/Pkm]	Emissionen pro Person Hauptverkehrsmittel [kg CO ₂ -Äq.]	Emissionen pro Person Vor-Ort-Mobilität [kg CO ₂ -Äq.]	Emissionen pro Person Gesamtreise [kg CO ₂ -Äq.]
Polnische Ostsee	Wohnmobil mit zwei Personen	1.000	0,165	165	73	238
Italienische Adria (Frankfurt – Venedig)	Bahn	1.800	0,045	81	4	85
	Flugzeug	1.200	0,194	233	4	237
Türkische Riviera (Frankfurt – Antalya)	Flugzeug	4.600	0,194	892	4	897

THG-Emissionen setzen sich aus den direkten Emissionen und den Emissionen der Vorkette zu Energiebereitstellung zusammen (Well-to-Wheel).

Quelle: eigene Berechnung (ifeu/ DLR/ KIT)

Fair distribution of emissions budget



Estimated average emissions generated per tourist visiting Austria from selected (non-) European countries (and German federal states) of origin, (in relation to transport type), in kg CO2.

Source: Neger et al. (2021) Carbon intensity of tourism in Austria: Estimates and policy implications.

Main hypothesis I

Emissions-generating activities of private individuals in pursuit of their leisure activities are morally questionable at the very least **(1) if those individuals generate more emissions than they are fairly entitled to, (2) insofar as their excessive emissions harm other people** and (3) they are liable for knowing this, (4) moreover, if they can act differently and in a better way, and (5) with burdens that are reasonable for them to bear.

(2) Harm caused by emissions-generating activities of individual actors

Which activities?

- Individual actions
- The sum of activities over the total lifetime of individuals.

How to measure their harmful effects?

- Measuring the difference it/ they make/s, in terms of harms
- Harms: which ones and to whom or what?
- Uncertainty

(2) Harm caused by emissions-generating activities of individual actors

Objections (1)

- Non-identity problem

Response: Threshold conception of harm

- Climate change an emergent problem?

R: no more

- No difference as for the most part each individual vote by itself in elections?

R: No, correlation between emissions and temperature rise

(2) Harm caused by emissions-generating activities of individual actors

Objections (2)

- Very small difference?

R: Many affected; possibly very large difference

- Only slight delay?

R: Not necessarily same impact; impact for numerically different people

- Uncertainty

See risk-averse sufficientarianism

(2) Harm caused by emissions-generating activities of individual actors

Measurement of the harmful effects

- Over total lifetime: average American causes significant suffering for or death of 1-2 future living (Nolt); shortens a person's life by half a year (Broome)
- For individual activities (joyride by car): significant damage for one person for one afternoon (Hiller based on Nolt); damage of 1 US\$ (Broome).
- Causing catastrophic damage is also possible (Weitzman; MA Thesis Benedikt Namdar).

Main hypothesis I

Emissions-generating activities of private individuals in pursuit of their leisure activities are morally questionable at the very least **(1) if those individuals generate more emissions than they are fairly entitled to, (2) insofar as their excessive emissions harm other people and (3) they are liable for knowing this, (4) moreover, if they can act differently and in a better way, and (5) with burdens that are reasonable for them to bear.**

(3) Knowledge of these harms

Since when can people be attributed knowledge of these harms, at what point are they liable for their possible actual ignorance? Since

- 1896 (first scientific text on the greenhouse effect by Svante Arrhenius)
- 1967 (first serious modeling attempts)
- 1990 (first IPCC report)
- 1995 (the second IPCC report)?

It varies for individual actors, depending on conditions of access to relevant knowledge base.

Main hypothesis I

Emissions-generating activities of private individuals in pursuit of their leisure activities are morally questionable at the very least **(1) if those individuals generate more emissions than they are fairly entitled to, (2) insofar as their excessive emissions harm other people and (3) they are liable for knowing this, (4) moreover, if they can act differently and in a better way, and (5) with burdens that are reasonable for them to bear.**

(4) Morally preferable alternatives

Limitation or reduction of emissions to an appropriate level through

- a. substitution of means
- b. foregoing goals
- c. substitution of goals

Main hypothesis I

Emissions-generating activities of private individuals in pursuit of their leisure activities are morally questionable at the very least

(1) if those individuals generate more emissions than they are fairly entitled to, (2) insofar as their excessive emissions harm other people and (3) they are liable for knowing this, (4) moreover, if they can act differently and in a better way, and (5) with burdens that are reasonable for them to bear.

Main hypothesis I

Emissions-generating activities of private individuals in pursuit of their recreational activities are morally blameworthy (1) ***if those individuals generate more emissions than they are fairly entitled to, (2) insofar as their excessive emissions harm other people and (3) they are liable for knowing this, (4) moreover, they can act differently and in a better way, and (5) with burdens that are reasonable for them to bear.***

(5) Reasonableness under conditions of non-compliance or partial compliance with duties by others

Assumption: Duties reasonable under ideal conditions of compliance by all

Question: reasonable under conditions of noncompliance or partial compliance by many others, if the costs of noncompliance cannot be imposed on the unwilling, or cannot be imposed on them in full?

(5) Reasonableness under conditions of non-compliance or partial compliance with duties by others

Non-fulfillment of (many) others leads to:

- a. Unequal burdens of the willing and unwilling
- b. Increased burdens on the willing in fulfilling their fair share of duties (because of relative costs, sanction costs)
- c. Need for greater efforts by the willing to achieve the goal (averting catastrophic climate change)

(5) Reasonableness under conditions of non-compliance or partial compliance with duties by others

Normative assessments

Because of a: (fairness to the willing) fewer or no duties

Because of b: (fairness to the willing) equal fair duties, less extensive duties

Because of c: (fairness to victims of noncompliance) more extensive duties of the willing

Main hypothesis II

At least in Western democracies, meeting duties to reduce private emissions can set an example

- amplifying their impact and
- reducing the political costs of enforcing government mitigation measures.

Individual responsibility and political responsibility

Assuming responsibility for reducing private emissions can also be a contribution to fulfilling citizens' obligations to promote the transformation to climate neutrality.

However, political responsibility can be met in many ways.

The options for action can be in competition with each other.

Concluding remarks

The conditions "harmful effect," "epistemically responsible," and "avoidable at reasonable cost" may be met for emissions-generating activities by private individuals.

Citizens are substantively responsible to contribute to a fair transformation to climate neutrality. The fulfillment of individual duties to reduce emissions can be a contribution to this. Failure to fulfill one's forward-looking duties can be blameworthy.

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