

# **10th International Conference of Panel Data Users in Switzerland**

## **Workshop - 4a**

### **Title**

*Cure or prevention? Voter preferences on the precautionary principle*

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### **Abstract**

Many policy problems require preventative and reactive responses. For example, to deal with climate change, there is a need for preventative action against global warming and policy measures that deal with the consequences, such as floods and droughts. In health policy, preventative and curative measures are needed to deal with pressing policy problems, such as infections and non-communicable diseases. In academic circles, there is widespread agreement that precautionary measures are needed. There are, however, political challenges when it comes to preventative action. Firstly, preventative policies are a “hard sell” on election day because politicians have to persuade voters that a policy dealing with a problem that is not yet there is necessary and should have priority over other policy problems, which are visible and perceived as more urgent. Secondly, preventative and precautionary policies have often powerful interest groups against them, which campaign for their policy interests either directly or through political parties. It is therefore a common assumption that preventative measures should be a lower priority than policies responding to urgent problems. In this paper, I will report the result of a survey that demanded voters whether they prefer a health system that is oriented towards curing existing diseases or one that focuses on prevention as a main paradigm. Representative data from the Swiss Household Panel shows that 60 percent of the respondents do prefer a health system that prioritizes preventative over curative approaches in health policy. This finding is remarkable because it shows that citizens prefer a fundamentally different health system than the existing one, which focuses above all on treating diseases. Furthermore, this finding is interesting because it shows that voters agree with the goals that are associated with preventative policies. The paper explores this question further based on multivariate regression analysis and discusses the implications of these findings for policymakers in health policy and beyond.

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