

THE SPATIAL INCIDENCE OF A CARBON TAX IN IRELAND

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Abstract

We estimate carbon dioxide emissions for the 3401 electoral districts of the Republic of Ireland combining data from the Census, the Household Budget Survey, the National Accounts, Environmental Accounts, and the Labour Accounts. The source data is available for many countries, but we are not aware of other studies that combine these data to estimate the spatial incidence of environmental regulation. For consumption, currently regulated emissions are reasonably uniform over space, while currently unregulated emissions vary much more substantially and are spatially concentrated in the commuter belts. This suggests that new regulation may run into local opposition. The incidence of a carbon tax correlates negatively with votes for the Green Party in the 2007 general election. Emissions from production are clustered around the cities but the spatial pattern is dominated by a small number of point sources (which are already regulated). Consumption emissions dominate total emissions in suburbs and the countryside. Production emissions dominate total emissions in the towns and cities as well as in those electoral districts that have a point source of carbon dioxide.

Key words

Carbon tax, spatial data, voter behaviour

JEL Classification

D72, H22, R12, Q54

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1. Introduction

A substantial literature has considered the impact of climate policy on many aspects of the economy such as the incidence of environmental taxes across income groups (see Poterba, 1993) and production sectors (see Morgenstern et al., 2004), but much less is known about the spatial incidence of carbon taxes. Given the findings of a differential incidence across income groups and industries, and given the uneven distribution of the population and industry across spatial units, one would also expect to find spatial differences in the incidence of a carbon tax.

A better understanding of the spatial incidence of a carbon tax is important from a political economy perspective since large differences across space in the burden of a carbon tax on households may be seen as unfair, and could affect voting behaviour. For example, Cragg and Kahn (2009) find that representatives from poor, conservative areas with high carbon emissions are unlikely to vote in favour of greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation measures. Thus, as all politics is local, a spatially differentiated incidence of fiscal measures may affect the political feasibility of climate policy. Furthermore, large differences across space in the burden of a carbon tax on companies may also affect the economic geography and local labour markets by affecting the cost of production.

A few papers have considered the spatial effects of curbing GHG emissions. The differential impact of climate policy on countries and groups of countries has been studied at length (Nordhaus and Yang, 1996; Weyant et al., 2006; Wiedmann et al., 2007). At the sub-national level, Bull et al. (1994) and Hassett et al. (2009) show that, for broad US regions, the incidence of energy taxes and a carbon tax do not vary significantly across space. However, they find that this even distribution is generated by large differences in the direct and indirect effects, which largely cancel out. Hassett et al. (2009) consider motor fuels to be the key driver of the variation that is found. Finally, Brännlund and Nordström (2004) estimate the consumer response and welfare effects of a CO₂ tax for Sweden, with data that is broken down for six broad regions: four urban areas and two rural areas (north and south). They find that the distributional impacts are pronounced across the regions, with households in low population density regions carrying a larger share of the CO₂ tax burden.

No analysis for carbon dioxide appears to have been carried out at a more disaggregated spatial scale.¹ Yet, given finely grained differences in most countries in such pertinent factors as settlement patterns, the availability of different transport modes, the age of the housing stock, and household size, one would expect the incidence of a carbon tax to vary more *within* the large regions that have been analyzed in the literature than *between* such regions. From a political economy perspective this is also important since the hitherto analysed regions are not coterminous with the electoral constituencies.

The lack of published data is one reason why there has not been any analysis of the incidence of a carbon tax at the highly spatially disaggregated level. This paper addresses

¹ Hynes et al. (2009) estimate the average methane tax per electoral district for the Republic of Ireland. The likely carbon tax in Ireland would cover only carbon dioxide emissions.

this issue by proposing a novel method of constructing the necessary data for both consumers and firms and applies these methods to the Republic of Ireland. The input data to our method should be readily available for many other countries.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 discusses data and methods. Section 3 presents the results. Section 4 concludes.

2. Data and methods

Separate methods are required to identify the direct incidence of the tax on consumers and its incidence on firms. In both cases only first-round effects are identified; to the extent that agents respond to the tax by adjusting their demand for taxed goods, this would need to be modelled separately. Moreover, firms may pass on some or all of the taxes they pay to consumers. Second round effects of this kind are outside the scope of the analysis.

2.1. Direct emissions from consumption

Our estimates are derived using two different Central Statistics Office (CSO) data sets. The Census yields the Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS), which contain demographic data on household structure, age, education, and employment per electoral district (ED) as well as data on housing conditions and facilities². The Household Budget Survey (HBS) has similar data on housing and demographics plus data on income, expenditures, and energy use. To impute carbon dioxide emissions for each area, we first computed emissions for all households in the HBS sample using the stated energy use by fuel and emission coefficients for Ireland (SEI, 2007). We then ran a regression of household emission in the 2004/5 HBS anonymised data file on the characteristics found in the 2006 SAPS, and used the estimated equation to impute the emissions level for each electoral district. Because the SAPS include only fairly basic information, the regression essentially computes the average income per group. It is a “classifying regression” rather than a continuous function – that is, the explanatory variables are dummies. Regional data on electricity use and household income were derived in the same way. Tables A1-3 show the estimated coefficients.

2.2. Direct emissions from production

Recently made available data from the Census of Population (2006) on travel to work that covers all persons in employment can be used to identify the location of employment by sector (see Morgenroth, 2008). By identifying the place of work of individuals this data identifies the location of employment. While the published micro-data (Place Of Work Census of Anonymised Records POWCAR), covers detail of broad sectors, a special tabulation covering the two digit NACE sectors was utilised by Morgenroth (2008) to establish the location of employment at the Electoral District level, and this data is used

² Electoral Districts are the smallest spatial units for which comprehensive data is available in Ireland. They range in size between 5 and 16,332 ha and in terms of population between 76 and 32,288 people.

in our analysis as this provides the most detailed data on the location of employment by sector available. It covers almost 2 million persons at work.

The 2005 Input-Output table for Ireland specifies value added per sector. The environmental accounts specify carbon dioxide emissions per sector. We constructed labour satellite accounts from the Census for Industrial Production and the Annual Services Inquiry, with supplementary data from the Quarterly National Household Survey and the Census. We thus know emissions per employee and sector, and value added per employee and sector. We combine this with our estimates of the number of employees per electoral district and sector to estimate emissions and value added per electoral district.

3. Results

3.1. Households

Figure 1 shows the average impact per household for each of the electoral districts of the introduction of a carbon tax on non-ETS CO₂ emissions. We assume a carbon tax of €20/tCO₂. Although a carbon tax is sometimes portrayed as placing an unfair burden on households at the countryside, Figure 1 shows a more nuanced pattern. A carbon tax would particularly hit the commuter belts around Cork, Dublin, Galway and Limerick, while the rest of the rural areas in fact see a below average impact. Figure 2 adds the carbon dioxide emissions from power generation, if the EU ETS permit price (assumed to be €20/tCO₂) is fully passed on to final consumers. Figure 2 also shows the impact of the EU ETS alone. The variation in electricity use is much less than the variation in the use of transport and heating fuels. This is supported by Moran's I, a measure of spatial autocorrelation. The carbon tax (Figure 1) has $I=0.48$, that is, electoral districts with above (below) carbon taxes tend to be close to districts with above (below) average carbon taxes. The EU ETS has $I=0.18$. The total climate policy package (carbon tax plus EU ETS) has $I=0.45$. That is, a carbon tax is more spatially inequitable than the EU ETS. The spatial pattern of the carbon tax dominates the spatial pattern of the EU ETS.

3.2. Production

Figure 3 shows the carbon dioxide emissions from production. Note that, because of the pronounced spatial concentration, the data are shown on a log scale. Figure 3 generally reflects the map of economic activity in Ireland, but with the location of power stations and industrial facilities (aluminium, cement) added.

Figure 4 displays the average carbon intensity of production, here measured as carbon dioxide emitted per Euro value added. Figure 4 shows that total carbon intensity spans more than two orders of magnitude, with a range from 20 gCO₂/€ to 5990 gCO₂/€. Figure 4 also displays non-ETS carbon intensity – that is, the amount of unregulated carbon dioxide emitted per value added. Unregulated intensity is obviously always smaller than total intensity. The data are fairly noisy. Indeed, the EU ETS covers 0% of emissions in many electoral districts but 100% in a few others. However, total and regulated carbon

intensity systematically deviate in the most carbon-intensive electoral districts. In other words, the EU ETS regulates carbon-intensive industries only.³

3.3. *Total emissions*

Figure 6 shows total carbon dioxide emissions from consumption and production per electoral district, as well as emissions from consumption only. Figure 5 shows total emissions as a map. Total emissions are heavily concentrated, with a range of 7 GgCO₂ to 2 TgCO₂ per electoral district. The share of consumption in total emissions varies widely, with a range of 0.4% to 99.7%, and randomly for most electoral districts. However, production emissions dominate in electoral districts with very high emissions.

Figure 7 shows a map of the share of consumption emissions in total emissions. This is essentially an inverse map of the production centres of Ireland, or a map of the towns and cities.

3.4. *Election results*

We note above that the spatial incidence of a carbon tax may affect voting behaviour. While a full model of the political economy of environmental taxes is beyond the scope of this paper, we can examine the relationship between tax incidence and voting behaviour using votes for the Green Party as an indicator of environmental taxation preferences. The Green Party made significant gains in the 2007 general election, and has been a junior partner in government since. Climate change was one of its main campaign issues, and a carbon tax is one of the few Green issues in the Programme for Government.

There are 166 seats in *Dáil Éireann*. 165 *Teachtaí Dála* are elected⁴ in 43 multi-seat constituencies. These constituencies are simple aggregates of the electoral districts used in the analyses above. In the 2007 election, 6 constituencies elected a single *Teachta Dála*. In these constituencies, the average carbon tax is 47.9 €/person/year. In the other constituencies, the average carbon tax is 54.4 €/p/yr. We ran a simple OLS regression of the percentage of first-preference votes for the Green Party on the estimated carbon tax, the average years of education per person, along with imputed values for per capita income and municipal waste per household. This shows that for every one euro fall in the carbon tax, the percentage of Green voters increases by 0.11, with a standard error of 0.05 (*p*-value: 0.03).⁵

One could conclude that Green voters favor a carbon tax, knowing that it would disproportionately fall on others. Note that for every 1000 euro increase in per capita income, the Green vote increases by 0.6 percent points. Recall that a carbon tax is regressive (Callan et al. 2009). Reverse causality is out of the question. Household carbon emissions are imputed, and the imputation method disregards political preferences.

³ This is almost by design. The EU ETS does not regulate the chemical industry, which tends to be very energy- and emissions-intensive. There is little chemical industry in Ireland, however.

⁴ The *Ceann Comhairle* is returned without vote.

⁵ The R² of the regression is 48%. See Table A5.

However, one may also argue that Green voting is driven by other issues than climate policy. For instance, the Green Party has severely criticized agricultural practices, which could explain their poor electoral results in rural constituencies,⁶ and planning practices, which could explain their poor electoral results in the newly built commuter belt.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we estimate carbon dioxide emissions for the 3401 electoral districts of the Republic of Ireland. The main source of data is the 2006 Census, which has the location of both home and work for every one in Ireland, as well as a detailed classification of household types and information on the sector of employment. The Census data is supplemented with data on average emissions per type of household and per worker and sector. Such data is available at comparable spatial detail for many countries. We distinguish between direct emissions from consumption and direct emissions from production, and between emissions that are already regulated under the EU Emissions Trading Scheme and emissions that may soon be subject to a domestic carbon tax.

For consumption, currently regulated emissions are reasonably uniform over space, while currently unregulated emissions vary much more substantially and are spatially concentrated in the commuter belts. This suggests that a carbon tax is more likely to run into local opposition than the ETS was. We have identified a possible political economy association, finding that the incidence of a carbon tax correlates negatively with votes for the Green Party in Ireland's most recent (2007) general election.

Emissions from production are clustered around the cities but the spatial pattern is dominated by a small number of point sources. The most carbon-intensive industries are already regulated under the EU ETS.

Consumption emissions dominate total emissions in suburbs and the countryside. Production emissions dominate total emissions in the towns and cities as well as in those electoral districts that have a point source of carbon dioxide. Therefore, the electoral districts with the highest emissions are already largely regulated.

As stated in the introduction, the data we use in the current analysis is readily available for other countries as well. We show here that a combination of data yields new insights into the spatial incidence of carbon pricing. This can be reproduced for other countries and for other regulations. Future research should also try to validate the spatial patterns obtained by the method presented here.

Acknowledgements

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⁶ Note that there is no significant relationship between the share of agricultural employment or the amount of waste generated and the share of Green votes.

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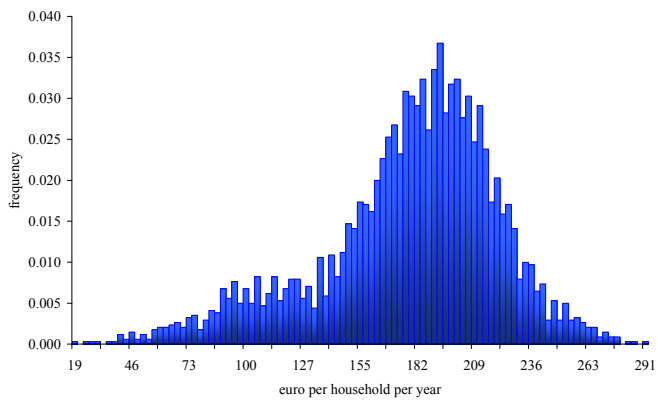
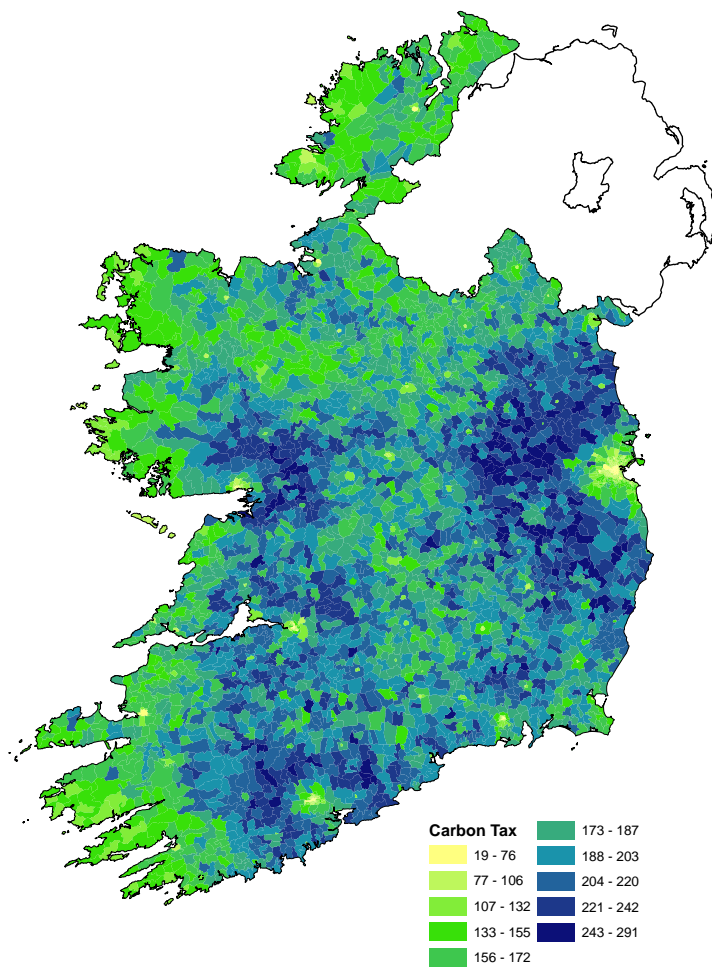


Figure 1. Average annual carbon tax per household by electoral district.

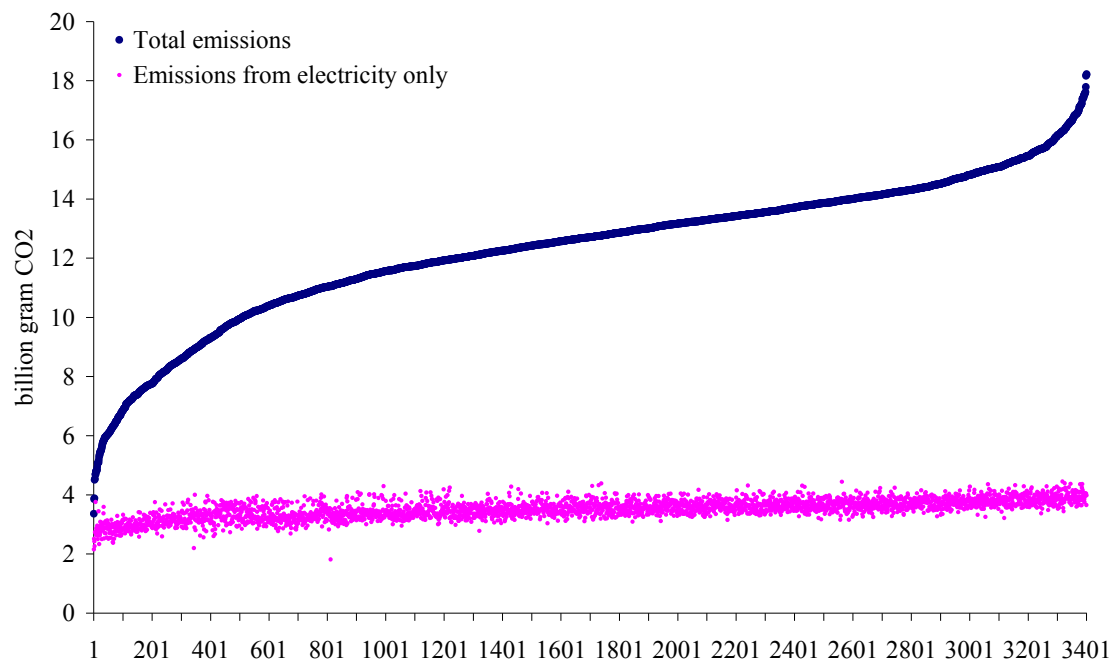


Figure 2. Average annual carbon tax on households plus pass-through of carbon permit price per household by electoral district, and permit price pass-through only; electoral districts are ordered on total carbon dioxide.

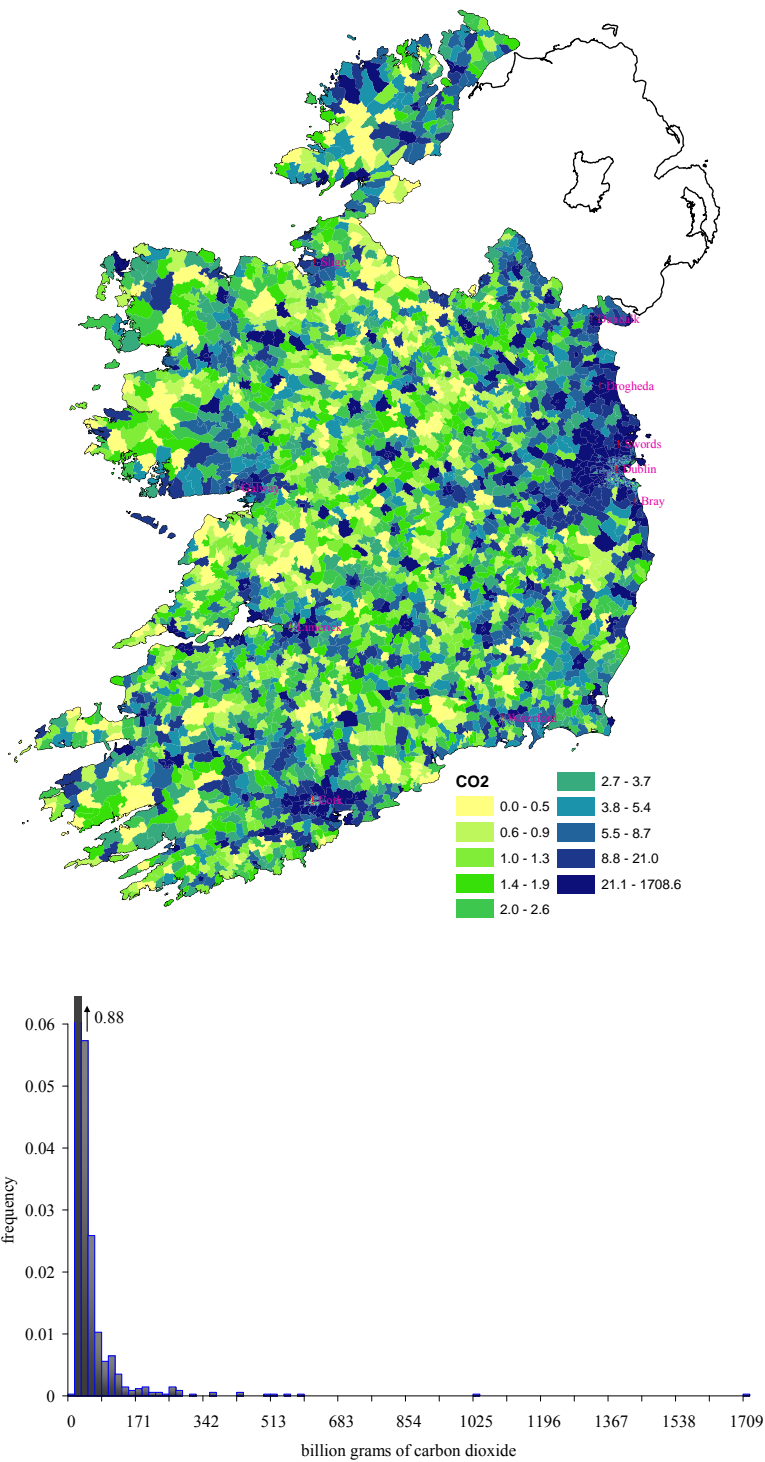


Figure 3. Total carbon dioxide emissions (billion grams of CO₂) from economic production per electoral district.

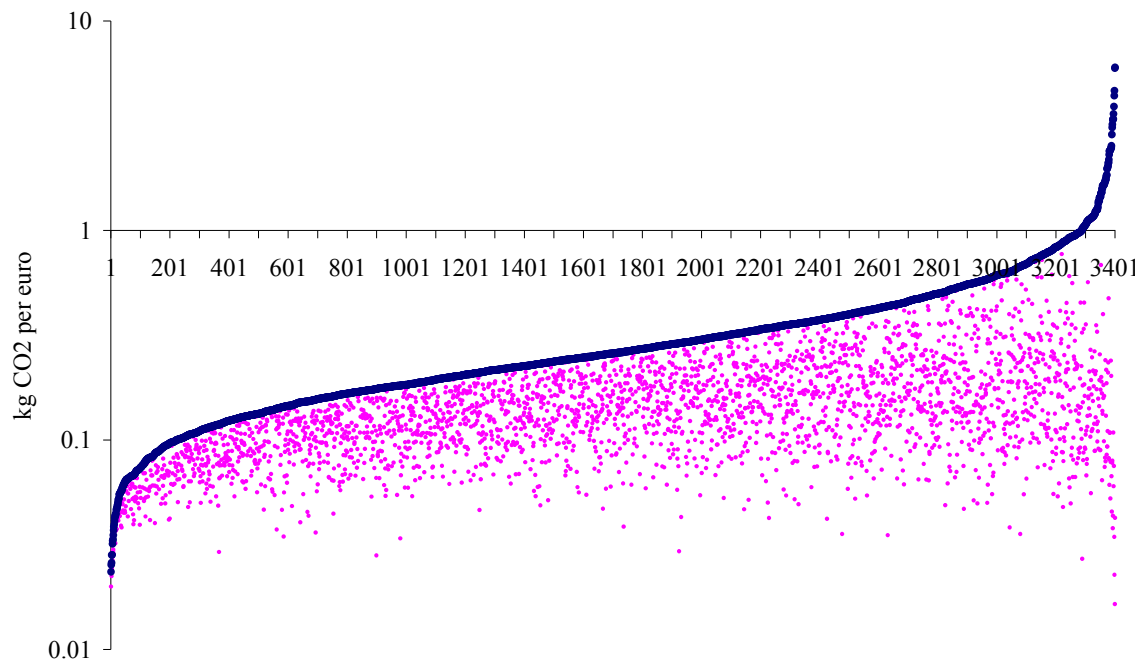


Figure 4. The average carbon intensity (kilogram of carbon dioxide emitted per euro value added) per electoral district for total carbon dioxide (large dots) and for carbon dioxide not part of the EU ETS (small dots); electoral districts are ordered on total carbon intensity.

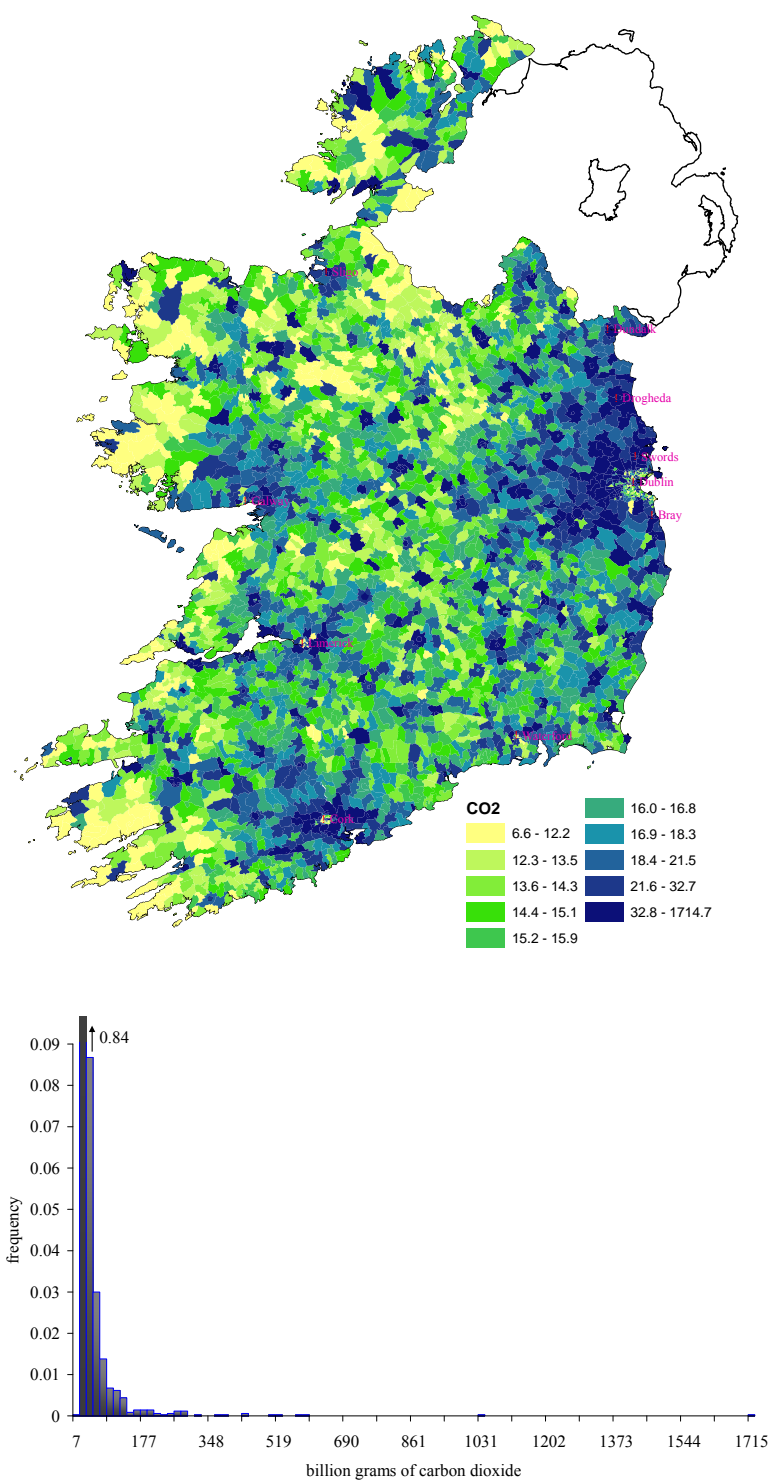


Figure 5. Total carbon dioxide emissions (billion grams of CO₂) from consumption and production per electoral district.

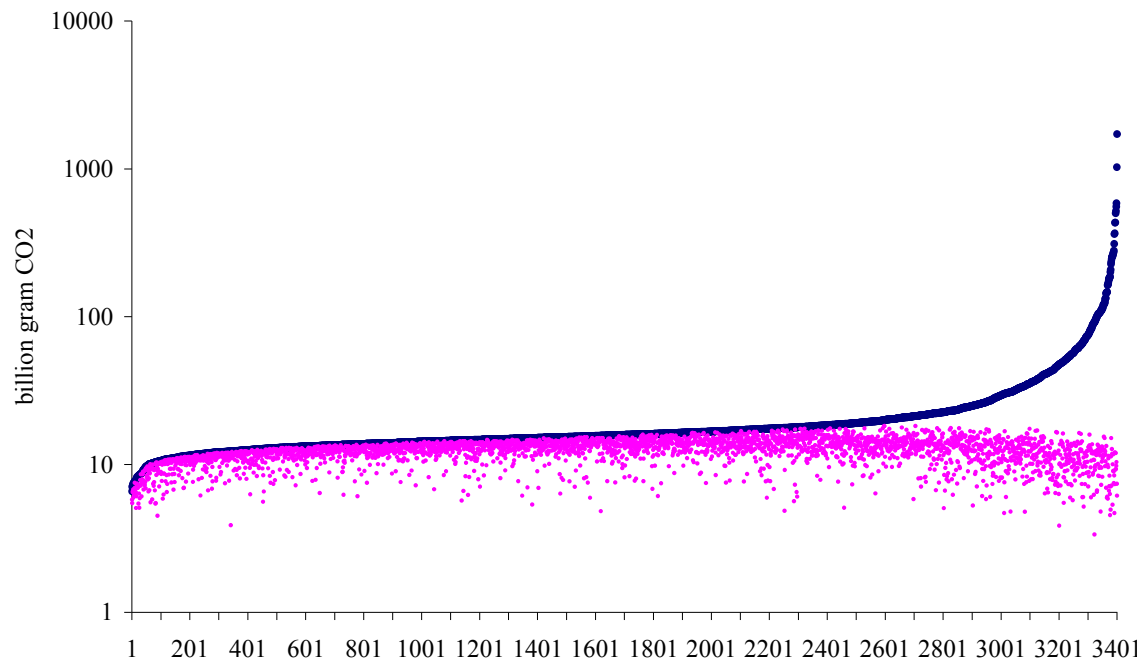


Figure 6. Total carbon dioxide emissions (billion grams of CO₂) from consumption and production per electoral district.

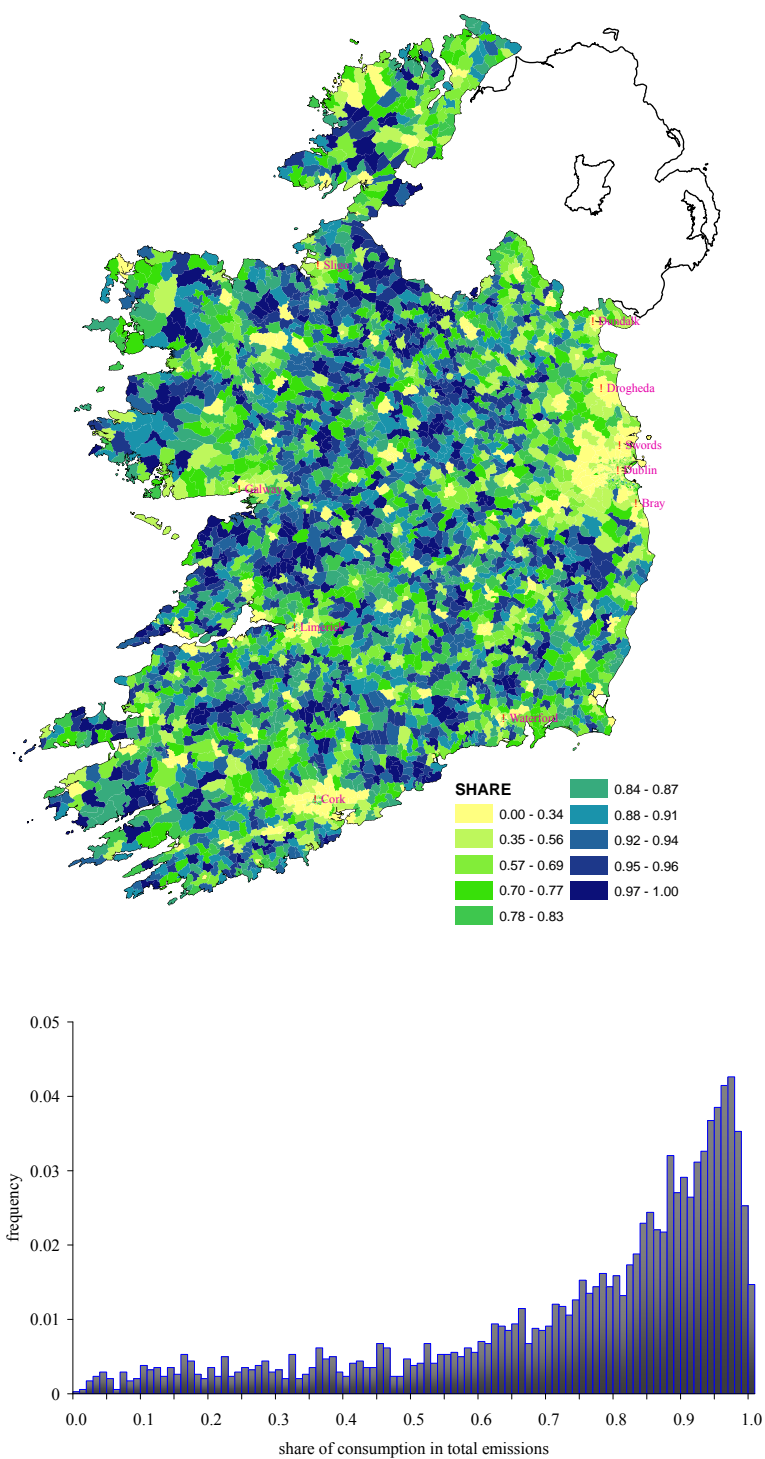


Figure 7. The share of consumption in total carbon dioxide emissions per electoral district.

Table A1: Household disposable income, OLS cross-section regression results		
Variables and statistics	All variables	
Dep. variable	ln(Weekly disposable income of household, €)	
	Coef.	Robust S.E.
d_social_1	0.318	0.0223***
d_social_2	0.366	0.0257***
d_social_3	0.219	0.0199***
d_social_5	-0.074	0.018***
d_social_6	-0.144	0.0204***
d_social_7	-0.185	0.0202***
d_social_8	-0.081	0.0309***
d_social_9	-0.148	0.0264***
d_social_10	-0.167	0.0485***
d_social_11	-0.112	0.0255***
d_empstatu~2	-1.2	0.0417***
d_empstatu~3	-1.17	0.0357***
d_empstatu~4	-0.754	0.0248***
d_empstatu~5	-1	0.0255***
d_persons_1	-0.605	0.019***
d_persons_3	0.377	0.0172***
d_persons_4	0.656	0.0198***
d_persons_5	0.815	0.0235***
d_persons_6	0.968	0.0288***
d_persons_7	1.01	0.0456***
d_persons_8	1.27	0.0644***
Constant	6.87	0.0179***
Observations	6,884	
R ²	0.654	
Note: *, ** and *** denote significant at the 10%, 5% and 1% level respectively. Numbers in brackets are p-values.		

Table A2: Total energy use from household fuels, OLS cross-section regression results				
Variables and statistics	All variables		Preferred model	
Dep. variable	Total energy use in household (kWh)		Total energy use in household (kWh)	
	Coef.	Robust S.E.	Coef.	Robust S.E.
d_rooms_1	-113	50.3**	-78.9	37**
d_rooms_2	-210	38.9***	-183	27.7***
d_rooms_3	-112	26.4***	-110	23.9***
d_rooms_4	-13.7	19.2		
d_rooms_6	0.351	12.3		
d_rooms_7	25.4	14.2*	25.6	12.4**
d_rooms_8	72.3	17.9***	74.4	16.5***
d_built_1	-9.29	17.3		
d_built_3	-25.7	20.3		
d_built_4	-25	17.3		
d_built_5	-57.7	16.3***	-40.3	12.7***
d_built_6	-70.8	16.4***	-52.6	12.8***
d_built_7	-55.4	21.6***	-41.7	18.5**
d_social_1	3.51	16.8		
d_social_2	18.9	25.5		
d_social_3	-1.91	16.8		
d_social_5	-34.4	16.8**	-40.7	13.9***
d_social_6	-15.8	18.3		
d_social_7	27.5	31.7		
d_social_8	34	26.1		
d_social_9	-63.4	19.1***	-76.9	14.3***
d_social_10	-86.3	38.4**	-91.6	37**
d_social_11	-38.6	23*	-37.9	17.9**
d_centheat	70.7	34.3**	70.4	34.2**
d_persons_1	-84.5	13.5***	-94.8	12.3***
d_persons_3	37.1	15.4**	28.6	13.1**
d_persons_4	21.3	15.9		
d_persons_5	68.4	22.5***	65.7	21***
d_persons_6	86.1	35.1**	84.3	29.6***
d_persons_7	83.5	45.6*	86.5	42.5**
d_persons_8	40.1	61		
d_urban	13.1	11.3		
d_housetyp_2	-122	28.2***	-132	27.3***
d_housetyp_3	-154	58.8***	-188	47.2***
d_housetyp_4	101	91.9		
d_empstatu~2	0.932	36.5		
d_empstatu~3	29	32.7		
d_empstatu~4	46.5	16.4***	37	15.8**
d_empstatu~5	74.9	22.9***	65.4	18.4***
Constant	359	36.7***	374	37.2***
Observations	6,884		6,884	
R ²	0.0473		0.0449	
Note: *, ** and *** denote significant at the 10%, 5% and 1% level respectively. Numbers in brackets are p-values.				

Table A3: Household electricity use, OLS cross-section regression results

Variables and statistics	All variables		Preferred model	
Dep. variable	Electricity use (kWh)		Electricity use (kWh)	
	Coef.	Robust S.E.	Coef.	Robust S.E.
d_rooms_1	-21.8	10.6**	-11.3	5.23**
d_rooms_2	-13	7.02*	-10.9	6.27*
d_rooms_3	0.429	4.27		
d_rooms_4	-0.158	2.40		
d_rooms_6	9.16	1.84***	9.06	1.71***
d_rooms_7	15.2	2.01***	15.2	1.91***
d_rooms_8	24.6	2.42***	24.7	2.33***
d_built_1	6.5	2.59**	6.68	2.36***
d_built_3	-1.47	2.28		
d_built_4	7.84	2.12***	7.75	1.85***
d_built_5	3.46	2.11*	3.21	1.81*
d_built_6	1.54	2.39		
d_built_7	-2.15	2.91		
d_social_1	3.67	2.30	4.31	1.87**
d_social_2	7.78	3.57**	8.49	3.31***
d_social_3	2.83	2.40		
d_social_5	-2.01	2.19		
d_social_6	-1.87	2.42		
d_social_7	0.613	3.60		
d_social_8	16.3	5.57***	16.9	5.30***
d_social_9	-10.8	3.03***	-10.5	2.48***
d_social_10	-4.65	6.47		
d_social_11	-3.05	3.46		
d_centheat	-9.38	3.14***	-9.18	3.12***
d_persons_1	-22.2	1.78***	-22.2	1.63***
d_persons_3	16	2.07***	15.4	1.99***
d_persons_4	26	2.62***	25.1	2.41***
d_persons_5	40.4	3.44***	39.0	2.88***
d_persons_6	43.4	4.09***	42.0	3.64***
d_persons_7	51.6	6.22***	49.9	5.95***
d_persons_8	63.7	12.6***	61.5	12.3***
d_urban	0.318	1.72		
d_housetyp_2	6.3	4.21		
d_housetyp_3	12	12.4		
d_housetyp_4	4.84	9.56		
d_empstatu~2	-1.91	4.62		
d_empstatu~3	-3.9	4.13		
d_empstatu~4	-23.8	2.28***	-23.6	2.11***
d_empstatu~5	-13.6	3.34***	-15.2	2.23***
Constant	81.2	4.62***	81.0	3.54***
Observations	6,884		6,884	
Adjusted R ²	0.222		0.220	
Note: *, ** and *** denote significant at the 10%, 5% and 1% level respectively. Numbers in brackets are p-values.				

Table A4: Household direct CO ₂ emissions, OLS cross-section regression results				
Variables and statistics	All variables		Preferred model	
Dep. variable	CO ₂ emissions (T CO ₂ / week)		CO ₂ emissions (T CO ₂ / week)	
	Coef.	Robust S.E.	Coef.	Robust S.E.
d_rooms_1	-0.0301	0.0266		
d_rooms_2	-0.0583	0.013***	-0.0552	0.0118***
d_rooms_3	-0.0308	0.00896***	-0.0277	0.00857***
d_rooms_4	-0.00477	0.00699		
d_rooms_6	0.0201	0.00471***	0.0223	0.0046***
d_rooms_7	0.0462	0.00585***	0.0494	0.00581***
d_rooms_8	0.0949	0.0127***	0.0987	0.0123***
d_built_1	0.00752	0.00653		
d_built_3	0.0227	0.0124*		
d_built_4	0.0173	0.00606***	0.0111	0.00518**
d_built_5	0.00828	0.00811		
d_built_6	0.00135	0.00653		
d_built_7	0.0053	0.00797		
d_social_1	0.0233	0.0124*	0.0236	0.0105**
d_social_2	-0.000489	0.0103		
d_social_3	0.0142	0.00943		
d_social_5	-0.00267	0.00858		
d_social_6	-0.00867	0.0089		
d_social_7	-0.0118	0.00912		
d_social_8	0.0227	0.0121*	0.024	0.01**
d_social_9	-0.0213	0.0101**	-0.0193	0.00743***
d_social_10	-0.0102	0.0178		
d_social_11	-0.00932	0.0114		
d_centheat	0.0275	0.00751***	0.0297	0.00742***
d_persons_1	-0.0514	0.00581***	-0.0535	0.00583***
d_persons_3	0.045	0.00694***	0.0451	0.00668***
d_persons_4	0.0706	0.0082***	0.0707	0.00747***
d_persons_5	0.118	0.0112***	0.119	0.0105***
d_persons_6	0.155	0.0273***	0.155	0.0263***
d_persons_7	0.145	0.019***	0.145	0.0184***
d_persons_8	0.159	0.0269***	0.159	0.0266***
d_urban	-0.0341	0.00565***	-0.0329	0.00561***
d_housetyp_2	-0.0353	0.0116***	-0.036	0.0113***
d_housetyp_3	-0.0513	0.0276*	-0.072	0.0085***
d_housetyp_4	0.00394	0.0253		
d_empstatu~2	-0.0373	0.013***	-0.0422	0.0129***
d_empstatu~3	-0.0858	0.0191***	-0.0914	0.0158***
d_empstatu~4	-0.0251	0.00797***	-0.0263	0.0076***
d_empstatu~5	-0.0375	0.00984***	-0.045	0.0066***
Constant	0.206	0.0121***	0.209	0.00968***
Observations	6,884		6,884	
Adjusted R ²	0.165		0.185	
Note: *, ** and *** denote significant at the 10%, 5% and 1% level respectively. Numbers in brackets are p-values.				

Table A5: First preference votes for Green Party, OLS cross-section regression results on county level data				
Variables and statistics	All variables		Preferred model	
Dep. variable	Share of votes (percentage)		Share of votes (percentage)	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Carbon tax - <i>imputed</i>	-0.102	0.0792	-0.104	0.041**
Years of education	2.39	1.12**	2.38	1.07**
Share of farmers in work force	-1.23	18.8		
Disposable Income (average ‘000 per household)	0.599	0.265**	0.609	0.194***
Waste generation (T/household) - <i>imputed</i>	-3.85	47.8		
Constant	-44.5	30.9	-46.5	17.4**
Observations	43		43	
Adjusted R ²	0.476		0.503	
<i>Note: *, ** and *** denote significant at the 10%, 5% and 1% level respectively. Waste generation is imputed using a similar approach to the one used for the carbon tax incidence: by applying the results from classifying regressions to population characteristics for each area. See Tol, et al. (2009) for details.</i>				

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