Global and Annex I emissions corridors for the 21st century

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Abstract: We analyze global and Annex I emissions corridors for the 21st century. Emissions corridors represent the range of admissible emissions futures which observe some predefined constraints. They are calculated on the conceptual and methodological basis of the tolerable windows approach. We assess the sensitivity of the corridors to limits on the non-intolerable magnitude of climate change, the acceptable rate of emissions reductions and the feasible transition pace towards a decarbonizing economy. In addition we consider the influence of climate sensitivity on the corridors. While we calculate the global emissions corridors for the idealized assumption of a single global emitter, the Annex I emissions corridors are computed for the case of two emitters that have to obtain equal per capita emissions rights as of the year 2050. Results show a large dependence of the corridors on the climate change limit and the climate sensitivity. When the limits are varied within their plausible range, we move from a climate policy regime with vanishing emissions corridors to a regime, where no action seems necessary. The economic parameters have a much larger impact on the the Annex I corridors than on the global emissions corridors. Due to the long term requirement of equal per capita emissions rights, the size of Annex I emissions corridors is strongly influenced by the emissions reductions capabilities of the Annex I countries in the long as well as in the short run.

Keywords: Tolerable windows approach; Guardrail approach; Emissions corridors; Sensitivity analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to compare the sensitivity of emissions corridors for the idealized case of a single global emitter to the sensitivity of Annex I emissions corridors calculated under the assumption of two emitters that have to obtain equal per capita emissions rights as of year 2050. We focus the sensitivity analysis on three stylized limits, so called guardrails, to exclude an intolerable magnitude of climate change on the one hand and an unacceptable amount of mitigation efforts on the other. The guardrail on climate change is formalized in terms of the maximum admissible increase in global mean temperature $T_{\text{max}}$ since preindustrial times. The guardrails on the emissions mitigation capability of the socio-economic system are captured in terms of a maximum admissible reduction rate $r$ and a minimum transition time $t_{\text{trans}}$ required for the implementation of a decarbonizing economy. In addition, we consider different values of the climate sensitivity $T_{2xCO_2}$ that is a key uncertainty in assessing the magnitude of the climate response to an increase in radiative forcing.

The sensitivity analysis is embedded in the framework of the tolerable windows approach (TWA, also called guardrail approach; Tóth et al. [1997]; Petschel-Held et al. [1999]; Bruckner et al. [1999]). Its objective is to translate guardrails for the future development of a dynamic system into the bundle of admissible control paths (policies) that lead to system trajectories which observe the given set of guardrails. In this way the TWA allows us to formalize the notion of a leeway for action. This is illustrated in particular by the concept of emissions corridors, which constitutes the projection of the bundle of admissible emissions paths onto the sub-
The guardrails as intolerability limits on the continuum of climate change. A sensible application of the TWA to real world decision making problems requires a proper interpretation of the guardrails. As Fig. 1 indicates, it is generally not possible to draw a guardrail as a sharp boundary between a tolerable and an intolerable domain in real world applications. Instead, it is more appropriate to allow for a grey zone between a stringent tolerability limit, enclosing the ‘safe’ domain, and a lean intolerability limit delineating the last frontier to an unbearable regime. In this analysis, we interprete the guardrails as specifying intolerability limits. Thus, admissible policies yielding non-intolerable outcomes are by no means equally ‘safe’ strategies, but only successful in observing the last frontiers to intolerability.

2 Calculation of Emissions Corridors

The methodological groundwork for the derivation of corridors in the framework of the TWA was presented in Petschel-Held et al. [1999] and Bruckner et al. [1999]. Here, we recapitulate only some basic concepts which are necessary for the understanding of what follows. A corridor Cor(y, t), with y being a particular control or state variable of a dynamical system modelled by a set of ordinary differential equations, represents the admissible range of values of y generated by all system futures which observe the predefined guardrails. An emissions corridor Cor(E, t), for instance, comprises the set of all admissible emissions values at any time. However, corridors do not contain information about the dynamics of the system, i.e. which of the admissible points are connected by admissible paths. The loss of information results in the important fact that not every conceivable path lying within the corridor is necessarily admissible. We can only say for sure that every path leaving the corridor is necessarily in-admissible. This property reinforces that the TWA is directed toward excluding inadmissible solutions rather than identifying tolerable solutions.

If an emissions corridor is simply connected, it is determined completely by its outer boundary. This boundary can be computed in a rather simple and efficient manner by subsequently maximizing and minimizing the emissions for fixed values in time [Leimbach and Bruckner, 2001]. The entire boundary of the corridor is put up by such emissions paths. In general, however, the boundary is not an admissible path by itself.

3 Climate Model

We use a simple model [Petschel-Held et al., 1999; Kriegler and Bruckner, 2002] to describe the response of the globally aggregated climate to anthropogenic forcing (see Table 1 for definitions of variables and parameters).

\[ \dot{F} = E \]  
\[ \dot{C} = \beta F + BF - \sigma C \]  
\[ \dot{T} = \mu \ln (c) - \alpha T \quad \text{with} \quad c = \frac{C + C_{pi}}{C_{pi}} \]

The model simulates the first order deviation of global mean temperature (GMT) from a presumed preindustrial equilibrium climate caused by anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide alone. Due

![Figure 1: The guardrails as intolerability limits on the continuum of climate change.](image)
4 GUARDRAILS

The concept of guardrails draws on the profound intuition that the carrying capacity of Planet Earth is limited. This intuition was taken up by the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), when formulating the basic idea of the TWA in a special report for the First Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in Berlin [German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), 1995]. In this report, the council put forward its own assessment of viable climate impact guardrails, the so-called WBGU window, which is specified in terms of GMT anomaly and its time derivative.

4.1 Climate impact guardrails

The choice of climate impact guardrails can be motivated by the possibility of large scale, abrupt climate discontinuities. However, the guardrails can also be meant to prevent a regular climate change from reaching a domain of intolerable climate change impacts. In this analysis, we consider three guardrails on GMT anomaly, namely

\[ T_{\text{max}} = 2 \, ^{\circ}\text{C}, \quad T_{\text{max}} = 3 \, ^{\circ}\text{C}, \quad T_{\text{max}} = 4 \, ^{\circ}\text{C} \]

symbolizing a low, medium and high estimate for the onset of the intolerable climate domain. The low estimate of 2 \, ^{\circ}\text{C} corresponds to the value chosen for the WBGU window [German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), 1995]. The high estimate of 4 \, ^{\circ}\text{C} marks an area of climate change, where the uncertainty in climate predictions becomes overwhelming, and large climate discontinuities are increasingly plausible [Smith et al., 2001].

4.2 Economic flexibility guardrails

In this analysis we avoid considering the complex socio-economic dynamics explicitly. The freedom to do so emanates from the concept of emissions corridors. The optimization procedure to calculate points on the corridor boundary automatically arranges the unspecified socio-economic factors in a way so to generate emissions paths, which attain the highest (lowest) possible emissions under the given constraints. In order to avoid highly uncertain ‘business as usual’ emissions scenarios, we interpret every emissions path not as the course of physical emissions, but as the distribution of emissions rights over time. Since emissions rights can readily exceed the actual emissions, we can restrict the total amount of emissions rights as well as their distribution over time solely by excluding intolerable climate impacts, unacceptable mitigation measures and unwarranted ‘free rider’ behavior.

We constrain the emissions paths of the idealized global emitter as well as of the industrial (= Annex I) and developing (= Non-Annex I) countries by three conditions. The first condition specifies the maximum acceptable reduction rate \( r \).

\[ -r \leq g(t) \quad \forall \ t \quad \text{with} \quad g(t) = \frac{\dot{E}(t)}{E(t)} \]

The second condition ensures that growing emissions of an emitter can be followed by a reduction period, but not vice versa. We formulate it even stronger by asking that the growth rate itself does not grow at any point in time in order to enforce single-peaked emissions paths without jeopardizing the stability of the optimization algorithm. This constraint is the least general one, since it requires the growth rate \( g \) to be monotonically decreasing in time with a maximum growth rate \( g_0 \) in
the year 2000. However, in the presence of a climate change mitigation policy the assumption of a decreasing growth rate is plausible.

The third condition addresses economic inertia by imposing a smoothness constraint on the transition to a decarbonizing economy. It is cast in terms of the minimum transition time \( t_{\text{trans}} \) to switch from the maximum growth rate \( g_0 \) to the maximum reduction rate \( r \). The last two conditions can be combined in the following inequality:

\[
-\frac{g_0 + r}{t_{\text{trans}}} \leq \dot{y}(t) \leq 0 \quad \forall t
\]  

(6)

We do not assume different values of the reduction rate \( r \) and transition time \( t_{\text{trans}} \) for industrial and developing countries in order to reduce the number of parameter combinations for the sensitivity analysis. Considering historic accountability and present capacity, such an assignment might seem unfair. However, the particular responsibility of the industrial countries is included through an equity principle. We require that industrial and developing countries have to obtain equal per capita emissions rights as of the year 2050.

\[
\frac{E_{pc}(t)}{P_{pc}} = \frac{E_{pc}(t)}{P_{pc}} \quad t \geq 2050
\]  

(7)

with 

\[ P_{pc} = 4.18 \text{ billion people in 1990} \]

\[ P_{pc} = 1.11 \text{ billion people in 1990} \]

5 Global Emissions Corridors

We analyze the sensitivity of emissions corridors for the idealized case of a single global emitter to 90 parameter constellations of \( (T_{\text{max}}, T_{2 \times CO_2}, r, t_{\text{trans}}) \). Different expectations about the limited resilience of human-environment systems to climate change are scanned by varying \( T_{\text{max}} \in \{2^\circ C, 3^\circ C, 4^\circ C\} \). The uncertainty about the magnitude of the climate response is assessed by varying \( T_{2 \times CO_2} \in \{1.5^\circ C, 2.5^\circ C, 3.5^\circ C, 4.5^\circ C\} \). Three assumptions about the maximum admissible emissions reductions rate \( r \in \{0.01, 0.02, 0.04\} \) are considered. The limitation on the transition pace towards a de-carbonizing economy is varied in the range \( t_{\text{trans}} \in \{0 \text{ a}, 20 \text{ a}, 40 \text{ a}\} \).

Fig. 2 shows the enormous influence of the choice of climate impact guardrail on the size of the emissions corridor, i.e. the area between upper and lower boundary. For instance, no immediate mitigation seems necessary for a guardrail \( T_{\text{max}} = 4^\circ C \). Nevertheless there are SRES scenarios for fossil fuel intensive futures with high economic growth (SRES A1FI: Nakićenović and Swart [2000]) that leave the corridor even for the choice of the leanest climate impact guardrail. Drastic mitigation measures are needed in the case of the guardrail \( T_{\text{max}} = 2^\circ C \). Global CO\(_2\) emissions are not allowed to exceed 10 GtC at any time and must decrease after 2030 at the latest.

As analyzed in detail in Kriegler and Bruckner [2002], the size of the corridor is approximately linked to a climate impact response parameter

\[
\kappa = \frac{T_{\text{max}}}{T_{2 \times CO_2}}.
\]  

(8)

This can be clearly seen, when studying the sensitivity of the maximum admissible cumulative emissions in the period 2000-2100 (MACE) as a simple indicator for the size of the emissions leeway. Fig. 3 shows the value of MACE across all 90 parameter constellations \( (T_{\text{max}}, T_{2 \times CO_2}, r, t_{\text{trans}}) \). To highlight the major trends, we have divided the MACE values into six classes ranging from very large emissions leeways (MACE > 2450 GtC) over large (1720 < MACE ≤ 2450 GtC), medium large (1370 < MACE ≤ 1720 GtC), medium small (1020 < MACE ≤ 1370 GtC), small (650 < MACE ≤ 1020 GtC) to very small (MACE < 650 GtC) emissions leeways. This classification is drawn from a classification of global emissions scenarios put forward in Figure SPM-4a in Nakićenović and Swart [2000].

In each column the parameter constellations are ordered from small to large climate impact response parameters \( \kappa \) (the smaller \( \kappa \), the higher the climate impact response). The predominantly horizontal partitioning of MACE values into classes
indicating that this quantity dominates the magnitude of global MACE. As we change κ from 1.6 to 0.44, we move from MACE values questioning the necessity of a climate policy regime to values indicating a strong need for severe mitigation efforts. For κ = 0.44 we even find regimes where no climate policy whatsoever would yield a non-intolerable outcome as prescribed by the guardrails. To put these numbers into perspective, Füssel and van Minnen [2001] calculate values of κ = (0.2 – 0.3, 0.5 – 0.6, 0.8 – 0.9, 1 – 1.2) to prevent an average (10%, 20%, 30%, 40%) change of biome types in the world’s protected areas. Nordhaus [1994] assumes a value of κ = 0.86 in his cost-benefit analysis for the scenario of a catastrophic climate change beyond T max = 2.5 °C.

6 EMISSIONS CORRIDORS FOR THE ANNEX I COUNTRIES

The emissions corridors for the Annex I countries are calculated under the assumption of two global emitters, i.e. the Annex I and Non-Annex I countries, which have to obtain equal per capita emissions rights as of the year 2050. Fig. 4 shows the sensitivity of the maximum admissible cumulative emissions in the period 2000-2100 (MACE) of the

Figure 3: Global maximum admissible cumulative emissions [GtC] in the period 2000-2100 (MACE) for all combinations of T max, T 2XCO2, r, ttrans and the assumption of a single global emitter. Black cells denote the non-existence of a corridor.

Figure 4: Maximum admissible cumulative emissions [GtC] in the period 2000-2100 (MACE) of the Annex I countries for all combinations of T max, T 2XCO2, r, ttrans and the assumption of two emitters with equal per capita emissions rights as of the year 2050.

Annex I countries across all 90 parameter constellations (T max, T 2XCO2, r, ttrans). Analogous to the global MACE values, the MACE values of the Annex I countries are divided into six classes ranging from very large emissions leeways (MACE > 820 GtC) over large (570 < MACE ≤ 820 GtC), medium large (460 < MACE ≤ 570 GtC), medium small (340 < MACE ≤ 460 GtC), small (220 < MACE ≤ 340 GtC) to very small (MACE < 220 GtC) emissions leeways.

There are striking differences between the sensitivity of global and Annex I emissions corridors, which can be seen clearly by comparing Fig. 3 with Fig. 4. As expressed by the change from horizontal to diagonal class boundaries, the influence of the parameters r and ttrans on the Annex I MACE values is much stronger than on the global MACE values. Requiring equal per capita emissions rights as of the year 2050 places a strong burden on the emissions rights of the Annex I countries in the long run. This burden limits the emissions leeway of the early stages much more, if the Annex I capabilities to reduce emissions are low. Therefore, even if distributional aspects are becoming restrictive in the long term only, a detailed discussion of the reduction capability of Annex I is necessary to assess its share of emission rights in the short run.
The emissions reduction capability of the industrial countries plays also an important role for the overall existence of a solution. The more limited the maximum admissible reduction rate of the Annex I countries is, the larger is the minimum amount of Non-Annex I emissions rights that is necessary to obtain equal per capita emissions rights in 2050. It is therefore no surprise that the parameters \( r \) and \( t_{\text{trans}} \) become as important as \( k \) for determining the very existence of a corridor, when equal per capita emissions rights as of 2050 are required. Fig. 4 shows that the ‘no solution’ domain expands substantially to \( r = 0.02 \) as well as higher \( k \) values. This highlights the important restrictions on future emissions leeways that come about by assuming two emitters with differentiated responsibilities in a future climate policy regime.

7 Conclusions

The enormous sensitivity of emissions corridors to the climate impact response parameter \( k \) leads to results ranging from cases where any climate policy seems highly unnecessary to cases where no climate policy however severe can avoid the prespecified intolerable domain. This highlights the pervasive role of uncertainty in generating the widely different views about climate protection. The socio-economic emissions reduction capabilities become a particular important factor, when two emitters with differentiated responsibilities in mitigating climate change are considered. The domain of the parameter space, where there is no solution to the climate change problem that observes all guardrails, is by far larger for the case of equal per capita emissions rights between industrial and developing countries as of the year 2050 than for the idealized case of a single global emitter. The equity condition is a particular strong burden for the Annex I countries, if their economic capability to reduce emissions is low. This reduction capability has to be assessed in detail when addressing the viability of ‘wait then run’ vs. ‘early action’ strategies.

8 References


