



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Global Environmental Change

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/gloenvcha

Tools for a new climate conversation: A mixed-methods study of language for public engagement across the political spectrum

Lorraine Whitmarsh^{a,*}, Adam Corner^b^a School of Psychology, 70 Park Place, Cardiff University, Cardiff CF10 3AT, UK^b Climate Outreach, 106-108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JE, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 June 2016

Received in revised form 26 October 2016

Accepted 14 December 2016

Available online 10 January 2017

Keywords:

Climate change attitudes

Political orientation

Ideology

Narratives

Communication

skepticism

ABSTRACT

Political orientation and ideology are amongst the most significant influences on climate change attitudes and responses. Specifically, those with right-of-centre political views are typically less concerned and more sceptical about climate change. A significant challenge remains to move beyond this ideological impasse and achieve a more open and constructive debate across the political spectrum. This paper reports on novel mixed-methods research in the UK to develop and test a series of 'narratives' to better engage citizens with centre-right political views. Qualitative work in Study 1 revealed two particularly promising narratives. The first focused on the idea that saving energy is predicated on the 'conservative' principle of avoiding waste; the second focused on the advantages of 'Great British Energy' (based on patriotic support for domestic low-carbon technologies). An online experiment in Study 2 with a representative UK sample compared these narratives with a more typically left-of-centre narrative focused on the concept of 'climate justice' with a representative sample of the UK public. Results indicate that the first two narratives elicited broad agreement and reduced scepticism amongst centre-right participants, while the 'climate justice' narrative (which reflects a common environmental message framing) polarised audiences along political lines. This research offers clear implications for how climate change communicators can move beyond preaching to the converted and initiate constructive dialogue about climate change with traditionally disengaged audiences.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

It is now well-established that political orientation and ideology are amongst the most significant influences on public engagement with climate change (e.g., Hornsey et al., 2016; Clayton et al., 2015; McCright and Dunlap, 2011). Those with right-of-centre political views are typically less concerned, more sceptical, and correspondingly less receptive to messages about climate change (Leiserowitz et al., 2015; Whitmarsh, 2011; Leviston and Walker, 2011). But while multiple studies attest to the ideological impasse that defines climate change communication in many Anglophone nations, far fewer have been able to offer evidence on how to promote engagement among citizens with right-of-centre political views, or indeed how to design communication and engagement programmes that resonate across the political spectrum.

This question is of significant practical importance. Major goals of the international policy community (such as legally binding

national legislation to limit future carbon dioxide emissions in the wake of the Paris United Nations accord; UNFCCC, 2015) are unlikely to be achieved without support from across the political spectrum. In the current paper, we describe two studies with members of the UK public that explore in greater depth the relationship between political conservatism and engagement with climate change. We focus on how different narratives about energy and climate change are perceived by members of the public, whether there are ways of framing climate change that are more engaging for citizens with centre-right political views, and ultimately whether it is possible to use these frames to initiate conversations about climate change which are engaging across the political spectrum (Corner, 2013).

This represents a novel contribution to the literature on climate change communication and framing by focussing on the UK context, which has taken a leading role in international negotiations and has world-leading domestic policy on climate change. Indeed, the UK was the first country to implement a climate change policy, committing it to binding carbon emissions targets (HM Government, 2008), which have recently been reaffirmed in the Fifth Carbon Budget. However, the levels of political and public

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Whitmarshle@cardiff.ac.uk (L. Whitmarsh), adam.corner@climateoutreach.org (A. Corner).

polarisation over the reality of and responses to climate change are higher than in most other countries besides the US (Painter and Ashe, 2012; Capstick et al., 2015a), and yet there has been far less work conducted in the UK context relative to other sceptical Anglophone nations. We therefore test the conclusions of previous (mostly US-centric) work on framing in a novel cultural context, and seek to develop new insights that could be applied in other settings characterised by political polarisation—at a time when the UK is facing enormous constitutional change and upheaval as it prepares to leave the European Union. Second, the research is novel in its approach—devising new narratives through qualitative discussions with key audiences and testing these through a representative experimental survey in order to explore both differences and commonalities across responses in both methodological approaches. Many studies develop experimental materials based on a priori (e.g., theoretical) assumptions about what language and concepts are appropriate, whereas the current study used a primarily bottom-up approach, developing materials by engaging directly with the target audience. Finally, its novelty lies in the materials tested, particularly the narrative exploring the notion of avoiding waste as a rationale for conserving energy, which has not to our knowledge previously been examined despite the acknowledged importance of frugality as a principle underlying sustainable lifestyles (Evans and Abrahamse, 2008).

1.1. Values, worldviews, ideology & scepticism about climate change

Public views about climate change have been subject to extensive empirical and theoretical research, and although a range of factors are now understood to influence public engagement, the role of values (Schwartz, 1992), worldviews (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982) and, as a consequence, political ideology are among the key predictors of scepticism and engagement (Corner et al., 2014; Hornsey et al., 2016). A value is usually defined as a guiding principle in the life of a person (Schwartz, 1992), and it is now widely accepted that there are 56 universal values that can be divided into four distinct clusters which vary along two basic axes. Those axes are openness to change (including self-direction and stimulation) versus a desire to conserve/respect tradition (including security and conformity); and self-transcendence (including altruism, forgiveness, and loyalty) versus self-enhancement (including power, ambition and hedonism). Although people possess a range of different and partly conflicting values, those who identify strongly with self-enhancing values (e.g. materialism, personal ambition) tend not to identify strongly with self-transcending values (e.g. benevolence, respect for the environment), and vice-versa (Crompton, 2010). With regards to public engagement with environmental issues and climate change, there is clear evidence from this research: people who lean more strongly towards self-transcending values, especially altruism, show higher concern about environmental issues, are less likely to be sceptical about climate change, and are more likely to support environmental policies and engage in sustainable behaviours such as recycling and energy consumption (Brown and Kasser 2005; Corner et al., 2014; De Groot and Steg, 2008; Poortinga et al., 2004).

An analogous conception can be found in the cultural theory of risk (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982). According to this approach, people's orientations towards different societal arrangements are impacted by 'cultural worldviews' that also vary along two axes. The first axis, 'hierarchy-egalitarianism', refers to a cultural preference for an equitable division of resources (i.e. irrespective of gender, race or religion). The second axis, 'individualism-communitarianism', relates to the question of whether individual interests should be subordinated to collective ones. Individuals with stronger egalitarian and communitarian worldviews tend to perceive climate change as riskier than those with individualistic

and hierarchical views (Stern et al., 1993). Egalitarian-communitarians also perceive a more urgent need for ameliorative action and are typically more supportive of climate policies that restrain market freedom (e.g., regulation of industry). In contrast, individualistic and hierarchical individuals tend to be more supportive of climate policies that maintain the autonomy of the free market (e.g., enhanced nuclear power capacity or geoengineering; Dietz et al., 2005). In other words, those who strongly support free markets and the primacy of private ownership but oppose governmental influence on the everyday behaviour of individuals are more likely to be sceptical about climate change (McCright and Dunlap, 2011) and the urgent need for its mitigation (Zia and Todd, 2010).

Both values and cultural worldviews are determinants of an individual's political ideology, whether expressed through party affiliation or their general political preferences (Goren, 2005). However, when dealing with subjects as complex and contested as political ideology, it is difficult to draw simple conclusions. Political conservatism means different things in different countries and cultures, as does the idea of a political spectrum from 'left' to 'right' (Aspelund et al., 2013). Nonetheless, right-leaning individuals have been shown to be more likely to endorse self-enhancing values (Sheldon and Nichols, 2009) and to express worldviews that lean towards individualistic and hierarchical perspectives (Kahan et al., 2012). Correspondingly, political conservatism predicts scepticism about climate change, particularly but not exclusively in English-speaking countries (McCright and Dunlap, 2011).

Formalising the reasoning implicit in many of the studies reviewed above, Campbell and Kay (2014) described the phenomenon of 'solution aversion' among US conservatives, arguing that Republicans' scepticism towards scientific knowledge about climate change and the environment is actually explained by a conflict between their ideological values and the most popular solutions to environmental problems (rather than the scientific evidence itself). They found climate solutions involving government regulation to be especially unpopular among conservative participants. In the UK, there is a direct relationship between voting for the Conservative Party and scepticism about climate change, suggesting that conservative values seem to be at least as important as environmental values in driving scepticism about climate change (Whitmarsh, 2011). As in the US, the usual explanation advanced for this relationship is that there is a conflict between conservative values—in particular around free market paradigms and individualism—and policies to tackle climate change (Campbell and Kay, 2014). But is it really the case that the values of the centre-right and engagement with climate change are inherently incompatible, or is it due to how solutions have to date tended to be framed?

1.2. Framing climate change to engage centre-right citizens

The convergent evidence reviewed above suggests that certain elements of right-of-centre belief systems are not a natural fit with the dominant social and cultural understanding of what climate change means (Hulme, 2009), and climate and energy policies typically promoted in response to it (Campbell and Kay, 2014). For example, one common way in which climate change is framed is as a question of social justice, given the disproportionate impacts on poorer countries and communities while wealthier countries and individuals are responsible for emitting more carbon (Hulme, 2009). However, as Wolsko et al. (2016) argue in a recent analysis of US conservatives' responses to differently-framed messages about the environment, "it may not be concern about the environment which is primarily being rejected by conservatives, but rather the moral tone of the prevailing environmental discourse, in which practising 'environmentalism' signifies being unfaithful to one's

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5115984>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5115984>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)