The Genesis of Climate Change Activism: From Key Beliefs to Political Advocacy

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Political Advocacy on Global Warming Is a Product of...

• Key Beliefs: *Reality & danger of global warming; human causation & solvability*
• Issue Involvement
• Injunctive Beliefs: *Legislators, corporations & citizens should act to mitigate global warming*
• Opinion Leadership
• Efficacy: *Believing that one is capable of action & that it will make a difference*
Context

• Climate legislation is stalled in the U.S. Congress
• Interviews suggest legislators fear public backlash if they support aggressive mitigation action
• Public support for some form of legislation is widespread
• Few Americans have expressed their support to their legislators
Political Participation among Americans Is Rare

In the prior year...

17%  Contacted a politician
13%  Attended a town/school meeting
10%  Served on committee of local organization
  8%  Wrote letter to editor
  7%  Attended rally/speech/protest
  6%  Was active member of political group
  4%  Worked for a political party

(Fall 2008; N=2,164)
Climate Change Activism among Americans

13% Volunteered with or donated money to group working to reduce global warming

11% Posted a comment online

7% Contacted government official

33% Rewarded companies working to reduce global warming

29% Punished companies that oppose reducing global warming

(June 2010 data; N=1,024)
Five Key Beliefs

Differentiate those who support strong climate change policies from those who don’t in the United States

1. Belief in the reality of climate change: It’s real.
2. Risk perceptions: It’s harmful.
3. Certainty: I’m certain of this.
5. Response efficacy: Humans can fix it.

-- Krosnick, Holbrook, Lowe & Visser, 2006
## Political Advocacy & Key Beliefs about Global Warming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Proportion of Population</th>
<th>Political Advocacy with belief</th>
<th>Political Advocacy without belief</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certain that GW is occurring</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is harmful</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humans cause</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Humans can reduce</td>
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*June 2010 data; N=1,024*
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## Cumulative Impact of Key Beliefs

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<th>Number of Key Beliefs Held</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>7</td>
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(June 2010 data; N=1,024)
Key Beliefs as Predictors of Political Advocacy

Existence Certainty -> .16***
Risk Perceptions -> .34***
Human Causation -> .04
Collective Response Efficacy -> .09**

Political Advocacy (29%)

Chi-square = 5.6, df = 3, n.s.
RMSEA = .020; CFI = .999
Variance explained ($R^2$) is shown in parens.
*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$
Why Do People Participate in Political Life?

- They can: *Resources*
- They want to: *Issue Engagement*
- Somebody asked them to: *Social Location*

-- Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995
Why Do People Participate in Political Life?

• They can: *time, money, skills*

• They want to: *issue involvement, perceived efficacy of actions*

• Somebody asked them to: *proximity to activist networks*

-- Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995
Problem Recognition & Risk Perceptions

Certainty about Global Warming

Risk Perception

Drive to Reduce Fear:
Issue
Involvement
Fear Control vs. Danger Control

Problem Recognition:
- Certainty about Global Warming
- Risk Perception

Human Causation

Collective Efficacy

Drive to Reduce Fear:
- Issue
- Involvement

Support for Societal Action
- Injunctive Beliefs
## Fear Control vs. Danger Control

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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>... AND Human Causation</td>
<td>6</td>
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Danger Control Responses Foster Advocacy

Certainty about Global Warming

Risk Perception

Human Causation

Collective Efficacy

Drive to Reduce Fear: Issue Involvement

Desire for Societal Action: Injunctive Beliefs

Political Advocacy
Danger Control Responses Foster Advocacy ...

If...

Certainty

Risk Perception

Human Causation

Collective Efficacy

Involvement

Interpersonal Communication: Opinion Leadership

Political Advocacy

Injunctive Beliefs
Danger Control Responses Foster Advocacy ...

If...

Certainty

Involvement

Risk Perception

Human Causation

Injunctive Beliefs

Self-Efficacy: Barriers

Opinion Leadership

Response Efficacy

Political Advocacy

Collective Efficacy
Theoretical Model of Climate Change Activism
Structural Model of Climate Change Activism

Chi-square = 135.9, df = 46, p < .001
RMSEA = .030; CFI = .984

Variance explained ($R^2$) is shown in paren. All standardized path coefficients are significant at $p < .001$, with the exception of the path from perceived barriers to political advocacy, which is significant at $p < .05$
To Foster Activism...

- Always pair risk information with messages that build efficacy and hope;
- Identify, train & activate opinion leaders – they will take action & inspire others to do so as well;
- Address the two primary barriers: “I’m not an activist,” & “It wouldn’t make any difference.”
All 4C reports can be downloaded at: climatechange.gmu.edu
Many thanks to the funders who are making this research possible: The Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy; the Betsy and Jesse Fink Foundation; the 11th Hour Project; the Pacific Foundation; and an RWJF Investigator Award in Health Policy Research from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
Who takes action in response to personal & societal threats? The people who....

• Recognize and understand the threat & its urgency: *problem recognition & risk perception*

• Believe that action to reduce the threat will be effective: *response efficacy*

• Feel motivated and empowered to take personal action: *self-efficacy*

-- Witte, 1992, 1994; Rogers, 1983