

# Equality's effect on environmentalism

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Credit: Victoria University

New research led by Victoria University of Wellington shows people who favour hierarchy and inequality in society are less likely to be pro-environmental.

The study, published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, involved 28 researchers from 25 countries, and examined the views of over 5,000 people.

Participants were asked about their support or opposition to statements such as 'superior groups should dominate inferior groups' and 'we should not push for group equality'.

The results show that individuals who favour the domination of 'inferior' groups by 'superior' groups are less likely to act on environmental issues.

"People who support these ideas are less likely to sign a petition to support protecting the environment, to buy environmentally friendly products, or to donate to an environmental organisation," says lead author Dr Taciano Milfont from Victoria's Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research and School of Psychology.

"In addition, the strength of the association is influenced by where people live. A social context of inequality, and lack of societal development and environmental standards gives people who endorse these ideas a stronger basis for not engaging in pro-environmental behaviours."

Dr Milfont says that preferences for [group](#) inequality, termed 'social dominance orientation' in the psychological literature, is well-studied in relation to intergroup relations and prejudice.

"My ongoing research programme shows that social dominance orientation is not only important for understanding human-to-human relations, but also human relationships with nature and animals," says Dr Milfont.

Previous publications by Dr Milfont and international researchers have shown a link between social dominance orientation and many environmentalism indicators, including denial of climate change. But this publication provides the first large-scale confirmation of the association across cultural groups, he says.

Dr Milfont says the research can help build a better understanding of current environmental problems.

"The findings suggest that a hierarchical view towards nature, with humans on top and nature and animals at the bottom, is connected with a view that humans have the right to dominate nature.

"This research also emphasises the importance of efforts to address social issues like inequality and development around the world."

**More information:** Taciano L. Milfont et al. On the Relation Between Social Dominance Orientation and Environmentalism, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/1948550617722832](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617722832)

Provided by Victoria University of Wellington

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