

Persuading conservatives of pro-environmentalism not as easy as one might think: Study

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In the context of the climate crisis, it is becoming ever so crucial that the public adopts pro-environmentalism worldviews and actions. However,

conservative people tend to be unlikely to change behavior and beliefs, and rather stick to traditions.

So, it might be necessary to reframe the 'standard' pro-environmental messages in campaigns targeted to conservatives. One way to do this is to use their own moral values and language.

"Notably, research indicates that liberals and conservatives make [moral judgements](#) based on different sets of moral foundations," explain the authors of the study.

"Whereas more liberal people tend to rely on individualizing morals which value individuals' rights and justices with empathetic motivation, more conservative people tend to rely on binding morals, which value ingroup loyalty, purity, order, and conventions."

While previous research has largely pointed to conservatives being likelier to be persuaded into adopting pro-environmental values and practices if the messages they consume align with their binding morals, such as purity, a new study from New Zealand found no evidence of this to be indeed the truth.

The replication study was recently published in *Social Psychological Bulletin* and followed open science practices, including making the data analysis plan available before [data collection](#) and providing access to materials, datasets, and analytical codes.

What the researchers from Victoria University of Wellington (Inkuk Kim and Matt Hammond) and the University of Waikato (Taciano Milfont) found, however, was that the participants were just as responsive to the 'adapted' pro-environmental messages that brought up either loyalty, authority or purity (e.g., "Preserving that purity is important. We should regard the pollution of the places we live in to be

disgusting.") as they were to 'plain' wording (e.g. "protect the natural environment of the places we live in").

Nonetheless, they did confirm previous conclusions that political conservatism is negatively associated with pro-environmentalism and conservation intentions.

The authors also note that, because "more conservative people are likely to avoid uncertainty and change, they tend to deny the threats of anthropogenic climate change and be reluctant to take pro-environmental behaviors that require [behavioral changes](#)."

Further, conservatives "tend to oppose pro-environmental policies because they think that these policies would undermine the economy and their economic liberty by regulating their business and behaviors."

In conclusion, the present study indicates that simply using language that aligns with conservative moral values may not be enough to encourage pro-environmental behaviors among more conservative people.

Instead, pro-environmental campaigns need to consider other conservative values, norms, identity, and political context to be more effective for more politically diverse people.

The study also highlights the importance of conducting replications using open science practices.

More information: Inkuk Kim et al, Do environmental messages emphasising binding morals promote conservatives' pro-environmentalism? A pre-registered replication, *Social Psychological Bulletin* (2023). [DOI: 10.32872/spb.8557](https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.8557)

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