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Title: Social Norms and Political Leader Influence on Climate Policy Support

Abstract: Effective federal climate policy is one of the best ways to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change on a broad scale, yet the United States has not implemented such a policy. Individuals base their support for such policies on the policy stances of leaders of their respective political parties. We hypothesize that this occurs in part because political party leaders convey information about party social norms, i.e., what other Americans in each party believe. This hypothesis comes from extensive work that social norms motivate other types of pro-environmental behavior, including energy and water consumption. Two studies explore the influence of social norms on support for climate policy with online samples of Democrats and Republicans. The first study demonstrates that individuals follow political party leaders in determining their climate policy stances because party leaders provide cues to party social norms. Participants read a hypothetical news article about a carbon tax and about whether political party leaders and other Americans from each party supported the policy. Some participants read that leaders and general Americans agreed, while some read that they held opposing stances. Participants then reported how much they supported the carbon tax. When leaders and Americans (social norms) opposed each other, leader stances no longer affected individual climate policy support; only social norms did. This indicates that individuals only follow party leaders when information about social norms is not available because they infer social norms from party leader stances. However, when information about social norms is available, individuals no longer follow party leader stances. The second study demonstrates that individuals follow social norms from their own party more than they act in opposition to norms from the opposing party. Participants first read a description of the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act and then received information about whether other Americans from their party and the opposing party supported the policy. They then reported their own level of support for the policy. Social norms from one's own party had a larger influence on individual policy support than social norms from the opposing party. Together, these studies demonstrate that individuals follow party norms when determining their climate policy stances, and that individuals follow party leaders in part because leaders provide information about party social norms. To increase support for climate policy, norms of policy support should be strengthened and emphasized.