

[Research Note]

New ways to motivate climate change action around the world

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Addressing climate change is a major world challenge of our time. Those trying to motivate widespread action on climate change usually convince people that climate change is real and important. Although this strategy was initially successful, progress has stalled or even reversed in many places. Especially, persuading those who remain unconvinced of climate change is often unsuccessful and the public's attention to and priority of concern about climate change tend to be declining (Whitmarsh, 2011).

Recent findings from a large cross-cultural study propose a new approach to convince people, especially those who are skeptical or unconcerned about climate change. Our research report (Bain et al., 2015), published in *Nature Climate Change* on September 2015, suggests that highlighting the co-benefits for society from acting on climate change could sidestep difficulties in motivating people's action. Simply put, rather than trying to convince unconvinced people to care more about climate change, perhaps they would act if climate change mitigation could produce other benefits that they cared about. For example, one may believe that mitigation behaviors can reduce pollution, support economic development through green industries, or benefit population health by reducing disease or promoting healthier lifestyles such as cycling or walking instead of driving. Or one could believe that climate change action can contribute to a more caring and moral society.

Although there are some previous studies that focus on such co-benefits as reduced pollution or economic development, they are lacking an integrated approach to understand how co-benefits are related and comparing their importance for motivating public action. Also, climate change is a global problem requiring a global solution, but most research has been conducted in Western countries such as USA (Maibach et al., 2010). To overcome these limitations, our study was designed to understand whether some co-benefits are more influential in different countries, similar to the variation observed in climate change risk perceptions across countries (Lee et al., 2015).

The research examined the views of over 6000 people in 24 countries. These countries were selected systematically based on environmental performance and geographic region (spanning all inhabited continents). They included 11 high carbon emitters (USA, Netherlands, Russia, Poland, Germany, Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, Israel, South Africa), 9 medium emitters (United Kingdom, France, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Venezuela, Mexico, Chile, New Zealand), and 4 low emitters (Brazil, Switzerland, Iceland, Ghana).

Surveys included questions about participants' views of the future in the context of climate change, how much they consider the future in their actions, their connectedness with nature, their identities (national and environmental), the personal and political efficacy of taking action, and individual difference variables linked to environmentalism such as system justification and social

dominance orientation. Surveys were completed in the major local language in each country.

According to the findings, two types of benefits were strongly linked to action: promoting economic and scientific development, and helping foster a more caring community. People were more motivated to act on climate change if they thought it would produce economic and scientific development, although this was more likely to be true in the case of richer countries taking part in the survey. Likewise, if people believe that addressing climate change will result in a more caring and moral community, they are more likely to act. Intriguingly, this was true of people surveyed in all participating countries, implying the universal value of benevolence (i. e., caring and morality between individuals) across cultures. This finding also reflects the universal need to belong and importance of relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Park, Haslam & Kashima, 2012).

To further look at the findings from East Asian data (e. g., S. Korea, Japan), it was not only societal dimensions but also *environmental identity* that predicted participants' motivation to action strongly. *Environmental identity* refers to a sense of connection to some part of the nonhuman natural environment, based on history, emotional attachment, and/or similarity (Clayton, 2003). In fact, although the reliability was poor in S. Korea ($r = .52$), *environmental identity* appeared the most important and reliable contributor in predicting overall actions against climate change.

Is the contribution of *environmental identity* to motivating action especially strong in East Asia? A couple of recent studies suggest some possibility that the identification issue itself could matter more in this culture. A study about S. Koreans' perception about future society regarding possible unification with N. Korea found that identification with N. Koreans was a significant predictor in S. Koreans' positive attitudes toward unification (Park & Bain, 2013). Also, national identification of Japanese people was a significant predictor in supporting/opposing expansion/shutdown of nuclear plants programs (Park, Bain & Kusumi, 2015). These consistent findings speculate another, extended form of collective self. In the current study people appear to have a group identity as a member of the entire ecological system, so that the contribution to pro-environmental actions is especially visible in collective cultures. Finally, from a different angle, environmental identity could be strongly associated with people's care for the nature and motivation to act influenced by environmentalism in ancient philosophy such as Taoism emphasizing unity of heaven and men. Future studies should look into the way ingroup or extended form of identity contributes to motivating people to do pro-social or pro-environmental actions in East Asia.

In conclusion, our recent social psychological research program provides a meaningful message for the world regarding how to motivate people to act on climate change. Communicating the co-benefits of addressing climate change could serve a way to foster public, and thereby influence government action, even among those who are unconvinced or unconcerned about climate change. That is, if government policies and communications addressed benefits people usually cared about, they are more likely to gain widespread public support. Although communicating climate change importance may continue to be effective in promoting action in those who are convinced climate change is real, it would be less so in poorer countries. Communicating co-benefits about benevolence, "action will help foster a more caring community," is likely to have the most consistent effects for a worldwide audience, although in some countries emphasizing

the effects on social development may have great impact. Finally, in Asian countries it would be also effective to encourage people to develop environmental identity in bringing them together for climate change action.

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