Climate hypocrisy attacks are bipartisan, but their psychological impact is unequal

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Climate hypocrisy attacks are bipartisan, but their psychological impact is unequal

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Climate hypocrisy attacks are bipartisan, but their psychological impact is unequal

Environmental action is one place where accusations of hypocrisy are frequent across the political spectrum. Here we test whether there is indeed a hypocrisy penalty whereby the same environmentally damaging actions are blamed more if the agent speaks out in favor of climate protection, rather than saying nothing. In two pre-registered studies, we also test whether the penalty faced for hypocrisy is the same depending on one's own climate policy support, and whether the target of the attacks modulates it. In two pre-registered studies (N = 962), we confirm a hypocrisy penalty but see it decrease among strong climate policy supporters and when hypocrisy came from one's political ingroup. Our findings highlight the asymmetric political impact of climate hypocrisy accusations, with implications for climate communication and political psychology.

Calling someone a hypocrite—accusing them of saying one thing and doing another (e.g., Barden et al., 2005)—is a frequent move in climate debates. Climate scientists are criticized for flying to conferences, and politicians for supporting oil companies while urging others to reduce fossil fuel use and claiming an undeserved higher moral or social ground (Effron et al., 2015). Such accusations appear in hundreds of news articles (Gunster et al., 2018b, 2018a) and flourish on social media platforms (Falkenberg et al., 2022). As such, climate hypocrisy represents a great place to study how accusations of hypocrisy play out, especially in a political rather than simply moral context.

Previous literature in psychology has indeed focused on moral inconsistencies, considering when the label of hypocrisy is applied and whether it is consistent with philosophical definitions (Kreps et al., 2017; Laurent & and Clark, 2019; Silver & Berman, 2024; Teeny et al., 2024; Vaughan-Johnston, 2024) , but also how it translates into changes in moral attitudes. Hypocrites are judged as disingenuous, less trusted, are punished more, and condemned as morally weak (Crisp & Cowton, 1994; Effron et al., 2018; Jordan et al., 2017; Laurent et al., 2014; Silver et al., 2021) Some studies have also considered the impact of hypocrisy accusations - for instance condemning adultery in public while having affairs - during political scandals (McDermott et al., 2015).

What makes climate hypocrisy accusations special, however, is not just that they are prominent in current political contexts, but that they originate from different sides of the issue. Large-scale studies have shown that critics call out contradictions in climate commitments across the political spectrum (Falkenberg et al., 2022; Gunster et al., 2018b). But do these accusations affect everyone the same way? Whereas sensitivity to moral inconsistency regarding general moral principles, such as not stealing or not lying, could be expected to be general, sensitivity to inconsistency in this more politicized domain raises questions: does sensitivity to hypocrisy depend on one's political support for climate policies? How does one's political support affect the expected ingroup-outgroup bias, where one's judgement is more lenient when the target of the accusation is from one's political tribe (Helgason & Effron, 2022; Wolsky, 2022)?

These are the questions we addressed in two pre-registered studies. The first goal was to extend prior research showing that hypocrisy is condemned more harshly than simple wrongdoing

(Barden et al., 2005; Effron, Markus, et al., 2018; Stone & Fernandez, 2008). We examined this in the context of climate commitments, looking at a" climate hypocrisy penalty" defined as a harsher judgment of environmentally harmful actions when paired with hypocrisy.

Study 1 further assessed whether this penalty depends on one's political commitment towards climate policies. Here, two opposite hypotheses can be made. Based on the Black Sheep Effect (Marques & and Paez, 1994), where group members are harshly evaluated when they deviate from group norms, one could expect supporters of climate policies may be more critical of hypocrisy due to concerns about credibility in terms of commitment to the cause and worry that it undermines their own and everyone's climate efforts. Indeed, it has been shown that accusations of climate hypocrisy erode trust, divert attention from solutions, and hinder progress (Attari et al., 2019; McDermott et al., 2015; von Sikorski & Herbst, 2020). Alternatively, considering the Moral Balancing Theory (Nisan & Horenczyk, 1990) or the Moral Licensing Effect (Simbrunner & Schlegelmilch, 2017) as mechanisms that allow people to find grounds that justify their own immoral actions, one could expect that people with lower climate policy support are harsher towards hypocrisy, finding it a way to regain a moral high ground over those who promote such actions (and are found guilty of doing the same as them). Study 1, therefore, can test these two predictions and see whether the hypocrisy penalty is stronger among those with higher or lower climate change (CC) mitigation support. If hypocrisy regarding climate action is considered only under the lens of moral inconsistency, we would expect that the penalty does not depend on one's commitment to the cause.

Study 2 explores another facet of the hypocrisy penalty relevant to the domain of climate. Previous studies have shown that a target is perceived as more hypocritical when the attitude they express (and contradict in practice) is more deeply embedded in their identity, which we expect to be the case for politicians in charge of defending and implementing climate policies. Accusations of hypocrisy are also more prominent when the target is seen as high in competence or power (Dong et al., 2021). Here, however, based on the Social Identity Theory (Hogg, 2016) explaining people's biases and perceptions of ingroup and outgroup members, coupled with vast literature showing that one's own political identity shapes reactions (Amira et al., 2021; Falk et al., 2012; Kim, 2018; Munro et al., 2010; Sparkman et al., 2019), we can expect that climate hypocrisy is less punished when it originates from a political ingroup rather than an outgroup.

We also examined whether reading about hypocrisy in politicians affects not just judgment but also donation behavior and emotions to shed light on its impact.

Does hypocrisy affect supporters and opponents of climate policies equally?

In study 1, we recruited 268 US participants (n=256 after removing attention check failures) using MTurk via Cloud Research - a research platform that builds on and improves access to participant pools and helps researchers recruit participants, control sample quality, and manage studies online. The study had an experimental design with two between-subject conditions. All groups read four scenarios where a character engaged in environmentally harmful behavior. The actions were identical, but the context varied. In the Hypocrisy condition (n=126), the character previously advocated for the opposite behavior. In the Mere Harm condition (Control, n=130), an unrelated detail about the character was provided. All vignettes were validated (see Supplemental Information). Participants judged the actions on a 7-point Likert scale and answered additional scales on climate change attitudes, including a climate change mitigation policy support scale.

In this context, we found that the climate hypocrisy penalty is significant. Across scenarios' topics (alpha = 0.81), environmentally harmful actions were judged far more harshly when paired with hypocrisy (M= 2.53, SD = 1.15) than when simply performed (M= 4.44, SD= 1.09; Wilcoxon test: W = 14,679 , p-value < .001, 95% CI [1.75, 2.25], r = 0.68).

A mixed-effects regression with an interaction term for condition and climate change mitigation support (alpha = 0.85), and random effects for vignette topics, confirms our pre-registered hypothesis showing that the climate hypocrisy penalty was stronger among those with low support and decreased as support increased (Est = 0.27, df= 1012.00, $p < .01$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.37], d = 0.32), as depicted in Figure 1. For more details, see Supplemental Information.

Figure 1. The moral judgment of climate hypocrisy versus climate mere harm (averaged across vignettes, alpha = 0.81) as a function of Climate Change mitigation support. Binned points represent mean judgments across 7 bins of Climate Change mitigation support, while the loess curves illustrate smoothed trends with 95% confidence intervals.

The vignettes in Study 1 focus on everyday individuals for whom expressing pro-climate attitudes may seem less consequential. Previous research has shown that hypocrisy is more strongly noted when individuals express attitudes that are more deeply embedded in their identity (Vaughan-Johnston, 2024), and given the political dimension of climate action, this should be the case for politicians.

Therefore, in Study 2 we embedded hypocrisy or mere environmentally harmful behavior accusations of either left or right-wing politicians as social media posts from fictive news sources (all posts were independently validated; Supplemental Information). We aimed to replicate that hypocrisy penalty varied with different climate mitigation support levels while measuring the effect of the target being a political ingroup or outgroup. Additionally, we tested whether just reading about climate hypocrisy would affect people s environmental donation behavior and emotional responses.

We surveyed 800 US participants (N= 706 after attention-check fails and political orientation filters mismatch exclusions) using MTurk via CloudResearch, balancing our sample between right and left-wing participants (72 participants who identified as ‘moderate’ were excluded). Using a 2x2 between-subjects design, each participant read three different posts on three different topics, pointing that a right or left-wing politician committed an environmentally harmful action (e.g., promoting fossil fuels industry) either while advocating the opposite climate-friendly behavior (e.g., encouraging CO2 reduction) or generic, unrelated goals (e.g., fostering national innovations). After reading each post, participants rated their judgment of the politician’s actions (7-point Likert-scale: ‘absolutely wrong’ to ‘absolutely right’), their emotional response to the post, and the plausibility of the post (i.e., how likely to be real they thought the post was; 7-point scale, ‘very unlikely’ to ‘very likely’).

First, we replicated Study 1 results. The climate hypocrisy penalty was significant. Participants found the actions of politicians accused of causing mere harm ($n = 357$, $M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.42$) more acceptable than those accused of hypocrisy ($n = 349$, $M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.31$; Wilcoxon test: $W = 79{,}777$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.99], $r = 0.24$). This pattern held across topics (alpha = 0.69). Similarly, we replicated the finding that support for climate mitigation policies (alpha =

0.83) significantly moderates the climate hypocrisy penalty. As support for mitigation increases, the penalty weakens (Est = 0.12, df = 2112.00, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.21], d = 0.15). These results remain unchanged when including the politically 'moderate' participants or when controlling for Plausibility (i.e., how likely to be true participants found the social media posts to be; see Supplemental Information).

As expected, participants judged actions—mere harm and hypocrisy—by the political outgroup as significantly less acceptable than by the political ingroup (Est = -0.57, df = 2113.00, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.72, -0.42], d = 0.33; see Figure 2). This effect remained significant when controlling for Plausibility, although in this case, Plausibility also had a significant negative effect on judgment (see Supplemental Information). Crucially, this bias was significantly influenced by participants' level of climate mitigation support, which moderated the gap between ingroup and outgroup judgments (Est = 0.11, df = 2111.00, $p < .02$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.19], d = 0.11). Again, these effects remained unchanged when controlling for Plausibility (see Supplemental Information).

Figure 2. Comparison of moral judgment (averaged across topics, alpha = .69) across conditions and groups. Violin plots depict the distribution of judgments for each group (Political Ingroup and Outgroup) and condition (Hypocrisy and Control). Black dots represent mean judgment values, and significance levels (calculated using pairwise Wilcoxon rank-sum tests) are indicated above.

Participants with stronger mitigation policies support donated significantly more to environmental causes (Est = 0.09, df = 704, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.24, 0.38], d = 0.66), suggesting that policy support drives meaningful action. However, accusations of hypocrisy versus mere harm had no significant effect on donation behavior (Est = -0.002, p = 0.94), and no significant difference was found between accusations against political ingroups versus outgroups (Est = -0.03, p = 0.31). Given that regressions for this behavioral measure did not follow normality of residuals, we used Bootstrapping methods and confirmed these results. For more details, see Supplemental Information.

Finally, participants were asked to rate their emotions—three negative (frustrated, angry, worried; alpha = 0.91) and three positive (proud, enthusiastic, hopeful; alpha = 0.95)—after

reading each post. Our exploratory analysis reveals that participants exposed to hypocrisy reported significantly higher negative emotions compared to those who read about mere harm (Est = 10.29, df = 2113.00, 95% CI [7.34 – 13.24], p < .001, d = 0.29). Similarly, participants reading about their political outgroup expressed higher negative emotions than those reading about their ingroup (Est = 9.55, df = 2113.00, 95% CI [6.60 – 12.51], p < .001, d = 0.28). Positive emotions followed the reverse trend, with lower ratings for hypocrisy (Est = -4.67, df = 2113.00, p < .001, 95% CI [-6.92 – -2.43], d = 0.18) and outgroup accusations (Est = -5.92, df = 2113.00, p < .001, 95% CI [-8.16 – -3.68], d = 0.22). That said, positive emotions were rated uniformly low across all groups, so the latter findings should be interpreted cautiously.

Discussion

Study 1 shows that accusations of climate hypocrisy carry a moral penalty, but this penalty is not applied equally and depends on the level of support for climate policies. The findings align with the Moral Balancing Theory (Nisan & Horenczyk, 1990), suggesting that individuals with lower support for climate policies blame perceived hypocrisy more than mere environmentally harmful behavior, contrary to the Black Sheep effect (Marques & and Paez, 1994), whereby supporters of climate policies would be the most concerned and critical of perceived hypocrisy.

Study 2 replicates this finding, also showing that the effect is moderated by individuals' political identities. In both everyday and political contexts, people judged environmentally harmful actions more harshly when they involved hypocrisy, but individual political attitudes and affiliations significantly influence the condemnation. Despite their emotional effects, accusations of hypocrisy did not affect pro-environmental donations. Together, these findings reveal the asymmetric nature of hypocrisy judgments in environmental debates.

On a methodological and conceptual level, the study shows the importance of accounting for fine-grained levels of support for a cause (here, climate policies) when studying hypocrisy. In the current case, levels of support were measured along with political ideology. Left-right or liberal-conservative labels are useful proxies for climate attitudes, but not perfect. In the U.S., Liberals

and Democrats tend to support climate action more than Conservatives and Republicans, but this divide is less rigid in other regions (Spektor et al., 2023). Even within the U.S., the pattern is more nuanced: the gap is smaller among people of color (Ballew et al., 2021) and shaped by levels of populist sentiment (Huber et al., 2020).

In terms of the target of hypocrisy accusations, political identity is predictably crucial as ingroup-outgroup effects are known to affect one's moral judgment (Amira et al., 2021; Falk et al., 2012; Kim, 2018; Munro et al., 2010; Sparkman et al., 2019). In both cases, people judged the hypocrisy less harshly when it came from their own political group. The interpretation of the other effect - the fact that higher support for climate policies makes people less harsh towards hypocrisy - remains open to several interpretations. Those less supportive of climate policies may see hypocrisy as a strategy to discredit advocates, or a way to assert their own consistency, assuming they don't preach for climate actions and perform environmentally harmful actions. The surprise is perhaps more on the side of the strong climate supporters, who, on the other hand, seem to be more outcome-focused and proportion their condemnation to actions rather than words. Climate policy support is shaped by several factors (Drews & and van den Bergh, 2016), including higher perceptions of the consequences of climate change, which may play a role in the present effect. Alternatively, we cannot rule out that other cognitive or religious attitudes also correlate with the differences in climate policy support and underlie the effect.

Before drawing practical implications about the effects of climate hypocrisy accusations, some limitations must be considered. Our two studies focused on the United States, where climate policies are a polarizing issue (Smith et al., 2024). This focus reflects both the concentration of existing research and the opportunity to test ingroup-outgroup effects (Kennedy, 2023). However, since sensitivity to hypocrisy has been shown to vary across cultural contexts (Effron, Markus, et al., 2018; Seo et al., 2024) and political attitudes toward climate action are more or less polarized depending on context (Smith & Hempel, 2022) and knowledge (Pröpper et al., 2022), these results call for broader testing across countries and samples. Still, given the U.S.'s significant contribution to climate change (Deng et al., 2025; Evans, 2021; Köne & Büke, 2015), our findings remain relevant.

The second limitation comes from the fact that no immediate effects on donation were observed. As the donation option featured charities unrelated to the accused figures, donations may not have appeared like an opportunity for punishment against hypocrisy. Measuring donations towards political parties could be addressed by future studies.

The final qualification comes from differences between topics and scenarios. Despite following an analogous template, not all scenarios were rated as hypocritical. As pointed out earlier, people's understanding of what counts as hypocritical or not does not perfectly align with philosophical definitions (Alicke et al., 2013). Therefore, we observed some variance in the validation of the vignettes. To avoid anchoring, we could not ask the same participants to judge whether the case was hypocritical and whether it should be blamed; therefore, we cannot directly establish an individual link between perception and evaluation of hypocrisy. We should note that, in study 2, only 58% of participants found the behavior hypocritical for one of the posts within the hypocrisy condition (topic Meat). Given that over 50% of raters considered it hypocritical, we decided to keep it in our analysis. In addition, used random effects for the stimuli topic in our models to account for any variability arising from the different topics of the social media posts. Nevertheless, future studies could investigate whether certain topics are more likely to be perceived as hypocritical but judged less harshly, and explore the reasons why.

With these limitations in mind, these findings still highlight key challenges in climate communication and policy framing. Climate hypocrisy accusations are frequent and holding leaders accountable for discrepancies between their words and actions remains important (Eckersley, 2013; Platt & Retallack, 2009), yet our findings warn that hypocrisy accusations will resonate with prior attitudes and add to existing polarization - resonating stronger among those already doubtful of climate initiatives, while potentially failing to move those committed to action. Even so, given that our findings suggest opponents react more, climate hypocrisy claims may reinforce resistance. If supporters don't, one can argue these accusations still risk increasing political cynicism and disengagement in the long term (Gunster et al., 2018b, 2018a).

Hypocrisy accusations can also serve different purposes, and while some intend to criticize politicians or companies who promote pro-climate action but do not follow by actions ("green washing"), some may aim to motivate reflection about the contradiction between pro-

environmental values and commitment attitudes (Gunster et al., 2018b, 2018a). Additionally, the importance granted to consistency between words and actions may be also a rich-country luxury, as pointed by critical scholars, when individuals or leaders from developing countries need to more immediately respond to changing contexts and compromises (Millar, 2024).

Conclusion

Whether in everyday conversations or on social media, accusations of hypocrisy are common in climate debates. People are quicker to condemn those who advocate climate action, like reducing air travel or phasing out fossil fuels, when they fail to follow their own advice, compared to those who stay silent on those issues. Perfect consistency is of course a high bar, but not everyone judges inconsistency in the same way.

Supporters of climate policies are more likely to overlook inconsistencies between words and actions, focusing instead on what gets done. But the impact of hypocrisy accusations still depends heavily on who they're aimed at. While moral judgments may look backward, what matters most is their long-term effect on credibility—whether pointing out inconsistency builds momentum for change or simply deepens public mistrust.

Methods

Study 1

Pre-registration

The pre-registration can be found here: aspredicted.org/zjjy-9nxy.pdf (anonymized link). Observations: To deal with non-parametric aspects of the data and match the analysis properly to the pre-registered hypotheses, some adjustments to the originally pre-registered analyses were needed to be made.

Design

We conducted an online survey experiment with 2 between-subject conditions, defined by the content of the vignettes participants would see as stimuli, explained below:

Hypocrisy	**Mere harm (Control)**
Character preaches to a group about the importance of certain environmental behavior. + *Character acts non environmentally in terms of that specific behavior (does the opposite to what they preached).*	*Random/neutral fact about the character, not related to any environmental behavior.* + *Character acts non environmentally in terms of a specific behavior*

Sample

Following our pre-registered sample goal, we surveyed 260 US participants (n=256 after discarding those who did not pass attention checks). Data collection was conducted using MTurk via CloudResearch. Average age was of 41.04 (SD = 11.04), 53.52% Women, 45.70% Men, 0.78% Other. Further demographics are summarized Supplemental Information.

Survey

The study was conducted using an online survey built in Qualtrics with the following structure:

- Vignettes (4)
  - Moral judgment
- Attention Check
- CC Mitigation Policy support measure
- Other measures for future analyses (Environmental values, Moral foundations, Climate change knowledge, Urgent issues rating)
- Demographics (reported in supplemental information)

Vignettes + Judgment

For all conditions, participants were presented with four vignettes. Each focused on a different Climate change action topic (Reducing use of flights, Recycling, Reducing beef consumption, Reducing commute by car). For example, "Last month, Sofia talked to her coworkers about how important it is that they stop using their cars and switch to biking in order to help the environment. Sofia drove her car everyday that same month." for Hypocrisy condition, and "Sofia lives in an apartment in a city. Sofia drove her car everyday in the past month" for Mere Harm condition. For a complete list of the vignettes refer to Supplemental Information.

- Moral judgment:
  After being presented with a vignette, participants were asked to answer how right or wrong they found the character's behavior in the story, using a Likert scale from 1 to 7, from 'absolutely wrong' to 'absolutely right'.

Attention Check

For both conditions, participants were presented with a 5th vignette that worked as an attention check by introducing a trivially right random action for the character in the story. Then, participants who rated it with anything below 4 were excluded. The vignette was as follows:

"Ben lives in a house in a town. Last month, Ben helped a blind person cross the street. "

CC Mitigation Policy Support

Participants are presented with a series of hypothetical policies that are meant to mitigate Climate Change at the cost of some individual benefit (see list below). For each one of them participants reported how much they supported each policy using a 7-point liker scale from 'Strongly oppose ' to 'Strongly support '(4 being 'Neither support nor oppose')

Policies:

- Increase taxes on gasoline, making it more expensive to commute by car
- Require electric utilities to produce at least 20% of their electricity from wind, solar, or other renewable energy sources, even if it costs the average household an extra $100 a year
- Changing school menu to all plant-based meals, eliminating all meat and other animal-based options
- Increase taxes on flights, making it more expensive to travel by plane

Other Measures

The survey contained other measures for exploratory analysis purposes which are not covered in the present paper. These measures were: Environmental Values (Ziegler, 2017), a brief version the moral Foundations questionnaire (Crone et al., 2021), and Climate Change Knowledge (Taddicken et al., 2018).

Study 2

Pre-registration

The pre-registration can be found here: aspredicted.org/f9fx-ss2c.pdf (anonymized link). Observations: To deal with non-parametric aspects of the data and match the analysis properly to the pre-registered hypotheses, minor adjustments to the originally pre-registered analyses were made. Moreover, 'Climate Change Care' from the pre-registration was operationalized with what we call the 'Climate Change Mitigation Policies Support' measure presented here.

Design

We conducted an online survey experiment with a 2x2 between-subject design, defined by the content of the social media posts participants would see as stimuli, explained below:

	Hypocrisy	**Transgression**
Right	Preaches green principles but harmful behavior by Right-wing/Conservative/Republican politician	No special principles mentioned but harmful behavior by Right-wing/Conservative/Republican politician
Left	Preaches green principles but harmful behavior by Left-wing/Liberal/Democrat politician	No special principles mentioned but harmful behavior by Left-wing/Liberal/Democrat politician

Sample

Following our pre-registered sample goal, we surveyed 800 US participants (n=706 after discarding those who did not pass attention checks or did not match the applied cloud research pre-screeners). Average Age was 44.64 (SD= 13), 48.44% Women, 50.42% Men, 1,14% Other. Data collection was conducted using MTurk via CloudResearch, where, to ensure a balanced number of Conservative/Republican and Liberal/Democratic participants, pre-screeners for both

political party and political orientation were applied. Participants that in our demographic questions responded with political orientations dissonant with political party affiliations were also excluded since it did not align with the cloud research pre-screener and it could create confusion on the interpretation of results. Further demographics are summarized in Supplemental Information.

Survey

The study was conducted using an online survey built in Qualtrics. It had the following structure:

- Infographics comprehension
- Stimuli (3)
    - Moral judgment
    - Judgment explanation
    - Plausibility
    - Affective reaction
- Donation Activity
- Attention Check 1
- Behavioral Change Intention measure
- CC Mitigation Policy support measure (same as in Study 1)
- Attention check 2
- Demographics (reported in supplemental information)

Infographics Comprehension

To ensure there was an understanding that at least in the view of environmental experts, certain behaviors go against protecting the environment/mitigating climate change, we added a comprehension measure in the survey where participants were presented with three infographics that they were told contained information from professionals on three different topics. After looking at each infographic, participants were asked to answer two questions about the content of the infographics. As a motivator for them to read the infographics carefully, they were told that if they responded at least 50% of the questions correctly, they would be included in a draw of over

fifteen $10 USD gift cards. The topics were: Mental health, Kitchen and food safety, and Climate Change causes. The figure below portrays the climate change infographic and its comprehension questions.

Infographic

Questions

According to the infographic, which of these activities are NOT a big driver of climate change? (select all that apply)

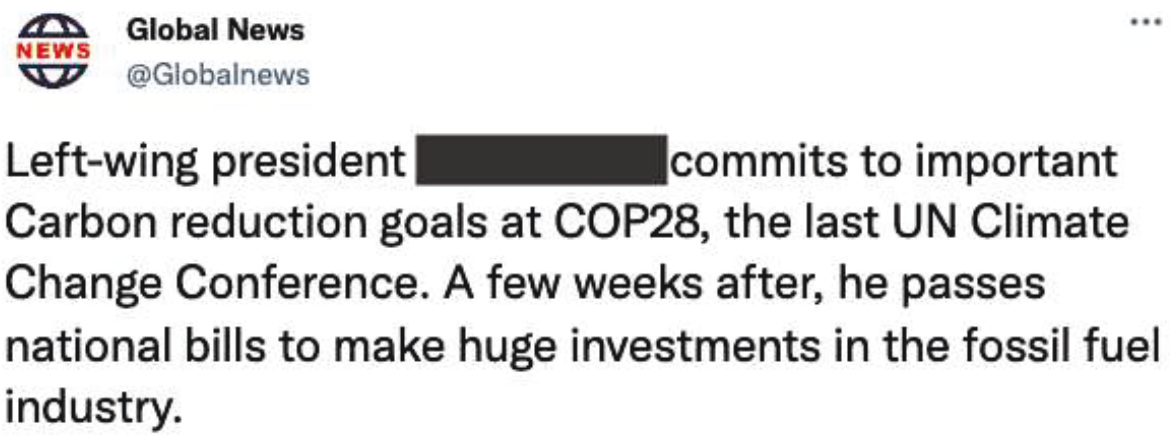
- ☐ Deforestation
- ☐ Recycling
- ☐ Waste Accumulation
- ☐ None of the above

According to the infographic, which of these activities are big drivers of climate change? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Meat Industry
- ☐ Fossil Fuels Use (planes, cars, etc)
- ☐ Electric Bikes Industry
- ☐ Vegetable Supply

Stimuli + Measures

For all conditions, participants were presented with three stimuli (snapshots of a social media post) each focused on a different Climate change action topic (Fossil fuel industry, Private Jet use, Meat industry), and were told to imagine they entered their preferred social media platform and saw the following post from a news source. The Figure below shows an example of how the stimulus looked like. For a complete list of the stimulus texts please refer to Supplemental Information.



- Moral judgment: After being presented with a Social media post, participants will be asked to answer how right or wrong they found the actions of the politician in each story, using a Likert scale from 1 to 7 from Absolutely wrong to Absolutely right with labels for each point in the scale.
- Judgment explanation: For exploratory purposes, after answering how right or wrong they found the politician's actions, they were asked to explain why they think that in two lines.
- Plausibility: Participants were asked, 'How likely do you find the social media post you just read to be true?' and were given a 7-point Likert scale from 'Very unlikely' to 'Very likely'.
- Affective reaction: Participants were asked how the post they just read made them feel. For this, they were presented with a list of 6 emotions (enthusiastic, worried, proud, angry, hopeful, frustrated) and they had to rate each one of them in terms of how much each emotion represented the way they felt. They rated these emotions using a slide bar from 0 to 100 that went from 'Not at All' to 'Extremely'. This was a modified version of the measures tested in Marcus et al. (2017).

Donation Activity

Participants were told to imagine they had 100usd personal budget to donate to charity, and were presented with three different charities (an environmental one, an climate change denial one, and

a neutral/non environment related one) among which they could distribute those 100 dollars. The three charities were: Clean Air Task Force (environmental), CO2 Coalition (climate change denying), Goodwill (neutral). Participants were presented with a small description of each charity and a sliding scale for each that allowed them to distribute the imaginary budget among the three of them. Additionally, to ensure participants cared about their decisions in this task, they were told that we would pick one participant at random and perform a donation based on their selection, meaning that their decisions in this task could have real-world consequences.

Attention Checks

Additionally, the survey had two attention checks that worked as stand-alone questions. For example: "Select the option that is NOT a fruit: a. Apple, b. Banana, c. Cookie, d. Peach."

Data Analysis

To analyze the data obtained in both studies, R code was used. The 'lme4' package was used to run all mixed effects models (Bates et al., 2015). Effect sizes were calculated using the 'effectsize' package (Ben-Shachar et al., 2020), used to obtain Eta Squared, and the following formula to calculate the effect sizes: $\sqrt{\frac{4*Eta^2}{1-Eta^2}}$ for the mixed-effects regressions; for the Wilcoxon tests, effect sizes were calculated with $r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{(n_1+n_2)}}$. Linear regressions and other standard statistical analyses were done using the 'stats' package in R (R Core Team, 2022). Bootstrapped linear mixed effects models were calculated using the 'lmeresampler' package (Loy et al., 2023), bootstrapped correlation coefficients were calculated using the 'boot' package (Canty & Ripley, 2022).

Ethics

All participants approved an online informed consent statement before taking part in the studies. Protocols for both studies received approval from the Ethics Committee of Faculty 10, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

Data and Code Availability

All data sets and code for analysis can be accessed with the following (anonymized) link to an OSF folder: https://osf.io/nzvx7/?view_only=e9a6260d4b674401bd02c2fe28dccd9e

Ethics and Inclusion (Authorship)

The research was conducted primarily through online survey platforms (MTurk via CloudResearch) with U.S.-based participants. While the study does not include local researchers from the U.S., one of the authors was based in the U.S. while Study 1 was conducted. Moreover, we consider the external perspective of non-U.S. researchers to be an asset in ensuring objectivity and broadening the scope of climate discourse.

The study examines climate hypocrisy accusations in the U.S., focusing on how reactions to hypocrisy vary based on climate policy support and political identity. While the research was not conducted in collaboration with local partners, its findings are directly relevant to U.S. climate debates. Additionally, conducting this research as non-U.S. researchers provides a valuable external viewpoint on the topic.

Roles and responsibilities were discussed and agreed upon among collaborators at all stages of the research process. No formal capacity-building plans for local researchers were included, as the study primarily involved survey-based data collection.

The research received ethical approval in Germany, covering all aspects of the study. The study examines moral judgments and climate policy attitudes, topics that could be politically sensitive. However, no personally identifying information was collected, and participants were recruited through MTurk, ensuring anonymity and minimizing risks. As an online study, the research does not pose significant health, safety, or security risks to the researchers.

The paper integrates research on climate communication, moral psychology, and public attitudes, with a strong focus on studies relevant to the U.S. context. One key reason for incorporating

climate policy support as a central variable is its potential ability to better capture the diversity of people's attitudes compared to traditional political classifications.

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