

The Social Acceptance of Energy and Climate Policy: Cultural and Economic Explanations

Panel proposal for the Section: "New Challenges of Sustainable Energy Transformations? Ambiguity, Contingency, and Politics". The Section description can be [found here](#).

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Abstract

The objective of this panel is to bring together research that explains the link between populism and climate scepticism, and exploring the role that scientific experts have on public opinion towards climate and energy policy (including that related to energy transitions). A number of authors have assumed that right wing populism poses a major challenge for climate policy (Beeson & McDonald 2013; Forchtner & Kølvråa 2015; MacNeil 2016). We are interested in exploring the structural, political economy foundations of climate policy and the 'ideological and social theoretical underpinnings of the environmental debate' (Manno 2004: 156) regarding climate policy, particularly in the EU. This includes the impact of structural conditions on the kinds of arguments and expertise that are privileged in public discourse.

Climate scepticism is linked not only to belief/denial of scientific claims. Corry and Jorgensen's (2015) analysis of climate scepticism focuses on differentiating along two dimensions – problem and solution definitions. There are those who deny there is a problem and doubt scientific knowledge claims, and along the continuum those who attempt to (re)define the 'climate' problem as an issue promoted, even exaggerated, by environmentalists and associated with harmful remedies that are disproportionate with regard to the scale of the problem – which is something that is manageable, or even an opportunity. Others agree that it is a significant problem but also believe it to be too complex for a clear agreement on the solution, with those at the extreme end focused on adaptation to climate change; fatalistic about the chances of preventing it. Attitudes towards state intervention and those favouring a state or market solution are linked to these beliefs.

We are interested in exploring beyond climate science belief and denial to that concerning the effect on policy and governance of climate change. This includes attempts to re-politicise climate solutions in Europe. For example, the Polish government has threatened to veto the EU's climate and energy package in 2030. Burden sharing within the EU on renewable, emissions and energy efficiency targets is also highly contested. We are also interested in how evidence-based policy-making is affected by the role of scientific experts operating in countries where climate policy

problem and solution definitions, as well as types of knowledge and what constitutes knowledge in the policy area, are contested.

We encourage contributions that consider, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- 1) Conceptualising the link between populism and climate scepticism, including on policy-making and implementation (and lack of).
- 2) The role of epistemic communities in shaping the visibility of certain representations of climate problems and solutions.
- 3) The effect of populist governments on scientific communities working on climate related issues, including access to policy-makers/the media, opportunities to disseminate findings, and types of framing and discourse.
- 4) The effect of populist governments on media coverage of climate related issues, including the amount of coverage representation of climate sceptic views.
- 5) The link between political beliefs and values and climate change policy and governance, including how populist political parties frame their climate arguments.