
This article argues that enacting climate change policy requires the active engagement and involvement of a broad spectrum of citizens. As past policy initiatives have demonstrated, passing public policy requires mobilizing the support of citizens as well as countering opponents of these reforms. Nisbet suggests that engaging the public around the issue of climate change requires reframing its personal relevance through a variety of trusted media sources and opinion leaders. Thus, “successfully reframing climate change requires tailoring messages to the existing attitudes, values and perceptions of different audiences while making the complex policy debate understandable, relevant and personally important (p.1). Nisbet goes on to define framing as, “…interpretive storylines that set a specific train of thought in motion, communicating why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible for it, and what should be done about it” (p.2). An important note that Nisbet makes is framing should not be synonymous with putting a false spin on an issue. Rather, it should put greater weight to certain considerations over others (p.4). The main body of the article goes on to describe the frames that are commonly used to engage and mobilize the public on the issue of climate change, as well as identifying numerous frames, sometimes which are the same, that have attempted to counter such support. Nisbet identifies this caveat stating, “frames should not be confused with policy positions; and could include pro, anti or neutral arguments, although one position might be more commonly used than others” (p.5).

The typology Nisbet uses to examine the frames applicable to climate change are originally derived from a study by Gamson and Modigliana (1989) and primarily relevant to science related issues. The following is a list of the frames and a brief description of each:

- **Social Progress**: Improve quality of life over solving problems
- **Economic Development and Competitiveness**: Cost/benefit
- **Morality and Ethics**: Matter of right vs. wrong
- **Scientific and Technical Uncertainty**: A matter of expert understanding or consensus
- **Pandora’s Box**: A need for precaution or action in face of possible catastrophe
- **Public Accountability and Governance**: Research or policy is either in the public interest or it is serving special interest
- **Middle Way/Alternative Path**: Third way between conflicting or polarized views or options.
- **Conflict and Strategy**: A game among elites, such as who is winning/losing policy debates
Nisbet explains how allies and opponents of climate change action have utilized several of these frames to reinforce existing political ideological divides. Additionally, he explains how several frames, such as public health, religion and morality and ethics, may hold promise in resonating with broader audiences. Finally, Nisbet concludes that new meaning and messaging is needed to engage the public on taking action on climate change. This requires focusing on media portrayals, messaging campaigns, as well as recruiting influential peers to pass on selectively framed messages.

Questions:

1). In your own research, how is your issue traditionally framed both in the media as well as among issue publics? Which frames do you notice gain the most/least attention, and which are the most/least effective?

2). Nisbet cites the fragmented nature of the media system as one of the main barriers to public communication on climate change not reaching broad enough audiences. Moreover, he suggests several frames that may break perceptual gridlocks. Given the rise of digital technology and news fragmentation, beyond the news media, what are ways in which these messages can reach broader audiences?

3). One of the points Nisbet addresses in his conclusion is how framing climate change communication cannot just rely on institutional and professional groups to engage broad groups of citizens. He suggests that new messengers, such as influential peers, are needed to frame messages to selected audiences. How do you see the need of new messengers arising in your own issue, and what role do they play within and/or beyond the traditional institutional and professional groups.

In this article, Nisbet et al. carry out an experimental survey to test how individual open-/closed- mindedness moderates framing effects about climate change within competitive and non-competitive framing environments. In so doing, the authors bridge literature from the fields of framing and message competition as well as open-/closed- mindedness and attitude change.

The authors describe competitive framing contests as various competing social actors (e.g. politicians, advocacy groups, corporations, etc.) attempting to shape public attitudes about an issue, topic or event to spur motivation. Citing the overestimating of framing effects on attitude change due to “one-sided” message design, and not taking into account the competitive message environments that surround the topics most framing research examines, the authors develop their first hypothesis (H1). This hypothesis states that exposure to a framed message in a non-competitive message environment will more likely result in attitude change compared to exposure to a framed message in a competitive environment.

Next, the authors describe past literature in the field of open-/closed- mindedness and attitude change. Also defined as “cognitive closure”, it is defined as “a desire for an answer to a question on any given topic, any answer” (Richter and Kruglanski 2004; as cited by Nisbet et al. 2013). Thus, people who are low in need of cognitive closure (open-minded) are more motivated to think about as much as the available data as they can, appreciate ambiguity and enjoy drawing out the decision process. Conversely, those are high in the need for cognitive closure (closed minded) are motivated to process information quickly and shallowly in an effort to draw any acceptable conclusion. The authors second hypothesis states: open-/closed- mindedness will moderate the influence of a message frame on attitude change, such that attitude change is more likely to occur among open-minded individuals (H2).

Finally, drawing from past research on framing of climate change policy, the authors posit that the perceived costs and benefits of government action on climate change mitigation will mediate the relationship between message frame exposure and attitudes about climate change policy (H3). Likewise, they test the hypothesis (H4) that when considering competing messages about climate change mitigation, open-minded individuals are more likely to perceive the benefits of climate change mitigation compared to closed-minded individuals who are more likely to accept the status quo.

In the analysis section, the authors find that those who view a pro-mitigation video paired with an anti-mitigation (competitive framing) video can shift opinions to be more supportive of climate change policy among those who are open-minded, supporting (H2), but rejecting (H1). They suggest the rejection of (H1) may be due to the fact that since climate change carries such a high degree of opinion polarization, exposure to messages in a non-competitive frame will be ineffective at inducing attitude change among both
open-minded and closed-minded individuals. The authors find support for (H3 and H4), in that viewing a message in competition decreased the perceived benefits among those who are less open-minded, resulting in less support for climate change mitigation policy. Conversely, among those who are more open-minded, viewing a video in competition increased the perceived benefits, resulting in support for climate change mitigation policy in comparison to those who saw no video.

Overall, the authors found that the competitive framing environment motivated open-minded individuals to weigh the overall benefits of climate change mitigation to a higher degree, which in turn influence their cost-benefit calculation, and support for government action on climate change policy. The authors suggest that future studies focus on a wider range of individuals differences that could moderate framing message/effects, rather than primarily focusing on value and belief systems as individual differences. Likewise, the authors suggest that climate change communicators identify which audience segments are most likely to be open-minded and prioritize those segments for greater consideration of the costs and benefits associated with climate change. Finally, the authors note that the effect of the climate change “denial” movement may be overstated. As their findings suggest, such messages may stimulate segments of the public to deliberate the trade-offs of climate change policies, and increase their support rather than diminish it.

Questions:
1). When considering your own research issues, how do you think open-/closed-mindedness moderates the effects of message frames that are traditionally used? In what terms (e.g. costs-benefits, stability vs. change, equality vs. inequality) do you see the primary focus of your issue? What other individual differences do you think may moderate the effect of the message frame?
2). Who would you view as the main social actors constructing the frames that shape public attitudes about your own topic? Also, in this article, the competing frames were examined through the medium of television. Through what medium do you see competing frames of your own issue playing out for public audiences?
3). In terms of persuasion and attitude change, how do open-/closed- minded individuals differ?