‘evidence-first’ approach

1. Scientific evidence (e.g., IPCC)
2. International agreement
3. National targets
4. Policy & action (evidence-based) to achieve targets
5. Climate solutions (target achieved)
How MPs understand and respond to climate change

- Joint initiative Lancaster University / Green Alliance
- Corpus analysis of political speech
- Interviews with current and former MPs

Key question:

*How do politicians reconcile the need to act on climate change with their role as a democratically elected representative?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees’ background and experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>party affiliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>time served as MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>current status</td>
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<tr>
<td>seniority</td>
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<tr>
<td>record on climate change issues</td>
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Participants were not asked for additional demographic data, e.g., age or ethnicity.
Any pressure to act on climate?

“I’ve knocked hundreds, literally thousands of doors, and had tens of thousands of conversations with voters… and I just don’t have conversations about climate change”

“I can’t remember the last time I was asked about climate change. It’s very rare to be asked about it”

“It’s an unusual city, it’s got its Guardian-reading intelligentsia, who are engaged... And yes, we know from the emails they send that climate change is one of the issues of concern, but to be honest, I’m quite interested in the other eighty-seven thousand people, and particularly working class people, who are not going to be engaged in the issues, but are concerned about whether their kids can get to school or whether the hospital is operating”
Constructing a ‘representative claim’ on climate change

Political representation is not simply a fact of political life, or an achieved state of affairs, resulting from elections. Rather, at a deeper level, representation is a dynamic process of claim-making and the reception of claims. (Saward, 2010:8)

An example: negotiating a claim on planning and environment
“The thing they’re talking about most often is town and country planning. So what were my priorities going to be, it was going to be about […] preservation of that quality of life. I think that kind of gave me a bit of a license to talk about environmental issues”

Four different claims identified on climate change:
• Cosmopolitan
• Local prevention
• Co-benefits
• Surrogate
A cosmopolitan claim

“I often start off with that sort of fairly internationalist viewpoint... a lot of the impacts of climate change are going to hit other places before they hit here. [My constituency] is not likely to be one of the first places to be hit particularly badly. So what? I just happen to be here.”

But....

“People fundamentally care about themselves, their environment, their friends, their local space. They’ve never been to Bangladesh, they’ve never met a polar bear... We have these sort of massive big things about what will happen in other parts of the world about bits of Africa drying, about these species, and they’re like, ‘yeah, ok, whatever’.”
A local prevention claim

“there are peaks of anxiety about climate change when there is severe flooding… people do suddenly say, oh crumbs, you know this climate change thing is really terrible, inevitably the people affected are worried […] So people are like, “argh, climate change”, and then everything sort of runs round for a bit, and you can [talk about it], then its kind of dies away.”

“I talk for example quite a bit about… domestic flood risk. I don’t see it as one of the biggest consequences of climate change, in reality, but ‘your house is going to flood if we keep doing this and you will not be able to get insurance for it, so we need to do something about it’… is a powerful message.”
A co-benefits claim

“I’ve just been to see a guy in my constituency, a car-related company, they’ve done it [saved energy], and it’s saving them money. So those are the messages, those are the ways of doing it, so it doesn’t seem a negative thing.”

“In [my area], the green economy, the offshore wind, presents an opportunity.”

“I know in my constituency about a community energy company… which is great and interesting and very innovative, and hopefully that will start to generate some interest.”

“I’m happy to use an economic argument if that means that more people will come on side… I change the language to be much, much less extreme.”
A surrogate claim

“I would rather not say a word about climate change and stop the local road being ten lanes, than make a really good case about climate change and have a ten lane bloody superhighway next to us.”

“If I had mentioned carbon emissions, I would have been… there would have been a rolling of eyes and saying, ‘oh here he goes again’.”

_interviewee:_ Climate change in my own party is toxic. There’s no need to talk about it.

_interviewer:_ to look at it from a different perspective, you and I both know the science of climate change, we know that going to two degrees, three degree warming is a really serious thing which affects the whole way we live our lives.

_interviewee:_ yes

_interviewer:_ why can’t you talk about that?

_interviewee:_ because unfortunately, as is always the way in most of these issues which are contentious… you won’t take people with you politically.
building public and political consent

scientific evidence (eg IPCC)

International agreement

national (and local) targets

ratcheting of targets and policies

meaningful policies

building support
Some tentative conclusions

• Not just politicians making representative claims. We can all make claims (which are accepted, rejected or ignored)

• Both legitimate and necessary to ask of every policy / strategy: Does this build public support?

• The surrogate claim – ‘climate by stealth’ – has severe limitations

• Policies: Young people / divestment? Community energy? Smart grids? Local carbon trading?

• Institutional changes: Representing the future? Deliberative processes?
References


Willis R (forthcoming)
Constructing a ‘representative claim’ for action on climate change: Evidence from interviews with politicians. *In review*
Building political and public support for climate policies

Rebecca Willis
September 2017
Corpus analysis of parliamentary debate on the Climate Change Bill

What’s in:
• Science (but selective)
• ‘cause / effect’ words
• Technical solutions capture [relating to carbon capture], efficiency, low-carbon, reduction/reduce, trading, costs, CCS [carbon capture and storage], fuel, power stations, measures

What’s out:
• Environment & non-human species
• People and social groupings
• Abrupt or irreversible impacts
Dominance of economic and technical language:

- eg words ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’ occur twice as often compared to Budget corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical use of costs and benefits in CCB Corpus</th>
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<td>early action considerably outweigh the costs produce lower-bound estimates of the costs they say: Both short and long run what we propose to do, who will bear the costs, and that if the investments are made of carbon abatement in 2050 costs could be unevenly distributed, with costs and who will get the benefits</td>
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| and to reap the potential economic benefits possible to calculate precisely the economic benefits the thing is that it puts the maximum benefits of years, but then the technological benefits that are on offer benefits or disbenefits of specific actions benefits of the actions proposed in the Bill benefits should kick in, albeit before the.
Semantic grouping ‘kin’:
Used six times as often in Budget speech

Typical use of words within semantic grouping ‘kin’ (S4)

CCB Corpus (28 occurrences in 97k words)

incentive schemes, designed to encourage households to minimise and recycle their waste impact of this Bill on the costs of ordinary households to play their part the world that they live in, and about my grandchildren and the world they live in billion would equal over 10,000 from every family in every constituency balance of reducing emissions, not only at household level but between different sectors

designed to encourage

Budget Corpus (85 occurrences in 50k words)
economy now and help businesses and families I will postpone that increase many lives. Central to that is helping more parents into work. We want to demonstrate for first-time buyers and lower-income families and this will help more people one such constituent is 106 and her husband died 40 years ago about charging 30,000 per member of a household . I am pretty sure concerns