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Abstract:

This study addresses polarization by examining how targeted ideological messaging through use of moral cues may stimulate political participation and influence attitudes in support for green energy. Democrats and Republicans continue to disagree about how we should address environmental problems and how to solve the climate crisis. This has resulted in political standstills in moving forward with environmental legislation. While most climate change messaging tends to appeal to the ideals of the Democrat party, we also need to develop approaches that are attractive to Republicans to gain bipartisan support. Based on previous literature from Moral Foundations Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this project examines how moral cues may trigger differing levels of cognitive processing and how this varies by ideology. Greater cognitive processing has been shown to result in stronger influence on attitude and behavior and may offer evidence of how moral cues have been so effective in persuasion. Across two experiments, this study attempts to expand current literature in four ways: (1) gaining understanding of the mediating role of elaboration in the effectiveness of applying moral cues to influence attitude and behavior in an environmental context; (2) exploring how this relationship varies by ideology to expand knowledge about developing strategic messaging for partisan groups; (3) building understanding of how varying the number of morals affects conservatives; (4) and building on previous literature that found including morals which appeal to both conservatives and liberals will not be alienating to either group. As certain scientific topics have become increasingly politicized and polarized, this study serves to offer science communication professionals a deeper understanding of how to structure messages to address the polarization of science. Understanding how moral cues may be used to identify common bipartisan language may reduce these differences in opinion.