

Abstract

Ejelöv, E. (2022). *On the Psychology of Environmental Policy and the Influence of Social Norms*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, PO Box 500, SE-405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden.

Current environmental challenges, such as greenhouse gas emissions and water pollution, are large-scale problems that will be difficult to solve without the intervention of governments or the coordinated cooperation of a large number of people. While governments can steer citizen behavior in a pro-environmental direction by the use of environmental policies, the implementation of such policies is often hindered by negative public opinion. In other cases, it may not be desirable for governments to regulate citizen behavior. In such situations, large-scale cooperation among citizens can be encouraged by communicating social norms in favor of pro-environmental behavior. In this thesis, I apply a psychological perspective on environmental policy research to understand how laypeople perceive policies, and how social norms can be utilized to promote environmental policy acceptability and behavior intentions. As some research on laypeople attitudes towards environmental policies use categorizations that are made on assumptions of how laypeople perceive such policies, the aim of **Study 1** is to provide empirically valid categorizations of policies based on laypeople attitudes towards the policies. We assessed the attitudes of 2911 Swedish citizens towards 44 environmental policies currently in use in Sweden. An exploratory factor analysis indicated that Swedish citizens perceive three categories of policies, one consisting of push policies (regulatory and market-based policies using disincentives), one of pull policies (market-based instruments using incentives) and one of informational policies (such as labeling). Results suggest that some current policy categorizations used in research may not adequately capture how Swedish citizens perceive environmental policies. **Study 2** consists of two experiments investigating how normative information, in the form of public opinion, may affect attitudes toward environmental policies when the policy issue is perceived to be polarized along ideological lines. The results of a total of 928 American citizens indicated that an outgroup norm may promote acceptability of environmental policies when the policy is perceived to ideologically belong to the person's in-group. For example, when conservatives are positive toward a perceived liberal policy, liberals become more positive towards the policy. Conversely, we found that conservatives became more positive toward a perceived liberal policy when exposed to information that other conservatives were positive toward the policy. This is suggestive of a positive effect of an in-group norm when the policy is perceived as an outgroup policy. These results suggest that careful use of the public opinion from different political groups may be used to promote environmental policy acceptability in a polarized context. **Study 3** investigates whether the influence of descriptive norms is moderated by perceptions that normative behavior is performed due to either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. We hypothesized that pro-environmental descriptive norms would be more influential when attributing others' pro-environmental behavior as intrinsically rather than extrinsically, motivated. Over two experiments ($N = 1326$), we compared participants' intention to purchase pro-environmental products between four conditions: control condition vs intrinsic norm vs extrinsic norm (Exp. 1) vs injunctive norm (Exp. 2). Results consistently showed a significant increase in pro-environmental purchase intention in the intrinsic norm condition compared to both extrinsic norm condition (Exp. 2) and no-information control condition (Exp. 1 & 2).

Keywords: environmental policy, social norms, behavior intention, acceptability