

Framing Climate Mitigation: Communication Strategies for Overcoming Polarization and Securing Bipartisan Support

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BACKGROUND

- Scientific research continues to highlight the growing risks of climate change.
- Since the 1990s, political scientists have observed rising polarization, especially around climate issues.
- Political polarization remains a major barrier to bipartisan climate policy in the U.S.
- Communication research shows that strategic framing — making climate change personal and relatable for different groups — can broaden support across political lines.

**METHODS**

1. Evaluate General State Policy

2. Investigate Specific policies- How are they framed?

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

**HOUSE BILL No. 1615** Session of 2023

3. Analyze public opinion (news/legislative results)- Successful or Unsuccessful?

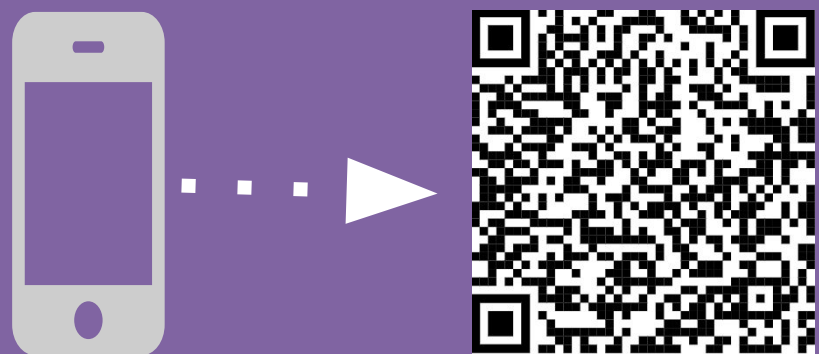
Result	Votes	Percentage
Yes	9,190	18.43%
No	40,680	81.57%

Vote	Count
Yes	102
No	99
No Vote	0
Recuse	1

Climate action controversy is often about messaging—conservatives may support it when framed around community safety and economic growth.

State	Frame	Example
 Texas <b>General Policy:</b> Texas submitted PCAP to EPA, and has RPS (very weak and voluntary).	Public Health and Safety  Business and Innovation  Public Accountability and Climate Justice	<b>Texas Water/Flood Protection Laws</b> <b>Texas Geothermal Energy Solutions</b> <b>Proposition K (El Paso)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Tried to establish a climate department, lower renewable energy costs, create climate charter and local ownership of utilities, ect.</li><li>Seen as too vague and costly, and there was threat of lawsuits.</li></ul>
 Pennsylvania <b>General Policy:</b> Pennsylvania submitted PCAP to EPA, has CAP, has AEPS, and joined RGGI (recently withdrew).	Economic Opportunity  Public Health and Safety	<b>PA C-Pace Program</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Greater access to financial capital and financing for businesses and property owners to implement efficient water systems and clean energy</li></ul> <b>PA House Bill 1615- Energy and Water Efficient Standards Act</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Emphasized lower utility bills, waste reduction, and less pollution from utilities</li></ul>
 California <b>General Policy:</b> California submitted PCAP to EPA, has CAP, RPS (100% by 2045), and Cap and Trade until 2030.	Business and Innovation  Public Health and Safety	<b>California Carbon Capture and Sequestration (2022)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Pro business and technology messaging</li></ul> <b>California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Package (2021-2022) and Senate Bill 379</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Emphasis on local safety and disaster prevention</li></ul>

Take a picture to download the full paper.



Why Does This Research Matter?

Transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy isn't just a technological challenge, it's a communication challenge. This research identifies the most effective communication strategies that harness bipartisan support for climate policy. Understanding what messaging strategies resonate best across the political spectrum—especially with conservatives—is key to building broader support, and more importantly, passing climate mitigation legislation.

Framing Types

Frame	Defines science-related issue as . . .
Social progress	A means of improving quality of life or solving problems; alternative interpretation as a way to be in harmony with nature instead of mastering it.
Economic development and competitiveness	An economic investment; market benefit or risk; or a point of local, national, or global competitiveness.
Morality and ethics	A matter of right or wrong; or of respect or disrespect for limits, thresholds, or boundaries.
Scientific and technical uncertainty	A matter of expert understanding or consensus; a debate over what is known versus unknown; or peer-reviewed, confirmed knowledge versus hype or alarmism.

Types of Climate Legislation

- Climate Plans  
CAP= Climate Action Plan  
PCAP= Priority Climate Action Plan  
CPRG= Climate Pollution Reduction Grant
- Renewable Energy
- RPS (Renewable Portfolio Standards)
  - Clean Energy Tax Incentives
  - AEPS (Alternative Energy Portfolio Standard)
- Carbon Pricing
- Cap and Trade
  - Carbon Tax
  - RGGI (Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative)

Results

- Public health and safety (including disaster prevention) framing and economic opportunity frames that focused on job growth, cost savings, private sector solutions, and innovative technology (ex. carbon capture) proved most successful.
- For all the states, focusing on the locality of issues was important to foster bipartisan support.
- Policy still failed on multiple accounts due to the following: seen as a government overreach, overly ambitious, use of justice-related messaging, and disagreement of policy implementation, despite agreement on overall goal.
- When climate mitigation is framed strategically, significant obstacles still prevent progress
  - Ex. Texas attracts fossil fuel companies and legislation has to bypass a strong wall of lobbyists.

Conclusion

Frames centered on local economic growth and public health (including disaster prevention) perform best at garnering bipartisan support. However, when policies are poorly framed and overly ambitious, they fail to gain support. Communication isn't everything, but it is a great starting point for passing more policy.