



IKMZ Speaker Series

Natural Scientists Advocating Climate Change Policies Undermines Persuasiveness

Monday, 7 October 2024, 4.15 p.m., room AND-2-02

Jon Krosnick

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Jon Krosnick is a social psychologist who does research on attitude formation, change, and effects, on the psychology of political behavior, and on survey research methods.

Author of seven published books and two forthcoming books and more than 190 articles and chapters, Dr. Krosnick conducts research in three primary areas: (1) attitude formation, change, and effects, (2) the psychology of political behavior, and (3) the optimal design of questionnaires used for laboratory experiments and surveys, and survey research methodology more generally.

His attitude research has focused primarily on the notion of attitude strength, seeking to differentiate attitudes that are firmly crystallized and powerfully influential of thinking and action from attitudes that are flexible and inconsequential. Dr. Krosnick's studies have illuminated the origins of attitude importance (e.g., material self-interest and values) and the cognitive and behavioral consequences of importance in regulating attitude impact and attitude change processes.

Abstract

Natural scientists often conduct research with public policy implications, but their findings rarely dictate specific policy solutions. This study explores whether natural scientists should limit their public communications to their research findings or advocate for specific policies. By “staying in their lane,” scientists may avoid appearing to express opinions outside their expertise, potentially enhancing their persuasiveness.

Dr. Krosnick's team tested this hypothesis through online survey experiments involving 9,822 American adults. Participants watched videos of a natural scientist presenting climate change findings. In some studies, the natural scientist only described natural science findings or did so while also saying that the public should pressure government to take action on the issue. In other experiments, the natural scientist explained natural science findings and then advocated specific emissions reduction policies or advocated government effort to deal with the issue without specifying specific methods for emissions reduction. These studies document a surprising impact of “crossing the line” on message recipients' opinions. All this raises important questions about how experts in all fields should define their lanes and stay in them.

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