

A matter of time? The role of future time orientation and temporal distance in the ideological climate change skepticism gap



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BACKGROUND

- The ideological gap in climate change beliefs is well-documented in Western countries,
- but not enough is known on the factors driving this relationship.
- We focused on one possible contributing factor: **liberals and conservatives might think differently about the future**
- Why is that? Possibly because conservative ideology is more focused on the past, while liberals focus more on the future. Also, conservatives might be less comfortable with uncertainty, inherent in thinking about and planning for the future.

METHODS

- We ran 3 online studies: 2 in the Netherlands and 1 in the UK (total N=654)
- We measured:
 1. Climate change beliefs
 - “Humans are too insignificant to have an appreciable impact on global temperature “
 1. Political orientation
 - Left-right & liberal-conservative
 2. Consideration of Future Consequences
 - “I am willing to sacrifice my immediate happiness or well-being in order to achieve future outcomes “
 3. Temporal distance to climate change
 - “Climate change is an immediate threat affecting people right now “



Conservatives think less about the future and perceive the effects of climate change to be further in the future than liberals. This can partially explain why conservatives believe in climate change less.

OA published paper available here:



RESULTS

Correlations (averaged across studies)

	1.	2.	3.
1. Climate skepticism	—		
2. Future time orientation	-.44***	—	
3. Temporal distance to climate change	.57***	-.33***	—
4. Political ideology	.37***	-.24*	.35***

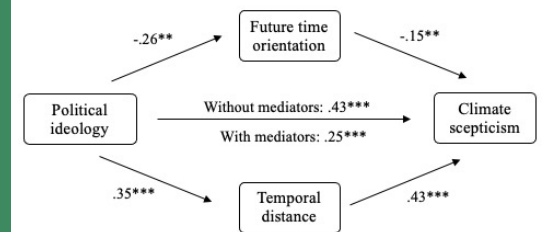
Note. ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Hierarchical regressions

Relative contribution of political ideology on climate skepticism is reduced when introducing time variables, so we tested...

Mediation models

(standardized coefficients averaged across Studies 2 & 3)



Open questions:

- How does the influence of time-related variables on conservatives' beliefs in climate change relate to motivated cognition processes?
- Implications for climate communication:
 - *Future-priming* could help bridge the ideological gap
 - Focusing on the more *present impacts* of climate change could appeal more to conservatives

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