Climate (in)action, communication and democracy in New Zealand

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Abstract

Despite New Zealand's active participation in multilateral climate change negotiations, and despite the economic benefit the country derives from its clean-green brand, domestic policy action has been muted and minimal. Policy inaction has been supported by ambivalence in public opinion: a 2014 survey showed that less than half of New Zealanders believe in the reality of climate change, or its negative consequences for the country. The over-riding question of this paper is why the overwhelming scientific consensus on climate change has not led to a shift in public opinion that would make policy action politically inevitable? A growing literature has located a problem in the ineffective messaging of climate advocates, that has assumed that a presentation of the science would be sufficient to prompt action. This paper surveys the arguments made for and against climate action in the New Zealand public sphere. It argues that climate messaging has, in fact, taken on board calls that it be principled (values-based), positive and practical, but that resistance remains to calls for climate action. The papers considers the reasons for democratic resistance to expert opinion, and assesses concrete calls for action.

Introduction

Despite New Zealand's active participation in multilateral climate change negotiations (Minstry for the Environment, 2016), and despite the economic benefit the country derives from its clean-green brand, domestic policy action has been muted and minimal. A planned carbon tax was never implemented, and the country has an emissions trading scheme that has been heavily criticized as insufficiently comprehensive and ambitious. Meanwhile, between 1990 and 2010, New Zealand's net emissions increased by sixty percent, the second largest increase amongst developed countries (UNFCCC, 2012). Policy inaction has been supported by ambivalence in public opinion: a 2014 survey (Leining & White, 2015) showed that less than half of New Zealanders are 'certain that climate change is really happening', and only 41% believe that climate change is likely to negatively affect New Zealand.

The over-riding question of this paper is why the overwhelming scientific consensus on climate change has not led to significant policy action to reduce national and global emissions. More specifically, why has this scientific consensus not led to a shift in public opinion that would make policy action politically inevitable? The paper begins by summarising the official reasons given for not implementing a more stringent regulatory regime. The broad contours of such argumentation are predictable and familiar: the New Zealand government has been unwilling to impose any costs on local industries when global trade partners (constructed as competitors) have not (Boston, 2011). The arguments, naturally, also carry a local inflection based on the peculiarities of the country's emissions profile (agricultural emissions account for 48% of New Zealand's GHG emissions (Ministry for the Environment, 2015) compared to 24% globally (Environmental Protection Agency, 2015)) and the particular vulnerabilities arising from the country's uniquely small and remote geo-economic position.

In addition to these political-economic barriers, a growing literature highlights the psychological barriers that stop the public from accepting the need for meaningful action (Bandura, 2007; Gifford, 2011; Jost & Major, 2001). This paper conducts an analysis of the public statements of civil society groups seeking to persuade people to accept and support a robust response to climate change (including their parliamentary speeches, press releases and media interviews) focussing on how these acts of persuasion are designed to overcome these psychological barriers, in a discursive context dominated by the neoliberal emphasis on promoting the economic competitiveness of individuals, firms and the national economy (Brown, 2015).

The paper sets out the nature and the logic of competing arguments, and seeks to show that the dominance of arguments against meaningful policy change have not dominated due to any inherent linguistic coherence or rhetorical elegance. This point is important, because many advocacy and activist groups are putting increasing emphasis on crafting compelling messages. The paper argues that while this emphasis is useful and should be applauded, it is unlikely to be sufficient to generate a democratic consensus.

Challenges of climate change communication

A growing chorus of voices have agreed that public communication by climate advocates has so far been broadly ineffective and unhelpful. Rowson and Corner (2014) argue that such communication has remained 'stubbornly stuck, like a broken record, on a problematic

vision of 'The Science' translating into a comically generic injunction for Action' that has left implicit 'most of the difficult ethical, cultural, political and economic questions'. These tendencies are certainly understandable. Climate scientists live and breathe in the data and it is the data that motivate them to communicate. Yet relying on the data as a communication strategy betrays a 'positivist model of human agency' that 'tends to perpetuate unhelpful presumptions about what people have reason … to do' (Hall, 2016). The critique of extant communication efforts holds that a presentation of facts does not motivate people to act, since human agents tend to be motivated by values and positive prescriptions for action rather than by demonstrations of statistical and empirical fact (Bain et al., 2016).

A body of research questions the assumption that people evaluate competing claims through anything approaching a process of objective rational calculation. On the contrary, people are routinely shown to discount information that challenges and disturbs their settled beliefs and assumptions (Bain et al., 2016). The paper draws on elements of system justification theory and psychological work examining the importance of positive and negative emotional states (Harré, 2011). System justification theory posits that an advantage accrues to arguments that assert the justness of the existing system (Jost & Major, 2001). As Johnson (2015) notes, 'just as individuals are driven to view themselves and their social groups in a favourable light' they are 'also driven to view the wider systems on which they depend in a favourable light … thereby perceiving [the status quo] as more legitimate than it actually is.' Denialist arguments are psychologically comforting and thus attractive compared to assertions of catastrophic outcomes and suggestions that our existing political economic systems are broken and unfair.

Harre's (2011) work summarises that different effects of human actors of positive and negative emotions. She shows how negative emotional states constrict creativity, collaboration, motivation and perceived agency, whereas positive states can facilitate these things. Taken together, these two frameworks demonstrate the advantage enjoyed by arguments that offer reassurance rather than threat. When climate activists insist that things are *not* fine, they evoke negative emotions of anxiety, guilt and fear that work against public receptivity to their arguments. People experiencing these negative emotions have a psychological incentive to ignore or deny such arguments. For climate change communicators, this poses a real problem. 'Presenting the reality of a serious social problem… creates system threat. For those so inclined, system justification then kicks in, with all the resistance to reality and social change that that entails' (Johnson, 2015). Climate change denial is thus understood here not as a falsifiable cognitive claim but as a psychological coping strategy. The paper thus understands the effectiveness of arguments not simply through an analysis of the formal structure of the argument itself, but also through exploring the psychological factors underpinning audience receptivity.

Responding to this quandary, significant emphasis has been placed on the importance of crafting compelling messages. Against desiderata of messaging that is principled (values-based), positive and practical, the critique runs that much climate change messaging has been fact-based, negative and defensive.[1] The analysis undertaken in this paper of

[1] A small industry has grown up advising advocacy groups on how to craft messages able to persuade citizen-voters that climate action is consistent with their interests, by activating values rather than simply reciting

contemporary climate communication campaigns suggests that this critique may be overstated. While it is undoubtedly true that climate scientists have tended to communicate in empirically-driven reports, they can hardly be expected to do otherwise. Rather than critiquing climate scientists for producing data-heavy reports, it makes more sense to assess how well other parts of the climate advocacy ecosystem have translated and amplified the available science. This paper demonstrates that the science is *already* being articulated as something more than 'flood[ing] the public with as much sound data as possible' (Cultural Cognition Project); that messages are *already* being framed as an 'appeal to values' (Harris, 2017).

These findings carry more than just academic interest. Critiques of a 'flood of data' messaging style carry a comforting corollary. The critique implies that if messaging strategies could be improved, then a public consensus is there for the making and taking. If, however, it can be shown that messaging has already been based on the suggested criteria (principled, positive, and practical) and that this has not had the desired effect, then we are confronted with tougher questions. If public opinion has not been influenced and shaped by the compelling presentation of sound data, what does this tell us about the prospects for a democratic response to climate change?

Climate communication and citizen engagement

Climate advocacy groups seek to persuade people that climate action promotes their interests (so long as those interests are properly understood). This effort is predicated on the assumption that voters predictably and reliably vote in line with their interests. This assumption is challenged, however, by the results of academic work (most recently in Achen & Bartels, 2016). This is not necessarily the patronising claim that normal citizens are *incapable* of engaging in rational, meaningful deliberation. The claim, more minimally, is simply that they *don't*, given their other priorities and concerns. Within the critical-interpretive traditions of policy study, the answer to this problem of democracy has typically been more democracy: usually through facilitating direct participation and deliberation. Indeed, studies have shown that deliberative exercise can increase support for policy action on climate change (Dryzek et al., 2009) Such calls are often framed as calls to counter the power of expertise with the expertise of an empowered citizenry (see Fischer, 2009 for an important overview). The relevant problem, in this reading, is that the historical rise of the expert-technocrat at the expense of opportunities for citizen participation in democratic decisions.

Climate change is a challenging issue in this light. From a "progressive" perspective, it is scientific expertise that establishes the problem and legitimates the necessary response. The problem here is not anti-democratic technocrats trumping the desires of the public for a decent life. On the contrary, the problem might be understood as the demos resisting expert calls for urgent action. This public sentiment, in turn, is constructed and supported by powerful actors whose economic interests are threatened by calls for action. But these voices of scepticism and inaction gain credence through resonating with a deep-seated psychological inclination towards reassurance and justification of the existing order.

facts (for example, Anat Shenker-Osorio's ASO Communications, Drew Westen's Westen Strategies, Common Cause in Australia).]

The paper returns below to the key question of how a democratic society can respond to climate change when voters cannot be persuaded of the need for action. Before doing so, it takes a necessarily brief dive into textual data drawn from public debates over climate change policy in New Zealand. The data are drawn from three sources: parliamentary debates in 2012 over the appropriate legislative response to climate change; sceptical voices in broader civil society: and the (more recent) calls to climate action made by a range of advocacy and activist groups. These data are analysed firstly in terms of their argumentative logic (what are the problems identified by different arguments? What policy responses are suggested (and ruled out) by these different representations of the relevant problem?) Further, the arguments *for* climate action are assessed against the proposed criteria of effective messaging discussed above.

Climate change arguments in parliament

In 2012, New Zealand's centre-right coalition government (led by the National Party) introduced and passed the Climate Change Response (Emissions Trading and Other Matters) Amendment Bill (CCRAB). This Bill proposed a series of amendments to a legislative response that was already criticised for its limited ambition: an Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) that excluded agriculture, imposed no set carbon price on emitters, and had - since 2009 - offered emitters two ETS units for the price of one. The major provisions of the CCRAB (2012) delayed agriculture's entry into the ETS indefinitely, and prolonged the two-for-one provisions. The Bill was, in sum, designed to 'take off some of the speed at which [the legislation] is going down… the climate change Highway'. Besides considerations of operational and administrative efficiency, it was held to be justified by its 'consistency with the government's economic growth objectives' (Groser, in NZPD, 8 November 2012).

The Government defended the Bill by using the trope of balance. It argued that the proposed legislation struck an appropriate balance between:

1. environmental and economic aims
2. New Zealand's and international efforts
3. ideals and "the real world"

Against the argument that climate change was the most pressing issue of our time and that it therefore demanded a vigorous response, the Bill constructed a balance between the environmental and the economic. The government was transparent in constructing environmental considerations as thoroughly subservient to its economic objectives:

> The Government is seeking to make changes to the emissions trading scheme because its overarching objective is to strengthen the recovery in a very fragile international economic situation. We did not, therefore, consider it a stellar time to increase charges and taxes on households and the firms that employ New Zealanders (Tim Groser, in NZPD, 13 September 2012).

The post-GFC economic challenges had a domestic element, but they were fundamentally global in nature, and policy action was framed as 'potentially a short-term response to very fragile economic conditions globally, so that … there are jobs for people and we remain competitive in this big world that we live in' (Bridges, in NZPD, 20 September 2012).

This broad premise was shared by parties who ultimately opposed the Bill, including New Zealand First - 'We maintain that the role of the State must be to strike a balance between economic progress and appropriate environmental goals' (Winston Peters, in NZPD, 23 August 2012) – and the Maori Party - 'We believe that we need to find a balance between keeping our most important exporter afloat during tough economic times, but at the same time protecting … the environment' (Te Ururoa Flavell, in ibid.) For government members, limiting the costs of the ETS on firms, and excluding agricultural emissions meant that 'our emissions trading scheme is helping to contribute to a stronger and more productive economy.' The Bill, in sum, was a 'pragmatic series of measures' that represented 'a sensible approach in these troubled economic times (Maggie Barry, in NZPD, 8 November 2012).

The Bill aimed, secondly, for a balance between the responsibilities of New Zealand and of others: 'we are doing the right thing for New Zealanders at this time, and we are doing our fair share in relation to climate change' (Bridges, in NZPD, 20 September 2012). The trope of 'doing our fair share' was explicit and oft-repeated. The government claimed to have 'campaigned quite explicitly on the basis of the formula that we wanted New Zealand to pay its fair share, but not to lead the world' (Groser, in NZPD, 8 November 2012). As National MP Todd McClay put it on the same day, 'New Zealand certainly has a role to play … but for the sake of jobs and income in New Zealand we must do *only* our part' (my emphasis).' These first two forms of balance were, for National, related to each other. For Nick Smith (in NZPD, 23 August 2012), 'New Zealand needs to take a balanced approach … [on] which we are doing our fair share as a country but one where we are also realistic about the sort of pressure business and households are under.' The Bill, for Todd McClay (in NZPD, 23 August 2012), was responsible because 'it does our fair share on behalf of New Zealand but it keeps down costs on New Zealand consumers, on New Zealand businesses, and on New Zealand mums and dads.'

The major opposition parties – Labour and the Greens – rejected that seeking balance in these terms was appropriate. Their critique of the Bill was framed in largely negative terms: they held that the scientific consensus on the scale and the urgency of the problem (see Chauvel, Dyson and Cunliffe in NZPD, 8 November 2012) provided moral grounds for a stronger policy response. In the Bill's third (and final) reading, it was left to the final Opposition speaker to attempt to construct a positive vision of an alternative, flourishing future. Green MP Gareth Hughes, taking only half a call, began by rehearsing the negative narrative ('the Arctic melting, super-storms, droughts, floods, heat waves killing people right now, and the global temperature inexorably rising') and noting the failures of the Government's response, arguing that the ETS as amended by the Bill 'is going to cost taxpayers, who are subsidising it … and the country' as a whole. Hughes uses this litany of complaint, however, as a base from which to build an alternative vision:

> The answers are obvious. They are available right now and they will benefit our economy, because … tackling climate change is about jobs. It is about new jobs in energy efficiency … forestry … transport … [and] in smart farming. It is about farmers and city dwellers working together, coming together for localised food production … It is about communities coming together and investing in a wind turbine … It is about Kiwi firms putting solar panels on people's homes. It is about Kiwi businesses innovating, exporting and manufacturing… It is about tackling climate change to give our kids a safe future. Tackling climate change is

not the cost you hear about from those Government benches; it is the biggest economic opportunity of the century.'

There is certainly much that could be critiqued here: the denial of trade-offs between environmental and economic considerations; the suggestion that progressive change can be made simply be producing and consuming different goods and services, without any challenge to the underlying mental models that support and naturalise materialism and over-consumption; the implication that an environmental policy is ultimately legitimated by its contribution to economic growth, activity and competitiveness (see Brown, 2015). What is most interesting here, though, is not the rejection of National's trade-offs between the environment and economic growth, but the effort to construct a positive vision of a future of connection and creativity: note the spectre of different people and groups (farmers and city dwellers; whole communities) 'coming together', and of the bold, innovative thinking required to develop positive alternatives.

The last balance that the government sought was more rhetorical, but underpinned their fundamental approach to climate change as an issue. This was the balance they sought between ideals and their conception of "the real world". This trope came out most strongly in heated exchanges in parliament with Green MP Kennedy Graham. In a highly-charged speech that was subject to consistent heckling, Graham (in NZPD, 8 November 2012) charged the government and individual ministers five times 'with the moral crime of ecocide.' Charges were also laid of 'criminal negligence' and 'violating the sacred trust.'

Graham flatly rejected the proposition that balance was an appropriate goal. Noting that the Bill 'is described as a balancing act. It balances our international reputation, doing our fair share, with New Zealand's national interests in economic recovery, and, indeed, future growth', Graham holds that 'in calibrating such an exquisite balancing act, the Government loses the plot.' Given the crucial importance of the issue, that task, for Graham 'is not to soften the pain for the current generation; it is to ensure the survival of the next.' Balance thus led to morally unacceptable outcomes.

These claims that scientific fact and moral necessity might over-ride economic considerations did not go down well. National MP Nick Smith (in NZPD, 8 November 2012) held that Graham's speech 'exposes the disservice that is done to the environmental movement by the Green Party.' Smith described Graham's presentation of scientific predications as a 'gross exaggeration' and the charges of ecocide as 'completely over-the-top.' In dealing with an admittedly important issue like climate change, it is 'vitally important', said Smith, that we 'stick to the facts', and 'get down to earth.' Rejecting Graham's speech as overblown hyperbole, Smith reiterated the primacy of balance: 'This difficult issue of climate change is actually a balance between how much progress we wish to make as a nation in curbing our emissions … compared with what costs we are prepared to impose on our economy.'

Climate denial outside of parliament

In the parliamentary debates analysed above, we see no outright climate denial. Climate change is acknowledged, but its moment and urgency are (implicitly) denied in calls to approach it in a balanced and down to earth fashion. When Maggie Barry (in NZPD, 8 November 2012) urged the Greens 'to get a grip on the reality … if they want to make a useful contribution', reality was constructed as a common-sense, status quo reading of

economic reality rather than a focus on scientific reality. This trope of balance (primarily of balance between economic and environmental objectives) is only made tenable, however, by work done elsewhere that keeps climate change in the realm of contested issues that are "up for debate." The more overt, outright forms of denial that perform this "merchant of doubt" (Oreskes, 2011) role come from a range of sectors.

Noteworthy examples have come from high rating broadcaster Mike Hosking ('if the Met Service struggles with the accuracy of a five-day forecast, I'm thinking the accuracy of a long-range prediction that takes in 86 years might be a bit dodgy. So my advice: don't let it ruin your night' (Media Law Journal, 2014); ex-ACT Party[2] leader and opinion columnist Rodney Hide ('So there you have it. More and more certain. Less and less evidence. The IPCC's disconnect from reality has left me 85 per cent certain in my diagnosis: the IPCC's psychotic' (Hide, 2013); and Federated Farmers spokesman Barry McAlley ('the science behind this seems to be 50-50' (cited in Barry & King-Jones, 2013)). These statements appear comically reductive when placed against summaries of IPCC reports. Judging, however, by the lack of any electoral sanction for National's climate inaction from 2008, they may well resonate with voters. Indeed, the National-led coalition governments who since 2008 have (beyond weakening the ETS) promoted increased exploitation of fossil fuel reserves and dairy intensification, have in no way been electorally punished. They have, rather, enjoyed levels of consistent popularity unmatched in contemporary New Zealand politics (Pundit, 2017).

In the face of apparent public acceptance of climate inaction, a range of activist groups continue to call for a more vigorous response. In the following section, the paper summarises the logic and structure of arguments made by the New Zealand Green Party, by youth movement Generation Zero, and by Greenpeace (New Zealand). The purpose of this analysis is to assess the extent to which their arguments align with prescriptions for messaging that is principled, positive and practical.

Green Party

In the lead-up to the 2016 Paris climate talks, the Greens (2015) released a report that stated that the Government's announced reduction target (an 11 percent reduction on 1990 levels by 2020) failed to meet the criterion that New Zealand should "do our fair share": 'if all countries followed New Zealand's lead, catastrophic climate change would be the result' (p. 3). Much of the report is technical in nature, explaining how the Greens' determination of the country's 'fair share' (a '40 percent reduction by 2030'), could be achieved, by setting out required actions in significant sectors. Of most interest here are the ways in which the case for this strategy was made in the opening and concluding sections.

Rejecting National's preferred framing of "balance" and "keeping things in perspective", the Greens drew strongly on the trope of national identity: New Zealand's answer to the questions posed by climate change, it was said, 'will define us'. 'It's time', the Greens asserted, 'for a climate change plan New Zealand can be proud of' (p. 3). Their climate plan was presented not as the defensive preservation of a desired good against threat but as the future-focussed pursuit of something new and valuable: It was, said co-leader James Shaw,

[2] The ACT Party is a classical liberal, free-market party. Critics have noted that the party adopted a more strident climate denial list line after receiving substantial funding from overseas groups (Hot Topic, 2014). Hide has continued in this vein since leaving Parliament in 2011.

‘a bold … plan with vision, leadership and Kiwi ingenuity.’ (p. 3). The country, said the Greens, ‘can lead’ if it takes this historic opportunity ‘to be nimble and quick’ (p. 25). By contrast, the existing Government’s climate inaction was ‘a backwards and hands-off approach that will leave us behind’, putting the country ‘at a long-term disadvantage.’ (p. 6, see also p. 25.) Climate inaction, they said, amounts to passivity: ‘sitting on our hands and waiting for others to lead’ (p. 25).

Pointedly, the Greens did not counterpoise their environmental vision against a focus on growth and jobs. Rather, social, economic and environmental objectives are held to be aligned (even interdependent), in the repeated formulation that New Zealand must transition to ‘a cleaner, fairer, and more prosperous future.’ (p. 7 – see also pp. 4, 26). The document cited with approval Felipe Calderon’s assertion that ‘it is possible to create jobs, reduce poverty, and reduce the carbon emissions that threaten our future’, so long as ‘we make fundamental changes and smart choices’ (cited on p. 27). Though the document did not dwell on what ‘fundamental changes’ might be required, it asserted that ‘action on climate change is a win-win for people and the planet, now and into the future’ (p. 28). Reiterating Gareth Hughes’ (in NZPD, 8 November 2012) invocation of a future that is flourishing beyond just prosperity and jobs, the Greens evoke a future where ‘we will have more vibrant, greener cities, where public transport is fast, clean and affordable [and where] kids will be able to walk and cycle to school safely’ (p. 27).

Generation Zero

This latter point (that an ambitious, creative response to climate change is not a dour self-denying asceticism, but the promise of a connected, creative, flourishing future) is central to the messaging strategy of youth-led climate advocacy group Generation Zero. In their self-description (Generation Zero, 2016), they note the urgency of the problem (‘climate change is the challenge of our generation’) but they neither explain nor dwell on the nature of the problem. Rather, they immediately move on to describing their ‘central purpose’ as ‘providing solutions’, and those solutions are framed in inherently (rather than instrumentally) desirable terms: ‘smarter transport, liveable cities & independence from fossil fuels’. These goals are presented not simply as aspirational, but as eminently achievable: ‘as New Zealanders, we are fortunate enough to possess an abundance of opportunities to make this transition.’ This theme is developed in a repeated “yes we can” formulation: ‘We can power our homes, our industries and our economy with clean safe energy. We can build more liveable cities with greater housing and transport choices .... We can move beyond fossil fuels and create a safer and healthier nation by doing so’ (ibid.) As with Gareth Hughes (in NZPD, 8 November 2012) the task is framed not in party political terms nor as an elite-driven utopia but rather as a popular movement: ‘solutions will not come from one minority, one political party, or one ideology … [but] from real New Zealanders, from all backgrounds joining together under a central vision’ (ibid.)

Generation Zero’s pursuit of solutions to climate change take them into a range of policy areas and scales, including urban planning and transport infrastructure policy at local government level. While their proposals rest on a good deal of policy and legal work, their public messaging is light on statistics and detail, relying heavily on emotive phrases and images that evoke positive emotions. The infographics that support their promotion of Auckland Council’s Unitary Plan (a plan that would allow for higher density housing, thus limiting urban sprawl and facilitating a more efficient public transport network) have

nothing to say about the technicalities of changing zoning restrictions, focussing instead on a vision of a dynamic, vibrant and person-focussed urban environment, relying on images more than on text (Generation Zero, 2016).

The group's largest-scale piece of work is the development and promotion of a Zero Carbon Act (ZCA) that would 'commit New Zealand to zero carbon by 2050 or sooner, set a legally binding pathway to this target, and require the Government to make a plan' (Generation Zero, 2017). The ZCA proposal explicitly names one aspect of contemporary democratic practice (partisan politics in the context of short (three-year) electoral cycles) as an important obstacle to the necessity of 'broad political commitment, immediate action, and coherent long-term planning.' To counteract the electoral self-interest of each party in maintaining short-term economic competitiveness, the ZCA incorporates an independent Climate Commission (modelled on the UK example) that would consist of '6 - 10 experts appointed by Parliament' to provide 'expert advice on targets, policies and climate risks' and hold 'the Government to account' (ibid.) An independent Climate Commission is also official Green Party policy. They envisage that such a Commission, 'comprising recognised experts on climate change and macroeconomic policy' would become the country's 'foremost authority on climate change', responsible for 'setting the ongoing price of carbon, and recommending complementary measures for greenhouse gas emissions reduction in order to meet our targets' (Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2015, p. 9).

Greenpeace

Greenpeace's introductory summary of climate change balanced a statement of the problem ('climate change is real. We're seeing the effects all around us - polar ice melting, sea level rising and extreme weather events') with a more practical and positive statement of response: we are 'campaigning for climate solutions that will help us prosper without damaging the planet. By starting an energy revolution, protecting our forests and switching to smart farming we can protect our natural world for future generations' (Greenpeace New Zealand, n.d.-b) Their more day-to-day messages, however, tend towards the relentlessly negative. Beyond repeating the negative environmental consequences (Greenpeace New Zealand, n.d.-a), Greenpeace held that 'if we do nothing, climate change will cost us around 20% of total gross domestic product (GDP) over the next half century. That's more than the cost of both world wars and the great depression put together' (Greenpeace New Zealand, n.d.-c).

Many of their Press Releases are highly critical of government inaction. A 2015 release held that the 'National led government has an appalling record with regards to tackling climate change', that it 'has failed to introduce a single policy to encourage the growth in clean energy technology' and that it 'has renewed its commitment to the target of 90% of our electricity coming from renewable energy by 2025, but has made no plan for getting there' (Greenpeace New Zealand, 2015). Taken together, these statements reinforce the urgency and the gravity of the climate change challenge, but might be seen as evoking negative emotions and engendering a sense of helplessness along with anger. One gets the sense that, rather than seeking to persuade uncommitted voters, they are communicating primarily to an already-persuaded base of supporters, and attempting to motivate that base to sustained protest and action.

Discussion

The broad conclusion here is that most of these groups have taken the critique of earlier climate messaging on board. While the problem of climate change is established in scientific and negative terms, much of the messaging discussed above is principled (values-based), positive and practical. Thus far, however, these groups have met with limited success in terms of shifting public opinion. As we have seen, only a minority of New Zealanders believe that climate change is really happening, or that it will negatively impact on the country. This is some distance from Hughes' vision (in NZPD, 8 November 2012) of a community-led public movement that would 'make it impossible for any Government of any hue not to act on the climate'.

The limited success – thus far – of climate change communication is typically perceived as a puzzle for those committed to action: how, they wonder, is it possible for people to sit by when faced with the biggest crisis facing the planet? As Graham (in NZPD, 8 November 2012) asks rhetorically: 'Are we mad? Are we so blindingly stupid? … Are we so craven? … Are we so intellectually weak?' In part this is a generational issue of neoliberal subjectification: those who have become politically active since the neoliberal upheavals of the 1990s have no real experience or (therefore) expectation of government action as the solution to major problems, nor have they been socialised within democratic institutions such as trade unions (union density of New Zealand's private sector, for example, has slumped to approximately ten per cent (REF from AAAJ). To generalise a good deal, this generation has been socialised, instead, within a free labour market with reduced expectations of social support and protection, a lived experience that encourages the internalisation of neoliberal norms, and of the criterion as the legitimating principle for individuals, firms and states (see Dardot & Laval, 2014).

The limited impact of climate change communication also suggests the limits of effective messaging as a vehicle for political change. While it would be foolish to suggest that communicating effectively is unimportant, we might at the same time suggest that the salient problem may well have very little to do with messaging technique. This prescribed emphasis on effective communication rests on an assumption of rational, self-interested voters: it seeks to more effectively inform and persuade people that climate action is necessary, since the consequences of climate change work against the interests – rightly understood - of most (or all) voters. This emphasis, then, is aligned with dominant theories of political behaviour, according to which 'ordinary people have preferences about what their government should do', with those preferences then expressed through either representative or direct means (i.e. through either elections or referenda). In either case, what the majority wants becomes government policy (Achen and Bartels, (2016).

Studies of voter behaviour, however (see Achen and Bartels (2016) for a summary) challenge this understanding. Bartels (in Illing, 2017) argues that 'much of politics … turns out to be about expressive behaviour rather than instrumental behaviour – in other words, people making decisions based on momentary feeling and not on some sound understanding of how those decisions will improve or hurt their life.' The failure of climate advocates to – thus far - effect a decisive shift in public opinion or political behaviour might be seen as an example of voters failing to apprehend and then vote their interests. Indeed, when so many voters appear willing to discount not just a scientific consensus, but also a

range of emotionally-resonant arguments for action, the existing democratic process may seem an unpromising way to deal with such a pressing problem.

As we have seen, human psychology is a salient factor here. A clear statement of the causes and consequences of climate change is psychologically disturbing, and less easily accepted than arguments that offer reassurance (arguments, for example, that climate change has been exaggerated, and that existing social-economic systems are fundamentally fair). Also salient is the institutional structure of the political context. Limiting domestic emissions (through, for example, a carbon tax) will tend to impose short-term costs on specified actors or sectors, for the sake of long-term benefits that will, by their nature, be widely-dispersed. Further, a key aspect of neo-liberal subjectification has been the widespread acceptance of the proposition that political legitimacy is derived from economic competitiveness. These contextual factors make it more difficult for any individual administration to embark on an ambitious emission-reduction path. Even those emission reduction targets that have been accepted in international fora have not been supported by any detailed plan likely to achieve the stated targets. Incumbent governments have an electoral incentive to defuse criticisms by looking like they are doing something, while leaving any controversial actions to later administrations.

The two concrete plans for climate action proposed by the advocacy groups discussed above can be seen as responses to these challenges. Firstly, as discussed above, some climate advocacy groups have identified the desire for electoral popularity within a short-term electoral cycle as a barrier to meaningful policy action. The partisan impasse provides the background to support for a non-partisan, independent Climate Commission. The zero-sum game of partisan self-interest might be overcome, they argue, if both major parties could be persuaded to commit to implementing the recommendations of such a Commission. While this proposal offers a productive way forward, it remains a limited step, insofar as it leaves untouched the larger-scale zero-sum game of global negotiations: what incentive exists for New Zealand to do anything (given the country's minimal contribution to global emissions) if it makes local industries globally uncompetitive? Any cross-party agreement to commit to the recommendations of an independent commission, in other words, would need to overcome the pre-existing consensus on the primary importance of maintaining national economic competitiveness in a hostile global environment.

Wendy Brown (2015) notes the neoliberal insistence that the political legitimacy of the state is secured through national economic competitiveness. She demonstrates how, for example, the Obama Administrations consistently legitimated progressive social and environmental policies on the basis not of their inherent worth, but of their instrumental contribution to the overarching goal of continued economic expansion. The *a priori* of economic competitiveness is stabilised through the widespread internalisation of neoliberal norms and aspirations, but also through the performance of economic power. Walter Wriston, former head of Citibank, contended long ago (in Pauly, 1995, p. 380) that the gold standard has been replaced by something 'far more draconian': the information standard, where policy decisions are evaluated in real time by the trading rooms of the world, and which lends large investors the capacity to punish "bad" policies. Implicit here is also the claim that large investors carry the definition to define policies as good or bad, and will do so based on their own interests. They become, in this sense, the 'sovereign definer' (Wolin, 1961).

A second concrete plan has accommodated itself to this constraint. Instead of emphasising negative sanctions (taxes, fees and statutory limits), New Zealand's Green Party stresses the long-term economic opportunities of a future that is 'cleaner, fairer, and more prosperous' (Green Party, 2015, pp. 4, 7, 26). Action on climate change need, according to this plan, need not be a trade-off with economic competitiveness. Rather, it 'is a win-win for people and the planet, now and into the future' (ibid., p. 28). The emphasis on "smart" growth weakens the reliance of climate action on political support. It requires not strong regulation but simply a benign environment. This might be achieved actively, through subsidies for new clean industries, but also, more minimally, through the removal of subsidies and support for old dirty industries. In either case, the Green Party here is not rejecting but seeking to work with the neoliberal vision of economic competitiveness as the criterion of political legitimacy.

The Green Party has been strongly criticised among the New Zealand left for its movement towards this sort of business-friendly position. Former Green MP Sue Bradford (cited in Manhire, 2017) saw the Greens' "Budget Responsibility Rules" as the Party 'nailing their colours to the mast of neoliberal capitalism', concluding that they had become 'a party of capitalism' and 'a party that Business New Zealand now loves.' While the Greens continue to argue in parliament – passionately, as we have seen – for a stronger regulatory regime, the unmistakable emphasis in their public-facing statements has been on a transition to new technologies and industry, justified on its capacity to generate competitive advantage, economic growth and job opportunities. This win-win message that promises to reconcile economic and environmental objectives has certain psychological advantages: it does not need to posit a broken system; it is inherently positive and future-focussed, and it stresses the long-term risk to competitiveness of remaining with the status quo. At the same time, it can be critiqued from the environmental left as an agenda that does nothing more than divert production and consumption into different areas, without questioning the mental models that legitimate and necessitate endless growth as a normative end-in-itself.

As a pragmatic-empirical matter of reducing emissions as quickly as possible, however, it might be seen as a necessary response to the failures of representative democracy to give expression to calls for a meaningful regulatory response. If twenty-five years of serious scientific and policy effort in New Zealand has not led to a politically acceptable consensus (Barry & King-Jones, 2013), seeking to reduce GHG emissions through market mechanisms might seem more productive than the continued attempt to 'build a movement … to hit the streets, … organise … [and] speak loudly' (Hughes, in NZPD, 8 November 2012). The truth, of course, is that climate change presents complex and deep-seated challenges that demand a multi-track response. Despite its demonstrated limitations, democratic participation retains an important legitimating function, and (if we accept that it is inherently valuable for people to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives) an important normative dimension. As such, Hughes' call for a public movement is laudable and necessary for the legitimacy and stability of long-term change.

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