

How should we think about **public acceptability** as behaviour-change practitioners?

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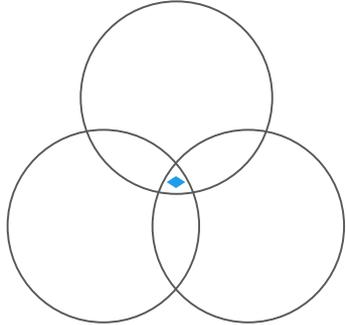
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We are a social purpose company

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World's first governmental organisation using behavioural insights to improve lives. We're now a leading independent global consultancy.

Achieving impact by understanding behaviour and testing interventions to improve products, campaigns, policy and services.



Designing policy, services and campaigns to support pro-environmental behaviour





Some important questions

1. Why might we want to influence behaviour?
1. What do we actually want, anyway?
1. What does this mean for how we think about public acceptance?



Why might we want to influence behaviour?

And does the level of 'permission' vary?



Because it benefits them

E.g. discouraging consumption of unhealthy food; age requirements on tattoos, gambling

Because it benefits us

E.g. selling more product; eliciting votes

Because it benefits someone else / society

E.g. tackling fraud & corruption; encouraging volunteering; green behaviours

More than one of the above

E.g. smoking in public places; social distancing.

Paternalistic

- A restriction to one's freedom for one's own good



that others have the right to harm us!)

- Most environmental behaviour change is justified on this basis. (Pro-social, rather than pro-self)

But this doesn't win us over. Pro-self intervention generally more acceptable than pro-social



Paternalistic policy
(restricting our choice for our own benefits, e.g. sugar tax)

Philosophically debatable
(brings benefits, but infantilising and presumptuous)

Yet... support often higher (because it does benefit us. And we sometimes want a nudge to act on our intentions)



We're good at rationalising our support, but a lot of it comes down to self-interest



non-paternalistic policy
(restricting our choice to stop us harming others, or from others harming us)

Philosophically defensible
(no one has the right to harm others)

Yet... support often lower Though it depends:

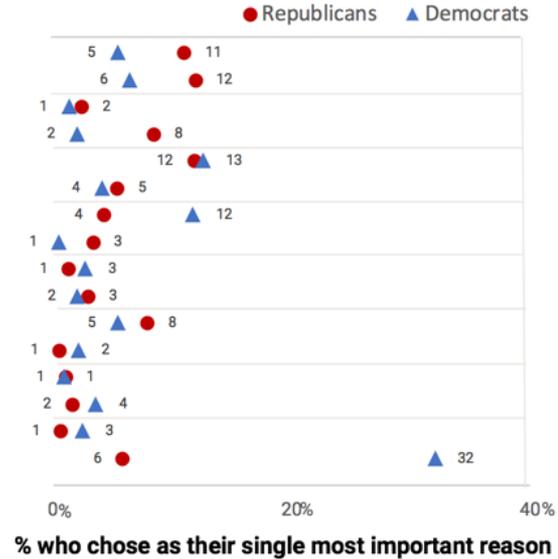
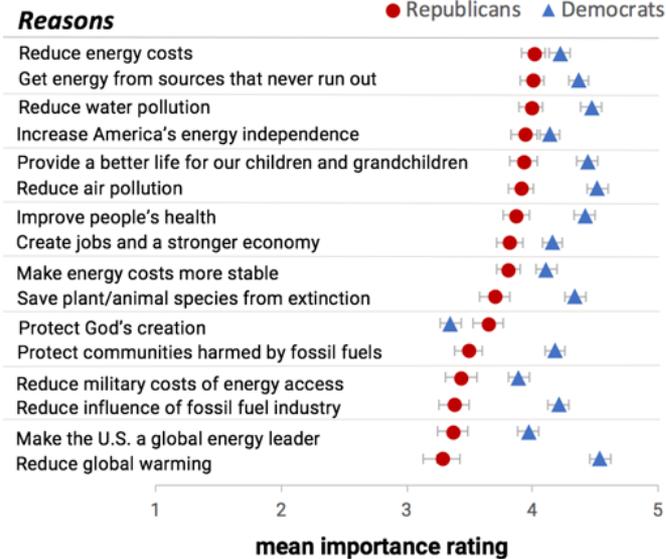
- If it restricts **our** freedom (to cause harm) 😞
- If it restricts **others'** freedom (to harm **us**) 😊



So what?

- Framing matters.** Many policies can be justified on multiple grounds (e.g. health and environmental and economic)

Which Reasons to Transition to Renewable Energy Do Republicans and Democrats Think Are Most Important?



Base: Republican and Democratic registered voters (N = 822).
December, 2018.

What do we actually want, anyway?



What do we actually want, anyway?



Our preferences are complex, and far from 'sovereign'



Where do preferences come from?

- They're more a **product** (of context, economic, social, material, media forces), than an endogenous, innate, or immutable characteristic.



Are they consistent?

- No!
- We have short-term preferences and long-term preferences 
- We have first-order preferences (wants) and second-order preferences (want to wants)
- Further skewed by biases (e.g. loss aversion, status-quo bias)



How do we even know what they are?

- Revealed preferences (what we do) are a poor proxy for **true** preferences.
- Self-reported preferences (what we say) can be better, IF asked properly, well-informed, and thoughtful.



Our preferences are complex, dynamic, and far from 'sovereign'



Figure 3: Public support for the London congestion charge shot up immediately after implementation.



Source: Impacts Monitoring: Second Annual Report, TFL (2004)



So what?

1. **Framing matters.** Many policies can be justified on multiple grounds (e.g. health and environmental and economic)
2. **Behaviour-change often comes first**, so don't be too fixated on whether current attitudes 'permit' intervention (within reason). Legitimate changes to the context (through policy or intervention, e.g. taxes, new technologies, social norms) will **lead to** new preferences.
3. **Help people help themselves.** We often already have 'second order' preferences (to be healthier, live in a more more sustainable) - even though, in the world as it currently is, we fail to live up to them and our short-term preferences prevail (driving is convenient, flying is cheap etc.). So...
 - i.) pay more attention to those aspirations (even though some may not immediately thank you), and
 - ii) help people close that intention-action gap (remove frictions, increase choice, incentivise), rather than restrict /penalise / admonish)
1. **Maintain liberty.** Nudges can be effective, and choice doesn't always need to be restricted.
2. **Highlight the benefits of policy**, and their **effectiveness**. Research shows both to boost support. Particularly where status-quo is strong, and the losses may be more familiar than gains.
3. **Make policy with the public.** Citizen assemblies & public dialogues really work - they create a mandate, bring fresh ideas, and people are more than capable of making difficult choices.

Thank you

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