

Reporting on Climate-Change Action in News Worldwide: An Amplification of the Domestic Cleavage

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Abstract

Climate change poses an existential threat to future life on our planet, yet, today's societies are rather sluggish when it comes to climate action and public opinion on climate change has become increasingly polarized in most countries. At the same time, we observe both international cooperation, in the context of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in particular, as well as bottom-up pressure from parts of the general public, in the form of the Fridays for Future (F4F) protests to avert these grim worst-case scenarios of climate change. But do these forms of pro-climate action impact on how the general public perceives climate change? Thus, can either international cooperation or public protest move the debate on climate change in a more positive direction or does it rather result in a backlash? We tackle these questions relying on a comparative media analysis including not only several news outlets over time but also various countries. We propose an original way of generating multilingual dictionaries and demonstrate its usefulness on a new dataset of newspaper articles from 16 countries, 26 newspaper outlets over a period from 2013 to 2020. To circumvent shortcomings of previous multilingual text analysis, we manually create a parallel corpus, which allows us to understand the context of words and thereby also their meaning. This enables us to generate dictionaries in different languages that contain words with similar meaning. Using this method, we are able to show that depending on the type of news medium, quality versus tabloid and liberal versus conservative, pro-climate action, such as F4F protest behavior or the Paris Agreement, are portrayed in very different ways thus potentially contributing to an increase in societal polarization on the issue of climate change. In addition, our extensive country and year coverage allows us to discuss interesting variations in climate-change reporting across space and time.

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