

While international conventions and environmental movements frequently stress that climate change is a global concern, people living in different parts of the world have varying perceptions of climate change, will experience different levels of vulnerability, and have different options for contributing to solutions. Global environmental issues are simply not globally shared in every sense of the term. How can climate change become a common, globally shared concern in a heterogeneous world?

This study explores whether consensual expert ideas can influence beliefs and attitudes in a similar way in radically different parts of the world and enhance global public support for taking measures against climate change. Drawing on epistemic community theory and psychological theories on attitude change, it develops a model of global public opinion change. The model moves beyond traditional studies on the international influence of ideas by shifting the focus from decision makers to public opinion. It also contributes to the development of theories about the micro-processes through which expert ideas influence global public opinion, in that it specifies what type of attitudes that such ideas influence as well as to what extent macro-level economic, political, and cultural differences alter this influence.

Underpinned by exploratory in-depth interviews and surveys, the study rests on an experimental design. The experiments investigate in what way promotional information from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC) influences public beliefs and attitudes. The large economic, political and cultural differences between the two contexts of this study- Sweden and Tanzania- should make similar effects unlikely.

The results show, however, that despite large economic, political and cultural differences, consensual expert ideas do influence beliefs and attitudes in a similar way in the two contexts. Although contextual heterogeneity influences both perceptions of climate change and of expert ideas, the differences are apparently not too great for expert ideas to lead to concerted, similar effects. Consensual expert ideas seem to promote the conception of climate change as being a common concern, irrespective of substantial differences in vulnerability, contribution and responsibility. Consensual expert ideas, it would seem, can cultivate global public support for the notion of "our common climate."

Keywords: public opinion, expert ideas, norms, climate change policy, international policy coordination, epistemic communities, environmental politics, Sweden, Tanzania, knowledge, campaigns, attitude change, persuasion, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).