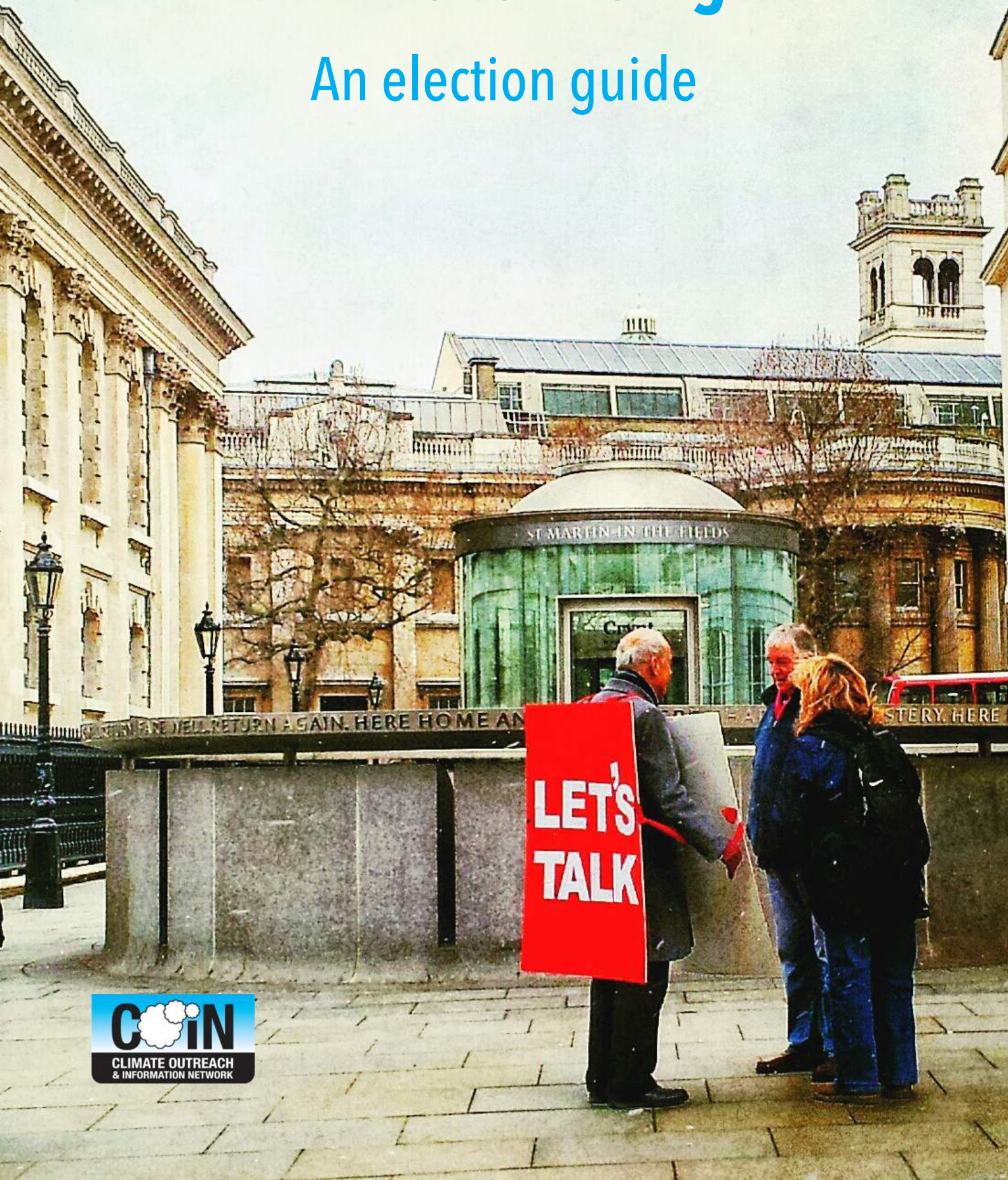


# How to talk climate change with the centre-right

## An election guide





## About COIN

The Climate Outreach and Information Network (COIN) is a charity focused on building cross-societal acceptance of the need to tackle climate change. We have over 10 years of experience helping our partners to talk and think about climate change in ways that reflect their individual values, interests and ways of seeing the world. We work with a wide range of partners including central, regional and local governments, charities, trades unions, business and faith organisations.

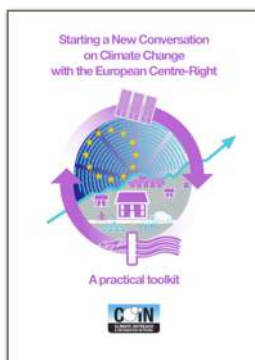
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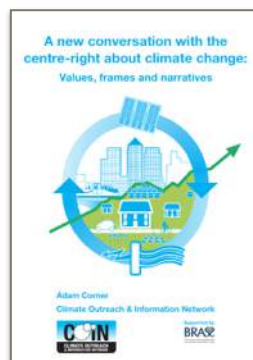
## About COIN's Centre-right programme

This is the most recent publication in COIN's centre-right programme. For further reading:



### [A New Conversation on Climate Change with the European Centre-Right](#)

January 2015



### [A New Conversation with the Centre-Right about Climate Change](#)

June 2013

## Project team

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## Acknowledgements

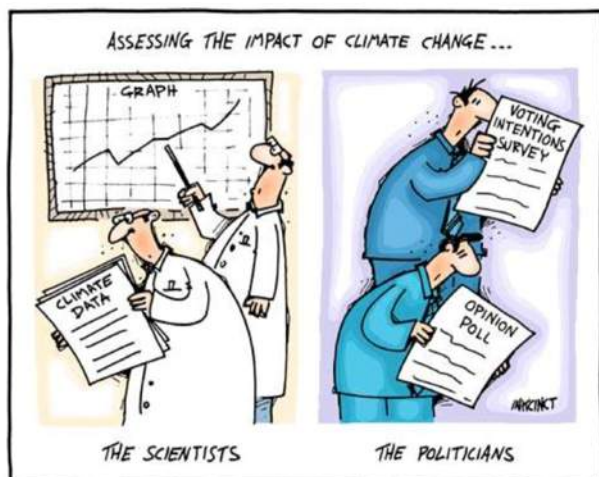
Our thanks to the COIN team who helped edit and proof this report: **Ella Sinclair** and **Max Leighton**. Thank you also to **Oliver Cowan** ([www.olivercowan.co.uk](http://www.olivercowan.co.uk)) for providing the design for this report and to **Sam Hamper** (<http://www.oxvids.co.uk>) for producing the [accompanying video](#) to this guide.

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**APRIL 2015**

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

## Why is this guide needed?



1. The election is a rare opportunity for public debate and will set policy agendas.
2. Climate change is hardly being mentioned in political campaigning or speeches.
3. This is an issue that should involve everyone but there are political divides: centre-right voters are currently less likely to be committed to climate action than centre-left voters.
4. There is still no clear, distinct and positive story about climate change for the centre-right.
5. Climate change could be a key election issue for engaging undecided voters and young people.

## Who is this guide for?

This guide is intended for communicators and campaigners from across the political spectrum. Although some centre-right voters identify with the *Conservative Party*, many others with “small c” conservative values do not, and all the main political parties have centre-right policies to appeal to them. A note on terminology: we use the term “conservatives” for all people with right-wing political *values*. We use the term “centre-right” for political *ideologies* and *voter groups* that are distinct from centre-left and far-right ideologies and groups.

## What does this guide say?

Communication is key to catalysing action on climate change. Climate change transcends politics; it is something that people of all political stripes have a stake in. Unfortunately, climate change as an issue has become increasingly politicised. It is considered the preserve of the left and associated with particular environmental ideas and values. Not surprisingly, those on the centre-right have become far less likely to be passionate about climate change than those on the left.

Whilst there are differences in opinion around the policy implications of climate change, there can be little argument that a wider audience needs to be engaged.

Drawing on strong research evidence, this guide argues that those on the centre-right (just like anyone else) pay most attention to communicators they trust and who use language and stories (narratives) that speak to their values. Communicators must establish this sense of trust and demonstrate that taking action on climate change is consistent with centre-right values.

Centre-right narratives about climate change must respect the underlying science. But until centre-right communicators start talking about climate change in a way that resonates with the values of their audience, robust cross-party support for tackling climate change will remain out of reach.

## WHAT THE CENTRE-RIGHT THINKS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

There is a marked difference between left-wing and right-wing voters. Labour and Lib Dem voters are consistently more concerned about climate change and 70% accept that it is human-caused.

Among conservatives who express an opinion, fewer than 10% do not accept that the climate is changing at all. Sceptics are often very outspoken, and people of all political persuasions overestimate their number.<sup>1</sup>

The real split on the centre-right is between those who believe that climate change is natural (40%) and those who think it is human-caused (just over 50%).<sup>2</sup> A small majority therefore accept that our actions are changing the climate.

Although many UKIP supporters lean towards a position that is further to the right on other issues, their levels of concern about climate change are very similar to mainstream conservatives.<sup>3, 4</sup>

## ELECTION SITUATION

Climate change is a low profile issue in the 2015 election. Polls show that the key issues for voters are the economy, immigration, healthcare, education, benefits and foreign affairs.<sup>5</sup>

However, politicians and parties would be wrong to assume that climate change is not a concern for voters. It is important to break through the social 'silence'<sup>6</sup> around climate change and challenge the idea that it is not relevant to the election. Overcome the natural 'distance'<sup>7</sup> of climate change by talking about the 'here and now' and how climate change is starting to affect concrete, tangible things like the way we travel, the way we heat our homes, and the crops grown by farmers.

Climate change is especially important for younger voters. People under 40 are far more likely to accept that we are changing the climate than people over 60. In one poll of conservative voters under 25 years old, 40% said they "could not vote for this party without a strong climate policy". The same poll found that 68% of voters overall wanted to see the party they vote for have a 'strong policy' on climate change.<sup>4</sup> Surveys consistently show that people want and expect the government to take the lead on climate change.

## CENTRE-RIGHT VALUES & FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

The strongest influence on people's attitudes to climate change is not how much they know about the scientific evidence. People form their views on the basis of the social norms around them, and whether the climate change 'story' fits with (or challenges) their existing values.<sup>8</sup>

Certain values are found consistently among people with centre-right politics.<sup>9</sup> These values can be brought to life using words and phrases – known as 'frames' – that provide a clear social signal that "this is something that people like me care about and should pay attention to". The table below describes 8 key centre-right values, plus 'frame words' derived from an analysis of centre-right speeches, interviews and news media articles.<sup>10</sup>

Taken together, these values underpin the centre-right belief system. However, people from across the political spectrum may identify with individual values - talking about climate change with the centre-right does not mean excluding others from the conversation.

## CENTRE-RIGHT VALUE

## FRAME WORDS

1. Resistance to (and discomfort with) change; defence of the status quo	Stable, straightforward, settled, moderate, order, structure
2. Support for a sense of social order; importance of rewarding hard work	Duty, tradition, law, order, self-discipline, prosperity, investment, growth, opportunity, achievement
3. Need for closure, certainty, and defined categories	Resolve, predictable, balance, proportionate, fair, clear, confidence, straightforward, reality, consistent, structure, framework
4. Conscientiousness: being thorough, careful, and vigilant <sup>11</sup>	Efficient, reliable, reasonable, sensible, tidy, organised
5. Purity: having moral standards and protecting the 'pure' (eg children and nature)	Innocent, beautiful, clean, safe, healthy, right, decent (and their opposites: ugly, dirty, filthy, pollution, waste, messy, wrong, evil)
6. Loyalty to the social group; patriotism	British, national, duty, pride, secure, defend, protect, way of life
7. Aspiration to enjoy life; avoidance of challenges to personal happiness	Life, positive, good news, quality of life, rewards, achievements, happiness, future, pleasure, rewards
8. Freedom from state interference in personal behaviour and property	Independence, personal, individual

## Why the current climate change story doesn't work for the centre-right

Most of the existing stories (referred to as narratives) around climate change are a poor match with the values listed above. Existing stories usually present a threat of instability and destruction (clashing with conservative values of maintaining the status quo, closure, purity and avoidance of negativity). Traditional climate solutions that extend state control do not fit well with centre-right values of freedom and 'enjoying life'. People tend not to accept narratives that challenge their values. The typical story about climate change may encourage centre-right voters to focus on the uncertainty inherent in all scientific research including climate change, and close ranks against 'outsiders' whom they view as scaremongering for political ends.

However there is no inherent reason why conservatives will not become mobilised around climate change, providing that they hear narratives and stories from trusted communicators who speak coherently to their values. In Germany there is no political division in attitudes because there are trusted centre-right communicators,<sup>12</sup> such as Chancellor Angela Merkel. She uses narratives around group loyalty and freedom, focusing on reconstruction in the energy sector, creativity, technical leadership and independence.

## 4 NARRATIVES THAT CAN WORK

The following narratives are composed from previous research by COIN (including our two previous reports on the subject)<sup>13</sup>, communications research in the US as well as centre-right political speeches and media articles. Each narrative embodies a conservative value and is composed using relevant frame words (highlighted in bold). Direct quotes from centre-right communicators are clearly indicated.

## NARRATIVE 1: The positive opportunity of energy transition

### Defence of status quo

"Our **dependence** on fossil fuels is a heavy **burden**. These resources are becoming increasingly difficult, expensive, and dangerous to extract. Relying on fossil fuels makes us vulnerable and insecure".<sup>14</sup>

### Purity

"Air **pollution** contributes to nearly 30,000 premature deaths a year."<sup>15</sup> One million children have asthma, related directly to ozone and particulates from vehicle **pollution**. "1,600 deaths in the UK can be attributed to the **pollution** from **filthy** coal fired power plants".<sup>16</sup>

**Wasting** energy is simply **wrong** - we are just throwing it away.

### Prosperity

**Clean**, renewable sources of energy offer a **reliable** and **secure** energy supply, fuel national **prosperity**, and **secure** long-term jobs.

### Freedom

British energy is changing, but it is up to all of **us** to **decide** what our energy future should be. We have **choices**, and we should make them wisely.<sup>17</sup>

### Happiness

Through energy efficiency we can all have more **comfortable** homes and afford to keep them warm and **cosy**.<sup>18</sup>

### Patriotism, loyalty to group

**Britain** has **creativity**, world-leading technology, the world's highest tides and Europe's strongest winds. Half a million home owners already have solar panels on their roofs, generating their own power and providing a **steady dependable** income for their owners.

But now other countries are moving far ahead of us. Our **competitors**, Germany and Denmark, have built billion dollar industries out of wind and solar power. The US and China are moving fast.

## NARRATIVE 2: Climate change is a threat to conservative values

### Threats to purity, youth, life

Doctors and the British Medical Association tell us that climate change will increase asthma, heatstroke and allergies, with serious impacts on the health of the **youngest** and **oldest** people.<sup>19</sup>

### The "unfairness" of weather damage

Last year's floods destroyed billions of pounds of **property**. Homes that people had **worked hard** and **saved for** all their lives were ruined. Some people's livelihoods have been **ruined**.

Acting on climate change  
the same as caring for  
the local environment

The condition of the pavements, vandalism and crime, litter, and the quality of the air we breathe are all environmental issues. Air pollution from vehicles alone kills more than 13,000 people a year, so reducing our carbon emissions is good for our health and our communities.

Local landscape as the key "environmental"  
value, not polar bears or rainforests

The British **countryside** could **change** for ever - with new **diseases** **killing off traditional** trees, rising sea levels eroding our coastline and **extreme** weather drying or flooding our **cherished landscapes**.<sup>20</sup>

Climate change as  
a "threat  
multiplier"

The strategists in the Armed Forces have no doubts about the threat of climate change and take it very seriously. They describe it as a "threat multiplier"<sup>21</sup> because it can make existing problems like famine and poverty worse, and make regions more unstable.

## An example of putting it all together

"The landscape and **countryside** of Britain is something we should all be **proud** of, and work together to **protect**. Over the years, we have **cleaned** up our rivers, banished **smog** from our cities, and **protected** our forests. Climate change poses new dangers to the countryside we value so much: more frequent and extreme flooding, coastline erosion, and disruptions to the seasons. The only **responsible** course of action is to **reduce the risks** we face from climate change. We **owe** this to our children and grandchildren - but also to the millions of people who live and work in the countryside right now."

## NARRATIVE 3: Your centre-right values require you to respond to this issue

Emphasise  
protecting and  
defending tradition  
and the status quo

"We are called Conservatives with good reason. We believe in conserving what is best – the **values** of our **way of life**, the **beauties** of our countryside [that] has shaped our **character** as a **nation**." (Margaret Thatcher)<sup>22</sup>

There are sacred  
values to defend

"Our planet has the unique **privilege** of **life**. It is our **duty** to **safeguard** our world. The more we **master** our environment, the more we must learn to **serve** it." (Margaret Thatcher)<sup>23</sup>

The 'Burkean contract'  
between the living, the  
dead, and the yet-to-be-born  
is a key centre-right concept

We are living **beyond our means**. Climate change is like a **debt** that we pass on to our children. And you can never pay it off - the **burden** lasts for ever.

Appeal to positive national values. British identity is defined more around a set of principles than a rigid patriotism or a flag

We are a proud, stubborn, stoical, people. We become indignant at injustice. Too many people, including many pensioners, are being forced to choose between food and fuel. Making it easy to save energy could be the quickest way to lift people out of fuel poverty, so there's no time to waste.

Centre-right people regard themselves as the most effective people who hold the country together

Climate change cannot be solved by any single approach, it requires us to all **pull together** and **contribute** what we are good at. But, let's face it, if anyone is going to sort out this problem, it will be us. We are the backbone of this country. Climate change can only be dealt with through **intelligence**, **discipline** and **hard work** - and that's why we need to **lead**.

Previous caution was understandable, but now we need to act

We are not people to rush into each new **fad**. We like to weigh things up carefully, and **balance** the **evidence**. But when we chose to act we are **strong** and **decisive**. After twenty years the scientists are now more **certain** than ever. Now is the time to act.

Those on the centre-right need to regain the initiative from the left

The challenge of climate change is too important be left to 'hair shirt and sandals' hippies. Creating a **modern, efficient** and **productive** low-carbon **future** is the **responsibility** of business **leaders** and entrepreneurs – the people who get things done in society"<sup>24</sup>

## NARRATIVE 4: A sense of common purpose

Dealing with climate change can bring us together

Facing up to this challenge can **strengthen** our country and give us a new national **objective**. We have lost our sense of focus and **self-discipline**. Rebuilding our outdated energy system and making it fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is something we can all rally around.

For many people, the Second World War is the defining metaphor for British resilience

During the Second World War everyone, whatever their politics, pulled together to **defend** our **way of life** and our **freedoms**. We **won** the war because we are a **strong, proud nation** and when the chips are down, we always come through. And we will again.

Adapting to a changing climate is a good entry point for engaging people who are sceptical about mitigation

Our weather is starting to change, and not for the better. We'll face more extreme weather, more often. But if we start dealing with climate risks now, rather than waiting until it's too late, we can **defend** our livelihoods and **protect** our property - coming through all the **stronger**.

We cannot be left behind by other countries who are taking the lead<sup>25</sup>

We can learn from countries like Germany that are way ahead when it comes to making sensible long-term decisions about energy. There are hundreds of small and medium-sized energy enterprises where people share in the profits and have a real sense of pride, ownership and responsibility for the energy they produce and consume. There's no reason we couldn't do the same – or better.



## WHAT NOT TO SAY

People do not just define themselves by who they are - they also define themselves by who they are not. People with centre-right values are especially loyal to their group and alert to the differences between themselves and other groups.

The people who initially took strongest ownership of climate change had centre-left or environmentalist politics. They built the narratives and images of climate change around their own values, which included a critique of capitalism and conservatism. A major reason for the indifference of the centre-right to climate change has been their rejection of this left-leaning 'story'.

**Speaking effectively to the centre-right means dropping the territorial language of the left and concentrating on the language of common ground and shared values.**

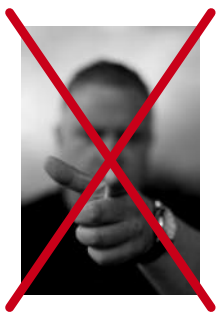
### Lose the eco-jargon



Avoid the eco-jargon below, which marks climate change as a left-wing and environmentalist issue:

- words such as green, eco, planet
- images such as polar bears and melting ice caps
- attacks on oil company greed
- moral appeals to 'save the planet'

### Avoid left-wing frames



Like the right, the left use words to frame their identity. Those to avoid include:

- social levelling (equal, entitled, alliance, unified, 'the rich' and 'the poor')
- political terms that suggest rapid and radical change (capitalism, revolution)
- moralistic judgment (caring/uncaring, compassion, greed)

### Avoid distancing

Those with centre-right values (like most people) are strongly invested in their current needs, community and locality. Therefore avoid language that presents climate change as a future problem that will affect foreign countries or other species. Focus on people's immediate area to explain both the impacts and the potential opportunities, and expand outwards from there.



## GLASS HALF FULL, NOT HALF EMPTY

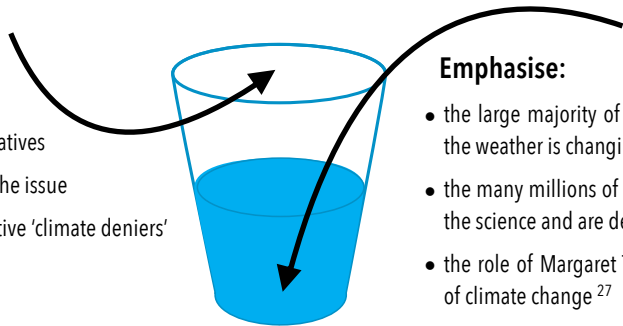
Research shows that people who say that climate change is natural do not hold this view with a great deal of certainty, and often have 'mixed feelings'.<sup>26</sup> Many are holding this position as a safe 'halfway house' on a divisive issue.

People take their cues about what to believe about climate change from their sense of the "social norms" among people around them. One of the challenges for communicators is therefore to emphasise that accepting the science is now the normal position for large numbers of centre-right voters.

### THE HALF-EMPTY GLASS

#### Avoid talking about:

- splits and divisions among conservatives
- the dominance of the left wing on the issue
- derogatory stereotypes of conservative 'climate deniers'



### THE HALF-FULL GLASS

#### Emphasise:

- the large majority of centre-right voters who agree that the weather is changing
- the many millions of centre-right voters who fully accept the science and are deeply concerned about the issue
- the role of Margaret Thatcher in championing the issue of climate change<sup>27</sup>

## ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATOR TRUST

Trust in the communicator of a message is crucial. Trust is based on a sense that the communicator is knowledgeable, honest, and, above all, shares at least some of the values and concerns of the target audience.<sup>28</sup>

#### Consider your appearance and presentation



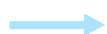
Because 'conscientiousness' is an important value, many centre-right voters will expect a clean and tidy appearance and good grooming. Manners and respect are similarly important.

#### Emphasise common ground



Emphasise the experiences and values you have in common. Even if you do not have centre-right politics, you may have similarities of background, location, age, work or parenthood, and many centre-right values are echoed across the political spectrum.

#### But do not fake it



People are rightly suspicious of a salesman pretending to be their friend. Attempts to mimic values and attitudes will be easily spotted.

#### Hold your own conviction



Honesty is displayed through personal integrity and sincerity. Even if you do not have common experience or political values, you can build trust by openly and honestly holding your personal conviction.

#### Speak from the 'I'



Rather than depending on dry scientific arguments, take personal ownership of your views and show the process by which you formed them: "I have seen huge changes in the weather. I trust the scientists. I was unsure but now I am personally convinced."

#### Respect sceptics



Although a minority, sceptics can be very assertive with their views. They are often well educated. Respect their intelligence and their right to form their views, but concentrate on the conviction with which you hold your own views. Observe that large numbers of their fellow centre-right peers agree with you, as well as many institutions they respect (church, royalty, armed forces, business leaders and scientists).

# ELECTION TIPS

## Speaking with centre-right voters

**A climate-aware candidate is a good person, with strong moral credentials**

You can trust (our candidate) because s/he really cares about the big issues that are important for us all... such as climate change.

**Name the silence**

Is climate change something that you talk or think much about?

**Break climate out of the green box**

Climate change is much more than an "environmental" issue. It is vitally important for people's health, the economy, energy bills, transport... all key issues that people are debating in the election.

**Make it 'here and now'**

The weather is starting to change; climate change is already happening. We need political action and leadership now, and the worst thing to do would be to wait until we can't control what happens.

## Speaking with centre-right politicians and candidates

As with any group, politicians need narratives that speak to their values and worldview. Despite their ideological differences, professional politicians of all parties share values of commitment to public service for their constituency and country, positive change and personal achievement. At election time they are motivated to support issues that will win votes (and not lose them). The challenge is to show that a strong position on climate change can speak to all these long-term and short-term motivations.

**Stress common ground and shared values**

Climate change can be an opportunity to all come together with a combined purpose and rebuild the country.

**Speak to political ambition**

This is the biggest issue of our times - a historically critical moment. We need strong leaders who, like Winston Churchill, are prepared to speak the truth and lead from the front.

**Say that centre-right voters expect strong climate policy**

In polls, over two thirds of conservative voters expect their party to have a strong policy and their leader to take a lead internationally.

**Emphasise that there are available votes**

I am undecided about who to vote for. This is a tight election and for me, this issue will play a huge role in determining who I will vote for and support.

**Make it a trust issue**

I will only trust a candidate who has a strong position on this issue. A party without a strong position is not suited to govern or represent the UK internationally.

**Speak for your wider voter group**

We young people/grandparents/women/Asians/teachers (etc.) are deeply concerned about climate change (give personal anecdotes, offer individual stories, and explain *why*).

**If you are young, emphasise the importance to your generation**

For people my age, this is a huge issue, and it will decide who we vote for now and in the future - or whether we vote at all.

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