

# Science for Environment Policy

## Political viewpoints may influence reasons for purchasing energy-efficient products

**US researchers** have found that promoting the environmental benefits of energy-efficient products may actually deter some people from buying them. Since environmental issues have become politically polarised, those who hold more conservative views are less likely to purchase products that are marketed using environmental benefits, they argue.

**Energy-efficient products** have been presented as one solution to help mitigate [climate change](#), but demand for such technologies has been lower than anticipated. Several barriers to their adoption have been identified, for example, a lack of knowledge of potential cost savings and climate change not being viewed as an urgent threat. This study has identified an additional potential barrier relating to political ideology.

There were two stages to the study. The first focussed on attitudes towards investment in energy efficiency and the second examined peoples' purchasing decisions. In the first stage, 657 participants were given a description of energy efficiency and then asked to rate the value they would place on three factors: reducing dependence on overseas oil, reducing the price of energy usage, and reducing carbon emissions.

The second stage involved 210 separate participants from a US University. They were asked their willingness to pay for a.) a standard light bulb and b.) an energy-efficient light bulb, both when prices were the same and when the energy-efficient bulb was three times more expensive. In one scenario, plain packaging was used and in another, a sticker with a 'Protect the Environment' message was applied. For both stages of the study, the political beliefs of participants were determined to assess the influence this may have had upon their decision making.

The researchers' hypothesis that the adoption of energy-efficient technology would be hampered by the association with environmental messages was correct. The first test revealed that more conservative participants were less likely to approve of investing in energy-efficient technologies. In the second test, conservative voters were less likely to buy an energy-efficient light bulb when the packaging had the environmental sticker. Those from all political viewpoints selected the more energy-efficient light bulb when it was in plain packaging without any messages, and even when it was more expensive.

Other messages which are likely to work better in attracting a greater share of the conservative vote relate to a lack of dependence on fuel from overseas and lower prices for energy. Highlighting issues which may have a greater appeal to conservatives, such as patriotism and purity, could also encourage their purchase of more energy-efficient products, the researchers suggest.

Similar political ideological divides are present in Europe, and therefore the conclusions are also likely to be relevant in the EU. In addition, the findings may be of interest to policymakers working in other areas of environmental concern, although further research, with greater numbers of participants, would strengthen the evidence. Whilst the study focuses on energy-efficient investment and purchasing, it does not consider behavioural aspects of energy efficiency.



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