

The politics of meat consumption and climate change

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Abstract

With growing awareness of the impact of animal agriculture on the environment and climate change (Herrero et al., 2013), there is an increasing interest in studying the rationale behind one's dietary choices. The documented reasons for meat consumption range from denying mental capacities to animals (Bastian et al., 2012), personal values like conformity (Hayley et al., 2015) and the rationalizations about eating meat such as the 4 N's: that eating meat is "Natural, Normal, Necessary and Nice" (Piazza et al., 2015). Although some studies in developed countries have found that people have a low degree of awareness of the connection between meat consumption and climate change (Macdiarmid et al., 2016), others have found that when people are aware of the environmental impact (among other repercussions) of meat consumption, they may be ambivalent towards meat and more likely to reduce their meat consumption in the future (Berndsen, & Van der Pligt, 2004). Further, Ku and their colleagues (2014) found that participants who consider intrinsic values such as affiliation and community feeling more important than extrinsic values, were more willing to pay money to preserve the environment. In light of increased understanding of the negative impact of animal agriculture on the environment and climate change, there is growing interest in dietary choices. Socio-political ideologies, including right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO) are implicated in climate change attitudes, more broadly. Therefore, in the present study, we investigated RWA and SDO as predictors of red meat consumption attitudes, trust in

organisations regarding the impact of red meat on the environment, the impact of agriculture on the environment, and willingness to pay more for red meat to protect the environment. American adults (n=486) recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in a 15-minute study entitled “The Impact of your Food: Eating Attitudes and Behaviors”. Results from regression analyses revealed that, controlling for demographic variables (age, gender, religion, ethnicity, income, education, urban/rural living, political affiliation), frequency of red meat consumption, climate change skepticism, and knowledge of impact of red meat on the environment, and identification as a meat eater, RWA or SDO explained unique variance in the outcome variables. Our results highlight the importance of political orientation with regard to meat consumption, willingness to reduce consumption and pay more for red meat. It also points to the notion that political orientation is linked to which agencies people trust and rely on as source of knowledge.