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MIKE LIVERMORE: Welcome to the *Free Range Podcast*. I'm your host, Mike Livermore. This episode is sponsored by the Program on Law Communities and the Environment at the University of Virginia School of Law. With me today is Michael VanDenburg, a law professor at Vanderbilt, and Jennifer Cole, a postdoc in social psychology at the Vanderbilt Climate Change Research Network. Together they've been working on a project examining political polarization around issues of climate change and recently COVID policies. Jennifer and Mike, thanks for joining me today.

MICHAEL VANDENBURG: Thanks so much.

MIKE LIVERMORE: So I find the topic of polarization and climate change to be a bit of a downer. It's frustrating and can seem kind of intractable and hopeless. But I take it that your message, at least as I understand it so far, is not one of doom and gloom. So I guess my first question just to try to set us off on an optimistic direction is just generally is there hope of overcoming what seems like this really intransigent, a deep partisanship that we seem to find ourselves in on the issue of climate change.

MICHAEL VANDENBURG: So why don't I jump off and try to take a legal perspective on that and a policy perspective and then turn it over to Jenny, who is our real social psychology expert on this. And she can describe some of the work we're doing and the themes that we're coming to as we try to think about how to deal with this incredibly difficult problem.

So the first start I would say is that an encouraging piece of the work that we're doing is that if we can get out of the mental models that we're all in, if we can start by trying to understand the part of the population that thinks differently than we do, then we can begin to identify the kinds of remedies and the kinds of ways of communicating that can bridge the partisan divide. And so sure it's gloom and doom, but we are finding some things that are really intriguing.

I'll start with one really important one and then turn it over to Jenny who, again, is the real expert here. But a starting one is that a paper we published about a year ago showed that although conservatives and moderates make up about 45% of the population when it comes to opposition to climate change, they become more interested in and more supportive of climate mitigation when they hear about what the private sector is doing on climate change. And this is called solution aversion.

So in other words, conservatives and moderates often are not unaware of the climate problem, they're just so averse to a big government solution that they're willing to reduce their likelihood that they think climate change is happening and their support for climate mitigation because they fear big government more than they fear climate change. But we found that when they hear about what the private sector is doing, they become more supportive. So that's our answer to solution aversion and it's just one of several things that Jenny has underway right now.

JENNIFER COLE: Yeah, and so I'll just add to that that I think, yeah, there is a lot going on in the world that gives us reason for pessimism as far as overcoming the partisan gap on climate change, because people are so influenced by their political parties, so influenced by their groups. But I think the flip side of that is that the fact that people are influenced by their groups is also a reason for optimism, because there is a really good amount of social psychology research showing how we can leverage the extent to which people follow their groups to bring them close together on various issues.

So if we can change what people think the norms are in their group, we can change what they think it means to uphold a certain identity such as being a Republican or being a Democrat and what that means as far as climate change. There are a lot of strategies that we can use to kind of take advantage of this group polarization process that drives people apart on climate change and actually use it to bring people closer together.

MIKE LIVERMORE: Yeah, that sounds potentially promising. Maybe just as a bit of background question, you mentioned social psychology. Obviously that's your field. But some of our listeners might not be familiar with the field. And so what's the thumbnail description of social psychology as a discipline? What separates it from non-social psychology? And what are some of the questions you're interested in and that kind of thing?

JENNIFER COLE: Sure. So I kind of broadly describe social psychology as the way people think about and interact with the social world around them. So it's kind of as opposed to clinical psychology, which is what a lot of people think of when they think of psychology and the study of psycho pathologies and mental illness. Social psychology is basically the psychology of everybody and how we interact with the world around us and interact with other people and institutions. And my research interests within that are basically attitudes and behaviors related to climate change. So I look a lot at people's support for various climate change solutions, their belief in climate change, their feelings about political parties, related things like that.

MIKE LIVERMORE: Impressionistically, I think a lot of people see polarization there. Certainly if you look at compare what's on the TV or what you get across your Twitter feed, there seems like there's a lot of difference of opinion. But I guess one just initial question is how bad on the ground? I mean, we could think of elite polarization, we can think of population in the electorate amongst regular folks. Do these things just map onto each other or is there a big difference? And kind of just generally what is the state of play with respect to how bad polarization is on the issue of climate change?

MICHAEL VANDENBURG: Jenny, maybe I'll take the climate first and then you can fill that out and then turn over to some of the COVID parallels that I know you've done really interesting work on recently. Michael, on the climate front, recent polling suggests that climate change is either the most or the second most, next to health care, polarized issue in the United States today. And once we begin to understand what your beliefs and behavior are on climate change, we can begin to predict so many other things. The American society has become so deeply polarized that you can distinguish between Republicans and Democrats all the way down to which kind of commercial products they have underneath their sink.

And we have sorted over time as well. And this has happened in Congress as well. So that starting in about 1990, Republicans and Democrats on League of Conservation Voters scores began to differ substantially on environmental issues to the point today where there is a remarkably broad difference. And that then makes it impossible to get past things like the need for 51 votes or even to break a filibuster in the Senate. So we see that this underlying polarization occurs among elites, it occurs among politicians, and it occurs in the general population. And then Jenny can talk more about the phenomena of confirmation bias and motivated reasoning that affect not only what policies we support but even what facts we think are important in the first place.

JENNIFER COLE: Yeah, and so I guess a couple of things I'll just add on to Mike's answer is I think whether polarization in the general public maps onto polarization at the elite level and vice versa. And I would say yes. In public opinion polls, that's pretty consistent. But that's also an important thing to acknowledge is that because they map onto each other, you can use one to influence the other, which I imagine we'll get into talking about ways to address polarization, but kind of leveraging public opinion to influence the elites and vice versa. That's kind of a prime opportunity for change to happen because they are closely related.

The other thing I will say is that while we see a lot of consistent polarization on surveys about concern for climate change and support for various types of climate change solutions, there is this concept of pluralistic ignorance, which is the idea that there is a widespread norm that is misunderstood. And that happens with Republicans and belief in climate change. So what that means is that most people think Republicans do not believe in climate change. They think that there is polarization or there is a gap between Republicans and Democrats and how much they believe that climate change is happening and that it is human caused. But that gap is actually much smaller than we think it is.

So we don't see actually in surveys that I've done and social psych research that I've read, we don't see that Republicans are actually denying climate change at very high rates at all. Generally we see something above like 70% of Republicans say that they believe that climate change is happening and human caused. So the polarization that a lot of people think of when they think of climate change polarization does consistently emerge as far as attitudes towards solutions but not as much on belief in climate change as people think that there is. And that might partly be because Republicans are hesitant to express that they believe in climate change even if they actually do because of their party expectations.

MICHAEL VANDENBURG: And let's talk for a moment if we can about why that's so important and the role of lawyers in this. Because I think one of the challenges is that in public debates these days, there's a growing sense among moderates and liberals and progressives that 55% of the population believes that climate change is an important issue and that we should do something about it and that that's an adequate number in order to get governmental change. And that's simply false. In our Democratic design, 18% of the US population lives in states that control 50 plus votes in the Senate. The Supreme Court reflects the Senate. The electoral college also reflects small rural states in an overweighted way.

And so one of the challenges is that people in the middle and on the left have gotten comfortable with the idea that they don't need to understand and somehow address the importance of the views of the 45% of the population if you look at the Six Americas study, for example, which is the leading research in this area, the 45% of the population that actually is not on board with climate change. If you look in the last decade, the number of Democrats who support doing something about climate change is increased from in the 60's to roughly in the 80's.

And if all of your friends are Democrats you think, oh gee, everybody's ready to go. So it must be some kind of a nefarious conspiracy among industry and some others to stop climate change. And I'm sure there's bad activity going on out there. But if you step back a little bit and think about the Democratic design, then you realize that it need not just be that. It might also be that in our Democratic system, for better or worse, you simply don't get major stable social change with 55% of the population supporting climate change.

So one of the things I try to do in my work is working with people like Jenny and our other postdocs and other experts around the world is think very carefully about making sure that the social scientists understand the importance of studying what moderate conservatives and conservatives think, because that ultimately is essential to the legal remedies that we can ultimately adopt.

MIKE LIVERMORE: Yeah. So just to kind of just return back to a point that was made a little earlier, Jenny, the point was raised just about the analogy to COVID and COVID policy. So maybe we can get that on the table, as if things weren't complicated and bad enough. Let's put another difficult and contentious issue on the table. But maybe there's something useful that we can learn about, apparently, something useful that we potentially could learn through the analogy.

JENNIFER COLE: Yeah, so a lot of social psychologists who do research in this area have published and talked about how COVID as a societal problem has looked a lot like climate change on fast forward. So there are a lot of similarities and parallels between the issues in that they're both global threats in which everyone would need to change their lifestyles to address the threat but also the threat impacts some groups of people more than others. And individual action on the part of just the people who are impacted is not enough to solve the problem.

So it's kind of this widespread global we call it a collective action problem that quickly became-- so COVID quickly became politically polarized. Climate change is politically polarized. So those are some of the parallels between the two issues in kind of the political climate of them now and then the types of behavior, the wide scale behavior change that would be needed to address them.

So I did a couple of research projects the past few years looking at political polarization surrounding COVID. And we see very, very similar patterns to climate change. So even though at the beginning of the pandemic social psychological theory would have said that COVID would not have become as polarized as climate change because COVID is a global shared threat and generally the literature has said in the past that shared threats bring people together and inspire cooperation to address them. We unfortunately did not see that with COVID.

So my research has basically just shown how people base their opinions about COVID-19 policies and solutions almost entirely on who is advocating for those solutions as far as politicians from either party or experts rather than what the actual content of the proposed policy is. And that's very similar to climate change. So those are some of the parallels that we've been looking at.

MIKE LIVERMORE: Yeah. I mean, one of the things I found striking, and curious what we think of this analogy, is actually the difficulty of even elites affecting people's behavior when something-- or views once something becomes polarized. So there's this is kind of famous example of Donald Trump urging people to get a booster or get vaccinated in general at a rally and being booed. And if there's anyone who has a direct line into the Republican Party base, it's the former President. So what do we-- and you my sense is that the folks at Fox News would actually be very pleased to encourage vaccination and they get pushback from their view. It's like, who's the dog and who's the tail and who's wagging who?

MICHAEL Jenny will have a deeper sense of this, but my sense that that is not a problem so much of where they are today
VANDENBURG: is that they saw an opportunity early on. The president did, President Trump and Fox News did and other conservative sources of information, they saw an opportunity to drive what Dave Roberts has called tribal epistemology. That your system of thought reflects what your tribal leaders tell you to think. And the early messages that were distributed were unambiguously skeptical that this was attached to liberal ideology.

So if you were in the liberal tribe, then you worried about COVID. And if you were in the conservative tribe, you didn't worry about COVID. And once that caught on, then it circulated within the closed information ecosystems on Facebook and Twitter, et cetera. And so once they created that sense of identification of pro COVID being left and anti COVID being right, then I think the horse was out of the barn on some level. Although Jenny, I don't if there is modern research that actually demonstrates that.

JENNIFER COLE:No, I think that's right. I think there is a strong phenomenon going on here that kind of the party stances on COVID were established very deeply. And so then if Trump changed his tune on boosters, then people kind of doubted his intentions maybe. Were like, oh, someone made him say this. He's not actually expressing what he really thinks. He's not expressing what Republicans are about. So it could be something like that, like people doubting Trump's motivation because the Republican stance had become so entrenched.

There's also a related research study that I did on climate change a couple of years ago where we showed that the influence that elites have on the public's policy opinions reduces by a lot when public social norms do not align with elite stances. So basically what that means is if you have a party leader from one party advocating for something but then it is known that kind of the widespread general public within that party doesn't agree with that elite, then that elite will be much, much less influential than they would be if the public's stance was not known or if the public's stance aligned with the elite.

So I guess the point that that makes is if there's a strong party norm established already, elites have a much harder time influencing the public stance against that established one than they would have if there was no established stance or a stance that was similar to or the same as the one that the elite was advocating for.

MIKE Got it. So this sounds terrible. This sounds like terrible news.

LIVERMORE:

[LAUGHS]

Because if the strategy is let's convince Republican elites to go out and start talking about climate change, and maybe with some different messaging or whatever, but my understanding actually when you talk to people in Congress, at least in the Senate, they'll say, oh yeah, I know that climate change is important, but I can't talk about it because my voters don't want to hear that. And my primary voters especially don't want to hear that.

And so it sounds like they're right in some ways that if they were to go out and start making a lot of noise about climate change, it wouldn't be that the folks in the party would just kind of salute smartly and change their views accordingly. They'd probably find themselves out on their ear and there'd be somebody else sitting in their former office in the Senate office building.

MICHAEL Truly it is the primary voters in both parties who are driving the polarization in the political system. So you have
VANDENBURG: to win the primary in order to get in the general. And so you have to pivot from very strongly advocating the views of the more extreme wings of your party, then try to circle back and catch just enough of the middle to win an election. But you don't even have a chance to do that unless you get the polar wing.

So I guess what I would say on that is that although it is true that in the current state of tribal identity that the-- let's say you're a Republican Senator. You couldn't come out tomorrow and say, OK, I support a major carbon tax in most states. But it is also true that it is the tribal leaders who set the tone. People do not simply decide what they think is right or wrong and then move forward. And Jenny can say more on this. They literally look to those tribal leaders to define for them what they should believe. And we could talk about that across a whole range of different issues.

So if you're a Senator and you do understand the depth of the threat that climate change poses, and my own view is that it's second only to nuclear war as the most important threat to the planet, and if you do care about that, then the answer is, sure, maybe you can't go out tomorrow and say I support government action, but our research shows that you could go out and spend time with every one of your audiences talking about what the private sector is doing, talking about the fact that Walmart has committed to a billion tons of carbon emissions reductions from its tens of thousands of suppliers around the world by 2030, an amount equal to Germany or Japan going carbon neutral.

Point out that BlackRock is heavily engaged in inducing Exxon to decarbonize, et cetera, et cetera. And that will help change what the solution is, which will avoid solution aversion. The other thing you can do is you can go to Fox News and go on Fox News and go to other places because it's really the signals from those media leaders I think that people are picking up on. It won't be easy, but there is work to be done if the leading Republican politicians want to get on the right side of this issue. And there is some room for optimism there.

MIKE
LIVERMORE: Jenny, I'd be curious about your thoughts on this. Just to kind of state the question again, this is countless to say, there's a complex interaction between what it sounds like, in any case, is that there's a complex relationship between leaders and the broader public within let's call them groups or identity groups or affiliation groups or however we want to-- whatever term we want to use there. And it sounded like what you were saying is that once an idea becomes fixed as constituting the views of the group, then it's very difficult for leaders to get off of that position and to still be accepted as leaders.

So that sounds like a tricky problem. So for a new issue, maybe we could look to elites. There's kind of a window. It sounds like there's potentially a window of opportunity. Maybe there was a window of opportunity with respect to COVID. And if elites in both political parties had just conveyed, look, this is important. We're going to take these public health measures. Everyone get vaccinated when that's an opportunity, then the issue wouldn't have been polarized. But once that window kind of shuts and the views firm up, it sounds like it's more difficult to actually convey that message in a way that's actually going to be heard. But maybe there's some trick around that problem. So I'm just curious what your thoughts are.

JENNIFER COLE: Yeah. I think you just made a lot of good points. So yes, I think, exactly, there is a window of opportunity before the party stances become very widely known and solidified at which getting people to align on an issue would be much easier. So that's definitely true. And unfortunately, we lost that window of opportunity with climate and COVID. But that's definitely something that can happen on a future issue.

And also before I get into a more detailed answer about what to do once we pass that window of opportunity, I'll just say that I'm glad you brought up the idea that it is a very complex relationship between the general public and elites. Because I think it's just important to acknowledge that there are a lot of complex systems here as far as the way that the public influences elites and the way that elites influence the public. And there's kind of a lot of qualifications about what happens in certain contexts.

And so we can talk in general about these ideas and about what the research has found, but there are always going to be nuances particular to various situations. So I guess basically the point I want to make is that, yes, it is complex and it takes understanding and observing the nuances of different situations, because any time you're studying human behavior, which is very different than studying hard science in the lab, you have to acknowledge that it's not a perfectly clean environment. So things might always be different than the broad theory predicts that they would be. So broader studies are useful, examples are useful, and we can learn from all of it.

So with that being said, then back to the question of what do we do once the window of opportunity is gone and a party's stances are kind of solidified but elites or someone wants to make change on what the party norm is surrounding an issue? So I think the point that I was making earlier about, for example, when you said Trump getting booed when he advocates boosters at a rally. I think that that is a situation where there is a strong party norm and people are continuing to hear from most of their party members and most of their party leaders negative attitudes toward boosters.

But then they hear from a single party leader, you should get your booster. That single party leader is not going to, even if it's Trump, who probably had more control over Republican Party norms than anyone, is not going to easily and quickly change the norm. I think if Trump were to continue that language over a long period of time and in various situations, he probably would have had some effect. And to Mike VanDenburg's point that people take their understanding of reality from their political elite stances. That is true too.

So if political elites say this is how you should interpret and understand a certain situation or a certain policy issue, people will adopt that as their own understanding if they don't have a preexisting understanding or knowledge of what their peers think ahead of time. So I think elites have more influence when peers' stances are not known and peers have more influence when elites' stances are not known. So some ways that we can address how do you change a party's normative stance I think are you could have party elites kind of express solutions and lead toward solutions that even if the issue has an entrenched party norm or polarization, that particular solution does not. That could be one pathway to bypass polarization.

And I think Mike gets at this when he talks about private sector solutions is that it's pretty widely understood what the two parties think about climate policy. It is not as widely understood what the two parties think about private sector solutions. So communication from elites on types of solutions that don't have entrenched views and polarization could be more effective. And I think that that's one reason why private sector solutions generate support, as Mike has seen in his research.

MICHAEL And a second example of that is a recent conversation that I had with a leading conservative young activist on **VANDENBURG:** climate change mitigation. And I mentioned that one of the other areas that we work on is not just the private sector wedge but the behavioral wedge, how you can change household behavior. And by the way, that's happened at a remarkable rate. We've had in the last decade for the first time since the Second World War a leveling off and now a decline in per capita household electricity use, which largely corresponds to the uptake of LED light bulbs and some other efficient technologies.

And what I suggested to him is that a message that appeals to moderate and conservative norms about personal responsibility might be a way to reach that community on those issues. And his answer to me was now you're speaking my language. Whereas if I had framed it differently or framed it that way with a more liberal leader, I would have gotten the answer that it's not about individuals. It's about the social context. So sometimes that kind of simple framing that can match up with the underlying intuitions that people have about what is normatively correct can have a real effect here.

JENNIFER COLE: Yeah, and so the other strategy that I was going to suggest that research would support could help in changing stances when the party stances are already very solidified is it is not such a good sign for elite influence that a handful of elites do not have a whole lot of power to change a party's stances once the widespread norms are known. But I think on the flip side of that, it is encouraging as to the power of bottom up change. So if elites lose their influence when norms among the general public are known and are strong or elite influence lessens when public norms are strong, then that means that public norms can be the source of change.

So that means that in cases where maybe the elites aren't on board with where we want them to be, for example, maybe with climate change, the change can happen from the public. And like I mentioned before, more Republicans actually believe in climate change and are concerned about climate change than people generally think they are. So that means that there's a big opportunity for change there. So if people can start realizing and talking about how much Republicans actually do want climate change to be addressed in general, even if not at the elite level, the change can happen from the bottom up, whereas those public attitudes that kind of are where we need them to be maybe can then in turn influence the elites even if elites are not leading the change on that issue.

MIKE Yeah. That makes a lot of sense to me. I think there's probably some hard questions about how you accomplish **LIVERMORE:** that. Let's say for the time being that we were to put a pause or to think outside the elite driven strategy. So then rather than thinking about how do we talk to Republican elites, convince them that climate change is important, and then develop strategies for them to try to bring the base along. Maybe that's going to happen simultaneously. But instead think about circumventing that group of people because they have their own set of incentives and they've got pressure coming from different directions, elite pressure to kind of orient them to not be so concerned about climate change. Obviously the fossil fuel industry wants to downplay the importance of these issues.

And so what would it look like to have a kind of base driven approach to depolarizing or changing norms within the Republican Party base about climate change? I think you have both pointed to the possibility of just alerting people to the fact that actually a strong majority of Republican voters, at least according to the research that you guys cite, do you think climate change is real, think that it's human caused? So just presumably getting people to become aware of that fact.

I think right now as a Republican, it's like at a dinner party with your friends, you don't say things like, man, climate change is really important. Because everyone there might think climate change is really important, but everyone else thinks that everybody else doesn't think it's important. And so how do you get people comfortable talking about these issues? So that's maybe one idea. But what would the strategy be to have a kind of ground up transition of views? Assuming that Fox News isn't going to come along for the time being and assuming that Republican political leaders aren't going to come along for the time being.

MICHAEL

So a couple of quick ideas and I'm going to turn it over to Jenny, because we both are just exploding with

VANDENBURG:

different ideas that we're working on right now. But I mentioned right at the beginning solution aversion. So that person at that dinner party, if we engage in a campaign to inform Republicans about what other Republicans think to deal with pluralistic ignorance and about what the private sector is doing to deal with solution aversion, that person would then be armed at the dinner party to say, hey, did you see what BlackRock just did with Exxon in getting three new members of the board of directors to be selected? Did you see what the investment funds did with Chevron to get a shareholder proposal adopted to require that they disclose and reduce scope 3 carbon emissions from the oil and gas that they sell?

And so the conversation could be about what the private sector is doing and about how many people that are their colleagues that are in their identity group or tribe are doing things that they're comfortable with. I serve on the board of an organization and sitting next to me in the meetings as someone who is remarkably powerful moderate Republican and who is on board with change because in the business they work in environmental, social, and governance issues are commonly discussed and are the norm among the business people. And so it doesn't feel like it's the green bean sprout team that is not your identity group. It feels like your identity group doing the activity. So those are two.

One last one I'll mention and turn it over to Jenny for some others is as we try to decarbonize the medical sector and we have efforts underway with our medical center to try to develop ways to get hospitals and others to really reduce very dramatically their carbon emissions, one of the things we find most effective is that most docs really are not that into climate change one way or the other, but they care deeply about being able to recruit the best medical students and recruit and maintain the best faculty and docs and staff and nurses on their teams.

And what we find being very persuasive is the fact that younger Republicans, millennials, and younger generations are far more pro climate action than our older ones. And so publicizing that, identifying that, using that for employee recruitment and retention is another way to get a bottom up kind of change. And I'll turn it over to Jenny for some others.

JENNIFER COLE:

Yeah. I think it's funny that you mentioned the dinner table, Mike, because actually there are a couple of papers that show that the more people talk about climate change with their friends and family, the more they believe in it and support addressing it. So that actually is a strategy. That's a viable strategy. We often don't think that we have power to kind of change people's minds one on one if they're very polarized opposite of us on an issue, but generally we do.

Something that I talk about with some of the people that I've worked with on these topics as kind of a quintessential example of a grassroots, bottom up, bipartisan effort is you probably are aware of what the Citizens Climate Lobby does and how they are pushing for a revenue neutral carbon tax. And they try to remain non-partisan. And so that's kind of the idea that I have in mind when I say bipartisan, bottom up efforts.

So Republicans have shown that they can and will get behind a revenue neutral carbon tax because it's not revenue generating and it's not as heavy handed economically as some other potential climate policies. And so the way that something like that works is if grassroots organizations can communicate about a potential climate change solution, get people from both parties on board, and then communicate more about how both parties are on board, then that will get more and more people supportive of it and then they can bring that to the policymakers and say, look at all these people from both parties that we have supporting it. So that kind of effort. Grassroots organizations gathering support for their efforts from both parties. That's really promising.

What I've found in my work is that if people only know one party's stance on an issue or a topic, they assume the other party to be in opposition. So then they will oppose the opposing party. But if both parties' stances are known, people care much more about following their own party than they do about opposing the other one. And what that means practically here is that if an environmental organization can continue to use Democratic language and involve their Democratic supporters while also adding Republican language, not dropping the Democrats.

I think bipartisanship from the general public on an issue I've found to be much more possible than people generally believe it is just because people assume the parties are in opposition. But if you show that both parties support something, people really care more about following their own party and they are much less likely to actually just decide that they will oppose something because the other party supports it, then we might actually expect them to be.

**MIKE
LIVERMORE:**

Yeah. Yeah, that's interesting. In the current environment, especially in the fundraising environment, one of the things that we're missing, let's just say this, in the US that doesn't exist is a really very far right pro-environment group. And what I mean by that is an organization that supports addressing climate change, that cares about clean water or clean air, all this kind of standard environmental issues, that is also pro-life.

Now, maybe that's explicitly or implicitly. But where the groups are, where the staff, the leadership are pro-life, the same way that, frankly, environmental groups that we actually have all are very close to all of the members and senior leadership would be pro-choice. That this kind of right oriented environmental group would be against gun control. Would use language around, say, traditional families that people on the left would be very uncomfortable with, would have reasons to be very uncomfortable with. Where people would, say, endorse the Blue Lives Matter kind of language.

And it's just very hard to picture that group that I'm describing and it's really hard to picture the major philanthropic charitable organizations supporting him or the major donors of environmental groups supporting them. So if such a group existed, it sounds like it could do some of the work that you guys talk about of building more of a base of support for these issues amongst more conservative folks. But it also just seems like the kind of thing that's very difficult to even imagine in our current environment.

**MICHAEL
VANDENBURG:**

So a couple of thoughts on that. First, I think that's a very insightful point. I think it's exactly right. On the other hand, there is a group called the American Conservation Council. Benji Backer was one of *Time Magazine's* 30 under 30 because of his leadership among Republicans. Senator Bill Frist, former Majority Leader, has participated in that. There's a group by Bob Inglis, the former member of Congress from South Carolina, RepublicEn it's called now. That RepublicanEn group has made some effect, but it hasn't just exploded in terms of obviously its effect on the Republican Party. So there are some of those groups that are working there.

I guess I would say it need not be the far right group. I don't think that we need to get the right 10% of the population on board and I don't think we ever will. But I do think that what's fascinating is how little we've seen sort of center right groups form and get funded and expand. And that's one of the things I'm focusing on right now is trying to understand where are the moderate Republican philanthropists who might step forward and understand the critical role that the center right plays moving forward.

And I'll say one last thing that emerges out of the literature that I wish I had known when I was at EPA that I see environmental groups doing over and over, whether on the far left or the middle or wherever you are, which is understanding the role of social norms in inducing behavior change by organizations and individuals. And so for example, there is a tendency among environmental groups to say nobody in the private sector is following through on their ESG commitments. But I can't think of a better way to reduce the likelihood that they will follow through on their ESG commitments.

Because people do what they think others are doing. So if you are strategizing in an environmental NGO right now and you're listening to this podcast, the right message is not no one is doing X. The right answer is most that we've studied are doing X, but some are not and we're going to name and shame that group. So what you want to do is create and reinforce the sense that most people are doing what you want to do and that there are isolated cases where people are not and that you're going to call them out for that. And in often case, it's often true about the same number of companies are complying with their ESG commitments as cities are complying with their climate plans.

So is the right answer to call out the companies for not complying or the cities for not complying or is it to focus on the fact that a substantial percentage are complying and then really go after the ones that are not? There's an example, I think, of how the social psych literature can help all of us who are in the legal community figure out how better to use law and legal enforcement strategies and all to achieve the kind of ends we want to.

JENNIFER COLE: I think the main point that I'll emphasize is what Mike said, that it doesn't have to be the far right. That by talking about maybe an environmental organization that uses more typical Republican language to talk about climate solutions, that doesn't mean that the organization has to also support other Republican policy issues. It just means that they have to use language that-- even using verbiage or terminology that Republicans hear from their Republican politicians can kind of subconsciously trigger a sense of, oh, these are my people talking.

Or there's a lot we didn't get into in talking about what are the differences in Republican versus Democrat morals and values. But it's possible to talk about climate change and, for example, the morals of maintaining the purity of the natural environment. That would be something that research would say Republicans would kind of jump on board with more. So it's more plausible to think of an environmental organization that doesn't necessarily align itself with and advocate for a lot of other typically Republican policy positions but can still frame climate change in terms of language and goals that appeals to the way people talk within the Republican Party. I would say that that's more of an achievable and effective goal, if that makes sense.

MIKE LIVERMORE: Yeah, great. Well, thanks very much for all the insights that you guys have and your optimism and your tireless efforts to think of solutions to some really difficult problems. It's been a lot of fun chatting.

MICHAEL VANDENBURG: Thanks, Michael. It's been so useful. And we just encourage your audience to contact us by email through Vanderbilt Law School if they have questions or if we can follow up.

JENNIFER COLE: Yeah, thank you. This was great.

[MUSIC PLAYING]