States Divided: Partisan Polarization and Environmental Protection

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June 14, 2017

Scholars have documented increasingly divergent attitudes about climate change among elites and members of the public from the two major American political parties. We do not know, however, whether this dynamic is mirrored within state publics or state parties, or whether polarization is more pronounced for climate change or extends across the slate of environmental issues. Because of these gaps, studies of environmental policy-making—often focused on the state level—have not directly incorporated the role of public opinion or the political parties into their analyses. I compile an original dataset of survey responses about environmental protection spanning from 1970 to 2015, which I use to estimate annual views about environmental protection in each state, among Democrats and Republicans. I produce the estimates using a Bayesian modeling framework developed by Caughey and Warshaw (2015), and use them to identify variation in the timing and extent of polarization about environmental protection. These data form the foundation for a larger study of partisan polarization about the environment, in particular the relationship between public opinion and environmental enforcement in the states, and between polarization about climate change and polarization about more traditional environmental issues.
References