**Letter to the Editors of *Psychological Science*: Boosting Scientific Consensus Is Likely to Correct False Beliefs Across Domains: Regarding Zarzeczna et al. (2021) on van Stekelenburg et al. (2021)**

Van Stekelenburg et al. (2021) show that boosting people’s understanding of scientific consensus can be a valuable approach to correcting false beliefs. Although the technique was effective for Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), it did not significantly reduce misperceptions about climate change. Zarzeczna et al. (2021) point out that this result was to be expected because conflict over contested science is rooted in political worldviews and therefore knowledge-based techniques have limited relevance. Although we agree that ideological worldviews play a key role in the politicization of science, the conclusions Zarzeczna et al. (2021) draw do not follow from their argument and their characterization of the literature has been selective. Here we aim to argue that boosting public understanding of scientific consensus is in fact likely to be useful in most science domains.

First, although Zarzeczna et al. (2021) contrast “cognition”-based approaches against those rooted in social and political identities, we argue that this is a false dichotomy (van der Linden et al., 2017). For example, messages that highlight that over 97% of climate scientists agree that climate change is happening are a classic example of a descriptive norm or “social proof” about the average opinion of an influential group (Lewandowsky et al., 2013; van der Linden et al., 2019). Decades of research on social norms has illustrated (a) the power of group consensus and (b) that correcting misperceptions about the level of agreement within a group can influence private attitudes (van der Linden et al., 2019). Information-deficit therefore does not usefully describe the approach because the deficit that is being corrected is both factual *and* social in nature. Moreover, scientific consensus cues can be presented by prototypical in-group members which can enhance their efficacy. For example, other research has shown that although using scientific consensus to correct misperceptions about climate change is effective on its own, it is even more powerful when presented by a Republican source (Benegal & Scruggs, 2018). Other recent work has found that highlighting the scientific consensus on climate change can protect against contrarian arguments in the media regardless of ideology (Imundo & Rapp, in press)

Second, contrary to Zarzeczna et al.’s (2021) claim that factual knowledge can polarize attitudes—which is based on correlational research—large-scale experimental replications have found no evidence for backfire effects across domains (Wood & Porter, 2019) and research on boosting understanding of the scientific consensus has shown that it can actually help *depolarize* conflicting worldviews (Lewandowsky et al., 2013; van der Linden et al., 2018). This approach has also been found effective in other science domains such as COVID-19 (Kerr & van der Linden, 2021) without leading to polarized responses.

In closing then, while we acknowledge the important body of work on how different science beliefs are rooted in a variety of (political) worldviews, contrary to Zarzeczna et al.’s (2021) central claim, boosting scientific consensus can often help correct influential misperceptions *across* science domains. In fact, as we’ve argued, although accuracy and social motivations can sometimes conflict, they are two pieces of the same puzzle.

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