Trust, motivated reasoning and public confidence

Positive Energy – Trust in Transition
Planning workshop January 24, 2018, uOttawa
Dr. Stewart Fast, Senior Research Associate, Positive Energy

www.uottawa.ca/positive-energy
Why focus on trust and public confidence?

- Scale and scope of energy transition will be disruptive
- Trust and public confidence will be required
- Policies will have unintended trust and public confidence consequences
- And…levels of trust in the organizations and institutions responsible for transition are in decline (in crisis?)
- Trust rests on expectations being fulfilled. But…
  - Are decision makers clear on what public(s) can expect?
  - Impact of echo chamber and “motivated reasoning”?
- Issues and opportunities for the project
“...trust is in crisis around the world...”
(Edelman Trust Barometer, 2017)

- Trust is an asymmetric social asset


www.uottawa.ca/positive-energy
# Trust in authorities at project level


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kitimat – Haisla Nation (Northern Gateway Pipeline)</th>
<th>Eckville - Rimbey (Western Alberta Transmission Line)</th>
<th>Oakville (Gas plant)</th>
<th>King Township (Gas plant)</th>
<th>Kent County – Elsipogtog Nation (Shale gas exploration)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree or somewhat agree</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree or somewhat disagree</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Do you agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or disagree with the following statements?

**I trust public authorities making decisions about energy projects**

Nanos conducted an RDD dual frame (land- and cell- lines) telephone random survey of 1795 adult residents in the four communities between July 26th and Sept 7th 2016

www.uottawa.ca/positive-energy
Trust and energy policy – a few markers from social science literature

- Role of trust in energy policy underappreciated (Greenberg 2014) and valuable topic for an energy and social science research agenda (Sovocool 2014)
- Parkins et al (2016) has observed that distrust can have the positive effect of motivating citizen involvement in energy governance (“critical trust”)


Sovacool, B. K. (2014). What are we doing here? Analyzing fifteen years of energy scholarship and proposing a social science research agenda. Energy Research & Social Science, 1, 1-29
Echo chamber, motivated reasoning and critical trust

- 55% of Canadians do not regularly listen to people or organizations with whom disagree
- Canadians 3.5 x more likely to ignore information that supports a position they do not believe in
- 49% never or rarely ever change their position on important social issues
  - All from Edelman 2017
- "motivated reasoning" (e.g. Kahan 2016)
- What does it mean for trust and public confidence?


www.uottawa.ca/positive-energy
Motivated reasoning: 3 interpretations and implications

**Problem**
- People interpret new information in ways that protect and validate pre-existing cultural worldviews and cultural identities
- Response: recognize and adopt strategies to present evidence/messages/policies in ways that resonate with different cultural groups

**Fact of life**
- All reasoning is motivated (prior attitude effect, confirmation bias, disconfirmation bias)
- Response: similar to above

**Rational skepticism**
- Giving more weight to one’s carefully constructed prior attitudes is sensible and it is rational to be more skeptical of information that doesn’t fit with one’s understanding of issues
- Response: motivated reasoning brings forward attitudes based on values that should be part of energy transition discussion
Reason for optimism

• Public more confident than elites

Do you think Canada in general does a very good, good, average, poor or very poor job at developing a shared long-term vision for Canada's energy future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>very good</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>very poor</th>
<th>unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>public</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elites</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Public: Nanos Research, RDD dual frame hybrid telephone and online random survey, September 23rd to 26th, 2017, n=1000, accurate 3.1 percentage points plus or minus, 19 times out of 20 / Elites online survey of 88 environmental and energy leaders in Canada, from September 26th to November 27th, 2017. No margin of error applies from small sample.
Opportunities and issues to consider

• Trust is about fulfilled expectations - What are public expectations for low-carbon transition?
• Are decision makers clear on what public can expect? (role of modelling and foresight)
• How are new low-carbon technologies perceived? Is information processed in culturally specific ways?
• Trust and energy policy is understudied