

This is Rachel.

Rachel has spent four years thinking very hard about climate policy in rural England, and why people think differently about it.

Thinking very hard for a very long time about an obscure subject is sometimes called 'going mad'. Other times it is called 'doing a PhD'.

Rachel's PhD is about 100,000 words long. That is a lot of words.

Most people will not read it. That is why Rachel has made this book.



Rachel used to work for an environmental charity. Rachel thought that people who did not like wind farms were being selfish.

One day Rachel interviewed a man who had spent a long time trying to stop a wind farm being built near his village. He had not succeeded. Then he gave some money to another village, to help them stop a wind farm being built. And then they were not successful and everybody gave money to another village for their fight too.

“I feel like Wat Tyler,” the man said. “Nobody listens. They just ride roughshod over us.”

‘But do you think climate change is a problem?’ Rachel said. ‘Oh, yes!’ said the man, who was clearly not an idiot.

Rachel wondered about this for a very long time.



Another day Rachel was in a meeting with a farmer .
Some other people in the meeting said everybody
needed to be a vegan to stop climate change.

The farmer cried and left the meeting.

Later she phoned Rachel. 'Sorry', she said. 'I am a
beef farmer. My mother and father were beef farmers.
My grandparents were beef farmers. They gave me
the farm to take care of'.

'But do you think climate change is a problem?'
Rachel said. 'Oh, Yes!' said the farmer, who was
clearly not an idiot.

Rachel wondered about this for a very long time too.



The man was not against wind farms because he did not care about climate change. He was against them because nobody had asked him.

The farmer was not against veganism because she did not care about climate change. She was worried about it because suddenly everybody was treating her and her family as if they were Very Bad People Indeed.

Rachel realised she had been conflating two different things. What people think about climate change. And what people think about who gets to decide what to do about it. These are not the same thing at all.

Rachel also realised that a lot of the climate policies that help the *whole* country actually happen in the countryside, like renewable energy and changes to farming. And then she realised that rural places are *also* the least likely to get nice climate solutions like good buses, or building retrofit.

She decided to research what other rural English people thought about this imbalance.



Before Rachel could start finding things out, she had to read a very great deal. This is called a Literature Review.

Rachel read about climate science and how people understand it. She read about how the political left and right think differently about what is right and wrong.

She read about nationalism, and why some people feel very strongly that England is a special place that should be protected. She read about Populism, which is when people feel that ordinary people like them are being taken advantage of by people who are more powerful.

Rachel also read about the countryside, and why rural communities sometimes feel that decisions are made about them by people who have never been to them.

And she read about Citizens' Assemblies, and whether they are a good way of making difficult decisions.

It was a lot of reading.



All of these things are connected. This is what made Rachel's research interesting, and also quite hard.

The connection goes something like this.

Climate change will require big changes to the way we live. People on the left tend to think this is an opportunity to make society fairer. People on the right tend to worry that it will mean getting rid of things that matter.

Different people worry about different things, and there is nothing wrong with that. Unless one side tells the other that they are wrong to have their worries.

Rachel decided she would look at two things. How climate policies get made. And what those climate policies actually contain.

Both of these things, she suspected, were going to look very different depending on which way you vote.



First, Rachel looked at how we make climate policies, because in some parts of England, people are trying something new.

Instead of politicians deciding what to do about climate change, they ask a group of 'ordinary people' to think about it together.

People usually call this a Citizens Assembly. Rachel calls it a Deliberative Mini Public because she is an academic now and academics never use a short word where a long one will do.

Thousands of people in the area are randomly sent a letter to see if they want to take part. Hundreds of people write back to say that they do. The people running the process carefully choose a final group that will represent everyone in the area. Different ages. Different jobs. Different education. This process is called Sortition.

In the past though, people were not usually asked which political party they voted for. Rachel thought this was interesting.



Rachel wanted to know if this mattered. It turned out that it mattered quite a lot.

In Herefordshire, Rachel looked carefully at who had come to a Citizens' Assembly on climate change. She counted the Conservative voters.

There were not as many Conservative voters as she expected. This was strange, because Herefordshire has a great many Conservative voters.

It is that sort of place.

Rachel wondered if this was because the Conservative voters did not write back to the letters that invited them. This would be strange, because Conservative voters normally like to take part in public meetings.

They are that sort of people.

So Rachel looked at who came to three more climate assemblies.



In all three, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters had put their hands up. Green voters had put their hands up very enthusiastically indeed.

But not many Conservative voters had put their hands up to take part.

Next, Rachel surveyed a very large group of people all across England, and asked them to *imagine* that a climate assembly was going to happen in their town, and if they would volunteer.

The pattern was the same. Most Green and Labour and Liberal Democrat voters were worried about climate change and wanted to take part. Most Conservatives were worried about climate change too. But they didn't really want to take part. Rachel thought this was odd.

Most interestingly, a new party had formed. They were called Reform UK. They were not at all worried about climate change. But they *did* want to take part.

Something was going on.



Rachel found some other interesting things. When Reform UK voters said they would take part in a climate assembly, almost all of them said it was because they wanted to be there to argue that climate change is greatly exaggerated. This is quite different from why everyone else said they would take part.

Rachel also asked people a ranking question. She gave them a list of six things that could be used to make sure a climate assembly represented everyone fairly: Age, income, education, ethnicity, job type, and political party.

People ranked political party very low. They did not think it was important. Rachel found this very interesting indeed, because in her research, political identity predicted a lot. Whether people supported the idea of a climate assembly, whether they would volunteer for one, and what they thought it should be about.

A thing that people thought mattered least was the thing that mattered most. Rachel wrote this down carefully.



But Rachel's thesis has two halves.

That first half was about how climate policy gets made, and who is in the room when it happens.

The second half is about what climate *policies* actually do to the countryside, and how people feel about that.

So Rachel put on her coat and went to find out about the countryside.

The countryside is very important to a lot of people in England. More important, perhaps, than some people in cities realise.



If we want to stop climate change, we will need to do things that will change the countryside.

We will need to build wind farms and solar farms. We will need to rewild some fields and plant new woodlands. We will need farmers to change what they grow and how they grow it.

Some people think this is a good idea.

Some people think this is not a good idea at all.

Rachel wanted to measure how resistant people were to changes to the English countryside that will come directly from making policies to stop climate change.

But there was a problem. Nobody had made a tool to measure this yet.

Rachel decided to make one.



Making a measuring tool for scientists is not like making a measuring tool for a shed.

Rachel wrote lots of questions. Then she asked people to answer them. Then she looked very carefully at the answers using a technique called Factor Analysis.

Factor Analysis is complicated. Rachel has written a whole extra chapter explaining it.

The chapter is called an Annex. It is quite long.

After a great deal of work, Rachel had an eighteen-question scale for measuring how much people resist changes to the rural landscape from climate policy.

Rachel called it the RRCI scale. This stands for Resistance to Rural Climate Initiatives.

Rachel was pleased.



The RRCI scale revealed something surprising.

Rachel had expected that people who objected to wind farms (which are big and man-made) would feel differently from people who objected to rewilding (which is all about nature). She thought these were separate concerns.

They were not separate concerns.

People who resist one tend to resist the other.

This is because the resistance is not really about wind farms, and it is not really about rewilding.

It is about what the English countryside means to people, and what they think *it* says about who *they* are. Rachel had suspected this for some time.

This is called identity. Identity turns out to be very important in Rachel's thesis.



Rachel now had a measuring tool. She wanted to know what predicted a high score on it.

Many scientists use something called a regression model to see if one thing is related to another thing. For example, does being more rural make you more resistant to wind farms? A regression model can tell you if two things tend to go together, but it cannot tell you what caused what.

Rachel wanted to build a map of how all the different things she had measured - nationalism, populism, rurality, political party, climate science beliefs - connect to each other, and which ones cause resistance to rural climate policy.

This is called a Path Model. It is a type of Structural Equation Modelling which involves quite a lot of Quite Hard Maths. Rachel did not know how to do this at the start of her PhD.

She does now, so she has written about how to do this in the Annex too, in case anyone else who is bad at Quite Hard Maths wants to give it a try.

The Annex is now very long indeed.



Rachel's data showed that Conservative voters and Reform UK voters are very similar in some ways.

They both think of themselves as right-wing. They both have a very strong sense of English national identity. If you put them next to each other on just these measures, you cannot tell them apart at all.

Then Rachel looked at something called Populism. Populism is the belief that ordinary people are being betrayed by a corrupt elite.

On Populism, Conservative voters and Reform UK voters were not similar at all.

Reform UK voters had very high Populism scores.

Conservative voters had very low Populism scores. Lower, on average, than most of the left-wing people in the study.



Rachel looked at how all the people scored on the RRCI scale. She looked at Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters. They were hard to tell apart on the scale, and they all had quite low scores.

Then she looked at Conservative voters and Reform UK voters. Rachel had expected the right-leaning voters to have high scores, meaning they would be very resistant to rural change from climate policy. But Conservatives, it turns out, are pretty average in their level of rural climate policy resistance.

The other very interesting thing was that in Rachel's Path Models, which look at all the things that might make someone resistant to rural climate policies, being *Conservative* didn't actually have a direct path to resisting rural climate policies at all.

Feeling very English, and being very rural *did* have direct paths to slightly higher than average resistance.

But the strongest path of all was: being a Reform UK voter.



Although the people in Rachel's study all lived in rural areas, the Conservatives were more rural in many respects than all the other people in the study. They were more likely to be farmers, gamekeepers, and foresters, and more likely to be members of local clubs. Reform voters were about the least likely to do any of that.

There was another interesting thing. Reform UK voters were the only group where some people did not believe that the climate was changing at all. Some of them, about one in ten, said the climate simply was not changing.

Rachel thought this was remarkable. It is quite hard to live in England and not notice that the climate is changing.

For Reform UK voters, rejecting climate change seems to have become a bit like a badge of membership. It is something you say because it is what people like you say.

Rachel thinks this might be more about belonging than about evidence.



The Reform UK group had the highest scores on the RRCI scale.

In fact, the gap between Conservative and Reform voters one way was just as big as the gap the other way between Conservative and Green voters.

This was important. It means that talking to Conservative voters about climate policy and talking to Reform UK voters about climate policy are definitely not the same conversation.

They are not one group. People who design climate policy often treat them as one big group of 'right-wing people'.

Rachel felt this probably needed to be said more loudly.

So Rachel has put it in a very long PhD thesis. This is the academic equivalent of saying something loudly and is probably why a lot of research doesn't lead to any changes.



Rachel knows that her sort of data, based on lots of people's survey answers, can mostly tell you what is happening. It cannot always tell you why.

Rachel decided to have a think about why.

Scientists are allowed to do thinking about why, as long as they are clear that it is thinking rather than finding.

Rachel was very clear about this.

Rachel wondered about two things in particular:

1. Why do left-leaning people think differently about climate assemblies than right-leaning people?
2. Why is there such a difference on the political right in terms of who is resistant to climate policies that will change the countryside?



Rachel thought about why Conservative voters are so reluctant to volunteer for climate assemblies, even though they are a lot more worried about climate change than Reform UK voters.

Rachel thinks this might be because Conservatives think that Citizens' Assemblies are not really as democratic as some people say they are.

They might think that the country already has some good democratic systems that people in the past spent a long time building up. They might think it is a dangerous idea to try to replace all of that with something new.

They might think that a Climate Assembly sounds too limited in its scope. Will the assembly consider market solutions? Will anyone be allowed to ask why the UK should make sacrifices while much larger countries do not? Will nuclear power be on the table?

A Conservative voter might say 'This is not really going to be a conversation. This is a conclusion dressed up as a conversation'.



Rachel also thinks that right-leaning people might be less keen on climate assemblies because climate change and the political left have become very associated with each other.

For someone on the left, accepting climate science fits comfortably with everything else they already believe. It is ideologically cosy.

For someone on the right, it is more complicated. Talking about climate science can feel like being asked to also accept a whole set of left-wing ideas about how society should be reorganised, like degrowth, global justice, and lots of international regulations.

This is not the same thing as climate science. But they have become tangled up so much that some people can't talk about one without talking about the other.

Rachel calls this epistemic contamination. It is one of her favourite phrases.



If climate science feels like a left-wing project, it creates a problem for right-leaning people.

They must either accept the science and feel uncomfortable about what comes with it. Or find reasons to doubt the science, which makes the discomfort go away. This is not because right-leaning people are stupid. It is because all humans do this.

It is called motivated reasoning. Everyone is at it.

The difference is that for left-leaning people, accepting climate science is comfortable because it lets them talk about other things they like to talk about, like Being a Vegan, Community Organising, or Ending Capitalism.

For right-leaning people it is harder. Many of them feel they are not allowed to talk about things that are more important to them, like believing that their country is good and important, because they will be told climate change is all their country's fault. This is like telling them that their country is rubbish, which is so upsetting that they would rather disbelieve climate science.



Rachel also thought about the countryside.

She had found that resistance to rural climate policy is rooted in identity, and in feelings about what the English landscape is, and what it means.

Rachel thinks this is connected to something called Moral Foundations Theory. Moral Foundations Theory says that left-leaning and right-leaning people are different in how they think about right and wrong, care and harm.

Left-leaning people tend to think about fairness and avoiding harm to individuals.

Right-leaning people think about those things too. But they also think about loyalty, traditions and the importance of things that have been handed down.

That is probably why landscapes are more important to them, because they think that the landscape is a record of all the people who came before, and that they are supposed to keep them safe for people who aren't born yet.



Rachel thinks there is other work that could be done now.

Somebody could sit down with Reform UK voters and really talk to them about climate change, without lecturing them or saying they are stupid or morally bankrupt, but being really interested in how they think about climate change and why.

Somebody could design a climate assembly that a Conservative voter would really want to attend, maybe by being really clear about how it is related to existing democratic processes, and making sure businesses are represented.

Somebody could find out whether the RRCI scale works in urban areas, or in other countries, or at different times.

These are all very good research questions. Unfortunately, Rachel cannot answer them, because she is quite worn out from doing a PhD and needs to get a proper job now so she doesn't starve when she is an old lady.

Perhaps somebody else could have a go.



Rachel's actual PhD Thesis can be downloaded here:

<https://doi.org/10.17635/lancaster/thesis/3266>

You will especially like it if you are the sort of person who has trouble getting to sleep.

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A quantitative analysis of politically right-leaning residents' attitudes to climate assemblies and climate policy in rural England.

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