

BUSHWHACKING:

THE WICKED ATTEMPT TO MOBILIZE CLIMATE ACTION

How did climate action organizations attempt to mobilize civic engagement during the Bush Era?

1) Why Mobilize Civic Engagement?

- Climate change is a wicked problem that requires a major, if not fundamental, shift in governance and the political economy
- Civic engagement is a tool that's historically been used to make dramatic change in society¹

2) Why Bush Era?

- The Bush Admin. ('01-'09) was obstructionist to climate action, in ways similar to current President Trump's Admin., making it a useful case study in organizing civic climate engagement for today's administration
- Bush's objectives included: reduce regulations, nominate oil executives to federal agencies (eg. EPA), systematically create doubt on scientific evidence on climate change, maintain status-quo, block international climate agreements, energy independence through drilling in US²

GREENPEACE



3) Methods & Data

Who: The two most prominent mainstream grassroots climate organizations active during the Bush era, Greenpeace (GP) and the Sierra Club (SC)

What: Their publications on climate intended to reach a broad audience. SC: National magazine ("Sierra") & newsletter ("Planet") GP: online media archives and press releases

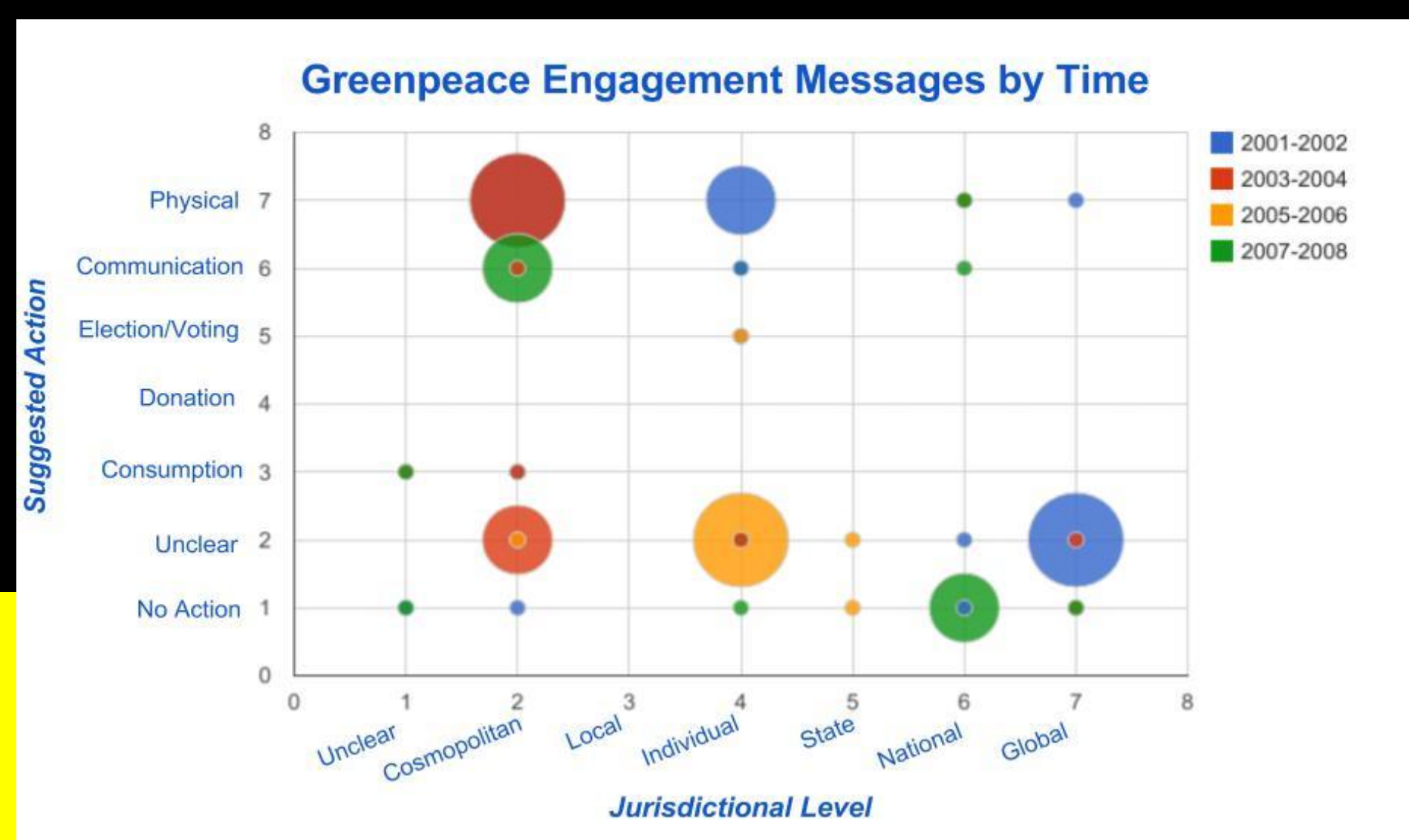
How: 1. Close reading rhetorical analysis. 2. Coding and graphing of their suggestions for engagement (type of action: scale of solution)

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SOURCES

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4. Rauber, Paul. "Two Time Losers." *Sierra*. Sept/Oct 2006.
5. Visser, Robert. *Greenpeace: Action at Exxon Mobil HQ in the US*. 6/27/03.
6. Visser, Robert. *Greenpeace: "Human Banner Art Climate Action Florida"*. 11/4/03.
7. Cash et al. "Scale and cross-scale dynamics: Governance and information in a multi-level world." *Ecology and Society*. 2006.
8. Nordhaus, Ted, and Michael Shellenberger. *Break through: From the death of environmentalism to the politics of possibility*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007.
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4) Suggested Types and Levels of Engagement



- Nuanced, but follows patterns:
 - '03/'04 → cosmopolitan level
 - '05/'06 → individual and state levels
- Consistency on unclear/no suggested actions & physical/communicative suggested actions

- Nuanced, but Newsletter had more consistent communication suggestion on all levels.
- Magazine, overall, had less consistent messages on suggested actions, more attention to national/global levels.



5) Sierra Club

Sea Levels Are Rising; Could Fuel Economy Standards Be Next?

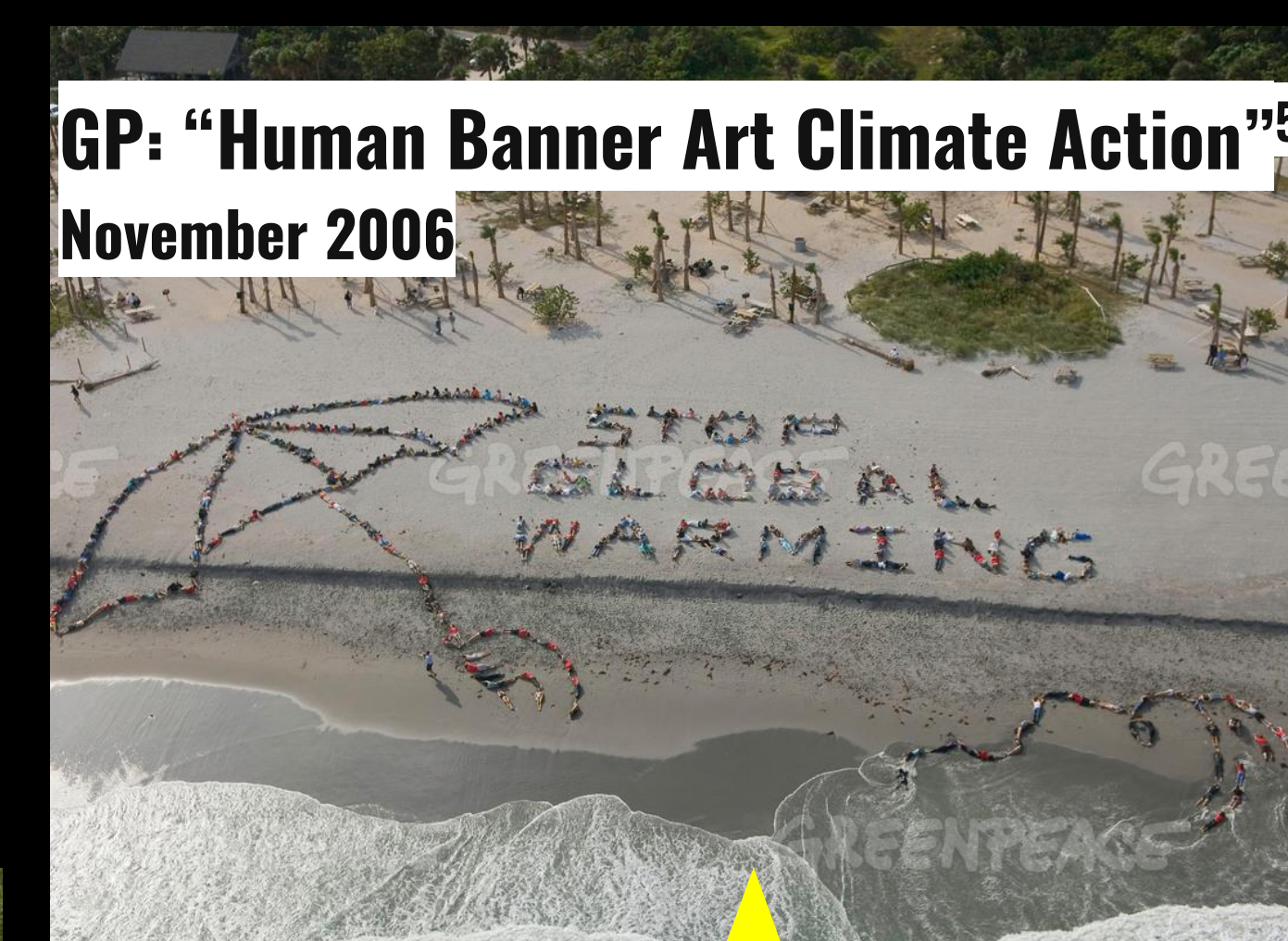
John Bryne Barry | Jan/Feb 2001
Take Action: Please write a letter to the editor bemoaning the US opposition to meaningful reductions in global warming pollution. You might mention what the Club has been saying for a decade, that the single biggest step to curbing global warming is raising fuel-economy standards for cars and trucks. (SOURCE: Planet)

Example of Sierra (for members and nonmembers). Commonly critiqued the Bush Admin. and Congress on climate related issue, citing corruption and lack of common sense.³

Example of Planet (for existing members to get more engaged). Commonly included section at the end articles called "Take Action." Usually suggested writing a letter to the editor, their senator, or congressperson.³



6) Greenpeace



Jurisdictional level: state
Action: Unclear
Appeal: fear of sea level rise

Jurisdictional level: cosmopolitan
Action: physical and consumption
Appeal: moral claim about corruption



7) Results

1. Flexibility over time and source in their messages about civic action → at least partially fulfilling Shellenberger and Nordhaus' *demand that environment. organizations adapt to contemporary the social values.*⁷
2. Ability to address multiple levels of jurisdiction → an asset to their movement, given Cash et al.'s claim that *addressing an issue's scalar idiosyncrasies is paramount to their success.*⁸
3. Tendency to send messages with "No Action Suggested" or "Unclear Action" → *appealing to people's emotions without a clear action may not effectively engage people*⁹

8) Implications: These mainstream climate engagement orgs. sent a diverse array of messages about the issues of and solutions to climate change, but lacked detailed and specific actions average individuals can take to join their movement.