

# Democratic decision making and the role of (climate) science

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Certain political and scientific groups claim that science would generate knowledge, from which immediate political measures would follow. A short hand is the reference to “without alternative”. The task left for policymaking is to make sure that these measures are efficiently implemented; also details of the implementation are left to the societal processes.

This is in particular so with climate science – at least in Germany, where I have been an observer, likely also in the UK and US. I suggest that this is a characteristic of all types of “post-normal science”, of which climate science is one. A science operates in post-normal conditions when scientific knowledge is uncertain, political decisions are urgent, societal values are affected and economic stakes are high.

Often, post-normality goes with a de-scientification of science, and a de-politicisation of policymaking. A key benefit of democratic policymaking, namely that decisions are obtained in societal negotiations, which go along with societal acceptance and social peace, is damaged in such a situation, because it is the scientifically constructed knowledge which leads to the decisions and not a competition and balancing of value-based options. In a post-normal situation, often the political utility of a scientific statements is more important than the scientific rigor behind it (e.g., by giving up the request of falsification) – which is a significant damage of the quality of science.

The alternative to „without alternative” is not that science remains silent in front of societal questions and issues. However, it would be good if scientists would respect their limitations, and policymakers would accept their responsibility in finding democratically acceptable solutions. The limitation of scientists is related to the fact that the issues, which need political attention, have implications for very many aspects, while scientists, as scientists, have competence only in very few aspects. This role of scientists is named “Honest Broker”.