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Climate change scepticism

Americans care deeply about 'global warming' - but not 'climate change'

Yale researchers have found that the two terms, often used interchangeably, generate very different responses



📷 Researchers found that the term 'global warming' resonates far more powerfully, triggering images of ice melt and catastrophe. Photo: Peter McBride /Barcroft

Suzanne Goldenberg US environment correspondent

Tuesday 27 May 2014 15.22 BST

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Barack Obama, scientists and campaigners have all looked at how to engage Americans more powerfully on the environment. Now

researchers have come up with one critical piece of advice: do say "global warming", don't say "climate change".

New research released on Tuesday found Americans care more deeply when the term "global warming" is used to describe the major environmental challenge. "Climate change", in contrast, leaves them relatively cold.

The two terms are often used interchangeably but they generate very different responses, the researchers from the Yale Project on Climate Change Communications and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communications said.

"Those two terms get heard and interpreted in very different ways," Anthony Leiserowitz, a research scientist at Yale and one of the lead authors, told The Guardian. "The choice of these two terms really does matter, depending on who you are talking to."

The term "global warming" resonates far more powerfully, triggering images of ice melt, extreme weather and catastrophe. Mention "climate change", however, and many Americans begin to disengage, the researchers found.

The researchers found naming the issue as "global warming" rather than climate change made it easier to connect. Americans in general were 13% more likely to say that global warming was a bad thing.

The differences were even more pronounced among Latinos, African-Americans, women, and young people.

Latinos were 30% more likely to view global warming as a personal threat, compared to climate change. African-Americans were 20% more likely to rate global warming as a very big risk, compared to climate change.

George W Bush swapped the term climate change for global warming in 2002, on the advice of the Republican political consultant, Frank Luntz.

In a secret memo before the mid-term elections, Luntz warned [Republicans](#) - and Bush in particular - were singularly weak on the environment. He advised a strategy of disputing climate science, and of avoiding the term "global warming" because of its highly negative connotations.

"It's time for us to start talking about 'climate change' instead of global warming ... 'climate change' is less frightening than 'global warming'," said the memo obtained by the Environmental Working Group.

The confusion stuck.

The [Obama administration](#), scientists and campaign groups have all struggled with how to communicate with Americans about the global challenge.

Officials in Obama's first term avoided any mention of the words global warming or climate change - believing it would provoke a backlash from Republicans - and spoke instead of “clean energy” and “green jobs”.

Scientists often prefer climate change to global warming for technical reasons.

Meanwhile, some campaign groups have argued that “global warming” was considered too political, and that “climate change” would make it easier to appeal to Republicans. The Bush administration preferred to use “climate change”.

Others coined new terms such as “climate crisis” and “global weirding”.

It turns out they would have all been better off sticking with global warming.

The survey sample of 1,657 people, compiled over a two-week period late last year, found a large swathe of Americans turned off by the words “climate change”.

“The use of the term *climate change* appears to actually *reduce* issue engagement by [Democrats](#), Independents, liberals, and moderates, as well as a variety of subgroups within American society, including men, women, minorities, different generations, and across political and partisan lines,” the researchers said.

“While global warming has catastrophic connotations attached to it, climate change suggests a more controllable and less emotional challenge.”

Meanwhile, there was no sign that using the term climate change was making any inroads in winning over Republicans, the researchers found.

“It is a kind of a wake-up call that it is complicated and that sometimes, depending on who you are communicating with, you are not achieving what you think you are,” Leiserowitz said.

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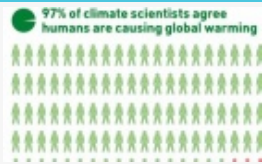


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Smith1867

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George W Bush swapped the term climate change for global warming in 2002, on the advice of the Republican political consultant, Frank Luntz.

Right, and then they went back in time to 1988 and renamed the Intergovernmental Panel on Global Warming (IPGW) to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

We hear whining from AGW activists all the time about inaccurate or misleading journalism from their enemies the Deniers, yet they must think that they get a pass. Furthermore, if explaining that global warming causes climate change, which is what the science says, is not scary enough, then you're not using science to promote action, you're using propaganda.

This is the kind of article that continues to confuse issues and promotes divisiveness.

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MobiusLoop → Smith1867

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This is the kind of article that continues to confuse issues and promotes divisiveness.

.....utter nonsense, this is a straightforward article on the complexities of communicating a complex and serious subject.

Climate Change or Global Warming, is underpinned by a vast body of scientific research and evidence presented in the **teeth of furious opposition from vested interests and many on the right** including Politicians and media sources.

Their output of those who oppose the reality of AGW on ideological grounds is extensive, and in many cases deliberately divisive and misleading. If you want to direct ire at anyone for causing confusion and politicizing the issue, that would be a better place to start.

All the cited research is doing, as reflected by the article is exploring the best way to clearly communicate the seriousness of the issue.

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Liam23 → Smith1867

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Right, and then they went back in time to 1988 and renamed the Intergovernmental Panel on Global Warming (IPGW) to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

It doesn't say he invented the terms, it says he swapped them.

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