
Global Warming: Controversy and Politics

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(Abstract)

Scientific opinion on climate change and Public opinion on climate change

There are different views over what the appropriate policy response to climate change should be. These competing views weigh the benefits of limiting emissions of greenhouse gases against the costs. In general, it seems likely that climate change will impose greater damages and risks in poorer regions.

Global warming controversy

The global warming controversy refers to a variety of disputes, significantly more pronounced in the popular media than in the scientific literature, regarding the nature, causes, and consequences of global warming. The disputed issues include the causes of increased global average air temperature, especially since the mid-20th century, whether this warming trend is unprecedented or within normal climatic variations, whether humankind has contributed significantly to it, and whether the increase is wholly or partially an artifact of poor measurements. Additional disputes concern estimates of climate sensitivity, predictions of additional warming, and what the consequences of global warming will be.

In the scientific literature, there is a strong consensus that global surface temperatures have increased in recent decades and that the trend is caused mainly by human-induced emissions of greenhouse gases. No scientific body of national or international standing disagrees with this view, though a few organisations hold non-committal positions.

From 1990-1997 in the United States, conservative think tanks mobilized to undermine the legitimacy of global warming as a social problem. They challenged the scientific evidence; argued that global warming will have benefits; and asserted that proposed solutions would do more harm than good.

Politics

Article 2 of the UN Framework Convention refers explicitly to "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations." In order to stabilize the atmospheric concentration of CO₂, emissions worldwide would need to be dramatically reduced from their present level.

Most countries are Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).[144] The ultimate objective of the Convention is to prevent "dangerous" human interference of the climate system. As is stated in the Convention, this requires that GHG concentrations are stabilized in the atmosphere at a level where ecosystems can adapt naturally to climate change, food production is not threatened, and economic development can proceed in a sustainable fashion. The Framework Convention was agreed in 1992, but since then, global emissions have risen. During negotiations, the G77 (a lobbying group in the United Nations representing 133 developing nations) :4 pushed for a mandate requiring developed countries to "[take] the lead" in reducing their emissions.[149] This was justified on the basis that: the developed world's emissions had contributed most to the stock of GHGs in the atmosphere; per-capita emissions (i.e., emissions per head of population) were still relatively low in developing countries; and the emissions of developing countries would grow to meet their development needs. This mandate was sustained in the Kyoto Protocol to the Framework Convention, which entered into legal effect in 2005.

In ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, most developed countries accepted legally binding commitments to limit their emissions. These first-round commitments expire in 2012. US President George W. Bush rejected the treaty on the basis that "it exempts 80% of the world, including major population centers such as China and India, from compliance, and would cause serious harm to the US economy."

At the 15th UNFCCC Conference of the Parties, held in 2009 at Copenhagen, several UNFCCC Parties produced the Copenhagen Accord. Parties associated with the Accord (140 countries, as of November 2010) aim to limit the future increase in global mean temperature to below 2 °C. A preliminary assessment published in November 2010 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) suggests a possible "emissions gap" between the voluntary pledges made in the Accord and the emissions cuts necessary to have a "likely" (greater than 66% probability) chance of meeting the 2 °C objective. The UNEP assessment takes the 2 °C objective as being measured against the pre-industrial global mean temperature level. To having a likely chance of meeting the 2 °C objective, assessed studies generally indicated the need for global emissions to peak before 2020, with substantial declines in emissions thereafter.

The 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) was held at Cancún in 2010. It produced an agreement, not a binding treaty, that the Parties should take urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet a goal of limiting global warming to 2 °C above pre-industrial temperatures. It also recognized the need to consider strengthening the goal to a global average rise of 1.5 °C.

Public opinion

The examples and perspective in this section deal primarily with English-speaking territories and do not represent a worldwide view of the subject. Please improve this article and discuss the issue on the talk page. (October 2011)

Based on Rasmussen polling of 1,000 adults in the USA conducted 29–30 July 2011.

In 2007–2008 Gallup Polls surveyed 127 countries. Over a third of the world's population was unaware of global warming, with people in developing countries less aware than those in developed, and those in Africa the least aware. Of those aware, Latin America leads in belief that temperature changes are a result of human activities while Africa, parts of Asia and the Middle East, and a few countries from the Former Soviet Union lead in the opposite belief. In the Western world, opinions over the concept and the appropriate responses are divided. Nick Pidgeon of Cardiff University said that "results show the different stages of engagement about global warming on each side of the Atlantic", adding, "The debate in Europe is about what action

needs to be taken, while many in the US still debate whether climate change is happening." A 2010 poll by the Office of National Statistics found that 75% of UK respondents were at least "fairly convinced" that the world's climate is changing, compared to 87% in a similar survey in 2006. A January 2011 ICM poll in the UK found 83% of respondents viewed climate change as a current or imminent threat, while 14% said it was no threat. Opinion was unchanged from an August 2009 poll asking the same question, though there had been a slight polarisation of opposing views.

A survey in October, 2009 by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press showed decreasing public perception in the US that global warming was a serious problem. All political persuasions showed reduced concern with lowest concern among Republicans, only 35% of whom considered there to be solid evidence of global warming. The cause of this marked difference in public opinion between the US and the global public is uncertain but the hypothesis has been advanced that clearer communication by scientists both directly and through the media would be helpful in adequately informing the American public of the scientific consensus and the basis for it. The US public appears to be unaware of the extent of scientific consensus regarding the issue, with 59% believing that scientists disagree "significantly" on global warming.

By 2010, with 111 countries surveyed, Gallup determined that there was a substantial decrease in the number of Americans and Europeans who viewed Global Warming as a serious threat. In the US, a little over half the population (53%) now viewed it as a serious concern for either themselves or their families; this was 10% below the 2008 poll (63%). Latin America had the biggest rise in concern, with 73% saying global warming was a serious threat to their families. That global poll also found that people are more likely to attribute global warming to human activities than to natural causes, except in the USA where nearly half (47%) of the population attributed global warming to natural causes.

On the other hand, in May 2011 a joint poll by Yale and George Mason Universities found that nearly half the people in the USA (47%) attribute global warming to human activities, compared to 36% blaming it on natural causes. Only 5% of the 35% who were "disengaged", "doubtful", or "dismissive" of global warming were aware that 97% of publishing US climate scientists agree global warming is happening and is primarily caused by humans.

Researchers at the University of Michigan have found that the public's belief as to the causes of global warming depends on the wording choice used in the polls.[167]

In the United States, according to the Public Policy Institute of California's (PPIC) eleventh annual survey on environmental policy issues, 75% said they believe global warming is a very serious or somewhat serious threat to the economy and quality of life in California.

A July 2011 Rasmussen Reports poll found that 69% of adults in the USA believe it is at least somewhat likely that some scientists have falsified global warming research.

A September 2011 Angus Reid Public Opinion poll found that Britons (43%) are less likely than Americans (49%) or Canadians (52%) to say that "global warming is a fact and is mostly caused by emissions from vehicles and industrial facilities." The same poll found that 20% of Americans, 20% of Britons and 14% of Canadians think "global warming is a theory that has not yet been proven."

Other views

Most scientists agree that humans are contributing to observed climate change. National science academies have called on world leaders for policies to cut global emissions. However, some scientists and non-scientists question aspects of climate-change science.

Organizations such as the libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute, conservative commentators, and some companies such as ExxonMobil have challenged IPCC climate change scenarios, funded scientists who disagree with the scientific consensus, and provided their own projections of the economic cost of stricter controls. In the finance industry, Deutsche Bank has set up an institutional climate change investment division (DBCCA), which has commissioned and published research on the issues and debate surrounding global warming. Environmental organizations and public figures have emphasized changes in the current climate and the risks they entail, while promoting adaptation to changes in infrastructural needs and emissions reductions. Some fossil fuel companies have scaled back their efforts in recent years,[1982] or called for policies to reduce global warming.

Etymology

The term global warming was probably first used in its modern sense on 8 August 1975 in a science paper by Wally Broecker in the journal *Science* called "Are we on the brink of a pronounced global warming?". Broecker's choice of words was new and represented a significant recognition that the climate was warming; previously the phrasing used by scientists was "inadvertent climate modification," because while it was recognized humans could change the climate, no one was sure which direction it was going. The National Academy of Sciences first used global warming in a 1979 paper called the Charney Report, it said: "if carbon dioxide continues to increase, [we find] no reason to doubt that climate changes will result and no reason to believe that these changes will be negligible." [188] The report made a distinction between referring to surface temperature changes as global warming, while referring to other changes caused by increased CO₂ as climate change.

Global warming became more widely popular after 1988 when NASA climate scientist James Hansen used the term in a testimony to Congress. He said: "global warming has reached a level such that we can ascribe with a high degree of confidence a cause and effect relationship between the greenhouse effect and the observed warming." His testimony was widely reported and afterward global warming was commonly used by the press and in public discourse.

Notes

The 2001 joint statement was signed by the national academies of science of Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, the Caribbean, the People's Republic of China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand, Sweden, and the UK. [190] The 2005 statement added Japan, Russia, and the U.S. The 2007 statement added Mexico and South Africa. The Network of African Science Academies, and the Polish Academy of Sciences have issued separate statements. Professional scientific societies include American Astronomical Society, American Chemical Society, American Geophysical Union, American Institute of Physics, American Meteorological Society, American Physical Society, American Quaternary Association, Australian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society, Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences, Canadian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society, European Academy of Sciences and Arts, European Geosciences Union, European Science

Foundation, Geological Society of America, Geological Society of Australia, Geological Society of London-Stratigraphy Commission, InterAcademy Council, International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics, International Union for Quaternary Research, National Association of Geoscience Teachers, National Research Council (US), Royal Meteorological Society, and World Meteorological Organization.

Earth has already experienced almost 1/2 of the 2.0 °C (3.6 °F) described in the Cancun Agreement. In the last 100 years, Earth's average surface temperature increased by about 0.8 °C (1.4 °F) with about two thirds of the increase occurring over just the last three decades.

^ Note that the greenhouse effect produces an average worldwide temperature increase of about 33 °C (59 °F) compared to black body predictions without the greenhouse effect, not an average surface temperature of 33 °C (91 °F). The average worldwide surface temperature is about 14 °C (57 °F).

^ In the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, published in 2007, this attribution is given a probability of greater than 90%, based on expert judgement.[191] According to the US National Research Council Report – Understanding and Responding to Climate Change – published in 2008, "[most] scientists agree that the warming in recent decades has been caused primarily by human activities that have increased the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere."