

# Survey finds public support for geoengineering research

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Research on geoengineering appears to have broad public support, as a new, internationally-representative survey revealed that 72 per cent of respondents approved research into the climate-manipulating technique.

The study, published today, 24 October, in IOP Publishing's journal *Environmental Research Letters*, is the first international survey on [public perception](#) of geoengineering and [solar radiation](#) management (SRM) and shows that these terms are becoming increasingly embedded into [public discourse](#).

Public awareness of geoengineering is remarkably broad. Eight per cent of the sample were able to provide a correct definition of geoengineering, an increase on previous estimates; however, 45 per cent of the sample correctly defined the alternative term "[climate engineering](#)", adding weight to the argument that "geoengineering" may be misleading and difficult to understand.

The 18 question, internet-based survey was completed by 3,105 participants from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States at the end of 2010, and was designed to ascertain how widespread [public knowledge](#) of geoengineering was and how the public actually perceived it.

Professor David Keith of Harvard University said: "Some reports have suggested that opposition to geoengineering is associated with environmentalists, but our results do not support this view.

"We found that geoengineering divides people along unusual lines. Support for geoengineering is spread across the political spectrum and is linked to support for science concern about [climate change](#).

"The strongest opposition comes from people who self-identify as politically conservative, who are distrustful of government and other elite institutions, and who doubt the very idea that there is a [climate](#) problem."

Geoengineering is the process of deliberately manipulating the Earth's climate to counteract the effects of global warming, whilst SRM is a type of geoengineering that seeks to reflect sunlight by various means to reduce warming.

The Stratospheric Particle Injection for Climate Engineering (Spice) project is a well-documented example of SRM that intends to release sulphate-based particles into the troposphere in attempt to reflect the light rays from the sun and reduce warming.

The researchers, from the University of Calgary, Harvard University and Simon Fraser University, publish their work at a critical time for Spice as a test project scheduled to take place in the UK was recently delayed by six months in order to explore and discuss the social aspects associated with geoengineering.

Interestingly, global warming was not a key factor in determining an individual's support or opposition of SRM. The researchers hypothesised that seeing climate change as an important issue, and its causes anthropogenic, would be an obvious predictor of support.

Ashley Mercer, lead author of the study, said: "I think this is the first in line of many studies that will show that SRM intersects with people's political and environmental attitudes in surprising ways.

"The results suggest that dialogue surrounding this topic needs to be broadened to include ideas of risk, values and trade-off."

**More information:** 'Public understanding of solar radiation management' A M Mercer, D W Keith and J D Sharp 2011 *Environ. Res. Lett.* 6 044006. [iopscience.iop.org/1748-9326/6/4/044006](https://iopscience.iop.org/1748-9326/6/4/044006)

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