

Actions and beliefs behind climate change stance

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A composite image of the Western hemisphere of the Earth. Credit: NASA

Strategies for building support for climate change mitigation policies should go beyond attempts to improve the public's understanding of science according to new research.

The study, published today in *Nature Climate Change*, found that regarding human-induced climate change, the actions and beliefs of both sceptics and believers could be understood as integrated expressions of self, underpinning specific social identities.

Using an [online survey](#) of climate change sceptics and believers living in the US researchers from Monash and other universities measured differences between the two groups in terms of environmental behaviours, emotional responses, national and global identification and a number of other variables.

Monash University behavioural social scientist Dr Ana-Maria Bliuc from the School of Social Sciences said although there was a growing belief in the general public that climate change was real; there was a sharp division in beliefs about its causes, with many sceptical of human-induced change.

"We found the contrasting opinions of believers and sceptics about the causes of climate change provided the basis of social identities that define who they are, what they stand for, and who they stand with (and against)," Dr Bliuc said.

"In making up an aspect of self, these beliefs and emotional reactions can predict [support](#) for actions that advance the positions of each group."

The researchers also found that part of the group consciousness of each group is anger at the opposing side.

"This finding suggests that antagonising sceptics and increasing their

anger towards their opponents is likely to polarise them further, making them more committed to act in support of their cause," Dr Bliuc said.

The researchers suggest the divisions between the two groups are unlikely to be overcome by communication and education strategies alone.

"Interventions that increase angry opposition to action on [climate change](#) are especially problematic," Dr Bliuc said.

"Strategies for building support for mitigation policies should go beyond attempts to improve the public's understanding of science, to include approaches that will change the relationship between the two groups."

More information: *Nature Climate Change*, [DOI: 10.1038/nclimate2507](#) target="_blank">nature.com/articles/[DOI: 10.1038/nclimate2507](#)

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Provided by Monash University

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