

Public views vary on climate change based on science, political news platforms

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While greater knowledge alone is unlikely to overcome the political divide on climate change, conservatives and liberals become less

polarized when the perception of harm increases, according to a new study by the University of Michigan and Ohio State University.

Lead author Sol Hart, U-M assistant professor of communication studies, and colleagues examined how attention to science and [political news](#) may influence the public's knowledge, risk perception and support for [climate change](#) policies. The data came from a nationally representative survey involving more than 1,200 people funded by the School of Communication at Ohio State University and the National Science Foundation.

Paying attention to science news reports on climate change increased knowledge for both conservatives and liberals, the study found. Attention to science news also raised conservative perceptions of harm closer to what liberals believed.

In contrast, increased attention to political news was not associated with knowledge gains for liberals or conservatives. Attention to political news did not impact perceptions of harm for liberals, but lowered perceptions of harm for conservatives.

The direct effect of knowledge on policy support was positive for liberals but negative for conservatives. In contrast, increased perceptions of harm were associated with more policy support for [liberals](#) and conservatives.

The results suggest some promising pathways for science communicators, Hart said.

"For conservative audiences, employing science/environmental news platforms to highlight the potential harm and risks of climate change, rather than focusing on factual [knowledge](#), may increase policy support among this segment," Hart said.

Furthermore, improving the accuracy of climate change coverage in political news outlets and reducing false-balance—which provides equal weight to climate advocates and deniers—especially in those outlets that lean conservative, may diminish the direct negative influence of political news on perceived harm and policy support exhibited in the analysis, Hart said.

Hart and colleagues noted that their study measured policy attitudes but did not observe voting behavior.

The findings appear in *Nature Climate Change*.

More information: Public attention to science and political news and support for climate change mitigation, [DOI: 10.1038/nclimate2577](https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2577)

Provided by University of Michigan

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