

Republicans more persuasive than scientists on climate change

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Regardless of political affiliation, people are more likely to believe facts about climate change when they come from Republicans speaking against what has become a partisan interest in this country, says a new University of Connecticut study.

In fact, Republicans are even more persuasive than scientists when it comes to correcting misinformation about climate change, researchers found.

"Unfortunately, correcting misinformation is much harder than simply providing 'facts'," says Lyle Scruggs, professor of political science at UConn, who co-authored the paper with Salil Benegal, a recent UConn Ph.D. graduate, now at DePauw University. The study is published in *Climatic Change*.

"For science issues such as climate change, we might expect scientists to be a credible and neutral authority," says Benegal. "However, partisanship increasingly influences perceptions of scientific credibility."

The study included 1,341 people, data collected by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and focused on a specific partisan issue on which scientific consensus has been widely adopted by Democrats but challenged by Republicans. Participants included those who self-identified as Republicans, Democrats, or Independents.

As expected, study authors found a partisan gap between Democrats and

Republicans in their stated opinions on climate change, with Democrats expressing the highest level of concern and scientific agreement. The partisan gap diminished, however, with corrective information.

In the study, misinformation was corrected by factual information from different sources stating the presence of broad scientific consensus that climate change is happening and attributable to human activity.

All participants, regardless of partisanship, received factual corrections after reading a statement denying climate change. The corrections were randomly attributed to Republicans, Democrats, or non-partisan climate scientists.

Overall, participants found the most effective corrections came from Republicans rather than non-partisan scientists or Democrats. This transcended partisan leanings, researchers found.

"This may be because Republicans who make such statements are engaging in more potentially costly behavior that lend them additional persuasive value," the authors say.

Republican political identity is now perhaps associated with climate change denial. As such, Republicans engaging in pro-climate change discourse is more "surprising" to all citizens, the authors say.

The researchers examined the issue in an attempt to determine which sources of information are the most effective in persuading individuals to reject misinformation on the topic of climate change.

The findings have implications for environmental communication strategies that seek to improve awareness about climate change.

"Citing Republican elites who endorse the [scientific consensus](#) on

[climate](#) change may be the most effective way to persuade citizens that [climate change](#) is a real and important problem," says Scruggs. "That may be a step forward in reducing the partisan gap in public opinion on the subject."

More information: Salil D. Benegal et al. Correcting misinformation about climate change: the impact of partisanship in an experimental setting, *Climatic Change* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10584-018-2192-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-018-2192-4)

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