

Does Taylor Swift deserve criticism over her private jet habits?

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Criticism of Taylor Swift on social media soared this past weekend after the pop singer [topped a list](#) of celebrities most guilty of polluting the planet with their private jets.

Swift's jet was in use for 170 out of the first 200 days of the year and emitted 8,293.54 metric tons of CO₂e, 1,184.8 times what a normal person emits each year, according to a [report from the sustainable marketing firm Yard](#). Out of the 21 celebrities ranked in the report, in 2022 the average celebrity jet emitted 3376.64 tons of CO₂e this year, or 482.37 times the average person's emissions per year.

Social media users were quick to respond to the findings over the weekend, creating memes depicting Swift using her private jet to go to Starbucks or to get a glass of water. Swift released a statement saying she regularly loans out her private jet to others.

Some users, however, questioned whether it was helpful or fair to blame celebrities like Swift for climate change considering that 100 companies are responsible for 71% of [carbon emissions](#). Deflecting blame onto consumers is a tactic used by corporate America to avoid [climate action](#). However, experts say that individuals and celebrities alike should still make climate-minded travel choices.

"I think it's great that there's attention being brought to the issue of the ethical considerations of flying," says Laura Kuhl, assistant professor of public policy and urban affairs and international affairs at Northeastern, in response to the Swift controversy. "The impacts of flying, even if it's commercial flights, are really, really high."

While 57% of transport emissions come from cars, she says, [flights make up 8% of emissions in the U.S.](#), and one transatlantic flight produces more emissions than most individuals will in an entire year. In total, [transportation made up 27% of greenhouse gas emissions](#) in the U.S. in 2020, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Compared to [commercial flights](#), the inefficiency of private jets is "off the charts," Kuhl says. Most private jet flights are relatively short: Kylie

Jenner was in the air for 13 minutes on Sunday, and Floyd Mayweather, who was the second biggest offender on the list, clocked a flight at 10 minutes long this year. Since most emissions are generated during takeoff and landing, this makes these flights particularly inefficient, in addition to the fact that they generally carry few people.

Taking a commercial flight is far better than flying private, though "there's really no circumstance where flying is more efficient than driving," she says. Choosing to take alternate forms of transport can have a big impact, and if you must fly, flying direct is better than choosing a [flight](#) with a layover.

Infrastructural changes, including investing in public transit, would help to encourage people to avoid flying, Kuhl says. Currently, transportation is the highest-emitting economic sector of the U.S., and following in China and Europe's footsteps by investing in high-speed rail would make a huge difference. "When that infrastructure is in place, people will use it," she says. Switching to electric vehicles would also be helpful.

However, the greatest impact would come from regulating corporations that contribute the most to climate change.

"It's true that the majority of emissions are generated by a small number of fossil fuel companies that are driving the supply of fossil fuels," Kuhl says. "Absolutely we should not lose sight of the need to put regulations in place."

Corporations with an interest in blocking climate action have instead exhibited a pattern of deflecting responsibility onto the consumer, according to Kuhl. An example of this is the rise of the term "carbon footprint" to describe how individual actions fuel climate change. The term, Kuhl says, was coined by British Petroleum, which also released a carbon footprint calculator in 2004.

"They wanted to push the issue onto consumers, of individual responsibility," Kuhl says.

The "carbon footprint" model distracts from the much bigger forces at play when it comes to climate change. The notion that individuals contribute to [climate](#) change by, for example, using plastic straws, "are really touching the surface and not really understanding the systemic nature of a lot of environmental problems and the need for more systemic solutions," Kuhl says.

Still, individual decisions do have an impact.

"I don't think this is an either/or," she says. "We need to be addressing it from all directions."

"Individuals may not be able to make the same contribution," says Alexandra Meise, associate teaching professor at the Northeastern School of Law, "but it doesn't mean individuals can't make a difference."

Meise suggests that travelers adjust plans to minimize flights and to utilize high-speed rails, which are far more efficient.

The debate over accountability aside, making choices to help combat [climate change](#) is a necessity, Meise says.

"If we are going to meet the targets that experts say are necessary in order to keep global temperature rises below that magic 1.5 degrees Celsius that they call for to avoid cataclysmic consequences, then we do need every little bit that we can get."

Provided by Northeastern University

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