

Emphasizing the need for energy independence could change the views of climate deniers, study says

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Emphasizing the need for energy independence and environmental stewardship could help to change people's minds about the climate crisis,

a new study says.

Climate change deniers focus on what they can see and have experienced personally, so solutions need to be framed in a way which makes sense to local communities.

But for this to work the political-media ecosystem also needs to shift to support climate action, and their corporate backers held accountable for the damage they have wrought, according to the research.

The study, published in *Ethnos Journal of Anthropology*, was carried out by Dr. Susannah Crockford from the University of Exeter.

Dr. Crockford spent time in rural areas in three states in the southern US—Arizona, Louisiana, and Missouri. She found denial, a political-media ecosystem funded by fossil fuel companies, and the influence of conservative white evangelicalism.

Those who Dr. Crockford spoke to did care about [erosion](#) and storms and fire and flood and their homes and their livelihoods and their communities. They were aware of climate changes and impacts from extreme weather events. However, they understand these events through what they had personally experienced—which they saw as caused by natural and supernatural factors—rather than through [climate science](#).

Dr. Crockford said, "I found a lack of belief in climate change or action comes not from [emotional reactions](#) or information deficit but because people's knowledge is insufficient for the scale of the problem faced. People could claim a sense of innocence by refusing to accept climate change.

"Some people thought climate change was just a plot cooked up by the Democrats to force through socialist policies by inventing a phony crisis

to solve. Those with [religious faith](#) thought what happened in nature could only be determined by God not affected by human activity.

"Fewer people worked in the oil industry but it maintained its symbolic status. 'People need power,' I was told, 'we gotta keep the lights on.' This was said with a shrug, indicating a level of resignation over the loss of land and pollution from [oil spills](#) as the price to pay for the benefits that fossil fuels brought."

James, a man in his 60s whose house had flooded twice, told Dr. Crockford he did not believe in [climate change](#). He did not see the proof of rising water visibly on his dock, so he rejected the association between increases in atmospheric carbon levels and sea level rise, although he conceded that he had not paid attention to what he called 'the graphs.'" Even though James held out the possibility that it was getting warmer every summer, he thought this was because he had become more sensitive to the temperature with age.

On the subject of erosion, however, James was clear-sighted: "The erosion's killing us," he told Dr. Crockford, reflecting on the changes he had seen in his lifetime: "I saw the environment change from a young age to what it is now ... all the places I used to fish are no longer there, it's just open water."

Dr. Crockford said, "In Louisiana people interviewed had an acute awareness of the fragility of the land they lived on and the risks to their way of life that they could observe and experience personally. However, their own direct observation and [personal experience](#) was prior to, and more important than, the computational models and numerical abstractions—'the graphs'—of climate science. Climate changes such as erosion and oil spills could be seen, whereas sea level rise could not."

More information: Susannah Crockford, *That Which They Will Not*

See: Climate Denial as a Vector of Epistemological Crisis in the Contemporary United States, *Ethnos* (2023). DOI: [10.1080/00141844.2023.2242599](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2023.2242599)

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