

Your emotional reaction to climate change may impact the policies you support, study finds

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Emotional reactions to climate change may lead to specific policy preferences, according to a study published in the open-access journal

PLOS Climate by Teresa A. Myers of George Mason University and colleagues.

A politician, public speaker, or journalist may opt for an [emotional appeal](#) when communicating about [climate change](#). Indeed, research shows that emotional investment can raise awareness of important issues and galvanize an otherwise apathetic public. However, existing [research](#) has not explored the unique links between specific emotions and support for types of climate policies.

Myers and colleagues explored whether five common [emotional reactions](#) to climate change (guilt, anger, hope, sadness, and fear) lead to distinct climate policy preferences using survey questions drawn from the ongoing Climate Change in the American Mind survey project.

Survey questions clarified respondents' emotional responses to climate change (e.g., "How strongly do you feel each of the following emotions when you think about ... [global warming](#)?") and support for specific policies (e.g., "Increase [federal funding](#) to low-income communities and communities of color who are disproportionately harmed by air and water pollution").

Surveys were distributed via Ipsos every six months from 2010 to 2022. Of the 16,605 total participants, 51% reported their gender as female and 73% reported their race as "White, Non-Hispanic." On average, participants were ages 45-54 and received "Some college" education. Survey questions did account for political ideology as well.

Results indicated that the five emotions are uniquely associated with support for specific categories of climate policy preferences:

- Guilt and anger are most strongly associated with support for personally costly policies (e.g., paying a gasoline tax).

- Hope and sadness are most strongly associated with support for proactive policies (e.g., investing in infrastructure).
- Fear, while most strongly associated with support for regulatory policies (e.g., regulating emissions) in comparison to other types of policies, was most strongly associated with all types of policy support in comparison to other emotions.

The researchers state that these results underscore the importance of emotion for understanding and encouraging climate policy support. For example, individuals and organizations advocating for proactive climate solutions might appeal to feelings of hope.

The authors add, "We find that in comparison to other policy options: those who are more fearful of climate change are more likely to support regulatory-first approaches to policy; those who feel more guilty support personally costly climate policies; and those who are more hopeful support more proactive climate policies like generating [renewable energy](#) on public land."

More information: Myers TA, Roser-Renouf C, Leiserowitz A, Maibach E (2024) Emotional signatures of climate policy support, *PLOS Climate* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pclm.0000381](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000381)

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