

How fear and hysteria fuels politics of climate science

Adam Creighton



Two decades after the release of Al Gore's film documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, it has become fun to point out how few of his hysterical claims have materialised. Sea levels have not risen six metres. The snows of Kilimanjaro have not vanished. Polar bear numbers have risen, and no major cities lie underwater.

Gore's impact on the climate change debate has been infamous, and increasingly amusing. But blame for the steady brainwashing of swaths of the population, including schoolchildren, who surveys show are the most fearful, must rest with the wider mainstream media.

Far from "following the science", it turns out 10 of the most important news outlets in [Britain and the US](#) have catastrophised the lengthy Assessment Reports produced every few years by hundreds of scientists under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Rigorous new research, published last month by the National Bureau of Economic Research, trawled through more than 116,000 newspaper articles from 10 influential outlets, both right- and left-leaning, and found systematic fearmongering in their reporting of the six major Assessment Reports from 1990 to 2023.

“Public summaries of IPCC climate assessments lean toward the more severe end of the technical evidence,” the authors find in their new paper, *Divergence in Climate Change Communication*.

Their conclusion is striking, though not surprising. First, the official Summaries for Policy Makers are themselves biased. These summaries tend to cherry-pick the more extreme forecasts and outcomes contained in the much larger IPCC Assessment Reports.

All 195 IPCC member governments – whose bureaucrats have typically swallowed the alarmist narrative – must approve SPMs line by line before they are released to the media. “This makes the public-facing document a politically negotiated artefact rather than a neutral summary of the underlying science (and) because a single delegation (can) block consensus, the wording converges on what the most risk-averse delegation will accept,” the report says, adding the SPM “reweights severity upward” in every one of the six reports.

From then on, it’s institutional [Chinese whispers](#) on a grand scale as the media sensationalises the findings further still, filtering the SPMs’ claims by dwelling on the scariest projections, and sometimes dumping important hedges and qualifiers that were essential to the original IPCC report.

Remarkably, left- and right-leaning outlets show similar patterns, except for *The Wall Street Journal*, which was the only outlet that consistently understated SPM (*The Guardian* and *The Independent* were the most sensationalist in the catastrophist direction).

Who can forget *The Guardian*’s 2004 classic report from “experts” that by 2020 “European cities will be sunk beneath rising seas as Britain is plunged into a ‘Siberian’ climate by 2020. Nuclear conflict, mega-droughts, famine and widespread rioting will erupt across the world”.

The report’s authors do not argue that anybody is fabricating evidence. Nor do they claim the science itself is wrong. Rather, scientists and journalists, being human and as such beholden to their own preconceived political and scientific ideas, select the higher-impact estimates and more dramatic interpretations that already exist.

For years, sceptics have been accused of distorting climate science. Yet clearly the major and far more insidious distortion has been in the opposite direction given the trillions spent on unreliable and extremely expensive wind and solar power. They have contributed to a global climate cult.

Why does this tendency toward amplification run so consistently in one direction? Look no further than the institutions that produce and interpret scientific knowledge: universities.

The same month the NBER paper appeared, another remarkable study examined the ideological character of academic social science itself. It turns out roughly 90 per cent of politically relevant social science articles leaned left between 1960 and 2024, and all disciplines drifted left from 1990 onwards, according to a new study from Oxford University.

Sociologist author James Manzi – who probably deserves a bravery award – used AI to analyse almost 600,000 English-language social science journal abstracts published between 1960 and 2024. He also found that the academic disciplines with more leftward orientation displayed the most ideological conformity. Perhaps the only positive finding was that sociocultural content “was more consistently left-leaning than economic content”, a gap that had been widening. Economists still have to argue in logic, numbers and statistics, which makes it harder, though not impossible, to publish biased nonsense.

“When evaluated under a stable 2025 ideological reference frame, anglophone social science abstracts have been persistently classified to the left of centre for decades, and this asymmetry has intensified over the past 30 years, most sharply on sociocultural dimensions,” Manzi concluded, singling out “climate change, racial justice, and gender/sexuality research” as among the top growth areas in social science research.

The very institutions that relentlessly advocate for diversity in the workplace clearly don’t prefer it for themselves. The popular veneration for “peer-reviewed” publications in such an environment is similarly ridiculous.

Whether the issue is climate change, energy, inequality, public health or immigration, interested citizens are often told they are receiving “the science”. Yet they are being fed a chain of politicised interpretations layered on top of the science that is often contestable, as the footnotes of the IPCC reports make clear – if ever we were lucky enough to hear about them.

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