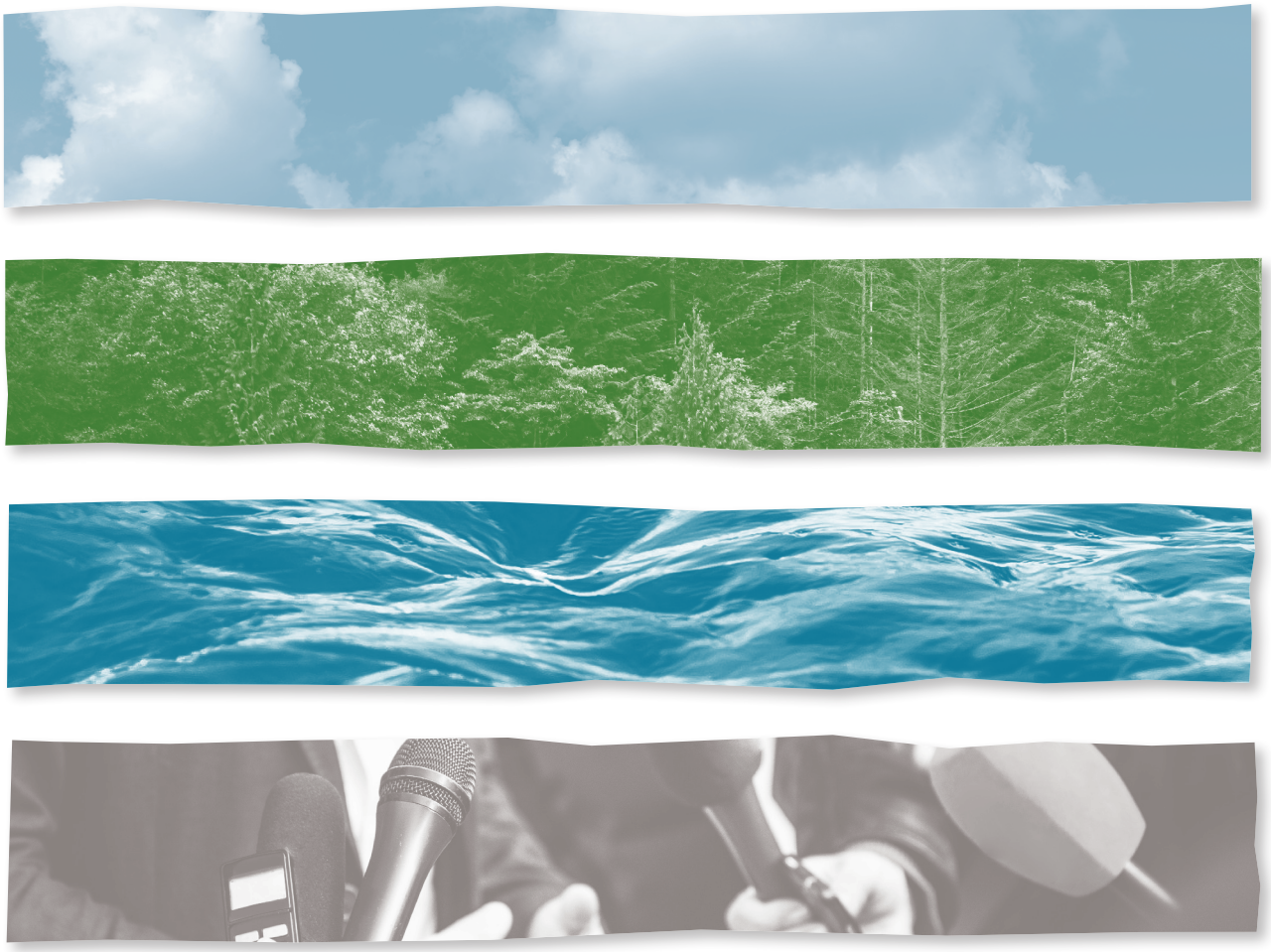

THE CLIMATE COVERAGE IN CANADA REPORT

Preliminary findings of an independent study on how journalists, scientists, and the public perceive news coverage of climate change

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contents

WHAT IS THE **CLIMATE COVERAGE IN CANADA REPORT** ABOUT?

Climate change is the biggest story of our time and journalists around the world have been grappling with how to get it right.

This preliminary report on Climate Coverage in Canada aims to help journalists in that effort. It's part of a larger study examining how journalists, climate change scientists, and the public view news coverage of a phenomenon that will affect every aspect of our lives and, by extension, every beat the media reports on. It's the first Canadian study to compare the perceptions of all three groups.

The information in this report is a fraction of the data from a 37-question public survey, 83-question scientist survey, and 92-question journalist survey. The surveys were fielded by polling company Research Co. of Vancouver with the support of the Canadian Association of Journalists, the Canadian Association of Black Journalists, and CWA Canada, the country's oldest and only all-media union. One hundred and forty-three scientists (Oct 8-Nov 3), 148 journalists (Oct 8-Nov 3), and 1,006 members of the public (Oct 27-28) in Canada completed the surveys.

The data presented over the next few pages indicate the scientists and journalists surveyed share an overwhelming consensus that the Earth is growing warmer due to human activity (scientists 97%, journalists 95%). They also somewhat or strongly agreed, along with the public, that we are facing a climate crisis (scientists 96%, journalists 95%, public 81%), revealing far less difference of opinion between scientists and journalists than the news media's coverage at times suggests.

However, members of the public surveyed were less certain about the causes of climate change and its severity, suggesting a disconnect in how scientific findings and the overall story of global warming is conveyed to the public in the news media.

Indeed, the data show many scientists and journalists are concerned about that coverage, including that news outlets are not providing voters with enough information about climate change for them to make informed decisions (scientists 66%, journalists, 64%, public 47%).

Moreover, scientists and journalists have been frustrated in their willingness and ability to communicate about climate change and climate change impacts. Among the journalists who reported such frustrations (32%), many (44%) identified a cause as lack of interest in climate change coverage from news managers.

Together scientists and journalists contributed 175 recommendations on how that reporting and their relationship can be improved—from providing climate change with "daily coverage like COVID" to letting climate change researchers "speak without editing." Those scientists and journalists, as well as members of the public, somewhat or strongly agreed the news media should cover climate change as a crisis (scientists 91%, journalists 95%, public 73%).

Scientists and journalists also thought newsrooms should consult with climate scientists in their editorial decisions on climate coverage (scientists 89%, journalists 82%). And both groups supported the idea of the news media hosting forums where the public can directly ask scientists questions about climate change and climate change impacts (scientists 89%, journalists 80%).

Finally, the analysis clearly reveals that facts matter to those surveyed. Scientists, journalists, and the public expressed concern about the unfiltered broadcasting and publishing of opinions that reject basic climate science findings.

A majority of respondents (scientists 64%, journalists 64%, public 59%) favoured social media companies suspending or banning users who are climate science rejectionists. An even greater percentage of journalists somewhat or strongly agreed (scientists 63%, journalists 73%) news outlets should not broadcast or publish columns, editorials, or guest essays that reject mainstream climate science findings.

The results indicate a need to create a new evidence-based community that includes scientists and journalists working together, on a regular basis, to share factual information with the public and counter a media environment that is increasingly saturated by misinformation and disinformation. Nothing could be more important, since democracy depends on citizens using such facts to make rational and empathetic decisions in their personal and political lives.

The surveys were developed by an interdisciplinary research team that included Prof. Sean Holman of the University of Victoria, Dr. Peter Ryan (APR) of Mount Royal University, and Dr. Patricia Elliott of First Nations University of Canada.

Given the events of recent months, including the climate change negotiations in Glasgow and the release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's "code red" report, it was important to release some of the preliminary results of these surveys to advance the conversation on Climate Coverage in Canada.

Our research team will release more information about these surveys over the coming months. We welcome questions and feedback about this preliminary report, as we join together in a conversation on how to better cover climate change.

For access to the summary data in this report, please click **here**. The report is being hosted on J-Source.ca, a journalism news site supported by J-Schools Canada/Écoles-J Canada, as well as a group of donors.

For more information about the study, please contact Sean Holman at smholman@uvic.ca or Peter Ryan at pryan@mtroyal.ca.

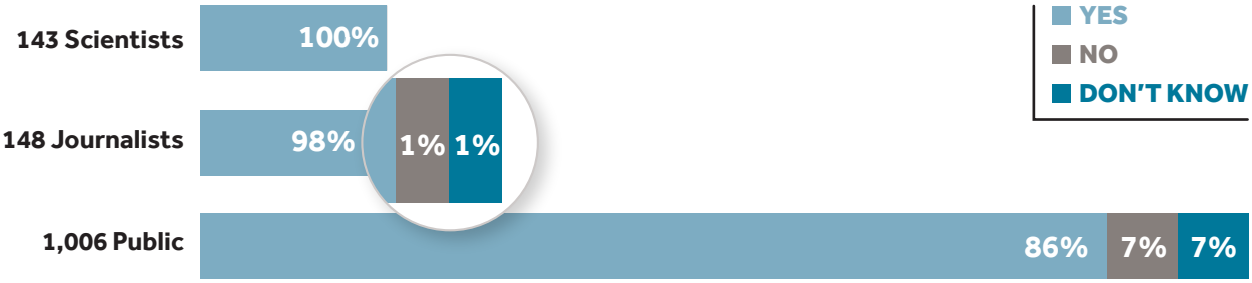
FACTS ARE FACTS

Do scientists, journalists, and the public agree human activity is causing climate change?

One hundred per cent of scientists and 98 per cent of journalists surveyed said the average global temperature is getting warmer. Among those who said that, 97 per cent of scientists and journalists said this warming is because of human activity, such as the burning of fossil fuels.

But this agreement with the facts of climate change isn't shared to the same degree by the public in Canada. Eighty-six per cent of them said the average global temperature is getting warmer. Among those who said that, 80 per cent said this warming is because of human activity.

From what you know, has the average global temperature been getting warmer?



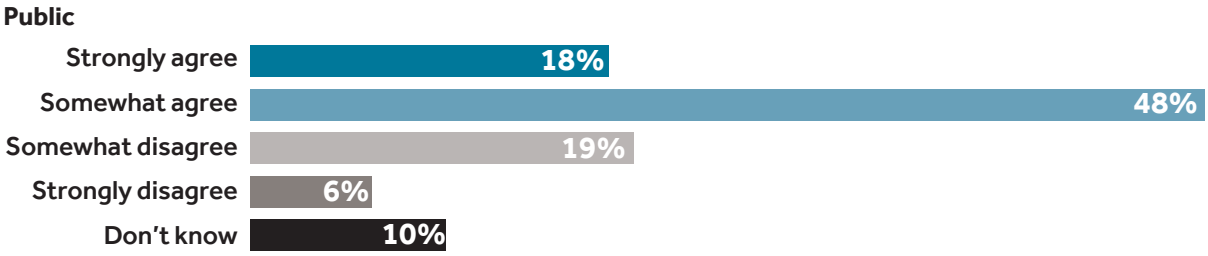
From what you know, is the average global temperature getting warmer mostly because of human activity such as burning fossil fuels?

3 BALLOT BOX ISSUE

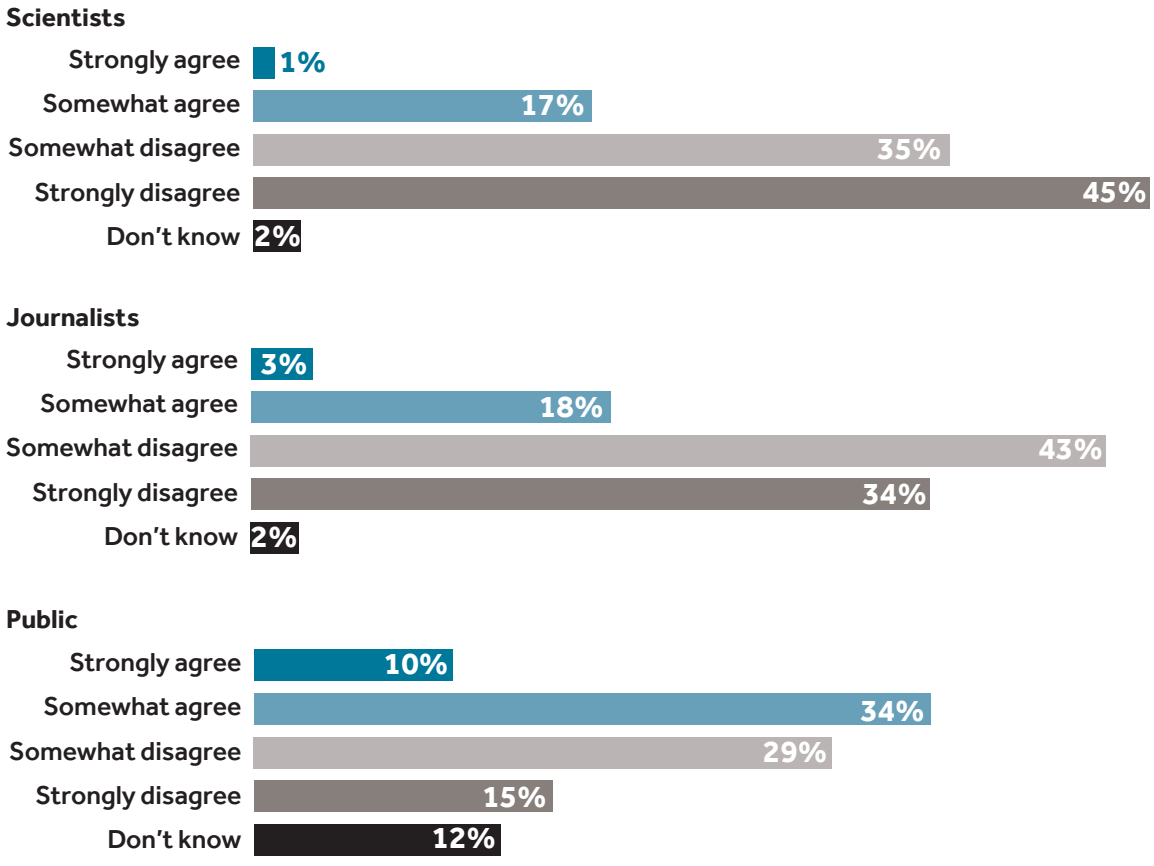
Do news outlets provide enough climate change information to voters?

Sixty-six per cent of the public said they know enough about climate change to make informed voting decisions. But just 18 per cent of scientists and 21 per cent of journalists surveyed agreed the public knows enough to do that. Moreover, just 34 per cent of journalists and 30 per cent of scientists agreed news outlets in Canada provide voters with enough information about climate change for them to make informed voting decisions, compared with 47 per cent of the public.

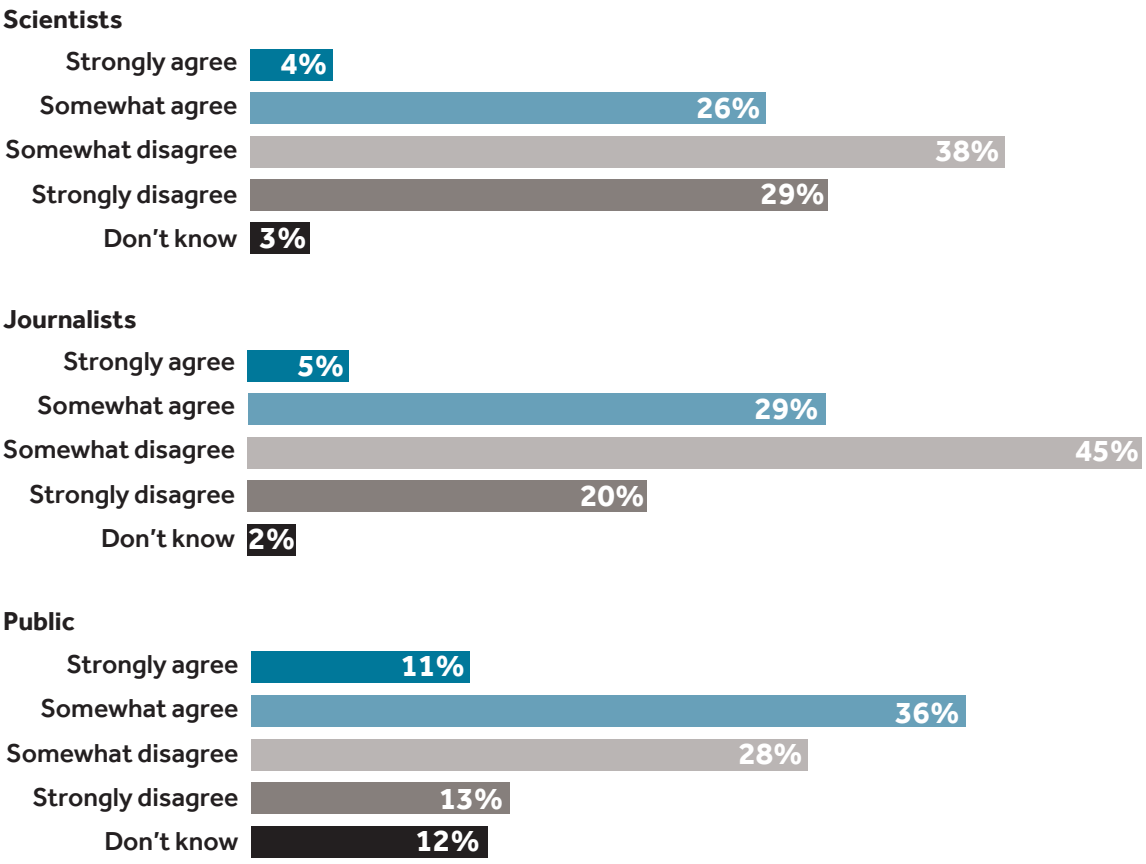
I know enough about climate change to make informed election decisions



The public in Canada knows enough about climate change to make informed election decisions



News outlets in Canada give voters enough information about climate change for them to make informed election decisions

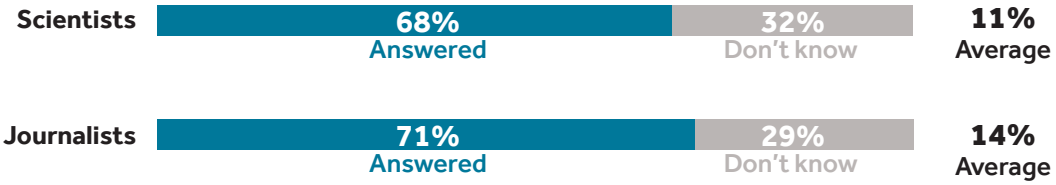


PROPORTIONATE RESPONSE

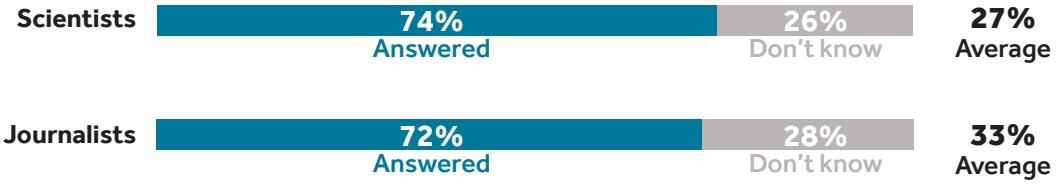
How much news coverage should be allocated to climate change?

On average, journalists surveyed estimated 14 per cent of news coverage in Canada is currently allocated to climate change, while scientists surveyed estimated 11 per cent of coverage is currently allocated to that issue. But, on average, both journalists and scientists said that coverage should increase. Journalists said 33 per cent of news coverage in Canada should be allocated to climate change, while scientists said 27 per cent of coverage should be allocated to that issue.

About what percentage of news coverage in Canada do you estimate is currently allocated to climate change?



About what percentage of news coverage in Canada do you think should be allocated to climate change?



5 FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

What barriers do scientists and journalists face in communicating about climate change?

Many scientists and journalists surveyed said their ability or willingness to communicate about climate change or climate change impacts has been negatively affected. Among scientists, 41 per cent said concern about the news media politicizing or misrepresenting them has negatively impacted their ability or willingness to be interviewed by the news media about these subjects. By comparison, 32 per cent of journalists said their ability or willingness to cover climate change or climate change impacts has been negatively affected. Of that amount, 44 per cent identified a lack of interest from news management as being a cause.

Have any of the following factors negatively impacted your ability or willingness to be interviewed by the news media about climate change or climate change impacts?

Most frequent responses from scientists

Lack of expertise necessary to answer all the news media's questions	45%
Concern about the news media politicizing or misinterpreting comments, findings, or conclusions	41%
Lack of time to respond to interview requests from the news media	31%
Concern about social media users politicizing or misinterpreting comments, findings, or conclusions	29%
Concern about interest groups politicizing or misinterpreting comments, findings, or conclusions	27%

Do you feel your ability or willingness to cover climate change or supervise climate change coverage has been negatively impacted for any reason?

Have any of the following factors negatively impacted your ability or willingness to cover climate change or supervise climate coverage at the primary news outlet you most recently produced or supervised content for as a journalist?

Most frequent responses from journalists

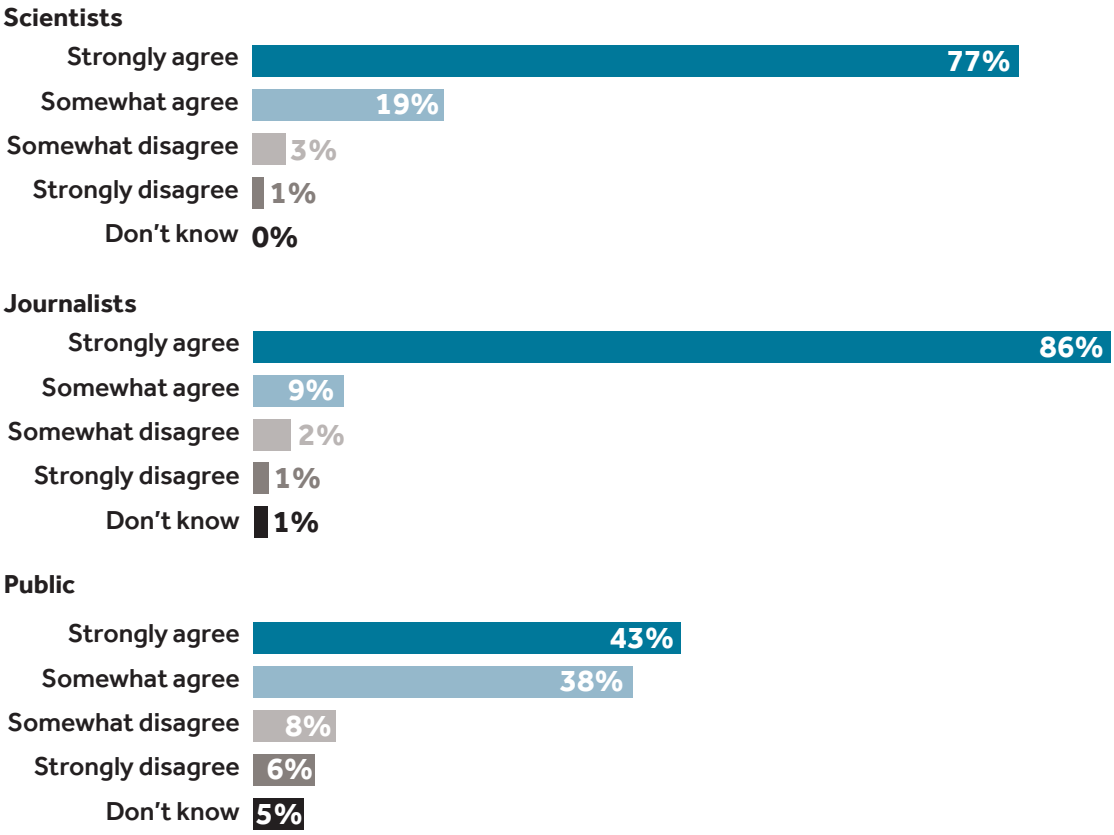
Lack of resources or work time to cover climate change	50%
Not on a beat or supervising a beat covering climate change	50%
Lack of interest from news management	44%
Lack of airtime or page space to cover climate change	40%
Other	35%

CRISIS IN COVERAGE

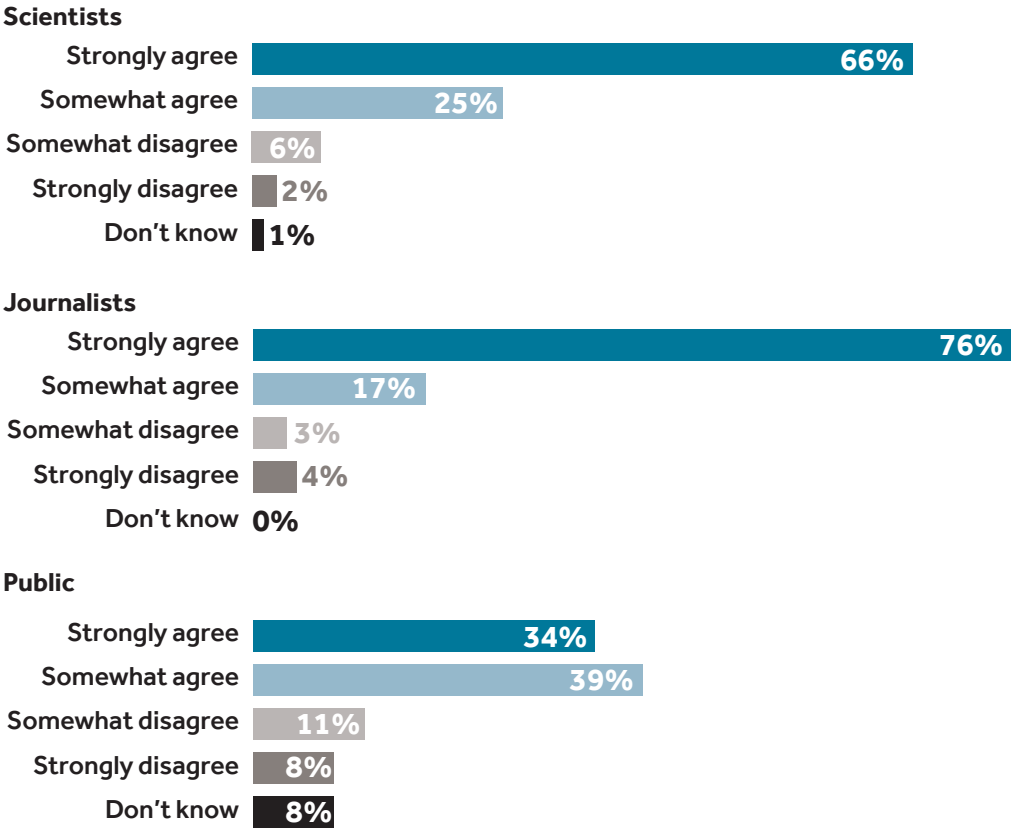
Should news outlets cover climate change as a crisis?

Ninety-six per cent of scientists and 95 per cent of journalists surveyed agreed there is a climate crisis. There was also strong but somewhat less agreement about whether the news media should cover climate change as a crisis and if the news media should use the phrase "climate crisis" or "climate emergency" to describe the impact of climate change. The support for those measures was stronger among journalists than among scientists. By comparison, 81 per cent of the public agreed there is a climate crisis, with 73 per cent agreeing the news media should cover it as a crisis. Sixty-six per cent of the public agreed with the use of the phrase "climate crisis" and 62 per cent agreed with the use of the phrase "climate emergency."

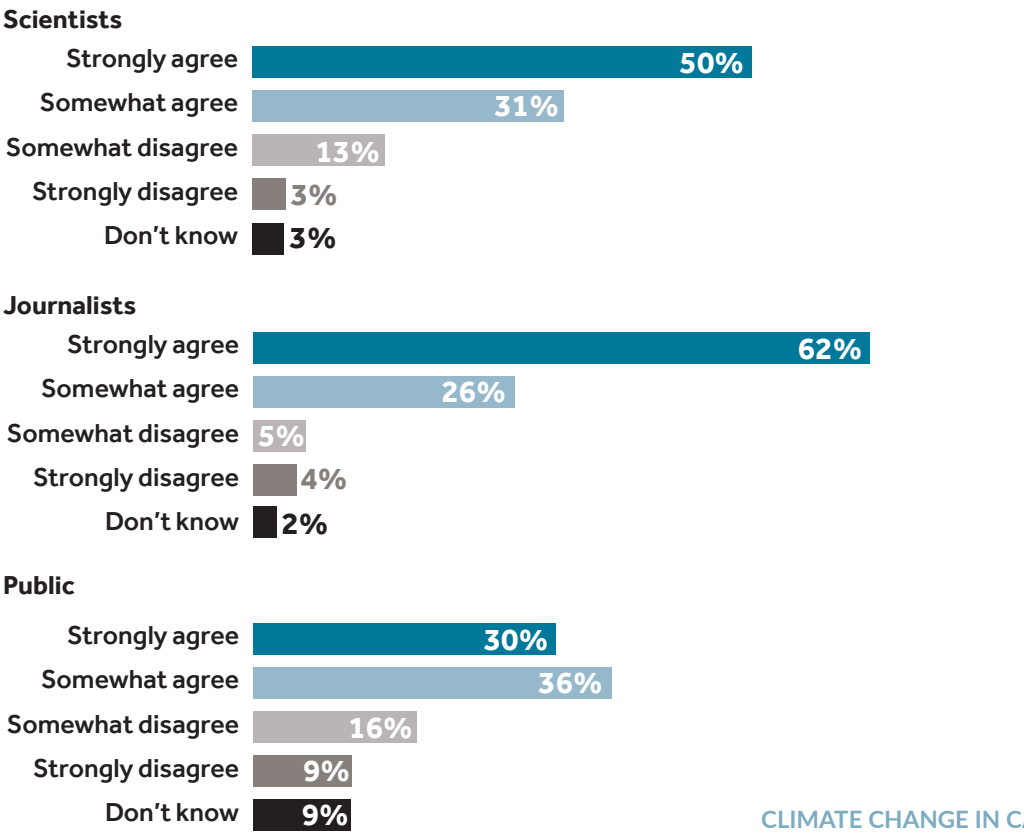
There is a climate crisis.



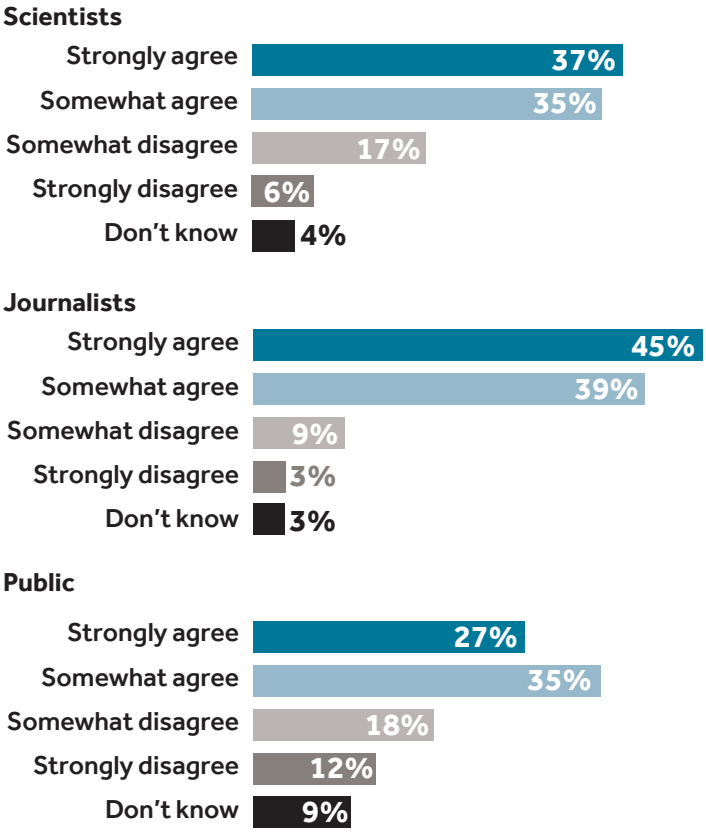
The news media should cover climate change as a crisis.



The news media should use the phrase "climate crisis" to describe the impact of climate change.



The news media should use the phrase "climate emergency" to describe the impact of climate change.



SCIENTIFIC METHOD

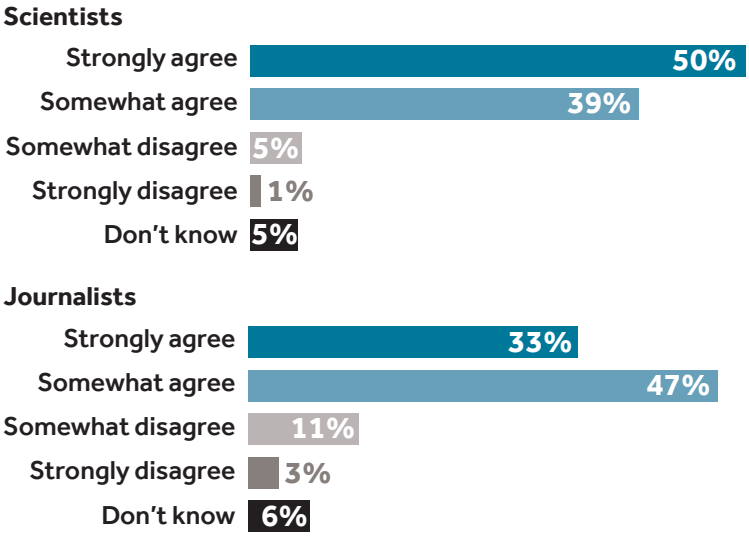
How can scientists be more involved in climate change coverage?

Eighty-nine per cent of scientists surveyed agreed the news media should organize forums where members of the public can directly ask scientists questions about climate change and climate change impacts, including 50 per cent who strongly agreed with that idea.

Eighty per cent of journalists surveyed also agreed with organizing such forums, while 82 per cent said that newsrooms should consult climate scientists in their editorial decision-making about climate coverage. Eighty-nine per cent of scientists also said they should be consulted.

However, just 19 per cent of journalists said scientists should definitely or probably be allowed to review stories about their findings and conclusions prior to them being published or broadcast—an idea supported by 79 per cent of scientists.

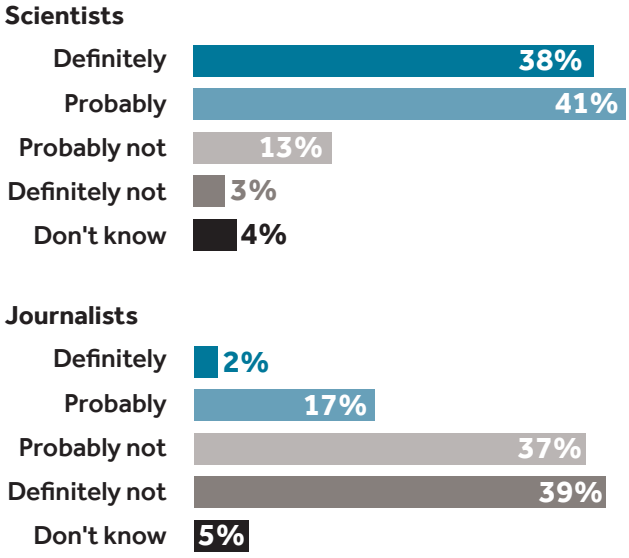
The news media should organize forums where members of the public can directly ask scientists questions about climate change and climate change impacts.



Which of the following individuals and communities should the news media consult in their editorial decision-making about climate change coverage?

5 most frequent responses from scientists		5 most frequent responses from journalists	
Climate scientists	**89%**	Climate scientists	**82%**
Forestry experts	**71%**	Forestry experts	**68%**
Health experts	**69%**	Renewable energy experts	**66%**
Agricultural experts	**66%**	Fisheries and aquaculture experts	**64%**
Fisheries and aquaculture experts	**66%**	Indigenous Knowledge Keepers	**64%**

Most news outlets don't allow sources to review stories prior to publication or broadcast to preserve their editorial independence. Should news outlets make an exception to that practice to allow scientists to review stories about their findings and conclusions prior to publication?



CAUSE AND EFFECT

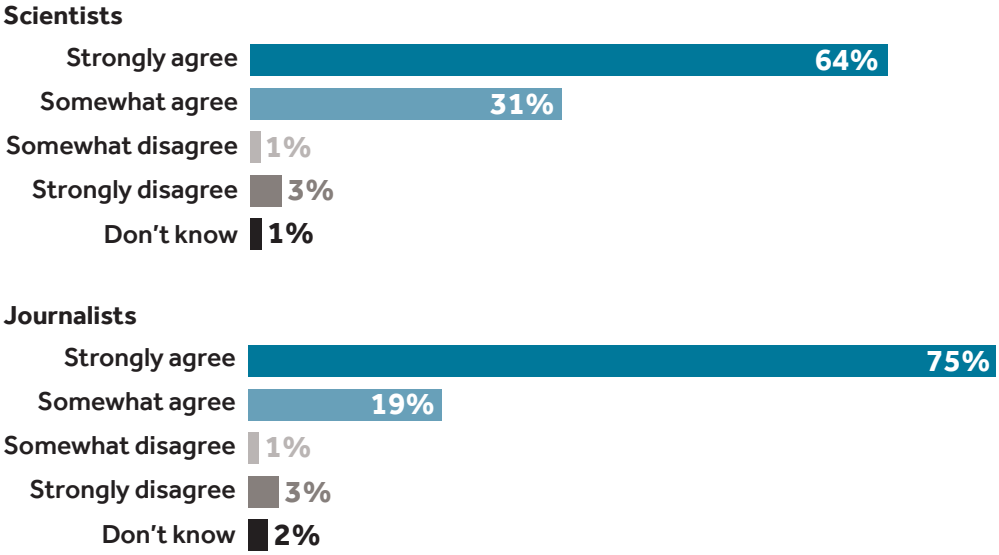
How should news outlets report on climate disasters and other climate change impacts?

Ninety-five per cent of climate scientists and 94 per cent of journalists surveyed agreed that news stories about natural disasters and extreme weather (such as heatwaves, flooding, and wildfires) should include information about how scientists say the likelihood and severity of those events are increasing as a result of climate change.

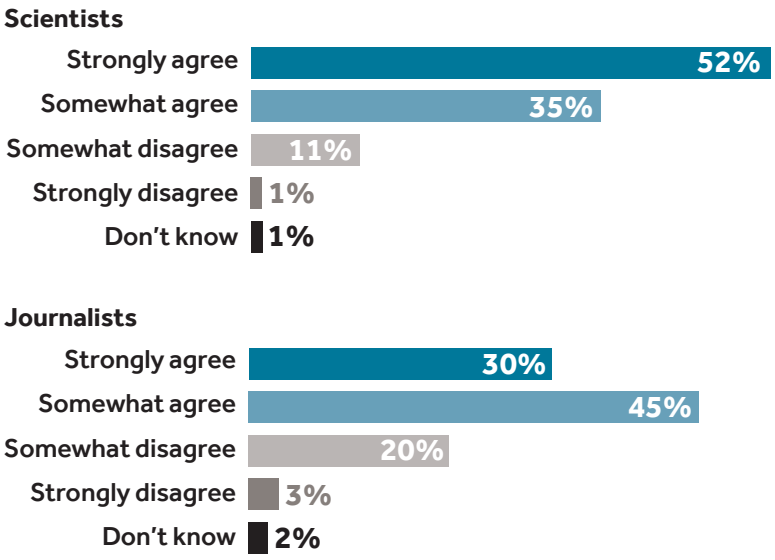
Eight-seven per cent of scientists and 75 per cent of journalists agreed that new stories about these and other climate impacts should include information on lifestyle and behavioural changes the public can make to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

By comparison, 93 per cent of scientists and 91 per cent of journalists agreed that news stories about climate impacts should include information on policy changes that national or federal governments could make to reduce their country's greenhouse gas emissions.

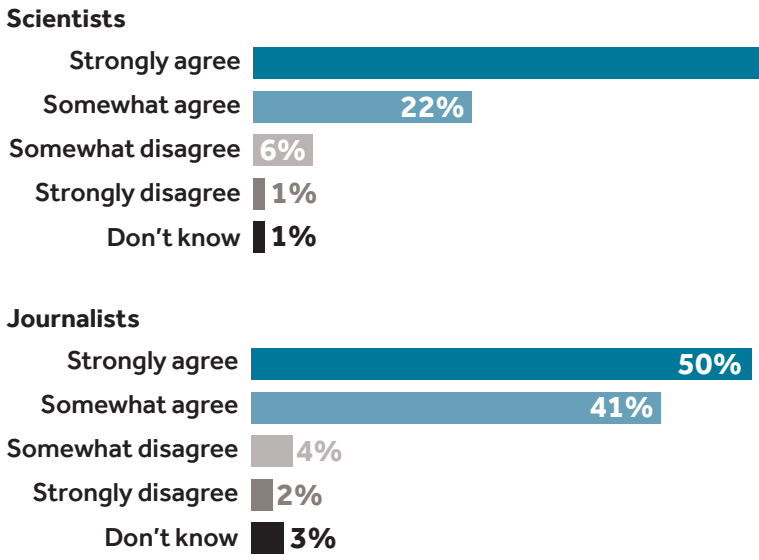
News stories about natural disasters and extreme weather (such as heatwaves, flooding, and wildfires) should include information about how scientists say the likelihood and severity of those events are increasing as a result of climate change.



News stories about climate change impacts should include information about lifestyle and behavioural changes the public can make to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.



News stories about climate change impacts should include information about the policy changes that federal or national governments could make to reduce their country's greenhouse gas emissions.



JUST THE FACTS

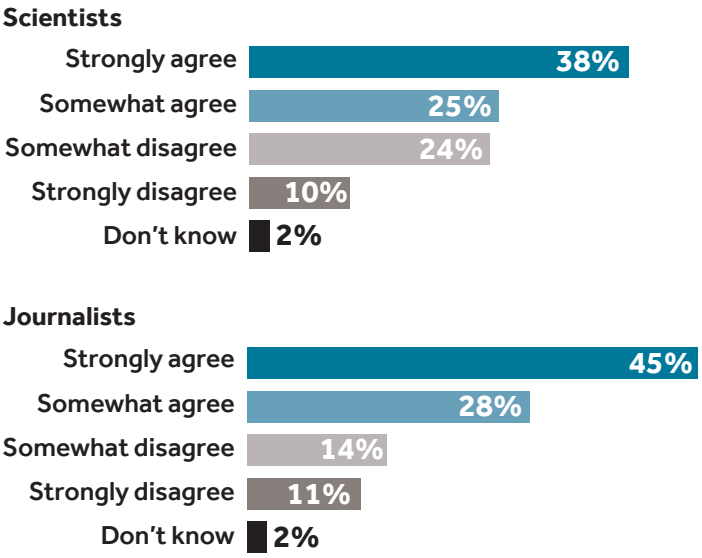
Should climate science rejectionists be platformed by the media?

Seventy-three per cent of journalists and 63 per cent of scientists surveyed agreed that news outlets should not publish columns, editorials, op-eds, or guest essays rejecting mainstream scientific findings that the average global temperature is getting warmer and greenhouse gases from human activity are mostly responsible for that warming.

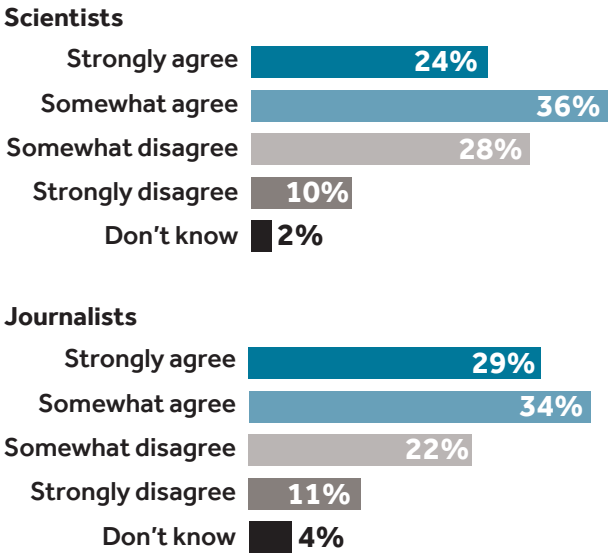
Sixty-three per cent of journalists and 60 per cent of scientists surveyed also agreed that news outlets should not publish audience comments or letters to the editor rejecting those findings. And 64 per cent of journalists and scientists said social media companies should definitely or probably suspend or ban users who are climate science rejectionists.

Fifty-nine per cent of the public also definitely or probably supported such suspensions or bans, although we did not ask them what they thought about news outlets publishing or broadcasting climate science rejectionists.

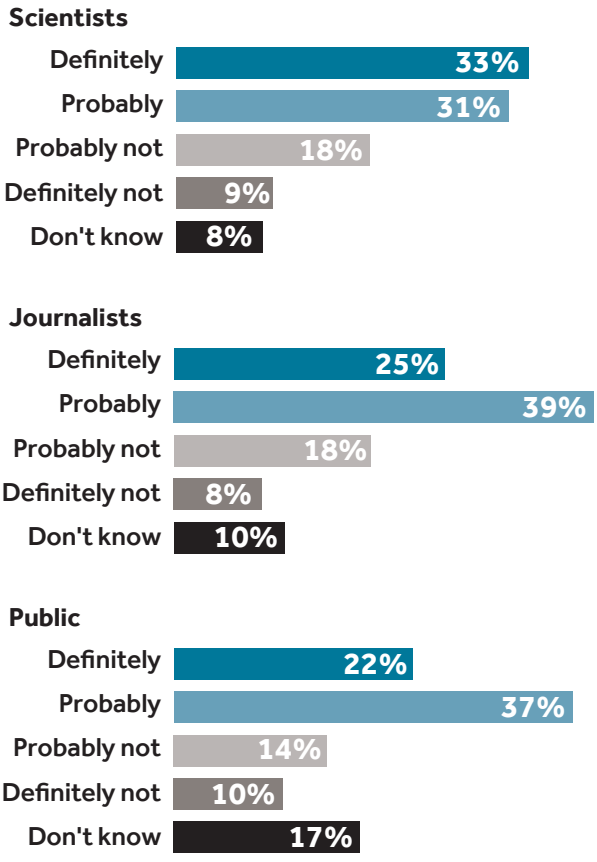
News outlets should not publish columns, editorials, op-eds, or guest essays that reject those findings.



News outlets should not publish audience comments or letters to the editor that reject those findings.



Recently, social media companies suspended or banned users who alleged voter fraud took place during the United States 2020 presidential election or denied expert guidance about COVID-19. Should those companies adopt the same approach toward users who reject mainstream scientific findings that the average global temperature is getting warmer and greenhouse gases resulting from human activities are mostly responsible for that warming?



OPEN MIC

What recommendations do scientists and journalists have for improving climate coverage?

We provided scientists and journalists surveyed with an opportunity to give their own suggestions of what improvements could be made to climate change coverage. Sixty-two per cent of scientists and 58 per cent of journalists took that opportunity. The following are just some of the 175 recommendations.

scientists

Not be afraid of climate denying billionaires.

Have scientists confirm key messages are accurate and not misrepresented.

Stop treating political parties' aspirational climate statements as sufficient.

Need to expose who is funding anti-climate change information and call them out.

Simple visual indicators such as countdown to a day when +1.5C is reached.

Interviewing researchers directly and letting them speak without editing.

Provide locally relevant facts and not rely on global facts.

Don't leave people feeling there is no hope and they are helpless.

Have scientists confirm key messages are accurate and not misrepresented.

Hold governments to account for their previous broken promises and greenwashing.

Hold politicians and corporate leaders accountable.

Promote climate change... to the lead item in news-casts and the front page of print and online media.

Stop being an echo chamber for anti-science propagandists.

journalists

Score politicians on the feasibility of their climate plans, and hold them to account on following through...

Ban all fossil fuel advertising.

Stop being afraid to link the climate crisis to the crisis of capitalism.

Tell them how much time we have left. Use a countdown clock.

Encourage reporters on all reporting beats to understand how climate change affects their beat.

Offer climate reporting bootcamps... hosted by scientists and veteran reporters on the climate beat.

Make it personal and regional (rather than always global).

Hire more reporters to specialize in climate change.

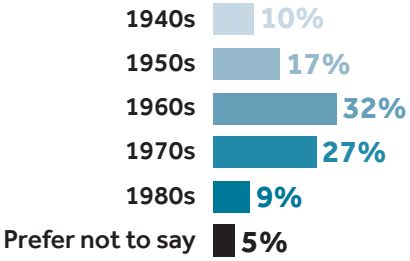
Cover it as an ongoing emergency... It needs daily coverage like COVID.

Highlight solution stories on how people are tackling climate challenges.

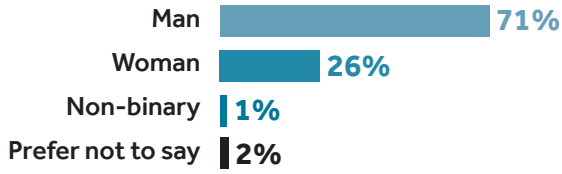
WHO WERE THE **SCIENTISTS** WE SURVEYED?

Our research team invited 1,015 researchers in Canada who had published four or more peer-reviewed scientific papers about climate change prior to 2021 to participate in the survey. Those scientists must have had an identifiable and valid email address. Of that amount, 143 completed the survey.

What year were you born?



What is your gender?



What is the highest level of education you have reached?

How would you best describe your training?

Environmental sciences	**53%**
Earth sciences	**43%**
Biological sciences	**38%**
Physical sciences	**11%**
Agricultural and veterinary sciences	**6%**
Engineering	**5%**
Mathematical sciences	**3%**
Studies in human society	**3%**
Medical and health sciences	**2%**
Other	**8%**

How would you best describe your current employment status as a researcher of climate change or climate change impacts?

Faculty member, tenured	**48%**
Full-time, permanent	**16%**
Faculty member, emeritus	**10%**
Faculty member, adjunct	**5%**
Faculty member, tenurable	**4%**
Other	**17%**

How would you describe the primary organization where you most recently conducted research on climate change or climate change impacts?

Post-secondary institution	**68%**
Federal or national government	**22%**
Provincial, territorial, or state government	**4%**
Privately owned company	**2%**
Indigenous government	**1%**
Non-governmental organization	**1%**
Other	**1%**
Municipal or local government	**0%**
Publicly traded company	**0%**
Self-owned company	**0%**

For how many years have you been involved in research related to climate change or climate change impacts?

3,222 combined years in research related to climate change or climate change impacts

22.2 years average per respondent

Please indicate the approximate number of climate change-related articles you have published in peer-reviewed journals, including as a co-author.

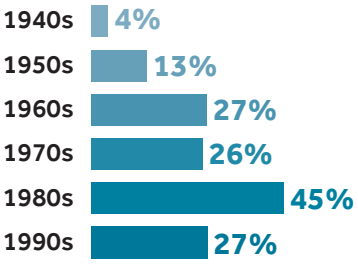
6,541 combined climate change-related articles in peer-reviewed journals

45.1 publications average per respondent

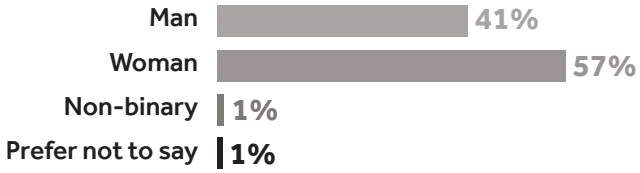
WHO WERE THE **JOURNALISTS** WE SURVEYED?

The Canadian Association of Journalists and the Canadian Association of Black Journalists, as well as Canada's two largest media unions, CWA Canada and Unifor, invited their members to participate in the survey. Of those members, 148 completed it.

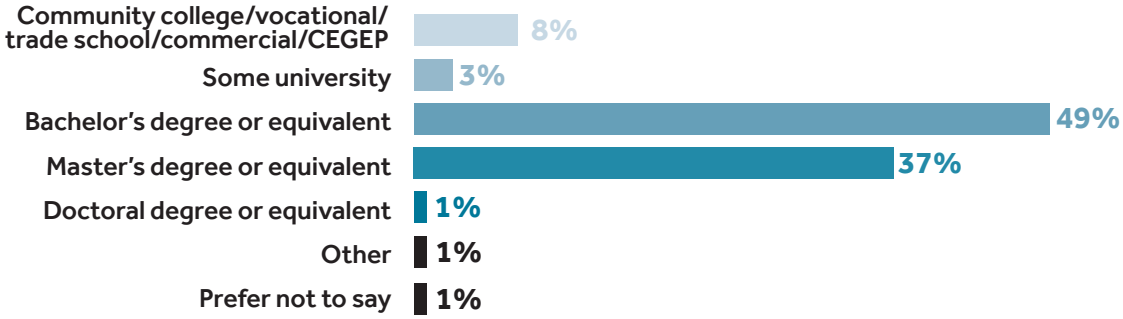
What is your age group?



What is your gender?



What is the highest level of education you have reached?



How would you best describe your current employment status as a journalist producing or supervising content for the news media?

Full-time, permanent	**57%**
Freelance	**18%**
Full-time, contract	**8%**
Part-time, contract	**3%**
Part-time, permanent	**3%**
Other	**10%**

How would you best describe the ownership of the primary news outlet you most recently produced or supervised content for as a journalist?

Public	**37%**
Private, chain or network	**20%**
Private, independent	**14%**
Non-profit	**8%**
Private, family-owned	**5%**
Other	**15%**

How would you best describe the primary news outlet you most recently produced or supervised content for as a journalist?

Broadcast station (television, radio, or both)	**41%**
Online media	**30%**
Newspaper, daily	**16%**
News agency or wire service	**5%**
Newspaper, weekly	**3%**
Other	**5%**

How would you best describe the overall audience of the primary news outlet you most recently produced or supervised content for as a journalist?

National	**28%**
Large city	**18%**
Regional (province, state, territory, etc.)	**18%**
Small city	**11%**
International	**7%**
Other	**18%**

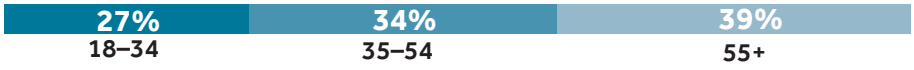
As a journalist producing or supervising content for the news media, how often have you worked on coverage about climate change or climate change impacts during the past 12 months?

More than once a day	**4%**
About once a day	**3%**
A few times a week	**9%**
About once a week	**8%**
A few times a month	**18%**
About once a month	**9%**
A few times over the past 12 months	**32%**
About once over the past 12 months	**4%**
Not in the past 12 months, but I have worked on coverage about climate change or climate change impacts in the past	**8%**
I have never worked on coverage about climate change or climate change impacts	**5%**

WHO WERE THE MEMBERS OF THE **PUBLIC** WE SURVEYED?

Our research team surveyed 1,006 members of the public in Canada using Research Co.'s representative online research panel. The data has been statistically weighted according to Canadian census figures for age, gender, and region in Canada. The margin of error, which measures sample variability, is +/- 3.1 percentage points, nineteen times out of twenty.

What year were you born?



What is your gender?

What is the highest level of education you have reached?

RESEARCH TEAM

Sean Holman, principal investigator (@seanmholman)
Prof. Holman is the Wayne Crookes professor in environmental and climate journalism at the University of Victoria. He's an award-winning investigative journalist whose research focuses on how we use and misuse information against the backdrop of climate change, biodiversity loss, and democratic decline.

Peter Ryan, principal investigator (@prnetworks)
Dr. Ryan is an associate professor of public relations at Mount Royal University, and an Accredited Public Relations (APR) professional through the Canadian Public Relations Society. His research interests include Canadian political communication, digital research methods, and social media issues management.

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Dr. Elliott is a distinguished professor in investigative and community journalism at First Nations University of Canada. Cited numerous times for outstanding investigative journalism, her research interests range from journalism pedagogy and freedom of expression to media development and media policy.

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Canseco, the president of Research Co., has conducted public opinion research since 2003 for public and private sector clients. Mario's work as an electoral forecaster in four different companies has resulted in 100 correct predictions of democratic processes in Canada and the United States.

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McAllister is president of McAllister Opinion Research. Over the past 20 years, his firm has developed, modelled, and tested research-driven communications strategy on a wide range of issues for governments, academic institutions, non-profits, and Fortune 500 companies in Canada, the U.S., and Latin America.

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Carrillo, the head of marketing at Research Co., leads qualitative and data visualization projects. She designs and manages online engagement campaigns, ensuring high response rates and the collection of reliable data.

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