CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE MINDS OF U.S. NEWS AUDIENCES



VALE PROGRAM ON Climate Change Communication



GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY CENTER for CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATION

Introduction

This report is an analysis of public opinion about climate change among the regular U.S. audience (American adults who frequently watch, read, or listen to the content) of each of six major U.S. news sources: CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, NPR, the Weather Channel, and the national nightly network news (on CBS, ABC, or NBC). The findings in this report are based on data from three nationally representative surveys conducted by the <u>Yale Program on Climate Change</u> <u>Communication</u> and the George Mason University <u>Center for Climate Change Communication</u> in April 2019, November 2019, and April 2020 (total N = 3,623) as part of the <u>Climate Change in</u> <u>the American Mind</u> project. The research was funded by the 11th Hour Project, the Energy Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation.

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Survey Methods

The samples for each of the three surveys was drawn from the Ipsos (formerly GfK) KnowledgePanel[®], an online panel of members drawn using probability sampling methods. Prospective members are recruited using a combination of random digit dial and address-based

sampling techniques that cover virtually all (noninstitutional) resident phone numbers and addresses in the United States. Those contacted who would choose to join the panel but do not have access to the Internet are loaned computers and given Internet access so they may participate. These samples therefore each constitute a representative cross-section of American adults – irrespective of whether they have Internet access, use only a cell phone, etc. Key demographic variables were weighted, post survey, to match U.S. Census Bureau norms. The weights are applied when calculating all values in this report.

This report uses subsets of these samples: Americans who regularly watch, listen to, or read content from each news source. To define and create these subgroups of "the regular audience" of each news source, we asked survey respondents "How often do you watch, listen to, or read content from the following?" with individual items labeled "CNN," "MSNBC," "National Public Radio (NPR)," "the Weather Channel," "the Fox News Channel," and "the national nightly network news on CBS, ABC, or NBC." Response options were "Never," "Every few weeks," "Once a week," "Every few days," "Almost every day," "Several times a day," and "Many times a day." For the purposes of this report, we define the regular audience of each news source as those who responded "Every few days" or more often, while excluding those who responded "Once a week" or less often. The demographics of each news source's audience are reported on pages 20-22.

Most figures in this report display the findings from survey items that were included in all three surveys. For these items, the average margin of error is +/- 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. However, a few figures show findings from items that were included in only one or two of the three surveys. These smaller subsample sizes result in a greater margin of error: an average of +/- 5 points when an item was included in two surveys and an average of +/- 7 points when an item was included in just one survey. Each figure caption notes which survey(s) contribute data to the figure. The sizes of news source audiences for each survey (and in total) are reported in Table 1.

For tabulation purposes, percentage points in each figure are rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result (and due to occasional non-response), some figures' percentages may total higher or lower than exactly 100%. Summed response categories (e.g., "strongly agree" + "somewhat agree") are rounded after sums are calculated (e.g., 25.3% + 25.3% = 50.6% which, after rounding, would appear in the report as 25% + 25% = 51%).

	April	November	April	Total
News source	2019	2019	2020	N
CNN	229	224	264	717
Fox News	287	347	326	960
MSNBC	291	188	208	597
NPR	213	216	166	595
Weather Channel	344		285	629
Nightly network news on CBS, ABC, or NBC	527	509	481	1,517

Table 1. Audience size, by news outlet.

Executive Summary

Desire for More Information

- Large majorities in most news audiences are interested in news stories about a wide range of global warming topics (p. 11-13).
- However, majorities in all news audiences feel they are not very well informed about global warming (p. 10). Fewer than 20% in any news audience feel "very well informed."
- Majorities in the CNN, NPR, MSNBC, and the nightly network news audiences think the media should be doing more to address global warming, as do about half of those in the Weather Channel (51%) audience. In the Fox News audience, only one in three viewers (34%) think the media should be doing more (p. 10).

Global Warming's Six Americas

- Large majorities of the NPR, MSNBC, and CNN audiences are either Alarmed or Concerned (p. 4) about global warming.
- The Concerned and the Cautious make up the largest portion of the Fox News audience (43% in total), and fewer (36% in total) are Doubtful or Dismissive (p. 4).

Beliefs and Attitudes About Global Warming

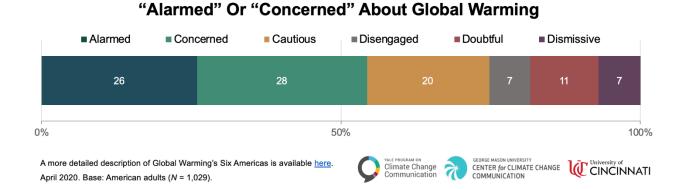
- In all news audiences except that of Fox News, large majorities think global warming is happening and human-caused (p. 5).
- About half of the Fox News audience (53%) think global warming is happening (p. 5).
- Only one in four in the Fox News audience (25%) think global warming is *not* happening, but many (48%) think it is caused by natural changes in the environment (rather than human activities) (p. 5).
- Most of the audience of each news source *underestimates* the scientific consensus on human-caused global warming. Members of the NPR audience are most likely to understand the extent of the scientific consensus, but even among this audience those who do are in the minority.
- In most news audiences, large majorities (80%+ for CNN, MSNBC, and NPR) are worried about global warming (p. 6).
- Majorities of the MSNBC, CNN, and NPR audiences think global warming is already harming people in the U.S. (p. 7).

The 2020 Presidential Election

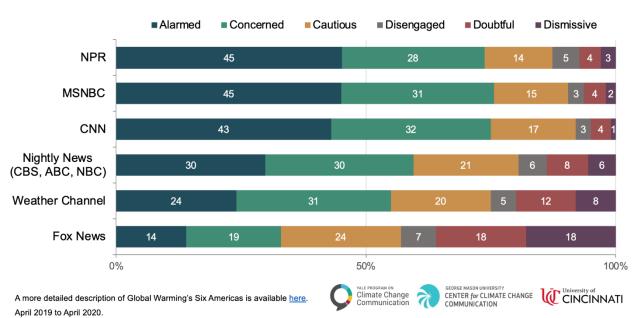
• Majorities in all audiences say global warming or protecting the environment will be important to their vote for president (p. 9).

Global Warming's Six Americas

Our prior research has identified "Global Warming's Six Americas"—six distinct segments of the American public. The Alarmed are convinced global warming is happening, human-caused, an urgent threat, and they strongly support climate policies. Most, however, do not know what they or others can do to solve the problem. The Concerned think human-caused global warming is happening, is a serious threat, and support climate policies. However, they believe that climate impacts are still distant in time and space, thus climate change is a lower priority issue. The Cautious haven not yet made up their minds: Is global warming happening? Is it human-caused? Is it serious? The Disengaged know little about global warming. They rarely or never hear about it in the media. The Doubtful do not think global warming is happening or believe it is just a natural cycle. They do not think much about the issue or consider it a serious risk. The Disensisive believe global warming is not happening, human-caused, or a threat, and most endorse conspiracy theories (e.g., "global warming is a hoax"). As of April 2020, about half of Americans are either Alarmed or Concerned. Far fewer are Doubtful or Dismissive.

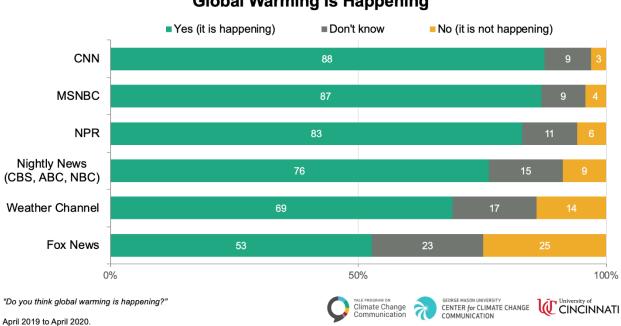


Over Half Of All Americans Are Either



Global Warming's Six Americas By News Source

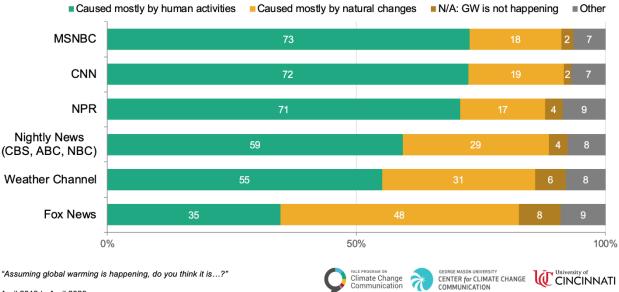
Global Warming Beliefs of U.S. Media Audiences



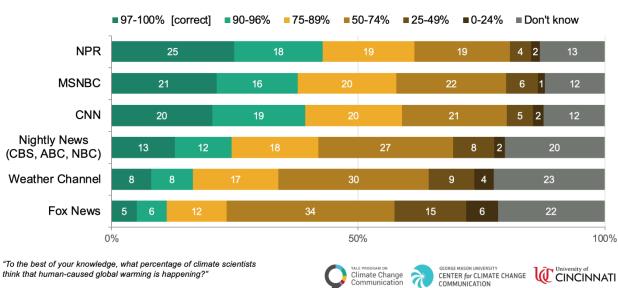
Majorities In All Media Audiences Think Global Warming Is Happening

Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from each news source more often than once per week

Majorities In Most Media Audiences Think Global Warming Is Human Caused



April 2019 to April 2020.

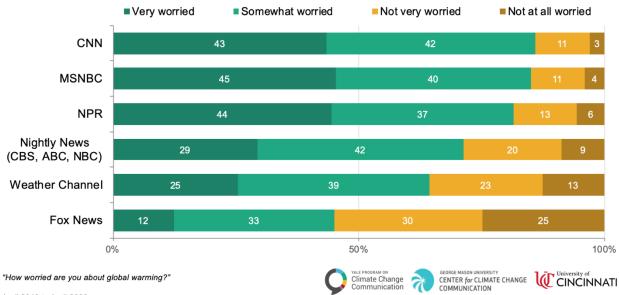


Majorities in All Media Audiences Underestimate The Scientific Consensus On Global Warming

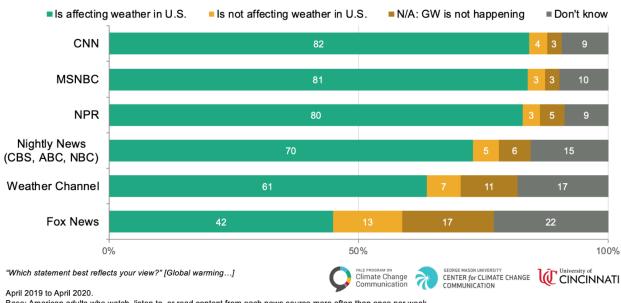
April 2019 to April 2020.

Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from each news source more often than once per week.

Majorities In Most Media Audiences Are Worried About Global Warming



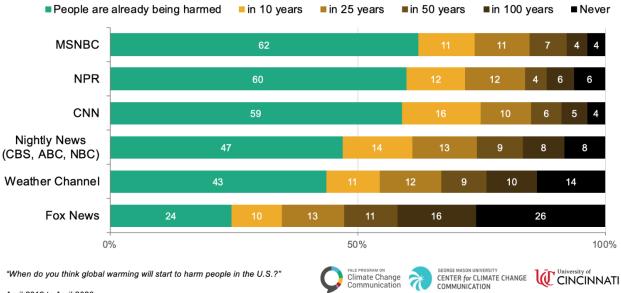
April 2019 to April 2020.



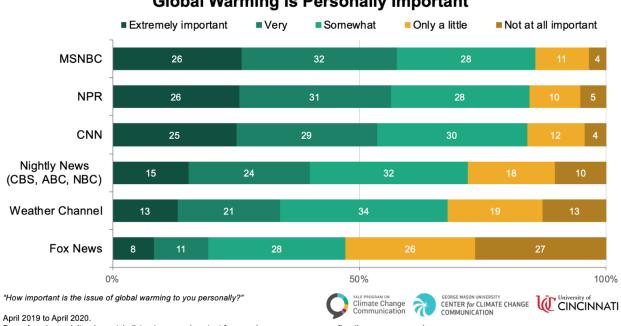
Majorities In Most Media Audiences Say Global Warming Is Affecting Weather in the U.S.

Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from each news source more often than once per week

Majorities In The MSNBC, NPR, and CNN Media Audiences Think Global Warming Is Already Harming People in the U.S.



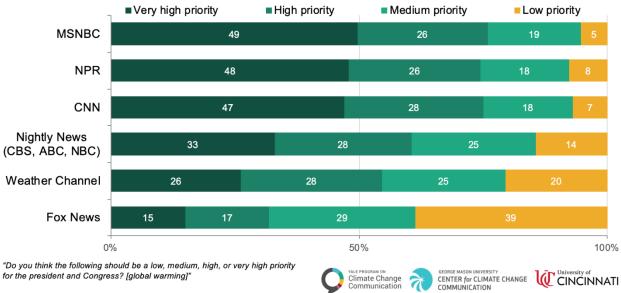
April 2019 to April 2020.



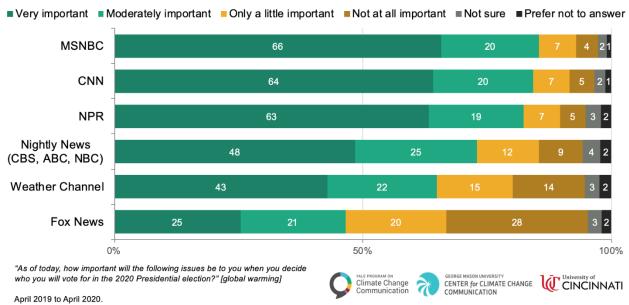
Majorities In Most Media Audiences Say Global Warming Is Personally Important

Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from each news source more often than once per week

Majorities In Most Media Audiences Say Global Warming Should Be A High Priority For Elected Officials



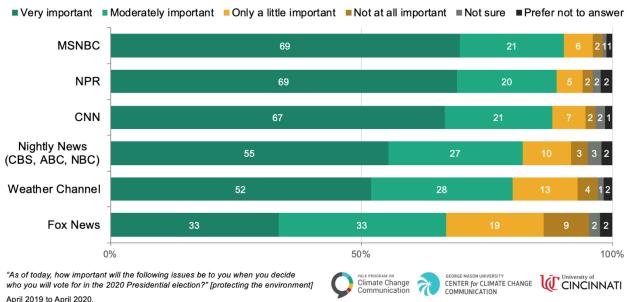
April 2019 to April 2020.

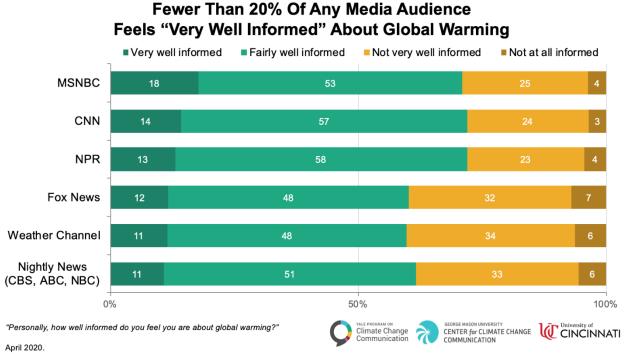


Majorities In Most Media Audiences Say Global Warming Will Be Important To Their 2020 Presidential Vote

Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from each news source more often than once per week.

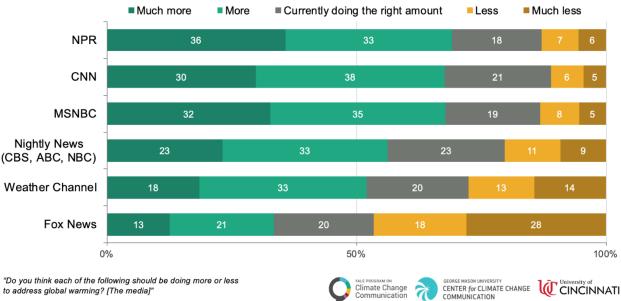
Majorities In All Media Audiences Say Protecting The Environment Will Be Important To Their 2020 Presidential Vote





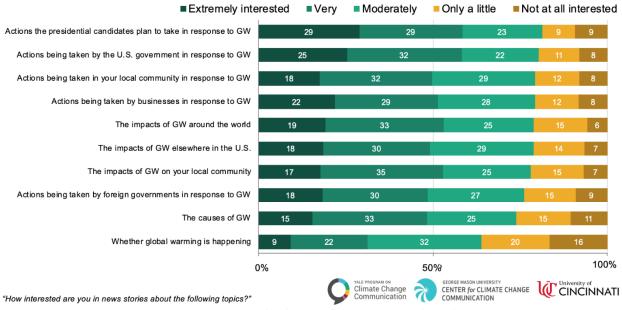
Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from each news source more often than once per week.

Majorities In Most Media Audiences Think The Media Should Be Doing More To Address Global Warming



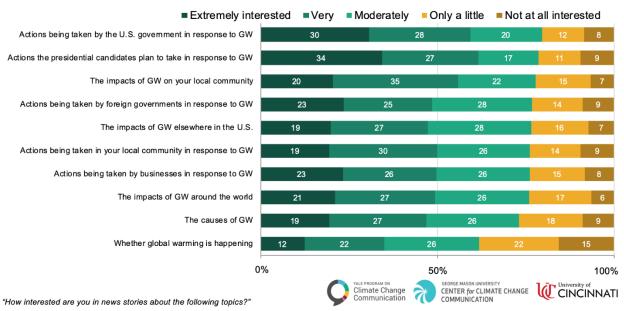
April 2019 to April 2020.





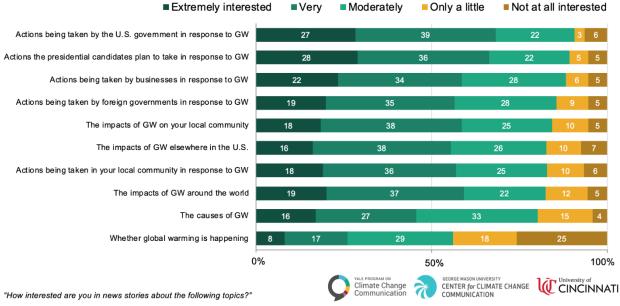
April 2020. Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from CNN more often than once per week (N = 264).

Most Of The MSNBC Audience Is Interested In News Stories About Global Warming Topics



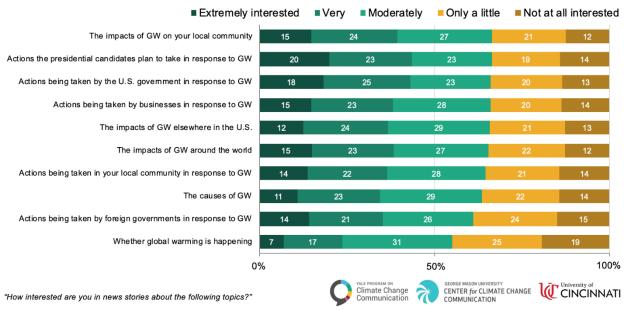
April 2020. Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from MSNBC more often than once per week (N = 208).





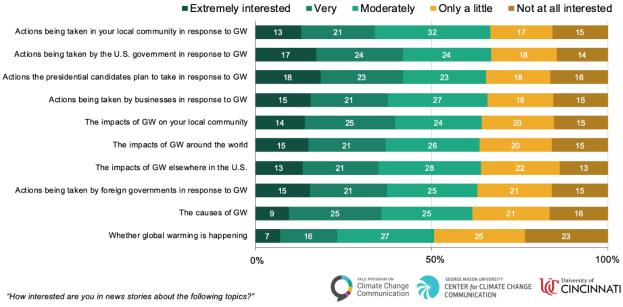
April 2020. Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from NPR more often than once per week (N = 166).

Most Of The Nightly Network News Audience Is Interested In News Stories About Global Warming Topics



April 2020. Base: American adults who watch the national nightly network news on CBS, ABC, or NBC more often than once per week (N = 481).

Most Of The Weather Channel Audience Is Interested In News Stories About Global Warming Topics



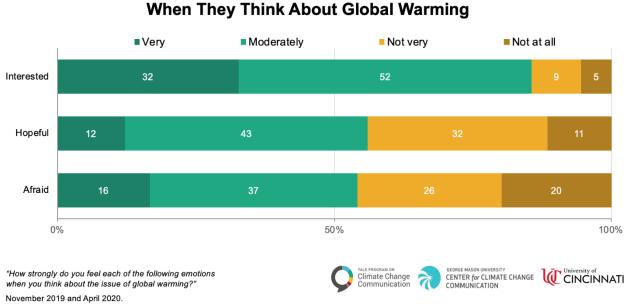
April 2020. Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from the Weather Channel more often than once per week (N = 285).

Most of the Fox News Audience Is Interested In News Stories About Global Warming Topics

Extremely int	teres	ted	■Very	Moderate	ely	Only a little	Not at all interested
Actions being taken by the U.S. government in response to \ensuremath{GW}	8		16	22		26	27
The impacts of GW on your local community	7	14	1	25		25	29
Actions the presidential candidates plan to take in response to GW	10		16	20		27	28
Actions being taken by businesses in response to GW	7	1	4	24		28	25
The impacts of GW around the world	7	1	5	23		27	28
Actions being taken in your local community in response to GW	6	13		24		26	30
The causes of GW	5	16		22		25	30
Actions being taken by foreign governments in response to GW	9		12	22		29	28
Whether global warming is happening	5	9		28		27	30
The impacts of GW elsewhere in the U.S.	7	12	2	22		28	28
0	⊢ %				50	%	100%
"How interested are vou in news stories about the following topics?"			C	Climate Change Communication	*	GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY CENTER for CLIMATE CHA COMMUNICATION	University of

"How interested are you in news stories about the following topics?"

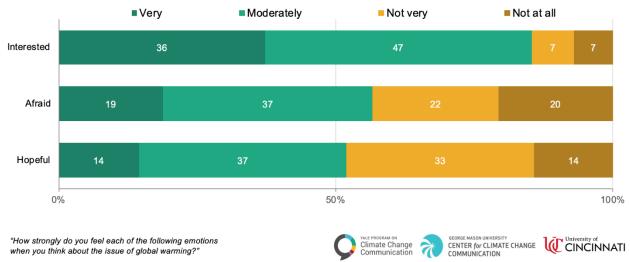
April 2020. Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from Fox News more often than once per week (N = 287).



More Of The CNN Audience Feels 'Interested' Than 'Hopeful' Or 'Afraid'

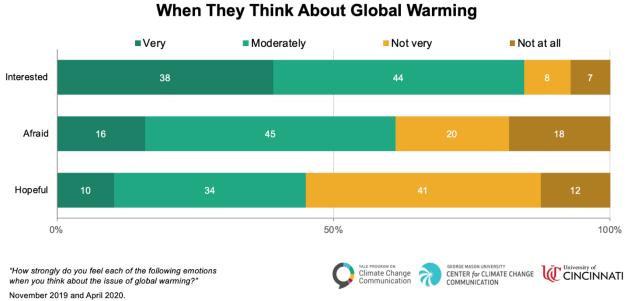
Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from CNN more often than once per week (N = 488).

More Of The MSNBC Audience Feels 'Interested' Than 'Afraid' Or 'Hopeful' When They Think About Global Warming



November 2019 and April 2020.

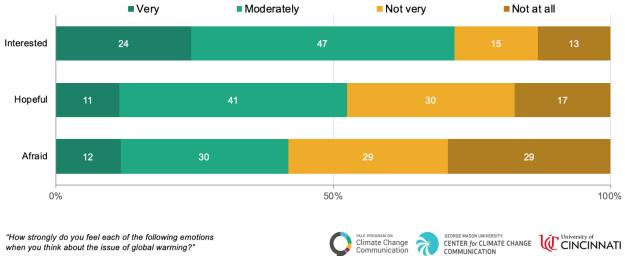
Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from MSNBC more often than once per week (N = 396).



More Of The NPR Audience Feels 'Interested' Than 'Afraid' Or 'Hopeful'

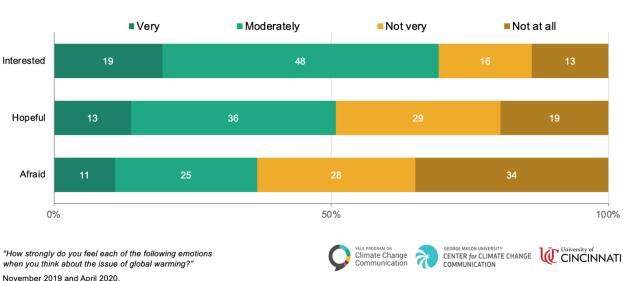
Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from NPR more often than once per week (N = 382).

More Of The Nightly Network News Audience Feels 'Interested' Than 'Hopeful' Or 'Afraid' When They Think About Global Warming



November 2019 and April 2020.

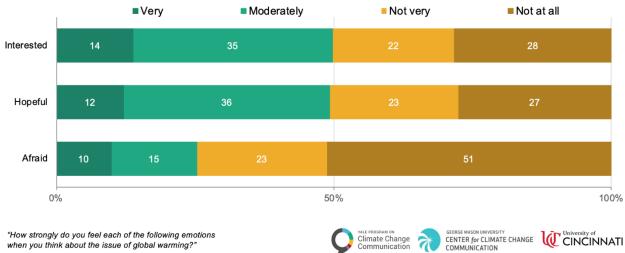
Base: American adults who watch the national nightly network news on CBS, ABC, or NBC more often than once per week (N = 990).



More Of The Weather Channel Audience Feels 'Interested' Than 'Afraid' Or 'Hopeful' When They Think About Global Warming

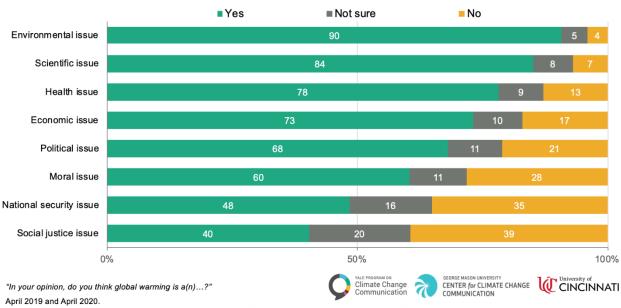
Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from the Weather Channel more often than once per week (N = 285).

More Of The Fox News Audience Feels 'Interested' And 'Hopeful' Than 'Afraid' When They Think About Global Warming



November 2019 and April 2020.

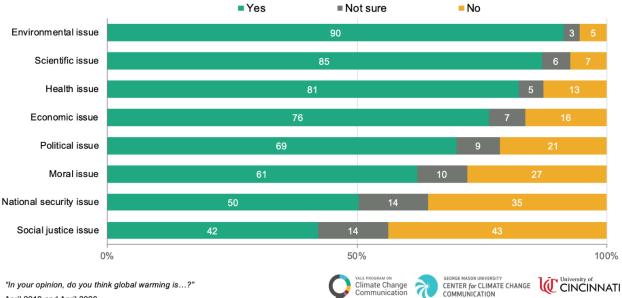
Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from Fox News more often than once per week (N = 673).



A Majority Of The CNN Audience Thinks Global Warming Is More Than Just An Environmental Issue

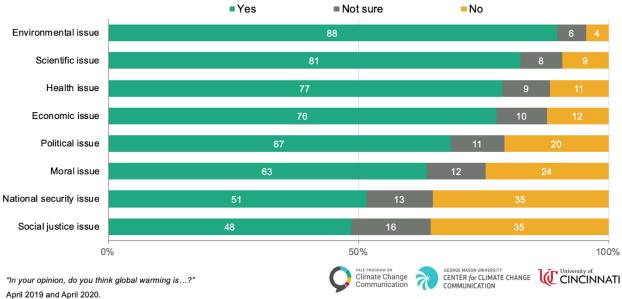
Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from CNN more often than once per week (N = 493).

A Majority Of The MSNBC Audience Thinks Global Warming Is More Than Just An Environmental Issue



April 2019 and April 2020.

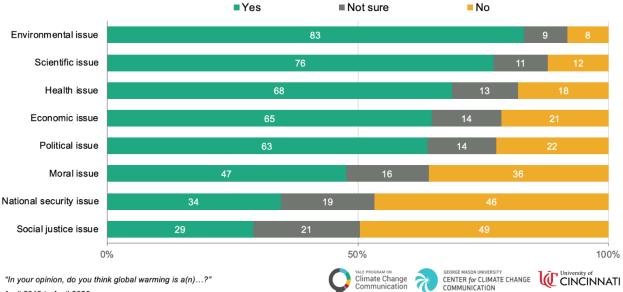
Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from MSNBC more often than once per week (N = 499).



A Majority Of The NPR Audience Thinks Global Warming Is More Than Just An Environmental Issue

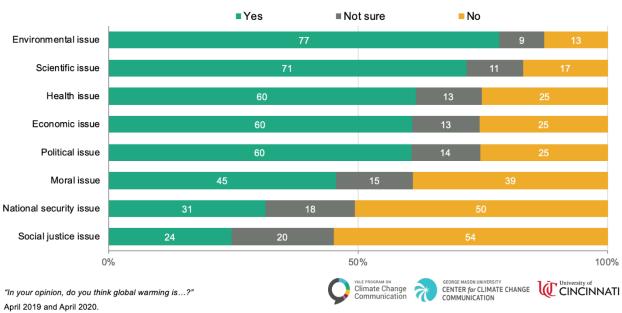
Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from NPR more often than once per week (N = 379).

A Majority Of The Nightly News Audience Thinks Global Warming Is More Than Just An Environmental Issue



April 2019 to April 2020.

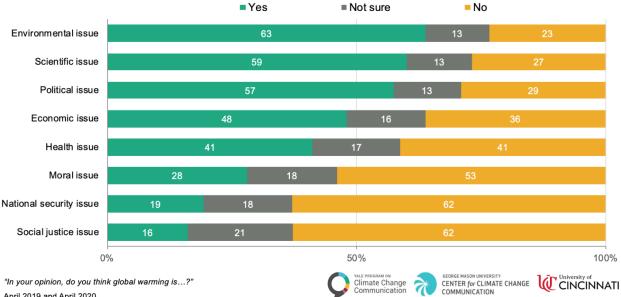
Base: American adults who watch the national nightly network news on CBS, ABC, or NBC more often than once per week (N = 1,517).



A Majority Of The Weather Channel Audience Thinks **Global Warming Is More Than Just An Environmental Issue**

Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from the Weather Channel more often than once per week (N = 629).

A Majority Of The Fox News Audience Thinks Global Warming Is An Environmental, Scientific, Or Political Issue



April 2019 and April 2020.

Base: American adults who watch, listen to, or read content from Fox News more often than once per week (N = 613).

Demographic profile of the CNN audience CNN audience = Americans who watch, read, or listen to CNN content more than once per week All other = Americans who watch, read, or listen to CNN content once per week or less often

8%

11%

Age	CNN	All other
18-24	5%	9%
25-34	15%	21%
35-44	16%	18%
45-54	16%	15%
55-64	21%	18%
65-74	19%	13%
75+	8%	6%

51%

21%

19%

8%

1%

66%

10%

16%

7%

1%

Eth White

Black

Hispanic

Other

2 or

more

H.S. or GED	27%	29%
Some college or Associate deg.	25%	29%
Bachelor's	20%	19%
Master's	14%	9%
Professional PhD, JD, MD, etc.	5%	4%
		All
Income	CNN	All other
Income 0-24k	CNN 12%	
	_	other
0-24k	12%	other 14%
0-24k 25-49k	12% 19%	other 14% 18%

Education CNN

< H.S.

Party x Ideology	CNN	All other
Democrat Very Liberal	15%	7%
Democrat Somewhat Liberal	22%	13%
Democrat Moderate/Consv.	33%	17%
Independent non-leaning	7%	10%
Republican Moderate/Liberal	9%	14%
Republican Somewhat Consv.	4%	15%
Republican Very Conservative	2%	10%
No party Not interested	7%	12%
Gender	CNN	All other
Female	43%	54%
Male	57%	46%

Religion	CNN	All other
Catholic	27%	22%
Protestant [non-evangelical]	19%	16%
Evangelical [+ "bom-again""]	17%	21%
Other, Christian	5%	9%
Other, non-Christian	5%	4%
Atheist / Agnostic	14%	12%
None	13%	15%
Region	CNN	All other
Northeast	21%	17%
Midwest	18%	22%
South	38%	38%
West	23%	24%

Demographic profile of the MSNBC audience

MSNBC audience = Americans who watch, read, or listen to MSNBC content more than once per week All other = Americans who watch, read, or listen to MSNBC content once per week or less often

Age	MSNBC	All other
18-24	3%	9%
25-34	13%	21%
35-44	15%	18%
45-54	14%	15%
55-64	21%	18%
65-74	22%	13%
75+	12%	5%

Race/ Eth	MSNBC	All other
White	53%	65%
Black	21%	10%
Hispanic	19%	16%
Other	7%	7%
2 or more	1%	1%

Educ.	MSNBC	All other
< H.S.	9%	11%
H.S. or GED	29%	28%
Some college or Assoc. deg.	27%	28%
Bachelor's	19%	19%
Master's	11%	10%
Professional PhD, JD, MD, etc.	5%	4%

Income	MSNBC	All other
0-24k	13%	14%
25-49k	18%	19%
50-99k	33%	31%
100-149k	18%	18%
150k +	18%	19%

Party x Ideology	MSNBC	All other
Democrat Very Liberal	15%	7%
Democrat Somewhat Liberal	24%	13%
Democrat Moderate/Consv.	31%	18%
Independent non-leaning	7%	10%
Republican Moderate/Liberal	8%	14%
Republican Somewhat Consv.	4%	15%
Republican Very Conservative	3%	10%
No party Not interested	8%	12%

Gender	MSNBC	All other
Female	46%	53%
Male	54%	47%

Religion	MSNBC	All other
Catholic	25%	23%
Protestant [non-evangelical]	20%	16%
Evangelical [+ "bom-again""]	16%	21%
Other, Christian	5%	9%
Other, non-Christian	6%	4%
Atheist / Agnostic	14%	12%
None	14%	14%

Region	MSNBC	All other
Northeast	21%	17%
Midwest	18%	21%
South	37%	38%
West	24%	24%

Demographic profile of the NPR audience

NPR = Americans who watch, read, or listen to NPR content more than once per week All other = Americans who watch, read, or listen to NPR content once per week or less often

Age	NPR	All other
18-24	5%	9%
25-34	16%	21%
35-44	20%	17%
45-54	15%	15%
55-64	20%	18%
65-74	16%	14%
75+	8%	6%

NPR 62%

12%

17%

8%

1%

64%

12%

16%

7%

1%

Race/ Eth

White

Black

Other

2 or

more

Hispanic

Education	NPR	other
< H.S.	8%	11%
H.S. or GED	23%	30%
Some college or Associate deg.	22%	29%
Bachelor's	24%	18%
Master's	15%	9%
Professional PhD, JD, MD, etc.	8%	3%

Income	NPR	All othe
0-24k	13%	14%
25-49k	18%	19%
50-99k	27%	31%
100-149k	17%	18%
150k +	25%	18%

Party x Ideology	NPR	All other
Democrat Very Liberal	17%	7%
Democrat Somewhat Liberal	23%	13%
Democrat Moderate/Consv.	22%	19%
Independent non-leaning	9%	10%
Republican Moderate/Liberal	7%	14%
Republican Somewhat Consv.	8%	14%
Republican Very Conservative	5%	10%
No party Not interested	8%	12%
Gender	NPR	All other
Female	49%	52%
Male	51%	48%

Religion	NPR	All other
Catholic	20%	24%
Protestant [non-evangelical]	16%	17%
Evangelical [+ "born-again""]	14%	21%
Other, Christian	6%	9%
Other, non-Christian	8%	4%
Atheist / Agnostic	20%	11%
None	15%	14%

Region	NPR	All other
Northeast	17%	18%
Midwest	20%	21%
South	38%	38%
West	24%	24%

22% 14%

20%

10%

5%

14% 15%

oth 17% 20% 36% 27%

Demographic profile of the national nightly network news (CBS, ABC, NBC) audience Night News = Americans who watch the national nightly network news on CBS, ABC, or NBC more than once per week All other = Americans who watch the national nightly network news on CBS, ABC, or NBC once per week or less often

Age	Night News	All other
18-24	5%	11%
25-34	11%	26%
35-44	13%	21%
45-54	15%	15%
55-64	25%	15%
65-74	21%	10%
75+	11%	3%

Race/ Eth	Night News	All other
White	61%	65%
Black	16%	9%
Hispanic	17%	16%
Other	6%	8%
2 or more	1%	1%

Education	Night	other
< H.S.	9%	11%
H.S. or GED	33%	25%
Some college or Associate deg.	29%	27%
Bachelor's	16%	21%
Master's	9%	11%
Professional PhD, JD, MD, etc.	4%	4%
FID, 3D, MD, 6tc.		
Income	Night News	All other
Income	News	other
Income 0-24k	News 14%	other 14%
Income 0-24k 25-49k	News 14% 19%	other 14% 18%

Party x Ideology	Night News	All other
Democrat Very Liberal	8%	8%
Democrat Somewhat Liberal	17%	14%
Democrat Moderate/Consv.	27%	16%
Independent non-leaning	7%	11%
Republican Moderate/Liberal	14%	13%
Republican Somewhat Consv.	11%	15%
Republican	6%	10%
No party	9%	12%
Not interested	- /•	
	Night	All
Gender	News	other
Female	52%	51%
Male	48%	49%

Demographic profile of the Weather Channel audience

WC = Americans who watch, read, or listen to Weather Channel content **more than once per week** All other = Americans who watch, read, or listen to Weather Channel content **once per week or less often**

Age	wc	All other
18-24	7%	9%
25-34	17%	21%
35-44	17%	18%
45-54	12%	16%
55-64	19%	19%
65-74	19%	13%
75+	9%	6%

wc	All oth
9%	119
36%	279
28%	28%
17%	20%
7%	119
3%	4%
	9% 36% 28% 17% 7%

Race/ Eth	wc	All other
White	61%	64%
Black	16%	11%
Hispanic	17%	16%
Other	5%	8%
2 or more	1%	1%

Income	wc	All
0-24k	17%	13%
25-49k	22%	18%
50-99k	29%	31%
100-149k	16%	18%
150k +	15%	20%

Party x Ideology	wc	All other
Democrat Very Liberal	7%	9%
Democrat Somewhat Liberal	13%	15%
Democrat Moderate/Consv.	23%	19%
Independent	6%	10%
Republican Moderate/Liberal	15%	13%
Republican Somewhat Consv.	16%	13%
Republican Very Conservative	11%	9%
No party Not interested	8%	12%
Gender	wc	All other
Female	51%	52%
Male	49%	48%

Religion	wc	All other
Catholic	22%	23%
Protestant [non-evangelical]	18%	16%
Evangelical [+ "born-again""]	25%	19%
Other, Christian	7%	9%
Other, non-Christian	4%	5%
Atheist / Agnostic	8%	13%
None	15%	14%

Region	wc	All other
Northeast	19%	17%
Midwest	21%	21%
South	44%	37%
West	17%	25%

Demographic profile of the Fox News audience

Fox = Americans who watch, read, or listen to Fox News content more than once per week All other = Americans who watch, read, or listen to Fox News content once per week or less often

Age	Fox	All other
18-24	5%	9%
25-34	10%	23%
35-44	13%	19%
45-54	15%	15%
55-64	23%	17%
65-74	21%	12%
75+	12%	4%

Race/Eth	Fox	All other
White	67%	62%
Black	13%	11%
Hispanic	15%	17%
Other	5%	8%
2 or more	1%	2%

Education	Fox	All other
< H.S.	11%	10%
H.S. or GED	33%	27%
Some college or Associate deg.	29%	28%
Bachelor's	17%	20%
Master's	7%	11%
Professional PhD, JD, MD, etc.	3%	4%

Income	Fox	All other
0-24k	14%	14%
25-49k	21%	18%
50-99k	31%	31%
100-149k	17%	18%
150k +	18%	20%

Party x Ideology	Fox	All other
Democrat Very Liberal	3%	10%
Democrat Somewhat Liberal	6%	17%
Democrat Moderate/Consv.	14%	21%
Independent non-leaning	8%	10%
Republican Moderate/Liberal	16%	12%
Republican Somewhat Consv.	25%	10%
Republican Very Conservative	18%	6%
No party Not interested	9%	12%

Gender	Fox	All other
Female	45%	54%
Male	55%	46%

Religion	Fox	All other
Catholic	28%	21%
Protestant [non-evangelical]	20%	16%
Evangelical [+ "bom-again""]	26%	18%
Other, Christian	6%	9%
Other, non-Christian	4%	5%
Atheist / Agnostic	6%	14%
None	10%	16%

Region	Fox	All other
Northeast	19%	17%
Midwest	21%	21%
South	40%	37%
West	20%	25%