

USC Annenberg

*Center for Climate Journalism
and Communication*

Temperature Check

25-26

CLIMATE COMMUNICATIONS LESSONS AND FORECAST

Table of Contents

Foreword	1
Key Findings	2
Our Respondents	3
Media Engagement	4
Climate Issues and Language	11
Challenges and Support	18
Artificial Intelligence	39
Analysis and Forecast	42
Methodology	44
Acknowledgement	45
References	46

Foreword

As a wave of historic environmental deregulation swept the United States in 2025, news coverage about climate change dropped. [Researchers at the University of Colorado Boulder found](#) that amongst five major newspapers, climate coverage was down more than 30% in November 2025 versus November 2024.

Layoffs in 2025 and early 2026 decimated climate units at outlets known for strong climate coverage, such as the [The Washington Post](#) and [CBS](#). Simultaneously, the U.S. federal government shuttered its website that hosts the National Climate Assessment, a government-mandated report detailing current and future climate impacts. And that’s just for starters.

In this eroded communication context, mis- and disinformation are flourishing. [A landmark report](#) from the International Panel on the Information Environment last year confirmed what many readers of this report already know:

The human response to the climate crisis is being obstructed and delayed by the production and circulation of misleading information about the nature of climate change and the available solutions... Powerful actors—including corporations, governments, and political parties—intentionally spread inaccurate or misleading narratives about anthropogenic climate change. These narratives circulate across digital, broadcast, and interpersonal communication channels. The result is a decline in public trust, diminished policy coordination, and a feedback loop between scientific denialism and political inaction.

This is the backdrop of our 2025 - 2026 Temperature Check report. Not surprisingly, we learned from survey respondents that their greatest challenge in communicating about climate change is the politicization of the topic. Respondents reported using the phrases “climate change” and “global warming” less frequently than they used to, and there was a noted shift away from “justice” framing.

It is an undoubtedly difficult time to be a climate communicator. We are deeply grateful for the insights of our respondents. Throughout our report, we will dig into the insights they shared with us and take a look at what might be on the horizon.

Allison Agsten

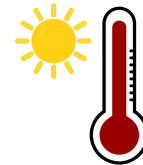
Director, Center for Climate Journalism and Communication
USC Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism

Key Findings



Media Engagement

Even though fewer Americans now hear about global warming and climate change through news, newspapers are still the top source of information for climate communicators. Climate communicators still prefer LinkedIn as their go-to social media platform for climate information, followed by Instagram and Bluesky. The use of X/Twitter for engaging in climate media continues to drop even more among climate communicators.



Climate Language

Climate communicators are most concerned about the lack of climate action, global warming and the health impacts of climate change this year. Yet, our survey shows climate communicators are also increasingly avoiding terms and phrases such as “climate change” and “global warming,” likely due to increasing politicization of the terms as well as pushback from the government as well as the public.



Challenges and Support

Almost 50% of our climate communicators said the biggest challenge for them when it came to communicating about climate change in 2025 was the over-politicization of climate change and the climate positions of the U.S. presidential administration. Other big challenges include the complexity of the issue and apathy and lack of interest from the public.



Artificial Intelligence

Our 2025 survey shows a growing acceptance and use of artificial intelligence among climate communicators, with less than 25% of communicators saying they never use AI for climate communication and more than 30% of communicators saying they think AI can play a positive role in climate communication.

Our Respondents

105 climate communicators responded to our second annual Temperature Check survey.

Almost 90% of our respondents reside in the **United States**.

11 of our respondents are based internationally and reside in countries including **India, Italy, the United Kingdom and Indonesia**.



More than a quarter of our climate communicators primarily identify as **journalists**.

Other climate communicators who responded to our survey primarily come from fields such as **academia** (30%), **nonprofits or NGOs** (16%), **communications and/or PR** (11%), **arts and entertainment** (5%), **corporate sustainability** (4%), **governmental organizations** (4%), and **advocate or influencer** (2%).

Media Engagement

Our respondents showed steady engagement with newspapers this year, despite the decline in journalism and closure of over 130 local newsrooms across the country.

Social media continues to be a popular source of climate information among communicators, with LinkedIn dominating the space, followed by Instagram and Bluesky. **More than 70% of our communicators regularly post about climate change on social media.**

Top News Sources

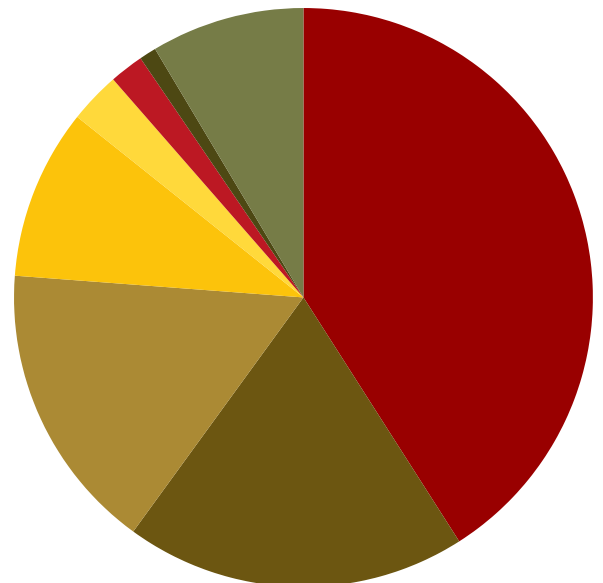
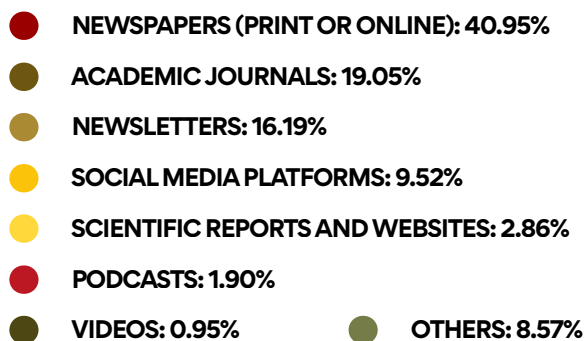
Newspapers are the primary source of information about climate change for respondents, followed by academic journals and social media platforms.

However, journalism is declining across the U.S. and globally. [Data from Muck Rack](#) shows that the number of local journalists in the U.S. has dropped by over 70% since 2005. This translates to a loss of about 3,500 newspapers and more than 270,000 jobs, as found by [Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism](#).

Climate journalism has also suffered as a result of these layoffs. Among the 300 journalists laid off by the Washington Post this February were **13 journalists** covering climate and the environment; CBS News laid off **almost its entire climate team** just last October.

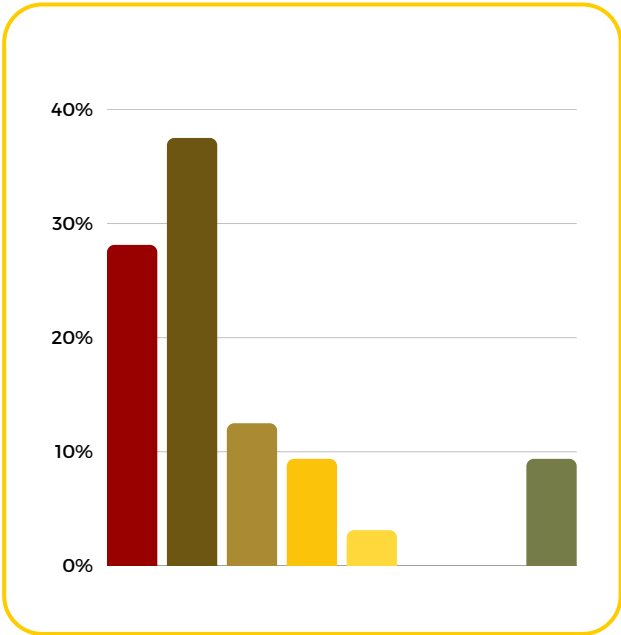
The effects of this decline in climate journalism are evident. [Yale found](#) that less than 50% hear about global warming in the media at least once a month.

Primary source for information about climate change

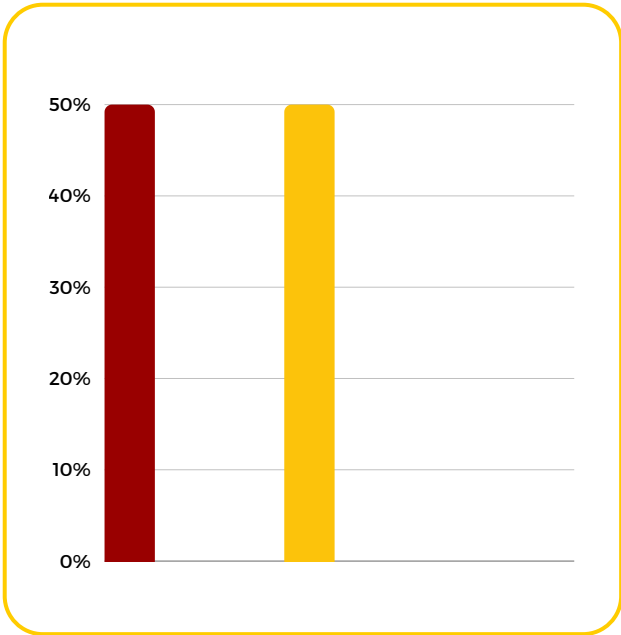


How respondents get their climate news based on job type:

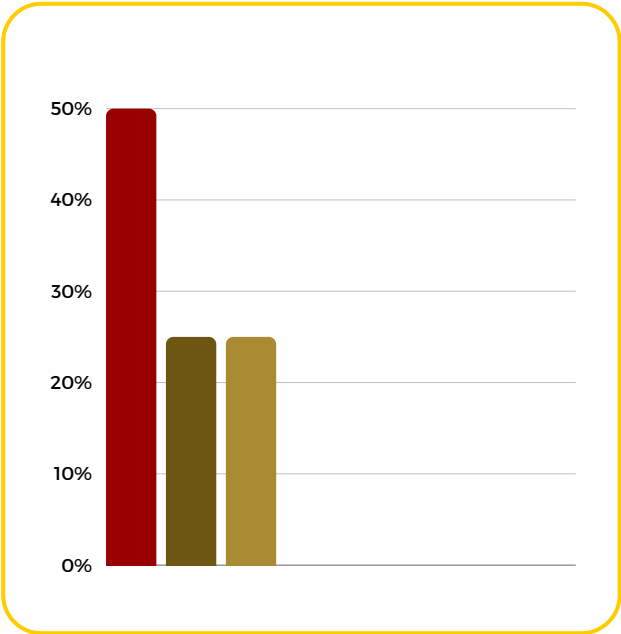
- **NEWSPAPERS (PRINT OR ONLINE)**
- **SCIENTIFIC REPORTS AND WEBSITES**
- **ACADEMIC JOURNALS**
- **PODCASTS**
- **NEWSLETTERS**
- **VIDEOS**
- **SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**
- **OTHERS**



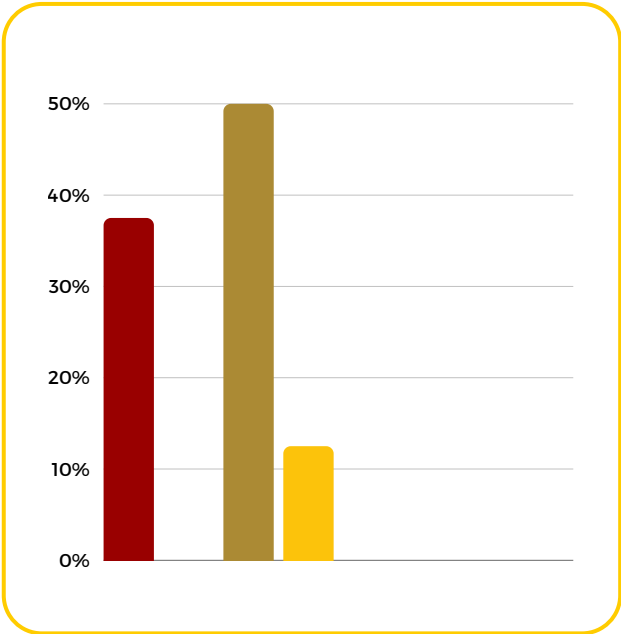
ACADEMIA



ADVOCATE OR INFLUENCER



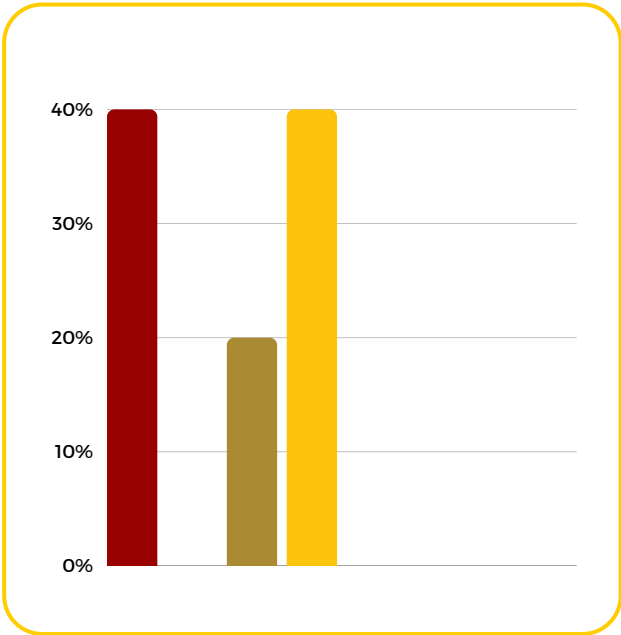
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT



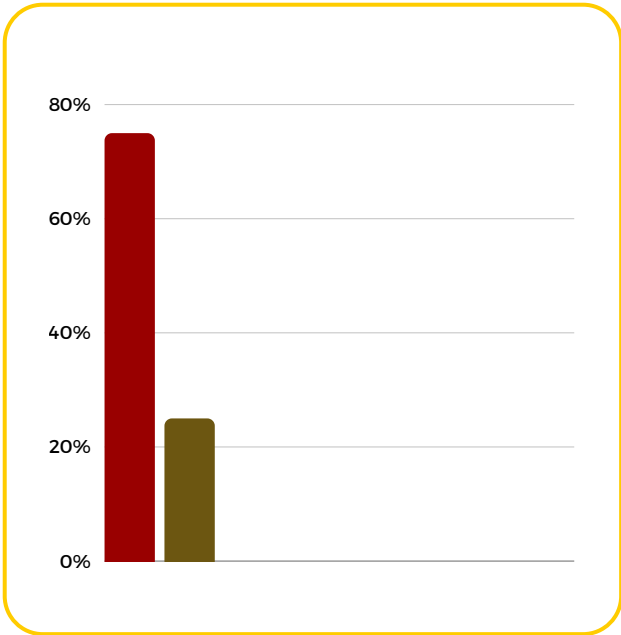
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

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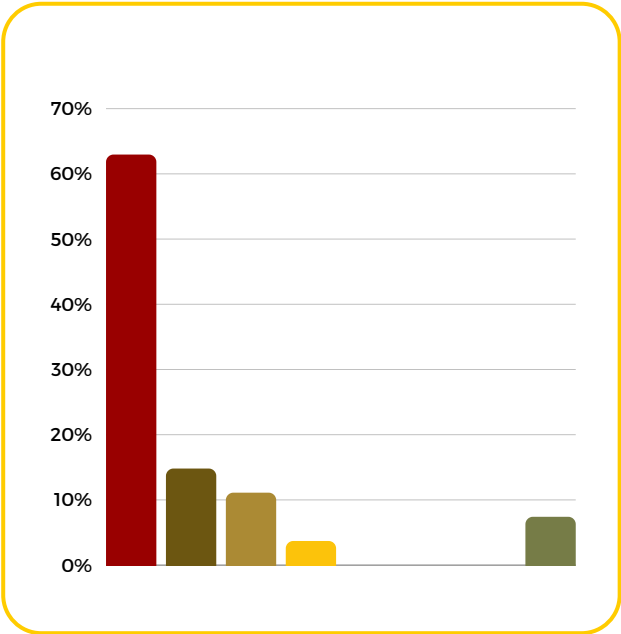
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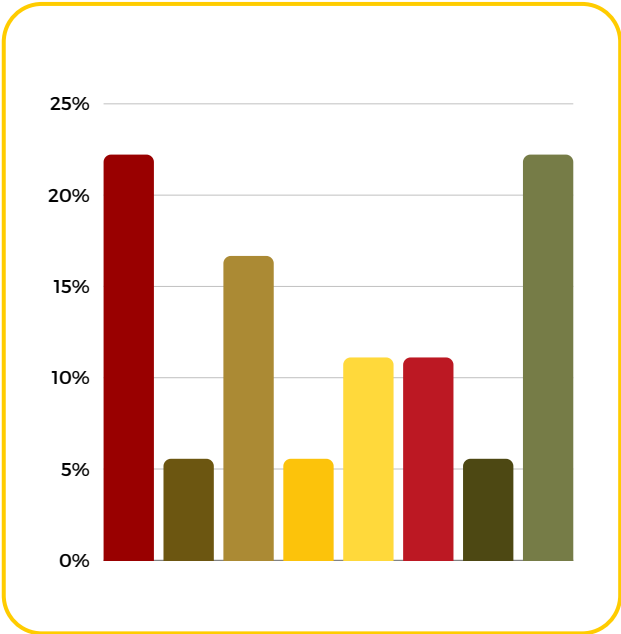
CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY



GOVERNMENT



JOURNALIST



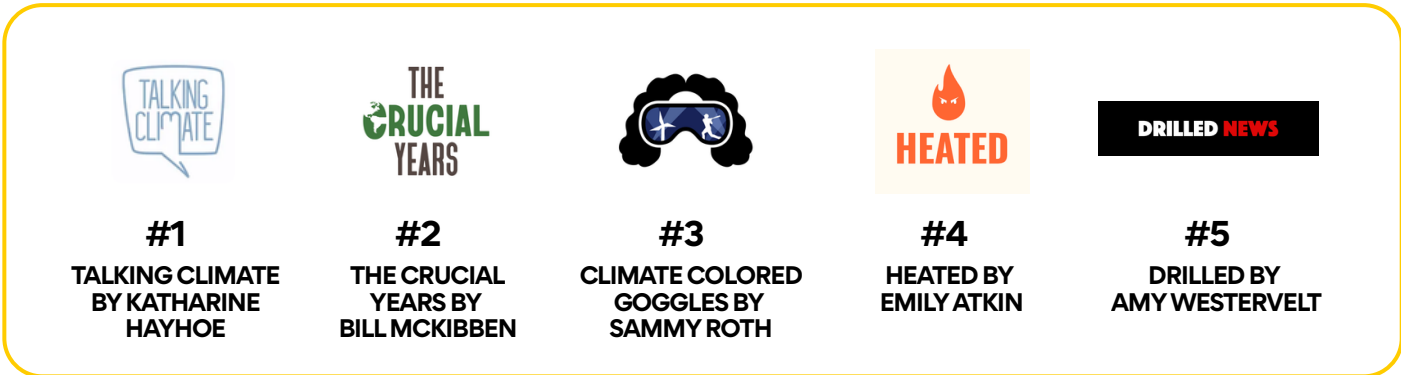
NONPROFIT OR NGO

We asked respondents to list the top three specific sources they use to access information about climate change.

Among traditional media sources, here is what our respondents most mentioned:



Among newsletters, here is what our respondents mentioned most often:



Nature was the most mentioned academic journal that our respondents go to for climate information, followed by **Science** and **Journal of Climate**. Multiple respondents also mentioned the **Yale Program for Climate Change Communication** as one of their top sources of information from the academic sector, followed by the **USC Annenberg Center for Climate Journalism and Communication** and **United Nations/IPCC** reports.

Social Media

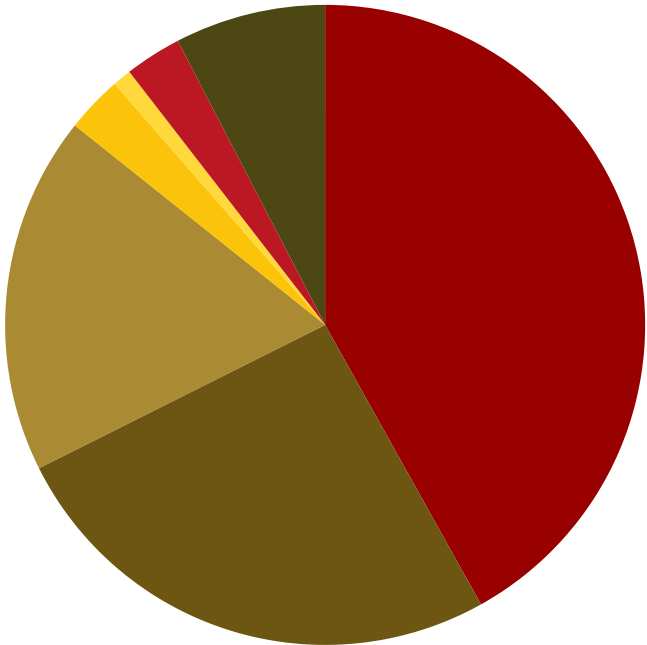
Similar to last year, LinkedIn was the go-to social media platform that climate communicators use to engage with climate change media, followed by Instagram and Bluesky.

Since Elon Musk’s purchase of X/Twitter, the number of climate communicators who use X/Twitter to engage in climate change media has reduced rapidly. Our 2025 report showed that 13.46% respondents engaged with climate media on X/Twitter in 2024. In our 2026 report, that number dropped to 2.86%, showing that fewer climate communicators engaged with climate media on X/Twitter in 2025.

A study by [Joh et al. 2025](#) analysed this transition in climate communication on X/Twitter through more than 7 million public tweets on the platform between September 2022 and June 2023, and found that discussions involving climate change on Twitter revolved around how Musk’s leadership at Twitter “has enabled or amplified climate denialism.”

Go to social media platform

- LINKEDIN (41.90%)
- INSTAGRAM (25.71%)
- BLUESKY (18.10%)
- X/TWITTER (2.86%)
- FACEBOOK (0.95%)
- OTHER (2.86%)
- I DON'T ENGAGE WITH CLIMATE CHANGE CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA (7.62%)

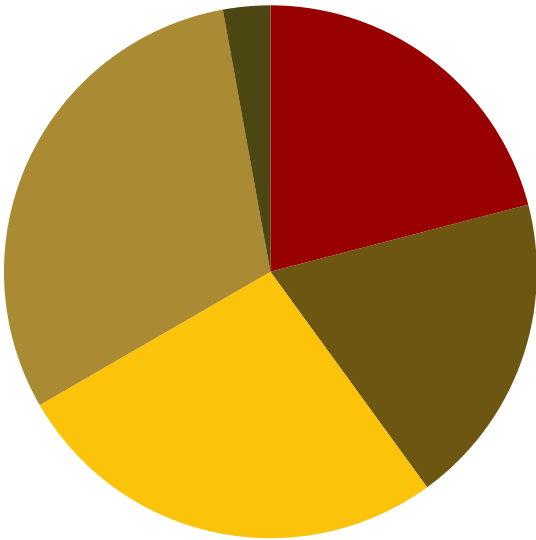


Climate communication at work

40% of our climate communicators write about climate change at least once a week, and more than 55% say they create multimedia content about climate change for work.

More than 70% of these climate communicators post about climate change on social media as part of their work.

Over 90% of our climate communicators have conversations about climate change at work.

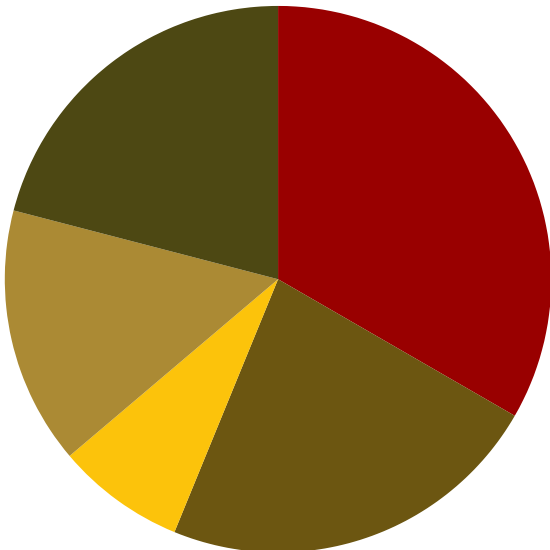


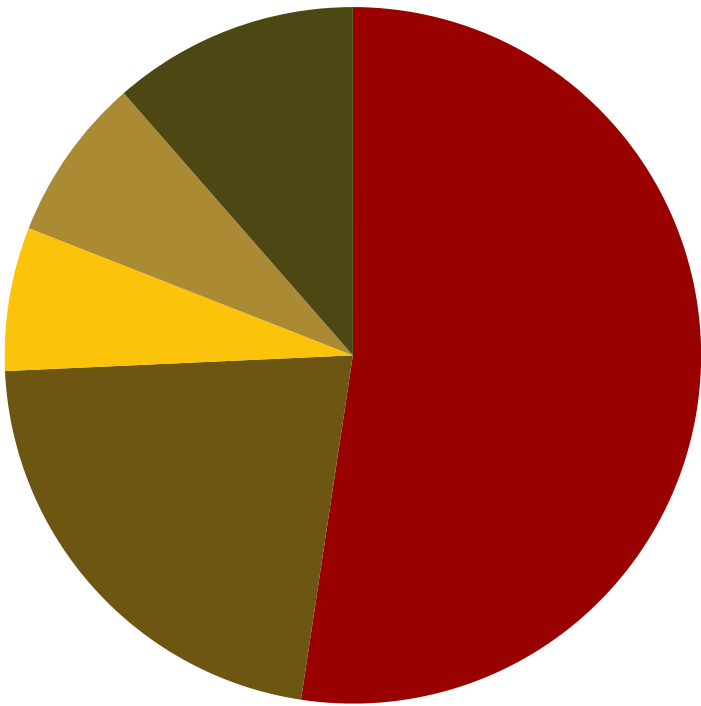
I communicate about climate change through the written word (e.g. journalism, publishing academic papers, blog posts, etc.) as part of my work.

- DAILY OR EVERY OTHER DAY (20.95%)
- A FEW TIMES EVERY WEEK (19.05%)
- A FEW TIMES EVERY MONTH (26.67%)
- A FEW TIMES A YEAR (30.48%)
- DON'T KNOW (2.86%)

I create multimedia content around climate change (e.g. podcasts, radio, videos and TV, photography, etc.) as part of my work.

- STRONGLY AGREE (33.33%)
- SOMEWHAT AGREE (22.86%)
- NEUTRAL (7.62%)
- SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (15.24%)
- STRONGLY DISAGREE (20.95%)



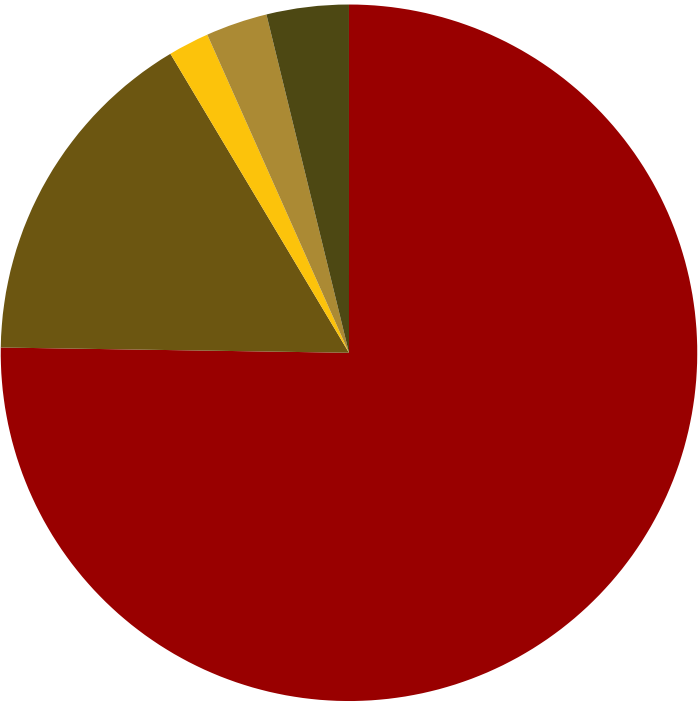


I post about climate change on social media as part of my work.

- **STRONGLY AGREE (52.38%)**
- **SOMEWHAT AGREE (21.90%)**
- **NEUTRAL (6.67%)**
- **SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (7.62%)**
- **STRONGLY DISAGREE (11.43%)**

I engage in conversations about climate change as part of my work.

- **STRONGLY AGREE (75.24%)**
- **SOMEWHAT AGREE (16.19%)**
- **NEUTRAL (1.90%)**
- **SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (2.86%)**
- **STRONGLY DISAGREE (3.81%)**



Climate Issues and Language

The way our communicators discuss issues around climate change has been highly impacted by the ever-changing media landscape as well as the political restrictions placed around climate communication in the U.S. and other countries.

Responses show that our communicators are primarily concerned about the bigger picture issues of lack of climate action, global warming and rising health risks due to climate change. Most of our communicators still strongly favor solutions-based messaging around climate change to counter this lack of climate action.

Yet, likely due to the political weight of terms like “climate change” and “global warming,” communicators find that they are using these terms less.

Communicators are primarily concerned about lack of climate action

The top climate issue that our communicators are currently focusing on is the **lack of climate action**, followed by **global warming** and **health risks due to climate change**.

While extreme weather events like heatwaves and wildfires are still issues of priority for climate communicators, as they were in the 2025 report, they are outranked this year by the above issues as well as by electrification-related issues, pollution, as well as the extinction of species.



#1
LACK OF CLIMATE ACTION



#2
GLOBAL WARMING



#3
HEALTH RISKS



#4
ELECTRIFICATION



#5
POLLUTION

#6
LOSS OF SPECIES

#7
HEATWAVES

#8
WILDFIRES

#9
WATER SCARCITY

#10
MINING, FRACKING AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION

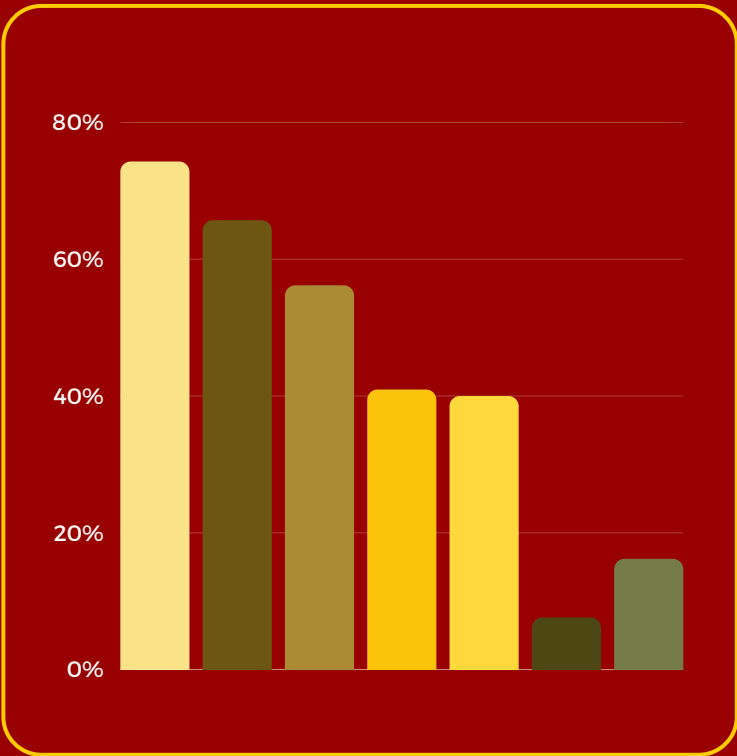
Communicators are primarily concerned about lack of climate action

About 75% of our climate communicators think solutions-based messaging is most effective, alongside other messaging tactics, including balanced messaging and action-based messaging.

Recent research from Stanford University shows that positive emotions increase climate engagement, which means messaging that leaves audiences feeling positive can also encourage more action.

Type of climate messaging communicators most use

- SOLUTIONS (74.29%)
- BALANCED (65.71%)
- ACTION (56.19%)
- POSITIVE (40.95%)
- BEHAVIORAL (40.00%)
- DOOM AND GLOOM (7.62%)
- OTHER (16.19%)



We gave our climate communicators a set of commonly used climate terminology and asked them which terms or phrases they use and which terms or phrases they avoid:

Terms or phrases climate communicators use

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WORSENING DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE 2. DRIVEN BY CLIMATE CHANGE/GLOBAL WARMING 3. MADE MORE INTENSE BY CLIMATE CHANGE 4. FUELED BY CLIMATE CHANGE/GLOBAL WARMING 5. MADE MORE LIKELY BY CLIMATE CHANGE | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. CHANGING CLIMATE PATTERNS 7. HUMAN-CAUSED WARMING 8. CLIMATE-FUELED DISASTER 9. CLIMATE-DRIVEN EXTREMES 10. NATURAL DISASTER |
|--|--|

Terms or phrases climate communicators avoid

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NATURAL DISASTER 2. CLIMATE CHANGE 3. GLOBAL WARMING 4. CLIMATE CRISIS 5. CLIMATE EMERGENCY | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. ANTHROPOGENIC 7. CAUSED BY CLIMATE CHANGE 8. CLIMATE 9. GREENHOUSE GASES 10. TIPPING POINTS |
|---|---|

Language vs. visuals

For the 2025-2026 Temperature Check report, we **analyzed over 450 research articles published in leading climate communication journal Environmental Communication within the last 10 years** to determine whether the research focused on climate and environmental language, visuals, or both. The articles analyzed cover a wide range of climate and environmental communication topics, including media framing and content analysis of existing communications as well as the efficacy of current intervention strategies.

Our analysis shows that climate communication research continues to be predominantly language-based; almost **65% of the articles we analyzed focus solely on language**. Just over **35% of the research articles contained a visual-based research component**: about 11% focus solely on visuals, while almost 25% look at both language and visuals.

Visual information plays a key role in effective climate change communication: **it can help close the psychological distance between societal behaviors and their environmental consequences** and therefore, foster engagement for climate change adaptation and mitigation (Meijers et al., 2018). For example, imagery on social media can **highlight the severity of environmental disasters and trigger an emotional response to climate change**, possibly catalyzing action to assist affected communities and help them recover and adapt to future events (León et al., 2022). Additionally, watching **nature documentaries can promote a willingness to donate to environmental causes**; although, according to Arendt & Matthes 2016, in order for nature documentaries to elicit a sense of connection to the natural world, a preexisting foundation of real-world nature experience must exist.

Social norms also play a key role in mediating the way images impact a viewer, with metrics like “views” and “likes” determining the credibility of climate change visuals in the eyes of an individual (Spartz et al., 2017). Oftentimes, **data can be some of the most challenging (and compelling) information** about climate change that we can share with the general public. This makes excellent communication critical, especially when the information corresponds to imperceptible environmental hazards that impact human health, such as air pollution. Data visualizations, such as maps of global temperatures rising with fossil fuel emissions or a carbon footprint calculator, are **critical to draw public attention to the impacts of climate change and improve understanding** of the associated risks (Kuchinskaya, 2018).

A diversity of research topics is key to developing effective communication; by conducting research that balances both language and visuals, we can better understand current communication challenges and create strategies to effectively communicate about the urgency of climate change, particularly in an information-saturated world.

Lina Rehbein

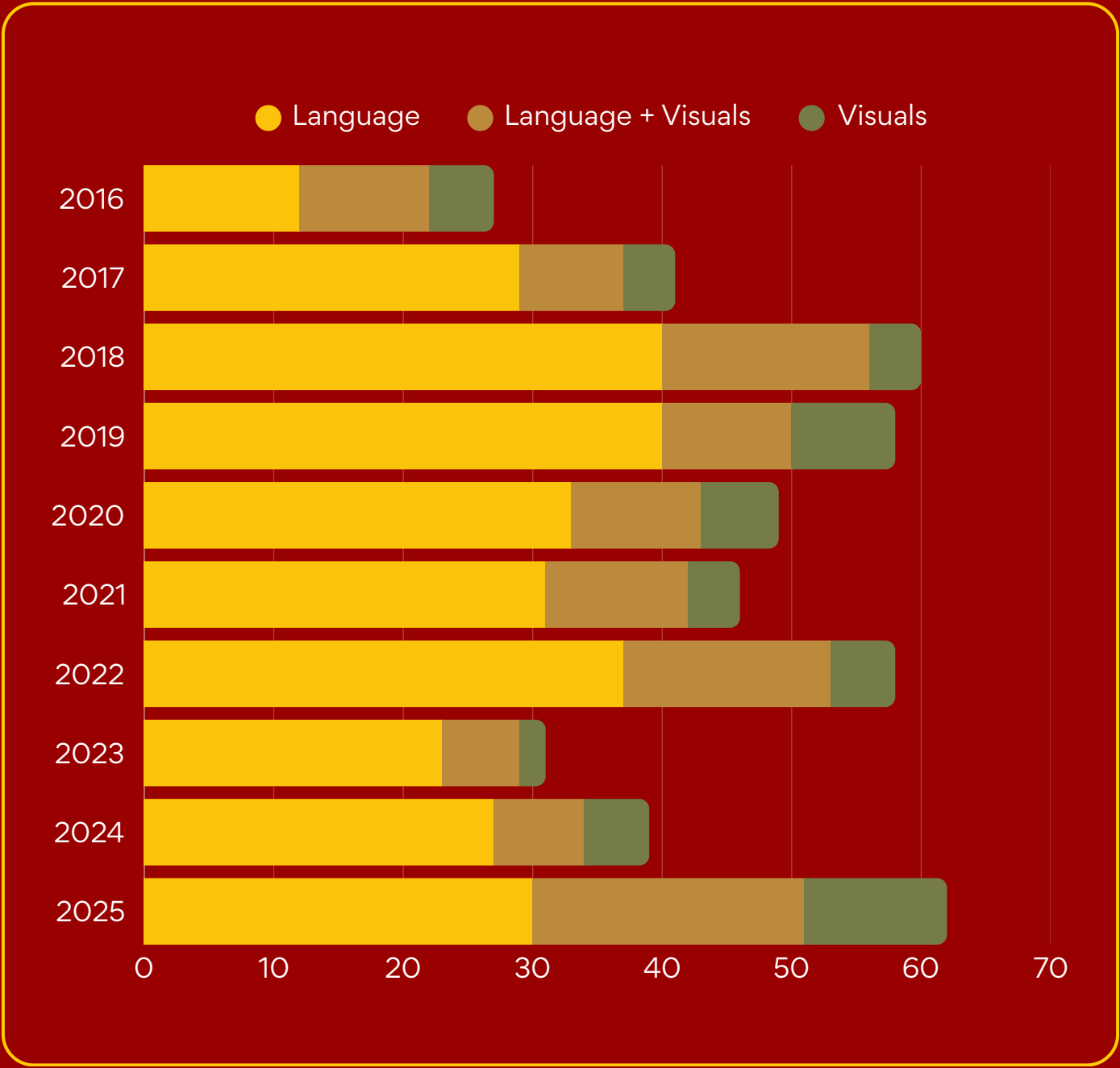
Research Assistant, Center for Climate Journalism and Communication

Total papers analysed: **471**

Number of papers analysed that solely discuss climate language: **302**

Number of papers analysed that solely discuss climate visuals: **54**

Number of papers analysed that discuss both climate visuals and language: **115**



Climate misinformation

Misinformation about climate change is prevalent online as well as in conversation. [A study by Harvard University](#) suggests that social media users can unwittingly spread climate misinformation if the message they encountered seemed to come from an expert, was long and widely engaged with by other users.

Our respondents share some of the most common pieces of misinformation they hear about climate change below:

“
GREEN TECHNOLOGY CAN FIX ALL OUR ISSUES WITHOUT ANY VALUES-BASED SOCIETAL SHIFTS.

- Benjamin Yosua-Davis,
Director of Applied Research
at the BTS Center

”

“
THE IDEA THAT CLIMATE CHANGE ONLY AFFECTS THE ENVIRONMENT, AND NOT PEOPLE’S HEALTH, SAFETY, COMMUNITIES, OR EVERYDAY LIVES.

- Dr. Misha Kouzeh,
Distinguished Lecturer of
Communication at USC
Annenberg

”

“
WE HUMAN BEINGS HAVE EXPERIENCED HEAT WAVES MANY TIMES IN OUR HISTORY. NOTHING DIFFERENT IS THUS HAPPENING, NOWADAYS.

- Marco Merola, science
journalist and founder of
Adaptation.it

”

“
THAT WE ARE ALL DOOMED AND WE SHOULD JUST GIVE UP TRYING TO REDUCE EMISSIONS NOW IN FAVOR OF GEOENGINEERING OUR WAY OUT OF THIS MESS.

- Katharine Gammon, freelance journalist

”

“

FALSE INFORMATION ABOUT SOLUTIONS (TECHNOSOLUTIONISM, GREENWASHING), CLAIMING THE CURE IS WORSE THAN THE DISEASE.

- Alyssa Sinclair, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Communication Neuroscience Lab at University of Pennsylvania

”

“

WHAT WE'RE EXPERIENCING IS JUST PART OF A NATURAL PATTERN OF PLANETARY TEMPERATURE CYCLES, AND THERE'S NO HARD PROOF THAT HUMAN ACTIVITY IS THE ROOT CAUSE.

- Kathryn Royster, Associate Director for Public Communications at USC Dornsife Wrigley Institute for Environment and Sustainability

”

“

THAT PROCURING MATERIALS NEEDED FOR CLEAN ENERGY IS WORSE THAN THAT FOR DIRTY FOSSIL FUELS. NOT TRUE.

CLEAN ENERGY PRODUCTION IS FAR FROM BEING A GREAT SYSTEM WITH A LOT OF SIMILAR ISSUES WE FIND IN EXTRACTING HYDROCARBONS. BUT HYDROCARBON EXTRACTION IS FAR WORSE IN RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE TERMS, AND FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES CONTINUE TO BE WORSE IN THEIR OPERATIONS.

- Arthur Sprogis, communications strategist; former senior advisor for the U.S. Department of Energy

”

Challenges and Support

Biggest challenges for climate communicators

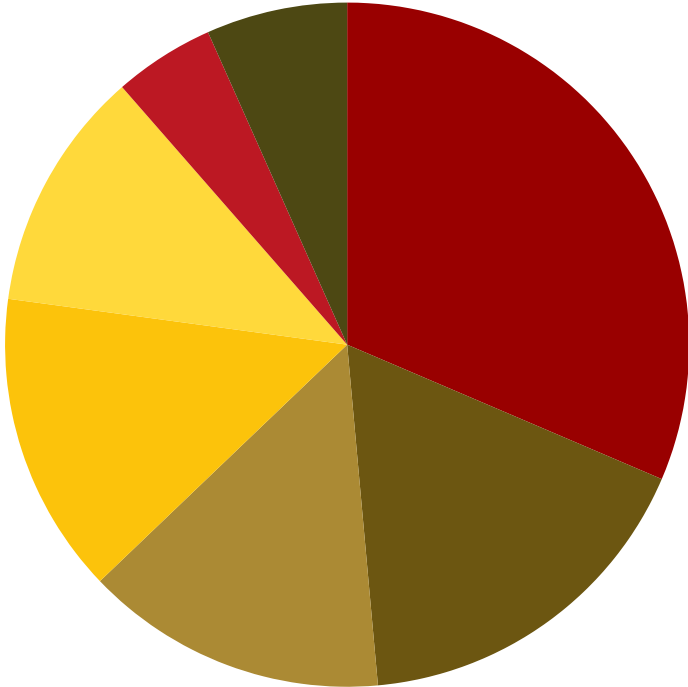
Perhaps unsurprisingly, the biggest challenge for most of our respondents in 2025 is the over-politicization of climate change. Almost 50% of our respondents list the over-politicization of climate change and the climate positions of the current U.S. presidential administration as their top challenges when it comes to communicating about climate change. Even as journalism loses funding, not a single journalist surveyed listed the lack of funding for climate change as their biggest challenge.

An analysis of the Factiva database shows that climate change mentions had been steadily increasing across U.S. in the past two decades, with a sharp increase since 2021. However, **the Trump administration’s position on climate change and the steps it has taken to stymie climate action and communication in 2025 has led to a chilling effect.**

In 2025, the number of times climate change was mentioned among publications on the Factiva database took a sharp drop, **to around 112,000 mentions, down from over 154,000 mentions in 2024.**

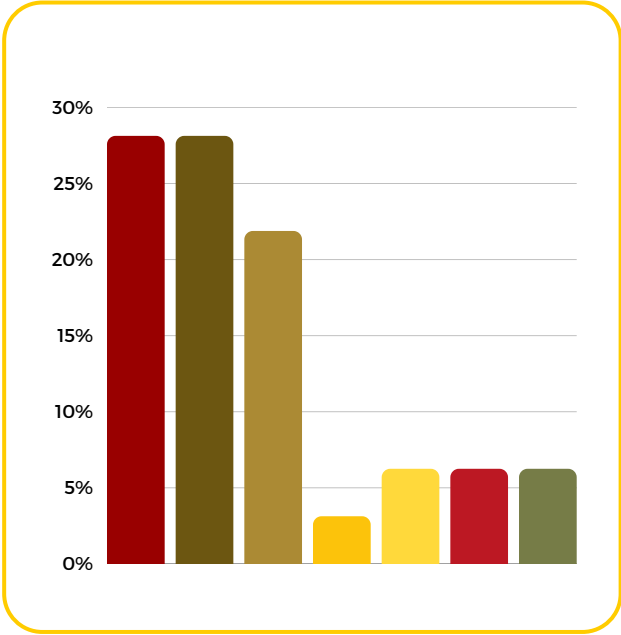
Biggest challenges for climate communicators

- OVER-POLITICIZATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE (31.43%)
- THE CLIMATE POSITIONS OF THE CURRENT U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION (17.14%)
- CLIMATE CHANGE IS TOO COMPLEX OR OVERWHELMING (14.29%)
- APATHY AND LACK OF INTEREST FROM THE PUBLIC (14.29%)
- MISCONCEPTIONS, MISINFORMATION, OR DISINFORMATION, AND LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE (11.43%)
- LACK OF FUNDING FOR CLIMATE COMMUNICATIONS WORK (4.76%)
- OTHER (6.67%)

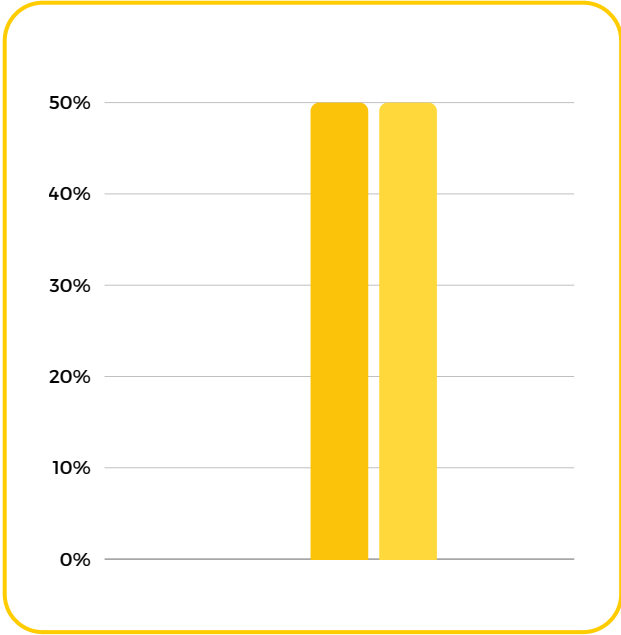


How respondents view challenges based on job type:

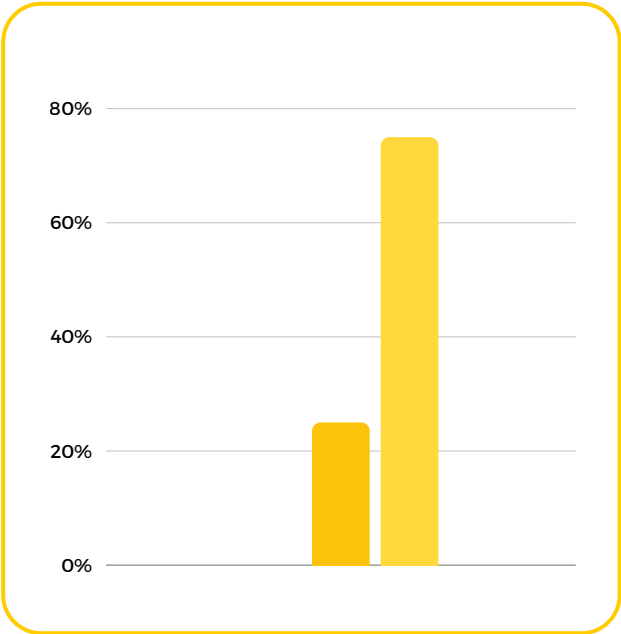
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- OTHER



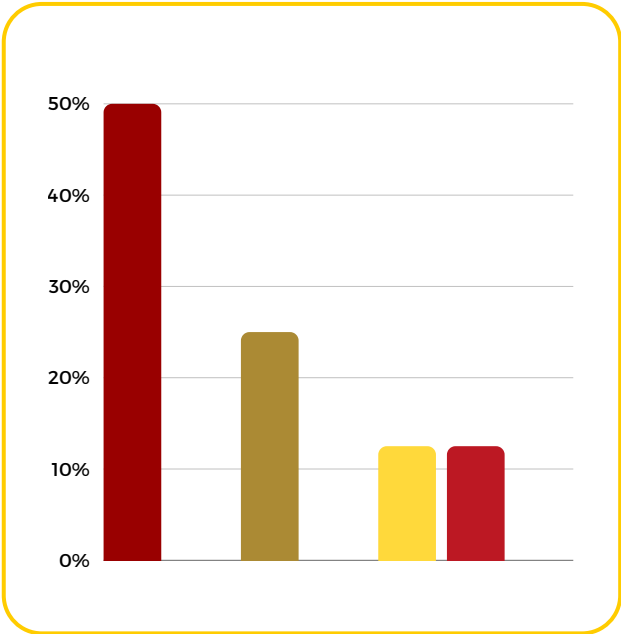
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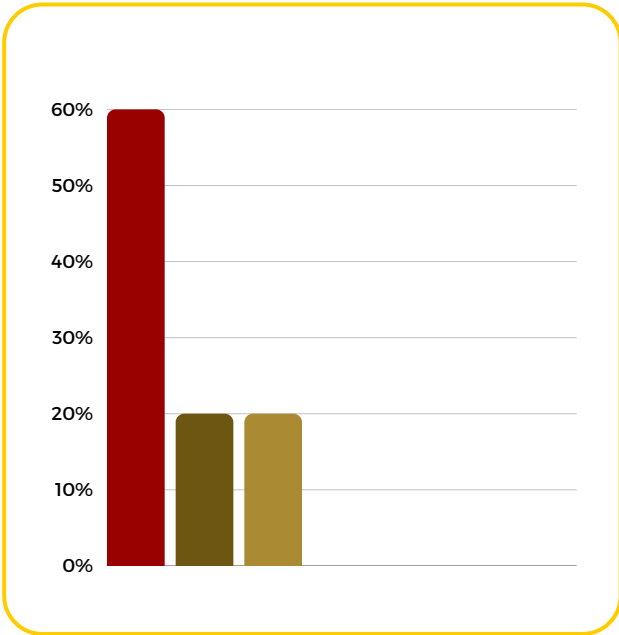
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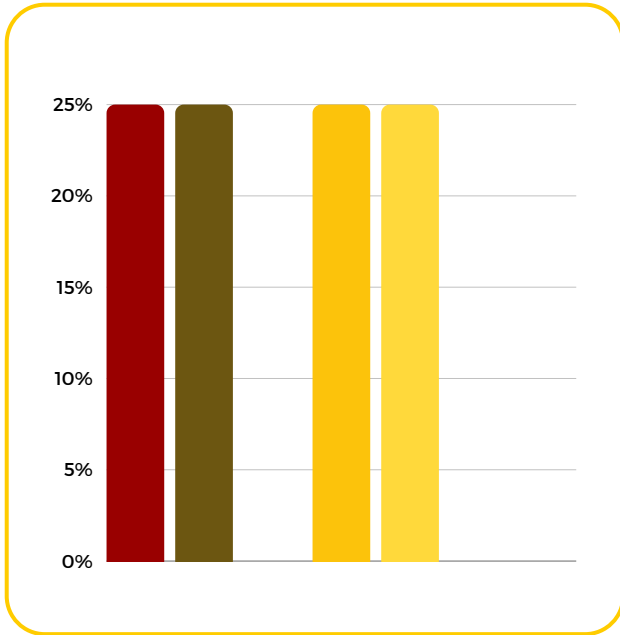
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

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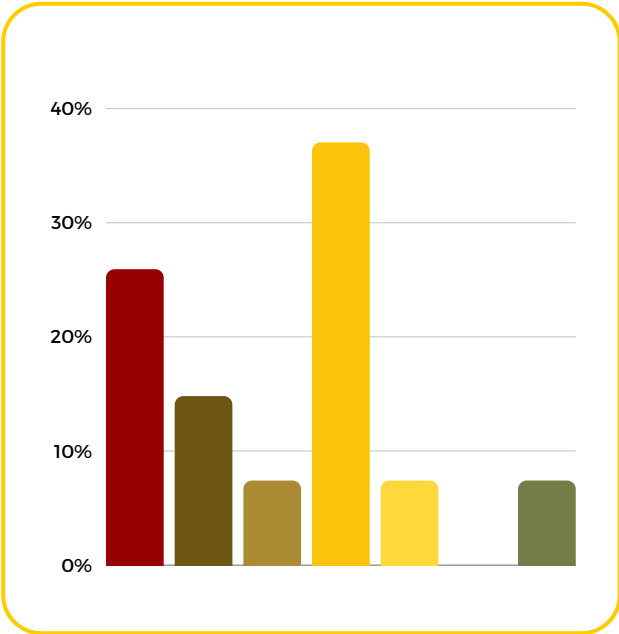
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- LACK OF FUNDING FOR CLIMATE COMMUNICATIONS WORK
- CLIMATE CHANGE IS TOO COMPLEX OR OVERWHELMING
- OTHER
- APATHY AND LACK OF INTEREST FROM THE PUBLIC



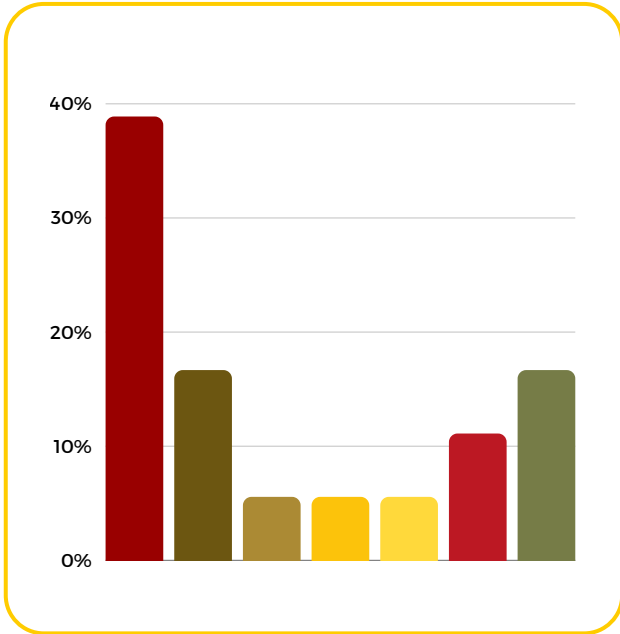
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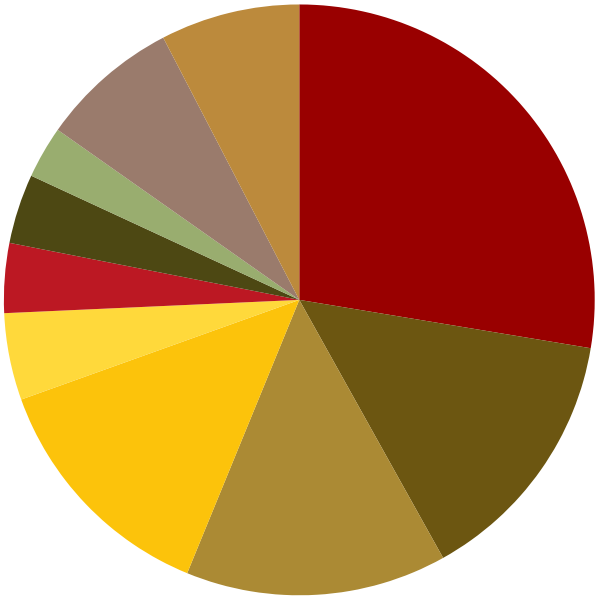
NONPROFIT OR NGO

What limits climate communications

Just like our 2024 survey, our 2025 survey shows that the biggest factor that limits climate communications for individuals is the lack of funding and resources.

Factors that limit climate communication

- LACK OF FUNDING/RESOURCES (27.62%)
- OVER-POLITICIZATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND LANGUAGE (14.29%)
- LACK OF TIME (14.29%)
- LACK OF INTEREST BY PUBLIC (13.33%)
- JOB-RELATED RESTRICTIONS (4.76%)
- LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES (3.81%)
- LACK OF KNOWLEDGE (3.81%)
- TOO MANY ISSUES TO FOCUS ON (2.86%)
- NONE (7.62%)
- OTHER (7.62%)



Who is driving conversations around climate?

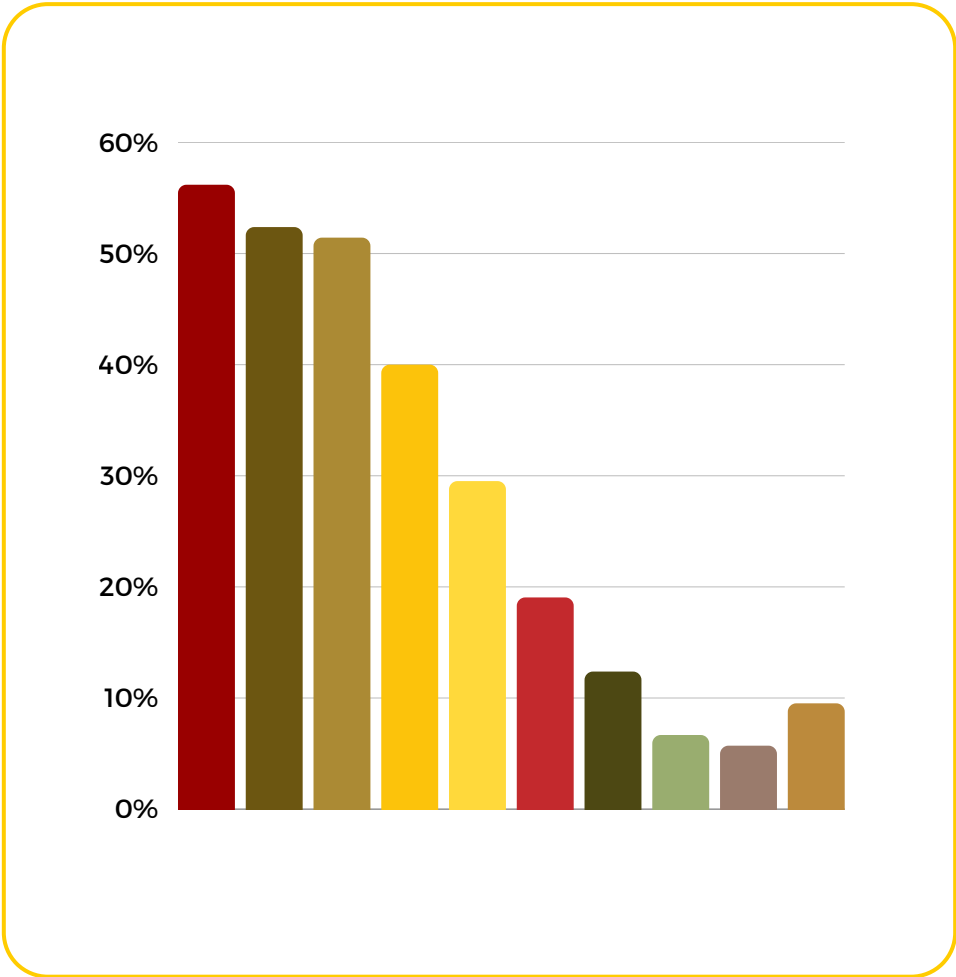
Our communicators say the fossil fuel industry is primarily driving current conversation around climate change in the U.S., followed by activist and advocacy groups and journalists and media organizations.

A 2025 report shows that Big Oil spent at least \$445 million before the 2024 U.S. election in lobbying and supporting candidates who could prioritize their agenda. Big Oil has also spent millions of dollars in taxpayer-subsidized donations to organizations that promote climate disinformation, including **\$236 million to the Heritage Foundation** which has been known to actively propagate climate disinformation.

Yet, activists also tend to be loud voices in the climate space, with people like Greta Thunberg having a wide range of influence.

In your opinion, which of the following groups is driving the current conversation around climate change in the U.S.?

- **FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY (56.19%)**
- **ACTIVISTS AND ADVOCACY GROUPS (52.38%)**
- **JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS (51.43%)**
- **U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (40.00%)**
- **RESEARCHERS AND ACADEMIA (29.52%)**
- **CORPORATIONS (19.05%)**
- **U.S. LOCAL OR STATE GOVERNMENTS (12.38%)**
- **NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS OF NON-U.S. COUNTRIES (6.67%)**
- **UNITED NATIONS (5.71%)**
- **OTHER (9.52%)**



What institutional challenges, if any, do you encounter in your climate work?

“ **ACADEMIC SILOS CAN MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO SPEAK BROADLY ABOUT CLIMATE. THEY TEND TO FOCUS ON THEIR SPECIFIC AREA OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND LESS FOCUSED ON IMPACTS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO COMMUNITIES.**

- Fara Warner, Executive Director of Metcalf Institute at University of Rhode Island

”

“ **WHEN X WAS TWITTER, IT WAS CENTRAL TO OUR ADVOCACY AT END CLIMATE SILENCE, AND WE ARE STRUGGLING TO FIND OTHER WAYS TO PUT PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS TO COVER CLIMATE CHANGE MORE, NOW THAT X SILOS POSTS ON CLIMATE AND MANY IN THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT HAVE LEFT THE PLATFORM.**

- Genevieve Guenther, Founding Director of End Climate Silence

”

“ **[IT IS HARDER TO WORK] WITH INSTITUTIONS TO CO-DEVELOP CURRICULUMS ON DIGITAL MEDIA FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.**

- Isaias Hernandez, founder of Queer Brown Vegan

”

“ **CONSERVATIVE AREAS BEING LESS RECEPTIVE, MORE CONCERNED ABOUT POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS.**

- Sarah Newman, Founder of Climate Mental Health Network

”

“ **INSTITUTIONAL NEUTRALITY CAN MAKE IT CHALLENGING TO COMMUNICATE BLUNTLY.**

- Michael Mann, Presidential Distinguished Professor at the University of Pennsylvania

”

“

AS BEST I CAN TELL, SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS DON'T LOVE CLIMATE CONTENT (ALTHOUGH I CAN'T PROVE THIS AND DON'T KNOW IF IT'S BEEN STUDIED).

FEDERAL BUDGET CUTS AND GENERAL LACK OF RESOURCES IN THE MEDIA AND CLIMATE ECOSYSTEMS MEAN SCIENTISTS AND COMMUNICATORS ARE MORE STRAPPED FOR TIME AND RESOURCES THAN EVER BEFORE.

- Sammy Roth, journalist and founder of Climate Colored Goggles

”

“

UNRELIABLE FUNDING; FUNDERS BEING OUT OF TOUCH WITH WHAT IS ACTUALLY NEEDED TO MAKE CHANGE AND CREATING UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND EXCESSIVE PAPERWORK FOR NONPROFITS IN THE PROCESS.

- Aimee Lewis Reau, co-founder of Good Grief Network

”

“

LOOKING OUT TOWARD THE INSTITUTIONS WE WISH TO REACH. MANY SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES DO NOT WALK THE WALK. THEY DO NOT TRULY PRIORITIZE THE CLIMATE CRISIS NOR THE VOICE OF THEIR OWN COMMUNITY, THEIR STUDENTS.

- Sue Crothers, Founding Director of One Earth Young Filmmakers Contest

”

“

LESS FUNDING FOR CLIMATE SCIENCE MEANS THERE IS LESS ACTUAL SCIENCE AND RESEARCH TO SHARE WITH THE PUBLIC.

- Katharine Gammon, freelance journalist

”

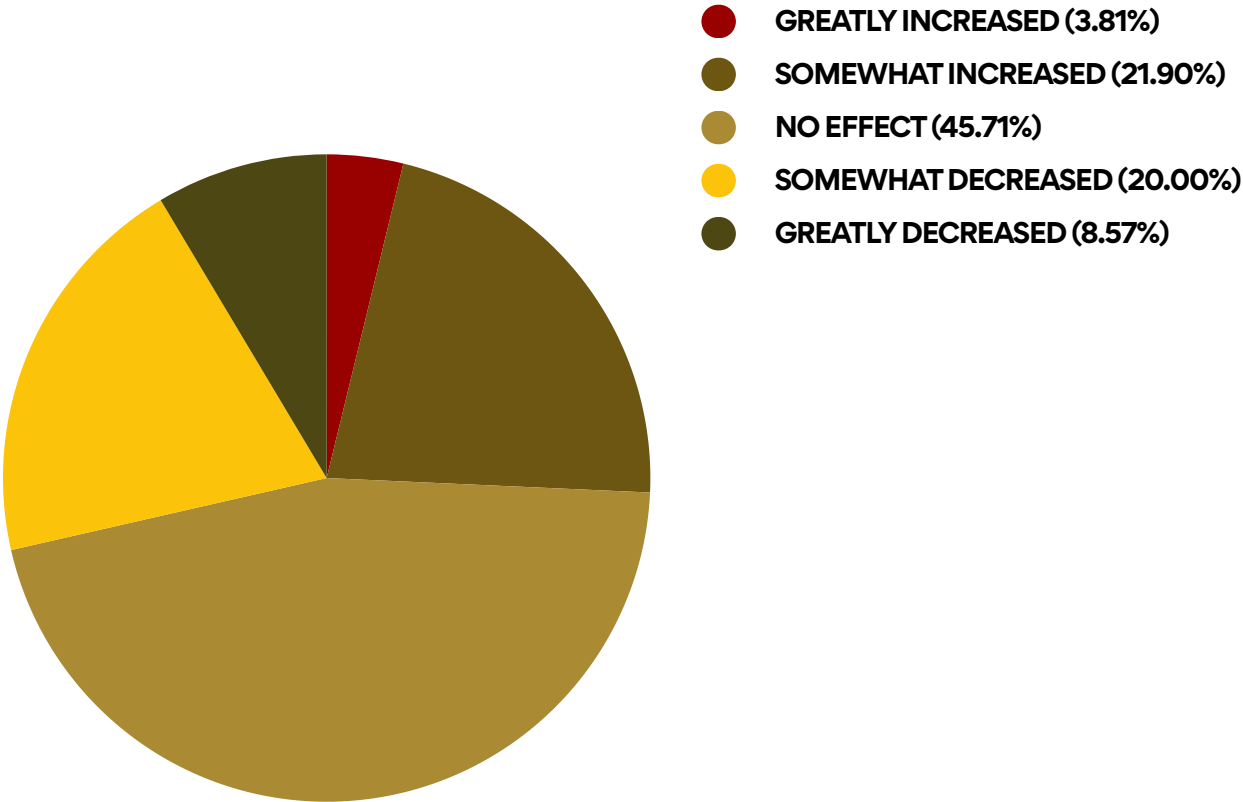
Role of growing politicization

Increasing politicization of climate change has created chilling effects in climate communication, with some respondents using terms like “climate change” and “global warming” less frequently than they used to.

But our survey shows that since the 2025 U.S. presidential inauguration, most of our communicators have not greatly changed how often they communicate about climate change, and most also don’t think their jobs will be threatened if they communicate about climate change.

Nonetheless, the election and inauguration have made about 67% of our communicators at least somewhat unsure about the framing of their climate communications. Some of our communicators are avoiding using the word “climate” in their communications.

Since the 2025 U.S. presidential inauguration, how has the frequency of your climate communication changed?



Some of our respondents share why their communications have decreased since the inauguration:

“

THERE SEEMS TO BE LESS OF AN APPETITE FOR DISCUSSION AROUND CLIMATE CHANGE, EITHER FROM THE RIGHT WHICH DOESN'T BELIEVE IT EXISTS, OR FROM THE LEFT WHICH SEEMS TO BE FOCUSED ON OTHER ISSUES LIKE IMMIGRATION, HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES OR THE AFFORDABILITY CRISIS.

- Michelle Alfini, climate beat reporter at WSOC

”

“

I THINK THERE IS A GENERAL BELIEF OUT THERE THAT PEOPLE GOING AGAINST THE ADMINISTRATION WILL BE TARGETED AND SILENCED, SO PEOPLE HAVE GONE UNDERGROUND AND ARE NOT AS CRITICAL IN PUBLIC. MANY FEEL THEY WILL BE VILIFIED, DISCREDITED OR ATTACKED. THERE IS A LACK OF TRUST IN FREE SPEECH.

- Leslie Cole, graduate student in sustainability and education at Columbia University

”

“

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S ACTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS ARE ASKING MUCH OF THE OXYGEN OUT OF THE ROOM AND IN A MORE INSIDIOUS WAY, MANY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FIGHT TO MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE ARE SELF CENSORING SO AS NOT TO ATTRACT RETRIBUTION FROM THE ADMINISTRATION.

- William Gee, co-founder of Manaaki Foundation

”

“

WE'RE TRANSITIONING INTO A FOCUS ON NATURE WHICH INCORPORATES CLIMATE. THE GRETA PHENOMENON HAS CAUSED BURNOUT AND MASSIVE LOSS OF TRUST IN NONPROFIT VOICES.

- Karl Burkart, Co-Founder and Deputy Director, One Earth

”

“ RECOGNIZING WHERE THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT IS AND WHEN/WHERE IT MAKES SENSE TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CLIMATE. MOST OF OUR EFFORT THIS YEAR HAS BEEN FOCUSED ON WILDFIRE RECOVERY, AND SURVIVORS REQUIRE MORE SENSITIVE/NUANCED LANGUAGE. FOR EXAMPLE, TELLING SOMEONE THE FIRE THAT BURNED THEIR HOUSE WAS MORE LIKELY BECAUSE OF CLIMATE CHANGE DOESN'T HELP THEM REBUILD THEIR HOUSE, BUT UNDERSTANDING THAT RISK FOR FUTURE DECISIONS IS IMPORTANT.

- Monica Dean, Director of the Ocean and Climate Diplomacy Initiative at Oceans5

”

“ OUTRIGHT HOSTILITY OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO REALISTIC ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SCIENTIFIC REALITY OF CLIMATE CHANGE. IN AN ACADEMIC CENTER, IT'S NOT THE TIME TO STAND UP AND DRAW ATTENTION IF YOU ARE IN ANY WAY DEPENDENT ON FEDERAL FUNDING. I HAVE A LOT MORE FLEXIBILITY THAN MOST, BUT HAVE RECEIVED GUIDANCE THAT THERE IS ENOUGH RISK TO THE INSTITUTION THAT "NOW IS NOT THE TIME.”

- N. Stuart Harris, Affiliate of the Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs

”

“ I GOT MORE HATE MAIL AROUND CLIMATE STORIES THAN ANYTHING ELSE LEADING UP TO THE 2024 ELECTION.

NOW I FEEL LIKE THERE IS LESS APPETITE FOR THESE STORIES IN THE PLACES I FREELANCE FOR.

- katharine Gammon, freelance journalist

”

“ REQUIREMENTS FROM UPPER MANAGEMENT.

- Stephanie Soto, geologist at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

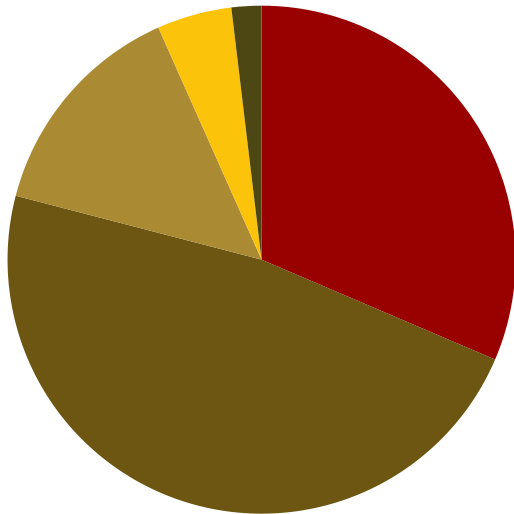
”

Dr. Katharine Hayhoe is among the respondents **who have increased their climate communications since the inauguration** and shares why:

“
IT HAS INCREASED BECAUSE THERE IS MORE OPPOSITION AND LESS PEOPLE WHO WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.
 - Katharine Hayhoe, chief scientist at the Nature Conservancy
 ”

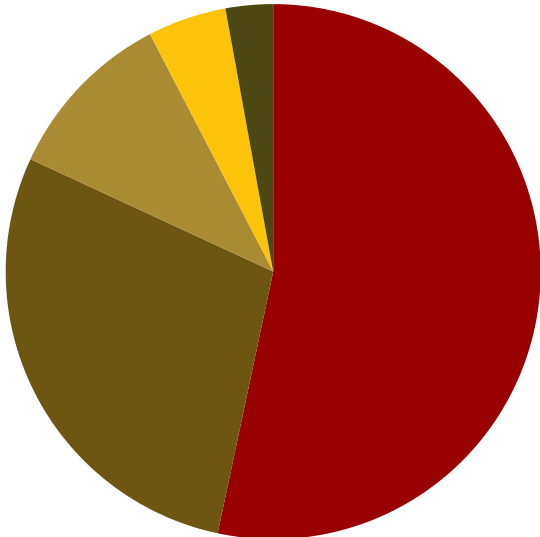
Following the 2025 U.S. presidential inauguration, do you feel unsure about the framing of your climate communications?

- NOT AT ALL (31.43%)
- SOMEWHAT (47.62%)
- SIGNIFICANTLY (14.29%)
- VERY UNSURE (4.76%)
- DON'T KNOW (1.90%)



Do you feel your job is threatened if you communicate about climate change?

- NOT AT ALL (53.33%)
- SOMEWHAT (28.57%)
- SIGNIFICANTLY (10.48%)
- VERY THREATENED (4.76%)
- DON'T KNOW (2.86%)



Has the 2025 U.S. presidential inauguration changed the language of your communication about climate change? List any words or phrases you don't use anymore.

1. **CLIMATE CHANGE**
2. **CLIMATE JUSTICE**
3. **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**
4. **GLOBAL WARMING**
5. **CLIMATE CRISIS**
6. **CLIMATE DENIER/DENIAL**
7. **DIVERSITY**
8. **CLIMATE**
9. **SUSTAINABILITY**
10. **EMISSIONS**
11. **CLIMATE EQUITY**
12. **DECARBONIZATION**
13. **GREENHOUSE GASES**
14. **CLIMATE EMERGENCY**
15. **CLIMATE DISASTER**
16. **ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM**
17. **CARBON SEQUESTRATION**
18. **TRANSITION**
19. **CLIMATE SOLUTIONS**
20. **CLIMATE ACTION**
21. **ENVIRONMENTAL**
22. **CULTURE**
23. **INCLUSIVE**
24. **GENDER**
25. **CLIMATE EDUCATION**
26. **CLIMATE LEADERS**

Strategies to navigate current challenges in climate communication

“

I AM DESPERATELY TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO EXPAND OUT MY WORK SO THAT IT IS INTERESTING TO A WIDER SWATH OF PEOPLE. PEOPLE NEED TO UNDERSTAND CLIMATE CHANGE AND WRITING TO A SPECIFIC SUBSET OF INTERESTED READERS AND ONLY TO THOSE PEOPLE IS NOT HELPFUL.

- Zoya Teirstein, senior staff writer at
Grist

”

“

MAINLY STICKING WITH WHAT I'VE BEEN DOING AND NOT BACKING DOWN FROM TALKING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS. ACKNOWLEDGING MY OWN EMOTIONS AND LETTING MYSELF FEEL THEM. FOCUSING ON THE ISSUES AND AREAS WHERE I THINK I CAN DO THE MOST GOOD.

- Jennifer Carman, Director of
Research Strategy at Yale Center for
Climate Change Communication

”

“

OUR RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT MEMBERS OF FAITH COMMUNITIES RESPOND WELL TO FOUR RHETORICAL STRATEGIES WHEN IT COMES TO CLIMATE CHANGE ENGAGEMENT: FRAMING CLIMATE CHANGE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PLACE, FRAMING CLIMATE USING RELIGIOUS IDIOMS, CONNECTING CLIMATE WITH OTHER SOCIAL JUSTICE CONCERNS, AND USING PEOPLE'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE NATURAL WORLD AS A STARTING POINT FOR CONVERSATION.

- Benjamin Yosua-Davis, Director of
Applied Research at the BTS Center

”

“

I TRY TO FOCUS MY REPORTING ON THINGS I KNOW PEOPLE CARE ABOUT: THE COST OF ENERGY, LOCAL POLLUTION, HEAT MITIGATION AND PREPARING OR RESPONDING TO EXTREME WEATHER.

- Michelle Alfini, climate
beat reporter at WSOC

”

“ TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CHANGING MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE, INCREASINGLY PUSHING BACK AGAINST MISLEADING FRAMING NOT JUST BY CONSERVATIVE MEDIA, BUT BY LEGACY MEDIA OUTLETS OUT THERE INCREASINGLY COMPROMISED BY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND APPEASEMENT AS THEY ARE BOUGHT OUT BY BILLIONAIRE PLUTOCRATS WHO TAKE AN ADVERSARIAL VIEW TOWARD CLIMATE.

- Michael Mann, Presidential Distinguished Professor at University of Pennsylvania

”

“ I'VE BEEN CONDUCTING PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTS TO TEST INTERVENTIONS TO MOTIVATE CLIMATE ACTION, COMPARE DIFFERENT MESSAGE FRAMING STRATEGIES, CHARACTERIZE THE PREVALENCE AND RISK OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF CLIMATE CHANGE MISINFORMATION, AND MORE. EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS FROM THESE STUDIES HAVE GUIDED MY OWN CLIMATE COMMUNICATION EFFORTS, BOTH PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY.

- Alyssa Sinclair, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Communication Neuroscience Lab at the University of Pennsylvania

”

“ THINKING A GREAT DEAL ABOUT HOW ISOLATION, INDIVIDUALISM, TRAUMA AND OVERWHELM IMPACT PEOPLE'S CAPACITY TO STAY ATTUNED TO THE PROBLEM. IN OUR WORK, WE TRY TO ADDRESS ALL OF THAT.

- Rebecca Weston, co-executive director of Climate Psychology Alliance

”

“

I SPEND A LOT OF TIME THINKING ABOUT THE FAMILY RAISING KIDS AND THE TEACHER IN THE SCHOOLS. THE TEACHERS LAY THE GROUNDWORK. THE KIDS ARE THE FUTURE. BUT THAT MEANS THE PARENTS, ADULTS, PROFESSORS, BOSSES WHO INFLUENCE THE TEACHERS AND THE KIDS NEED THE CAPACITY TO CRITICALLY EVALUATE INFORMATION AND OPTIONS SO THEY CAN PASS INFORMATION/MINDSETS ON.

I TEND TO THINK BEHAVIOR IS DRIVEN BY WHAT LEADS TO A GOOD LIFE AND JOY. THUS, COMMUNICATIONS THAT CORRELATE SUSTAINABLE ACTIONS WITH A BETTER LIFE AND JOY ARE MOST LIKELY TO LEAD TO SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIORS.

- Charles Zukoski, former provost of USC and host of *Electric Futures* podcast

”

“

I BELIEVE THAT THE MORE WE ENGAGE WITH PUBLIC ON CLIMATE ISSUES THROUGH ACTION, HOPE AND CREATIVITY, THE MORE WE WILL FIND COMMON GROUND.

I REMIND MYSELF THAT SO MUCH OF THE POLITICIZATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE IS MANUFACTURED BY THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY. I DON'T BELIEVE IT RUNS DEEP IN COMMUNITIES TO NOT CARE ABOUT THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR NEIGHBORS. ENGAGING WITH PEOPLE ON THE THINGS THEY DO CARE ABOUT: FAMILY, ECONOMY, SECURITY. THESE ARE WAYS INTO ENGAGING WITH THEM ABOUT HOW THE CLIMATE AFFECTS THOSE ISSUES.

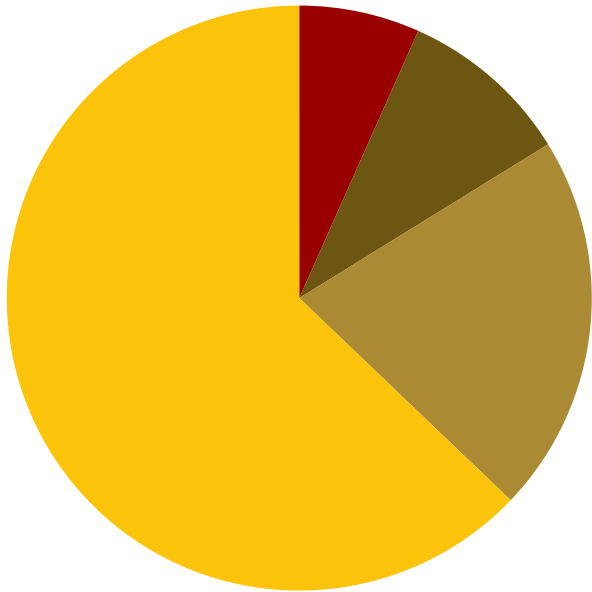
- Fara Warner, Executive Director of the Metcalf Institute at the University of Rhode Island

”

Community and support in the climate space

Our communicators say that financial support would be most meaningful to their work at the moment, followed by community events and training and workshops.

What type of institutional support would be most meaningful for your work?

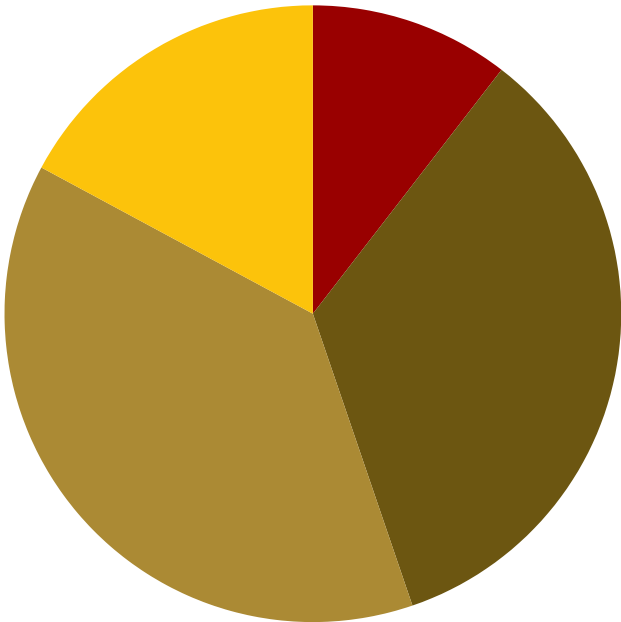


Financial support

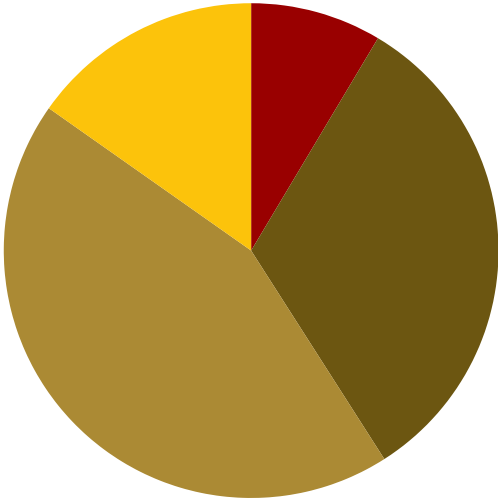
- NOT IMPORTANT (6.67%)
- SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT (9.52%)
- IMPORTANT (20.95%)
- VERY IMPORTANT (62.86%)

Training and workshops

- NOT IMPORTANT (10.48%)
- SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT (34.29%)
- IMPORTANT (38.10%)
- VERY IMPORTANT (17.14%)



What type of institutional support would be most meaningful for your work?

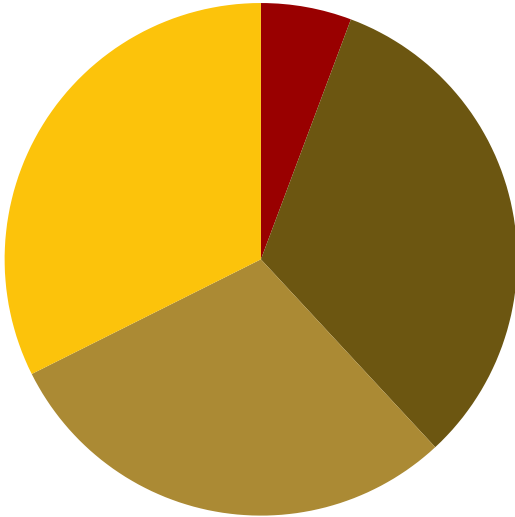


Public events and programs

- NOT IMPORTANT (8.57%)
- SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT (32.38%)
- IMPORTANT (43.81%)
- VERY IMPORTANT (15.24%)

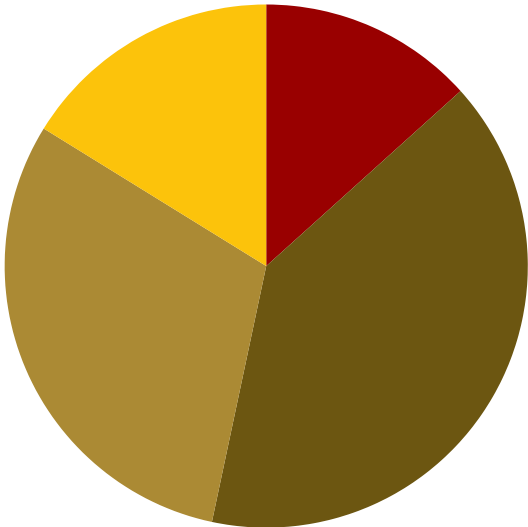
Community events

- NOT IMPORTANT (5.71%)
- SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT (32.38%)
- IMPORTANT (29.52%)
- VERY IMPORTANT (32.38%)



Climate change discussion groups

- NOT IMPORTANT (13.33%)
- SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT (40.00%)
- IMPORTANT (30.48%)
- VERY IMPORTANT (16.19%)



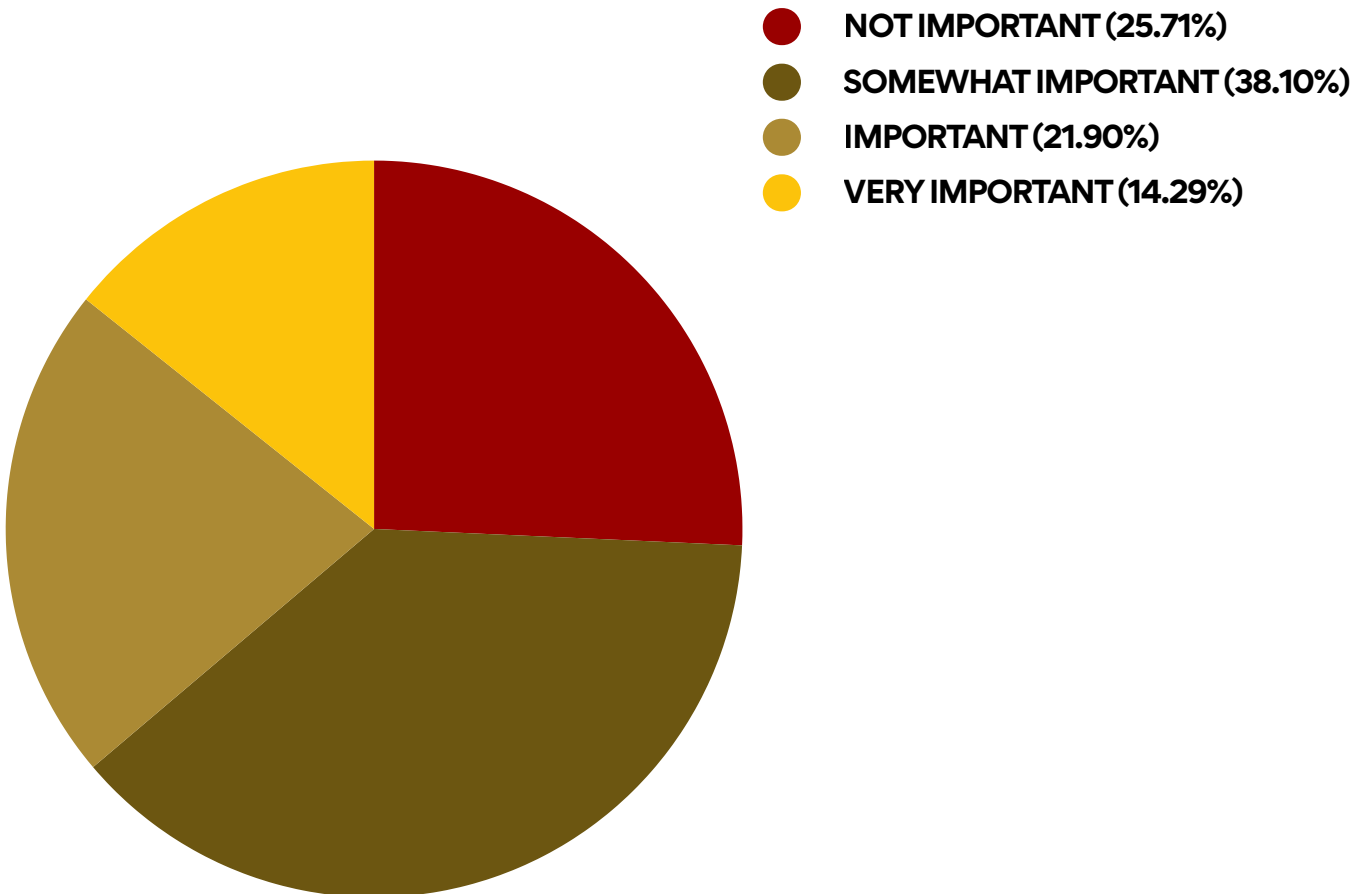
Climate emotions

Communicators say the emotion they feel the most often when engaging with work on climate change is anger, followed by sadness, positivity and fear.

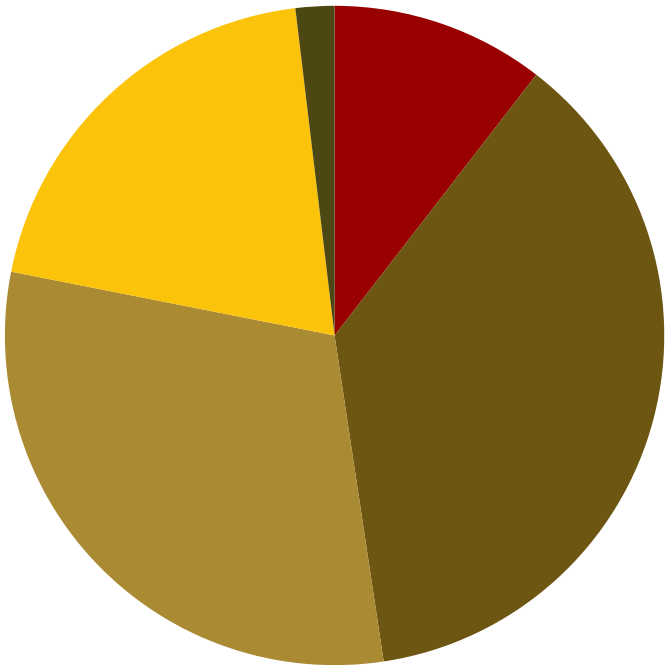
A 2023 study conducted in Norway shows anger arising from climate change was more strongly linked to an increase in climate activism than emotions such as hope, guilt and sadness.

About 75% of communicators consider climate change-related mental health resources to be at least somewhat important in their work. Yet, more than 40% don't seek mental health resources when engaging with difficult work related to climate change.

How meaningful are climate change-related mental health resources in your work?



What kinds of emotions do you experience when you engage with work on climate change? Rank these based on how often you experience them.

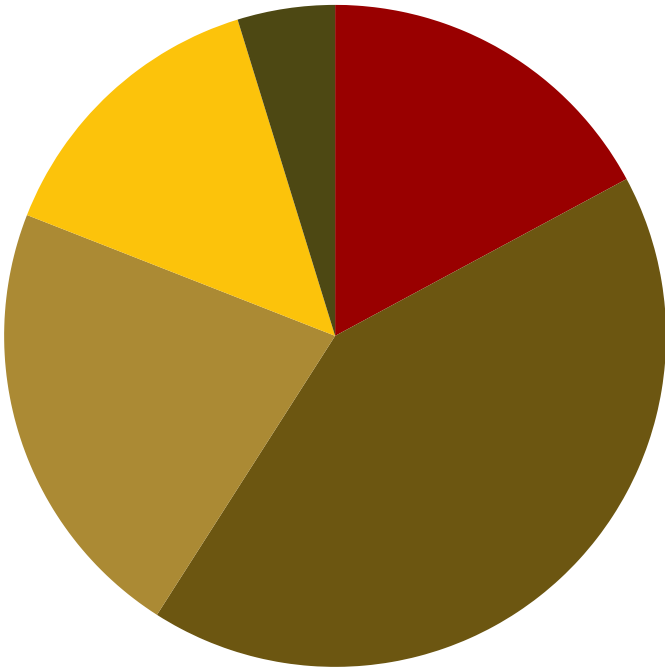


Positivity

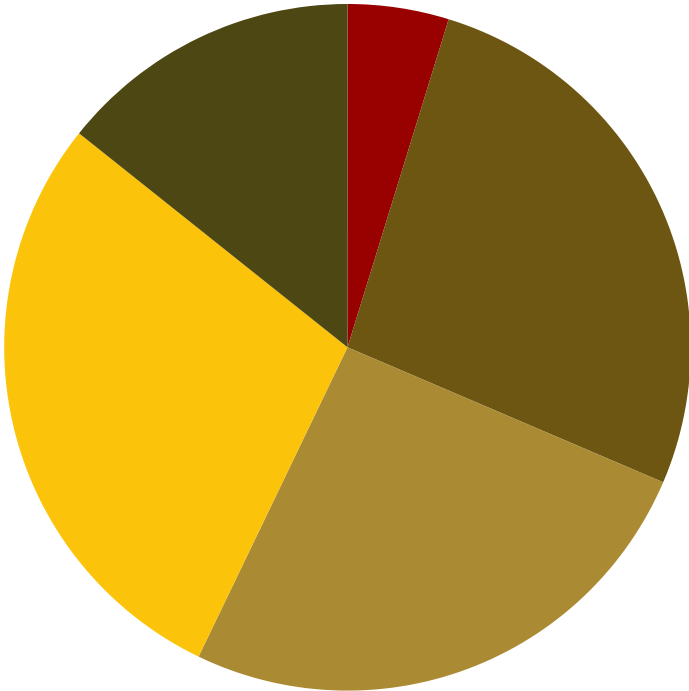
- **ALL THE TIME (10.48%)**
- **OFTEN (37.14%)**
- **SOMETIMES (30.48%)**
- **OCCASIONALLY (20.00%)**
- **NOT AT ALL (1.90%)**

Anger

- **ALL THE TIME (17.14%)**
- **OFTEN (41.90%)**
- **SOMETIMES (21.90%)**
- **OCCASIONALLY (14.29%)**
- **NOT AT ALL (4.76%)**



What kinds of emotions do you experience when you engage with work on climate change? Rank these based on how often you experience them.

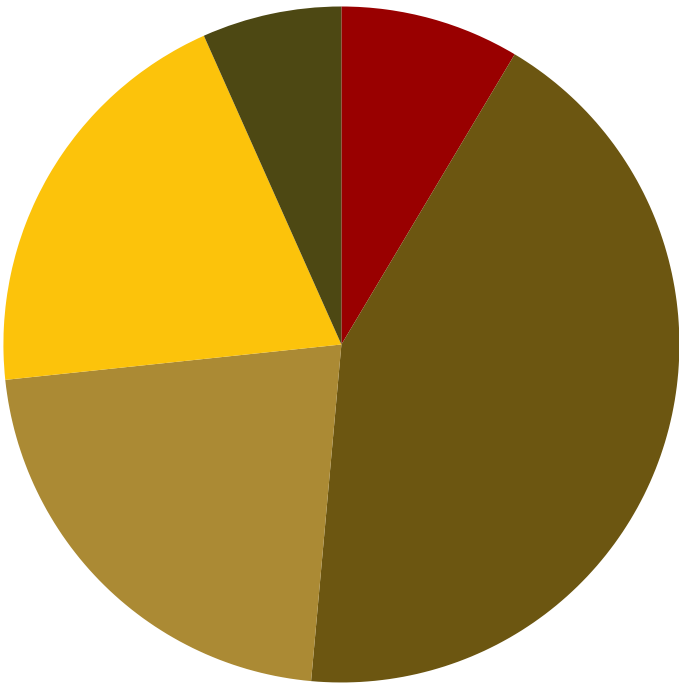


Fear

- ALL THE TIME (4.76%)
- OFTEN (26.67%)
- SOMETIMES (25.71%)
- OCCASIONALLY (28.57%)
- NOT AT ALL (14.29%)

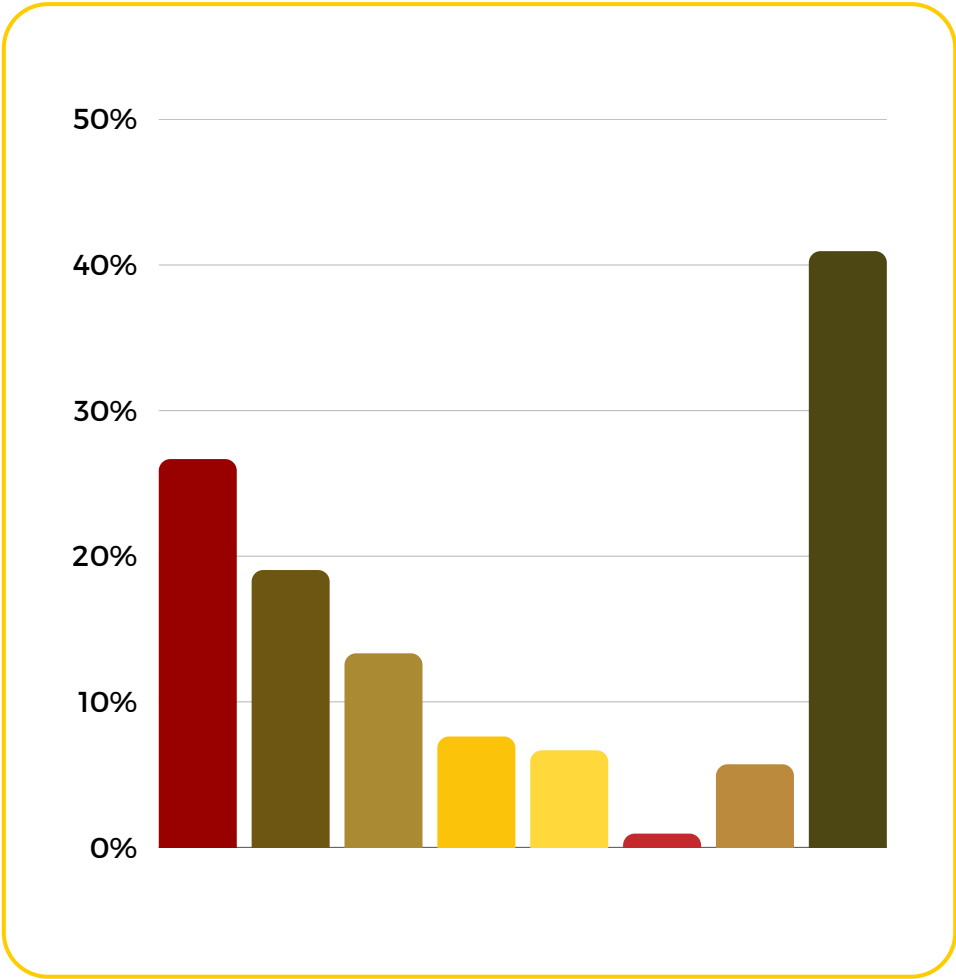
Sadness

- ALL THE TIME (8.57%)
- OFTEN (42.86%)
- SOMETIMES (21.90%)
- OCCASIONALLY (20.00%)
- NOT AT ALL (6.67%)



What kind of mental health resources, if any, do you seek when engaging with difficult work related to climate change?

- **COMMUNITY AND PEER NETWORKS (26.67%)**
- **THERAPY FROM A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL (19.05%)**
- **MINDFULNESS AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES (13.33%)**
- **TIME IN NATURE (7.62%)**
- **MENTAL HEALTH FOCUSED MEDIA (6.67%)**
- **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT APPS (0.95%)**
- **OTHER (5.71%)**
- **NONE (40.95%)**



Artificial Intelligence

Around 3,000 data centers are currently undergoing construction or have been planned to be constructed in the U.S., as of December 2025 [according to data collected by Axios](#).

Our report shows an increase in use of AI as its adoption and impact around the world grows. Less than 25% of respondents of the 2025 survey said they never use AI for climate communication compared to the 2024 survey, where about 30% said they never use AI for climate communication.

Communicators listed a greater number of AI tools they use in the 2025 survey, compared to the 2024 survey, and more than 30% of communicators think AI can play a positive role in climate communication in 2025 compared to about 20% of communicators in 2024.

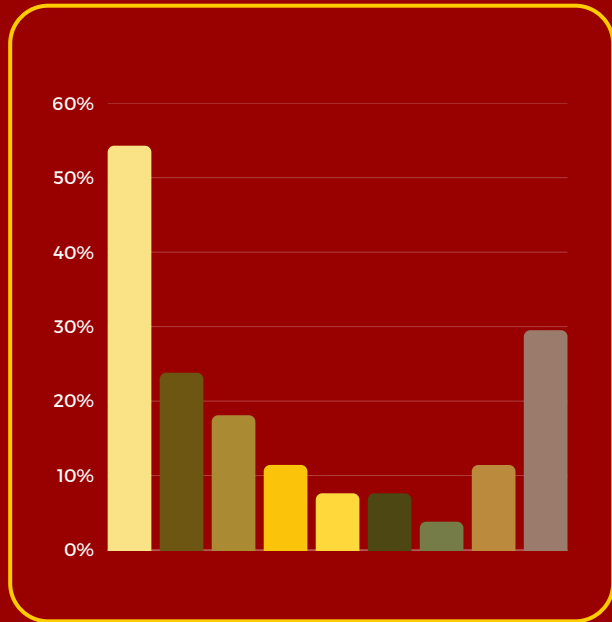
How climate communicators use AI



How frequently do you use AI for climate communication work?

- DAILY OR EVERY OTHER DAY (17.14%)
- ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK (21.90%)
- ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH (15.24%)
- A FEW TIMES A YEAR (20.95%)
- NEVER (24.76%)

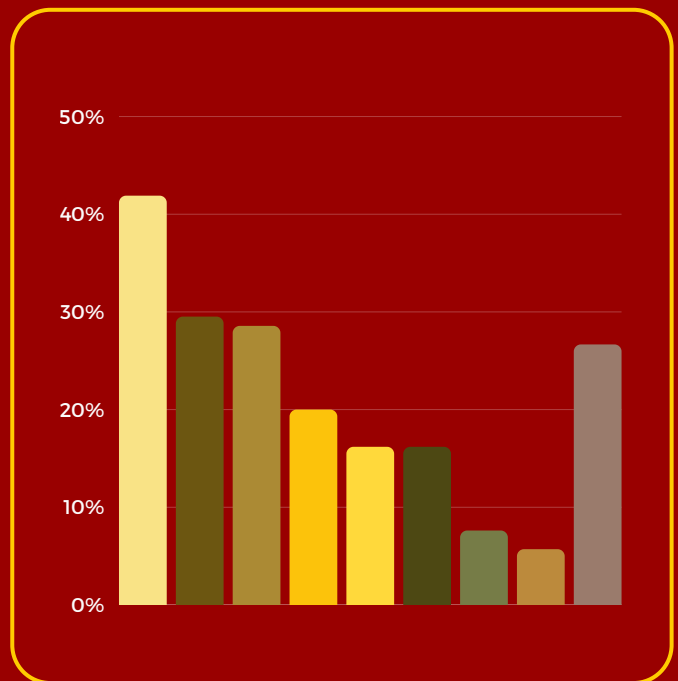
What AI tools or platforms do you use in your work as a climate communicator?



- CHATGPT (54.29%)
- GOOGLE GEMINI (23.81%)
- OTTER.AI (18.10%)
- MICROSOFT COPILOT (11.43%)
- CLAUDE (7.62%)
- PERPLEXITY (7.62%)
- DALL - E (3.81%)
- OTHER (11.42%)
- N/A (29.52%)

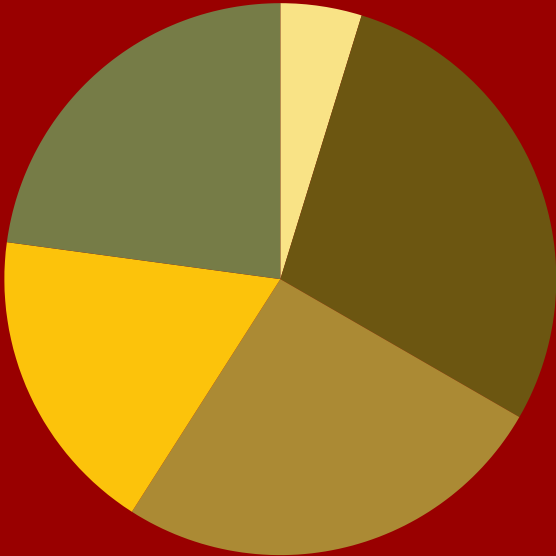
In what ways are you using AI for climate communication?

- EDITING/PROOFREADING (41.90%)
- RESEARCH (29.52%)
- DRAFTING TEXT (28.57%)
- TRANSCRIPTION (20.00%)
- FACT-CHECKING (16.19%)
- IDEATION (16.19%)
- GENERATING IMAGES, AUDIO, VIDEO (7.62%)
- OTHER (5.71%)
- N/A (26.67%)

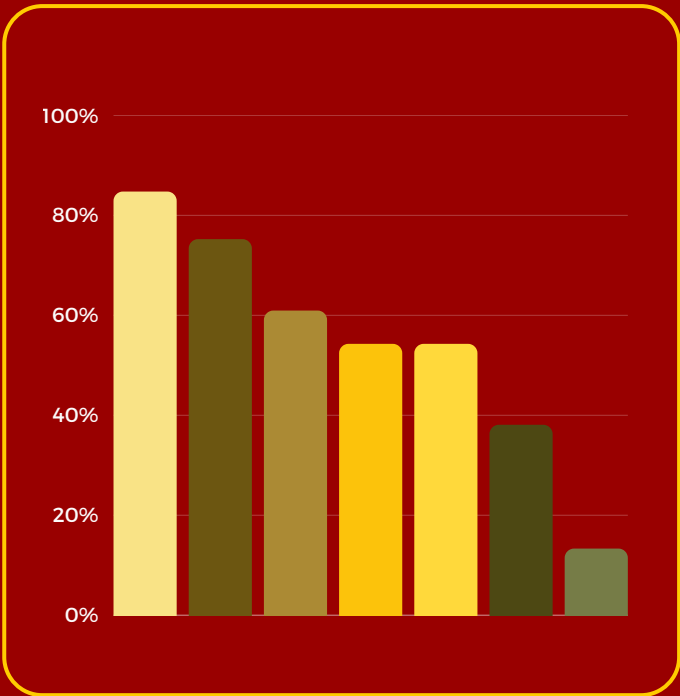


Can AI play a positive role in climate communication?

- STRONGLY AGREE (4.76%)
- SOMEWHAT AGREE (28.57%)
- NEUTRAL (25.71%)
- SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (18.10%)
- STRONGLY DISAGREE (22.86%)



What are your biggest concerns with the use of AI?



- INFORMATION CAN BE INACCURATE (84.76%)
- USING AI CAN BE HARMFUL TOWARDS THE ENVIRONMENT (75.24%)
- ISSUES WITH PIRACY, COPYRIGHT, PLAGIARISM (60.95%)
- DON'T KNOW WHAT THE SOURCE OF INFORMATION IS (54.29%)
- INFORMATION CAN BE BIASED (54.29%)
- WRITING STYLE DIFFERS FROM MY OWN VOICE (38.10%)
- OTHER (13.33%)

Analysis and Forecast

The 2026 Carbon Lexicon

Who is the most powerful climate communicator in the world? **Arguably, it's Donald Trump.**

Under his administration, a new carbon-coded lexicon has taken root. There's the strongman language of "energy dominance," and "unleashing American energy," and the gentler, "energy addition," which represents a political flip in the "all-of-the-above" narrative. Not long ago, that idea – all energy sources are needed – was primarily the purview of fossil fuel interests intent on saving their place in the once-vaunted "energy transition." Now, prominent democrats like Kathy Hochul are jumping on board, signaling a broader shift in climate messaging that may shape both parties' election strategies.

Energy rhetoric has been around as long as oil companies have understood the threat of climate change. "All-of-the-above" was **first deployed in the energy context** in 2006 by marketers for British Petroleum. (BP is the same company that brought us "carbon footprint" two years earlier, placing the onus for reducing oil consumption on consumers rather than companies or governments.) Newer on the scene, "energy addition" is typically used by economists to describe seemingly intractable oil consumption in spite of the growth of renewables. U.S. Secretary of Energy Chris Wright gave it a spin in his first Secretarial Order in February 2025 when he introduced his "common sense" top priority – **advancing energy addition, not subtraction.**

The Trumpian allure of "energy addition" lies in its promise of more, not less. The phrasing aligns neatly with the abundance framing that is commonplace in the president's "big, beautiful" vernacular and, especially when paired with phrases like "common sense," as above, it has the veneer of reasonableness. Further, addition (without subtraction) blunts the urgency of the crisis at our doorstep.

"Energy addition" both glides off the tongue and over the consequences of continued fossil fuel consumption. Scientific consensus is clear on the necessity of reducing carbon emissions to survive the worst of climate change. But electoral politics rewards promises of expansion, not contraction. "Energy addition," as used by Secretary Wright, resolves that tension rhetorically, but does not resolve it physically.

The language around mitigating climate change is hardly as inviting as "energy addition." The consequences of not addressing climate change – higher mortality rates, biodiversity loss, destruction of livelihoods and even extinction – are grim. The challenge of framing a deadly serious issue while

not alienating audiences is not unfamiliar to communicators. In the Temperature Check survey, 74% of respondents said they favor applying a solutions lens, which poses a way out, with just 8% favoring doom-and-gloom framing.

That rhetorical advantage has clear electoral implications. Who wins may depend less on the facts and more on the framing. Which party can convince Americans that better days are on the horizon, and what language will they use to get us there? Now more than ever, climate communicators are challenged with balancing what they know to be true – climate change is brutal – with a tired American public desperate for more, not less.

Allison Agsten

Director, Center for Climate Journalism and Communication
USC Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism

Methodology

Distribution and Response Rate

The survey was distributed to thousands of climate communicators using Google Forms, which enabled us to reach respondents from a variety of fields across the world, including researchers, journalists and other professionals whose job involves some degree of climate communication.

We received responses from 105 people, out of which 11 were international, while the rest were based in the United States.

This broad target group was strategically chosen to capture a diverse range of insights and experiences within the field. To maximize the number of respondents, we implemented a strategy of frequent follow-ups with our audience base. However, better strategies can be implemented in the future, including offering incentives upon filling the survey out etc.

Survey Duration and Timing

We released the survey on October 15, 2025 and kept it open until December 31, 2025 so that respondents could use this time to reflect on the work they did throughout the year.

Data Collection and Analysis

The survey consisted of a series of structured questions, crafted to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Some of the qualitative responses were categorized into bins to allow for quantitative analysis.

Limitations and Considerations

Certain limitations are inherent in this type of research. The responses represent a subset of the targeted population, and the views expressed by respondents may not fully encapsulate the entire spectrum of opinions in the field of climate communication. Since some of our qualitative responses were categorized into quantitative responses, there may be some inaccuracies associated with misrepresentation of views, although we have attempted to categorize these responses with nuance and sensitivity.

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About The USC Annenberg Center for Climate Journalism and Communication

The USC Annenberg Center for Climate Journalism and Communication empowers professionals across media, public relations, strategic and corporate communications, and the sciences to become effective storytellers who advance a deeper understanding of the consequences of climate change — from the global to the local and from the collective to the individual.

About USC Annenberg

The Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California is an international leader in education and scholarship in the fields of communication, journalism, public diplomacy and public relations. With an enrollment of more than 2,200 students, USC Annenberg offers graduate and undergraduate degree programs that prepare the most promising minds to inquire, innovate and lead at the global crossroads of media, technology and culture.

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