

Supplementary Information

Supplementary Notes

Australia

Ownership and control of free-to-air television channels is highly concentrated with three commercial operators (7, 9 and 10) and two public broadcasters (ABC and SBS) in the major capital city markets. Of the four channels chosen for analysis, ABC (the public broadcaster) could technically be considered to be non-aligned, but is somewhat left-leaning in its tendencies.^{1, 2, 3} Its charter requires its news content to be 'public interest' as opposed to commercial outlets that often identify with the business sector, which is their main source of advertising revenue.

The cable channel service, Sky News (not related to Sky UK) was chosen as 'right-wing' due to the presence on air of regular right-wing commentators and/or individuals who express forms of climate skepticism⁴, and because it has the highest number of viewers identifying as right-wing (43%)¹. In contrast, more viewers of public broadcasters identify themselves as left-wing than any other channels. For the main free-to-air commercial channels 7, 9 and 10, the largest categories for each channel identify as politically in the centre¹.

In 2021, television remained the single largest source from which Australians obtain their news. Sixty-three percent of men, and 58 percent of women use television as a general source of news¹. Channel 7 and channel 9 have both had around 30% of the free to air market for a decade (i.e. 60% in total). The ABC has increased its share in recent years from 15% to nearly 20% today. Sky News has a small share of the viewer market.

While those with lower levels of educational attainment tend to rely more on television as a source of news, age is also an important predictor of television viewing with older viewers being more reliant on television¹. This translates into a continuous decline in the power of television news, the most loyal viewers with a high interest in news displaying a 13% decrease since 2018¹. Despite this, trust in news since April 2020 has increased, with the largest increase amongst Gen Z, and the public television channels ABC (70%) and SBS (69%) the most trusted¹.

In general, a well-defined nexus between fossil-fuel interests, political elites and mainstream media shapes the reporting of climate change⁵, with highly polarised coverage and the frequent presence of climate skeptics in right-leaning media, including Sky News. The commercial channels also sometimes give space to such voices, in the interests of balanced reporting, but ABC less so. Balance in political opinion is central to ABC programmes, but increasingly it frames climate change as a scientific topic based on overwhelming evidence, not opinion.

Brazil

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2019 96.3% of Brazilian households had a television⁶. In 2021 the six main TV networks were in order of popularity: Globo,

Record TV, SBT, TV Band, TV Brasil, and Rede TV!⁷. Of these we included Globo, Record, SBT and Rede TV!.

Globo, formerly known as Rede Globo, is the number one free-to-air television network measured by audience reach. Businessman Roberto Marinho launched the broadcast in 1965, and, to this day, the company is the top offline media brand in popularity⁸: 46% of the Brazilian audience watches Globo at least once a week.

Record is the number two free-to-air television network, measured by audience. It is the oldest Brazilian television station, launched in 1953. In 1989, the founder and leader of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Bishop Edir Macedo, acquired the company. He made significant investments in the station's infrastructure, resulting in an increased audience. The broadcast is the number two offline media brand in popularity in Brazil⁸. 36% of the Brazilian audience watches Record at least once a week.

Brazilian Television System, best known as SBT, is the number three free-to-air television network, measured by audience. Businessman and television personality Silvio Santos founded the broadcast in 1981. It is the third most popular offline media brand⁸, with 29% of the national audience watching the station at least once a week. 67% of the national audience says they trust the network.

Rede TV! is the 6th major Brazilian free-to-air television network by audience. 10% of the national audience watches the station at least once a week. It was chosen as the right-wing station due to the presence of an opinion-based news program, which has broadcast climate change skepticism in the past, and because of the hiring of presenters who offered consistent support for ex-president Jair Bolsonaro⁹. Several studies have demonstrated notably high levels of public concern about climate change in Brazil and generally, an absence of climate skepticism in the media¹⁰. Nonetheless, the climate coverage, especially on TV is not very abundant. Globo stands out for complex and regular coverage of climate change. CNN has recently arrived in the country as a paid television channel, and its climate stories are frequent and last longer than the national average. The other free-to-air stations, including Record TV, SBT and Rede TV!, rarely dedicate prolonged coverage of more than five minutes within one programme.

Sweden

Rapport [Report] 19.30 and Aktuellt [Currents] 21.00 are the two main news broadcasts on Swedish public service television, SVT1 and SVT2 respectively, receiving an audience of between approximately 500,000 and 1,000,000 nightly. They have separate newsrooms, but frequently share material. Combined, the news on SVT reaches 46 percent of the population daily, but with a marked difference stratified by age. While 88 per cent of 65-85-year-olds watch one of the SVT news programmes on a daily basis, only 38 per cent do so among people aged 25-44¹¹. Trust in SVT is generally high in Sweden, but there is a clear divide politically. While between 82-96 per cent of the sympathizers to any of the other seven parliamentary parties trust the news on SVT, only 65 per cent of sympathizers for the right-wing party the Sweden Democrats do¹².

Nyheterna [The News] 19.00 is the main evening news broadcast on the free-to-air, commercial channel TV4, which started in 1992. The news on TV4, which includes both the evening news programme and a morning studio show, reaches 38 per cent of the population daily, with a nightly audience of about 600,000. Similar to SVT it is stratified by age, where 63 per cent of 65–85-year-olds watch it on a daily basis, but only 27 per cent of people aged 25–44¹².

Our choice for a right-wing channel is SwebbTV, an online video-channel, which started on YouTube but was expelled being accused of breaking platform-rules regarding hate speech and disinformation about COVID. Before being shut down, SwebbTV had more than 64,000 subscribers on YouTube and a daily average of roughly 30,000 views¹³. On its present, self-owned, platform several of the programs receive between 10,000 and 20,000 views. SwebbTV started in 2015 mainly focusing on immigration. During 2018–2019, there was a marked upturn in reporting on climate change on the channel, often interviewing prominent figures from a group called the Climate Realists, who have expressed climate skepticism in the past¹⁴. During 2021, they received €130,000 in public subsidies, and according to one of its own stated applications for funding it employs four full time journalists and one on 80 percent^{15, 16, 17}. We chose SwebbTV as the right-wing channel due to the right-wing slant of its political reporting and its willingness to give forms of climate skepticism a frequent airing.¹⁸

Climate science denial has been a relatively scarce in Swedish media discourse, though it was seen during a peak in media attention to climate change around 2008–2009, leading up to the Paris-agreement¹⁴. A peak of reporting came at the end of the 2010s, following the release of the IPCC SR1.5 report and the rise to fame of Greta Thunberg and the Fridays for Future movement¹⁹. Several new digital media on the right of the political spectrum have now been established, reaching around seven per cent of the Swedish online population⁸. Two recent studies on climate change coverage in 2018–2020 suggest that while a certainty framing was prevalent in legacy media²⁰, in right-wing alternative media a discourse was created that climate change was a hoax¹⁸.

UK

Television is the most used platform for news overall in the UK (79%), although there are some exceptions; for example, 16–24 year-olds are more likely to use the internet for news than TV (89% vs. 61%), while the same is true for those from minority ethnic groups (85% vs. 69%)²¹. In 2021 BBC News (TV and radio) had the widest reach of any media organization in the UK at 57% weekly usage, followed by ITV News at 31%, and Channel 4 News at 11% (behind Sky News)⁸. The three stations have the highest trust scores of any media organization (62% - BBC, 61% - ITV, and 58% - Channel 4). BBC 1 remains the most-used news source across all platforms. Of the three flagship programmes monitored in our sample, in 2020 BBC 1 News at Ten had a (linear viewing) nightly audience of around 4 million, more than ITV News at Ten (around 2 million) or Channel 4 at 7pm (around one million)²². Viewers on YouTube and social media platforms add substantially to these numbers. Television bulletin viewing increased during the COVID pandemic⁸. The three stations are regulated by Ofcom for impartiality. Since 2018, the BBC has reduced the space given to climate skeptics²³, and in 2021 appointed its first ever climate editor. ITV News at Ten and Channel 4 also say they are committed to covering climate change more.

Our choice for a right-wing channel was GB News launched on 13 June 2021. According to the Reuters Institute at Oxford University, it aims to provide an alternative to what it claims is the 'liberal and metropolitan bias' of established news outlets, perhaps inspired by the commercial success of Fox News in the USA²⁴. It was reported to have received 3.7 million viewers in its first month of operations (compared to 12.6m for the BBC 24-news channel). However, its viewing figures for some of its programmes decreased substantially later. Nigel Farage, the former leader of the UK Independence Party, presents a nightly news programme called 'Farage', which attracts higher ratings, and an estimated nightly audience of 100,000²⁵. In March 2022 Farage called for a referendum on the UK's Net Zero Policy. In its first week, the channel gave space to groups exhibiting climate skepticism including representatives of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, who stressed the costs rather than the benefits of taking climate action²⁶. We chose GB News as the right-wing channel in the UK, due to the right-wing composition of many of its presenters, the right-leaning nature of its audience²⁴, and its willingness to give regular air time to climate skepticism.

USA

We examined two mainstream news networks without overt ideological alignment (ABC and NBC) and two cable news networks that are right-wing and left-wing (liberal in the US context) news media (Fox News and MSNBC, respectively), according to our criteria. Fox News was chosen as our right-wing channel in the USA, due to the political support it offers to the Republican Party in its coverage, the right-wing nature of its audience, and the regular presence of skeptics on its programmes^{27, 28, 29}

NBC News began regular broadcasting in 1940, the first regularly-scheduled news program in American television history, and ABC News began regular broadcasting in 1948. Industry analysts have rated both news networks as highly accurate and politically close to neutral (though slightly left-wing) in their reporting³⁰. Fox News entered the market in 1990s and shortly became cable news' prime-time ratings leader and one of the most highly rated cable channels across all genres³¹. From inception, its business strategy was to provide a conservative perspective that would stand in contrast to the mainstream media³¹. MSNBC did not have an explicit slant at inception³¹, but in 2008, it rebranded itself as a liberal response to Fox News³².

According to a survey of US adults in May 2021, ABC was the most credible news source in the country, with 58% of respondents believing the organization to be very or somewhat credible³¹. ABC was followed by NBC with 54% of respondents believing the organization to be very or somewhat credible. In contrast, 44% trusted Fox News, and 43% trusted MSNBC³³. Just 15% of respondents found Fox News to be very credible, whereas 28% said the opposite. Fox News was among the most divisive news sources when it came to perceptions of its credibility rating and respondents' political affiliation. Similarly, just 16% of U.S. adults responding to the survey said that they thought MSNBC was very credible, and 18% found the source to be not all credible. MSNBC's credibility rating was higher among Boomers, high-income respondents, and Black Americans.

In 2013, 65% of Americans watched network news over the course of a month according to Nielsen data³⁴. In 2014, the nightly evening newscasts on ABC, CBS, and NBC collectively drew 24 million viewers

on average³¹. In 2020, the average audience for network television during the evening news timeslot, was 7.6 million for ABC and 6.5 million for NBC. Average audience is defined as the average number of TVs tuned to a program throughout a time period³⁵.

As of June 2020, Fox News was the most-watched cable news network in the United States with around 3.9 million primetime viewers over a month-long period³⁶. Fox and MSNBC compete for the top spot during prime-time. Fox News delivered an average prime time audience of 2.5 million viewers in November 2020, followed by MSNBC with 1.0 million. *Tucker Carlson Tonight* was the most-watched show in cable news with a total viewership of 3.6 million viewers over one month. *Special Report with Bret Baier* was second with 2.7 million viewers³⁶.

For several years Fox News has regularly hosted climate skeptics and questioned climate change science. It interviews a greater ratio of climate change skeptics to believers than MSNBC (or CNN)³². MSNBC by contrast generally reflects mainstream climate change science. ABC and NBC have been criticized in the past for not covering climate change enough³⁷.

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Supplementary Methods

Codebook: the television coverage of the IPCC's 2019 AR6WG1 report in 5 countries

Codes: Unless otherwise stated, codes are 0 for not mentioned and 1 for mentioned. These are to be entered in that variable's cell. No cells should be left empty; if something is not mentioned, that cell should contain a 0. v is short for variable.

A. Formal variables

1. Coder: (initials, e.g. Josh Ettinger = JE)
2. Country
3. a) TV channel b) political leaning of channel (e.g. left-leaning, right-leaning, neutral)
4. Name of programme
5. Date, e.g. 05-Feb-2019
6. Local Time
7. Length of programme (in minutes)
8. Programme genre: 1) news; 2) opinion; 3) hybrid (e.g. some of Fox News programmes). *Code as 1, 2, or 3*

B. Volume and type of coverage

9.1 Was the IPCC/UN report headlined? Headline here means that the IPCC report is mentioned at the beginning of the programme. For example, the BBC News at Ten on 8 August opened its whole news bulletin with 'A code Red for Humanity: A UN report's stark warning on climate change'. Code as Yes (1), No (0) If not known, please write n/a

9.2 What was the length of the segment covering the report?

Please add the length of report to nearest minute (and write in '<1' if less than 1 minute)

9.3 Was the item 1. Anchor only reading a report. 2. Package(s) made by reporter (s). 3. Studio discussion with reporter. 4. Studio discussion with guest(s). 5. Some combination of these. *Code as 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5*

C. Contestation

10. Was there any specific criticism of the IPCC report ? Y/N

11 If Y to v10, did it question the scientific validity, credibility, or accuracy of the report?: Y/N

If Y to v11, was it (*see note at end of code sheet*)

12a. questioning the trend of temperatures rising? Y/N

12b. questioning attribution to human activities (including extreme weather not linked to cc) Y/N

12c. questioning the magnitude of the impacts (e.g. too alarming/alarmist, or exaggerated, particularly for children; Example: 'UN chooses doom over facts') Y/N

12d questioning the consensus amongst scientists Y/N

12e Other (e.g. IPCC too cautious in its scenarios, '1.5 inevitable'; 'SPM a political, not a scientific report'). Y/N *If Y, please note what these are in Excel sheet cell below Y/N answer*

13. Response skepticism

The IPCC report's authors recommended 'strong, rapid, and sustained reductions' of greenhouse gas emissions to stave off the most severe consequences of climate change. Did the coverage at any point question the need for strong regulatory policies or interventions, or raise the issue of the possible difficulties in meeting them? Y/N.

Were the following arguments included:

13a. The impracticality of taking (urgent) action (in general, without specifying any details e.g. those appearing in 13b to 13h) Y/N

13b. Did it question the economic costs of taking (urgent) action (in general) Y/N

Examples: 'This would be committing economic suicide'; 'the costs and changes are not worth it.'

13c Action to tackle climate change is already costing job losses or will do so in the future. Y/N

13d. Did it raise the question of whether taking action would or could involve a lot of /too much personal sacrifice (e.g. reducing or not flying, not eating/reducing meat)? Y/N

13e. Solutions will hit the poorest sectors the hardest Y/N

13f. Will outsource jobs, or hurt national competitiveness Y/N

13g. Will give too much power to governments (to impose new regulations and taxes) Y/N

13h. Other unacceptable costs not mentioned above Y/N. *If Y, please note what these are in Excel sheet cell below Y/N answer*

13i. Specific skepticism: Did the coverage focus on a specific policy, often country-based, for being insufficient in scope and scale to address the climate problem, or unrealistic due to political and other obstacles. (e.g. Biden or Johnson's green policies). Y/N

14. Other forms of contestation

Were other contestation narratives present? *(No need to code Y/N)*

14a. Question the need to take action when other countries (e.g. China) are not doing enough. Y/N

14b. Enough is already being done (e.g. PM Morrison's speech in Australia). Y/N

14c. Technology (including Carbon Capture and Storage) should be the main element of the solution (and not so much emphasis on switch from fossil fuels) Y/N

14d. Preferring adaptation to inevitable impacts rather than mitigation. 'It's not possible to mitigate climate change (sufficiently), so we should just adapt.' Y/N

14e. Gap between government rhetoric and action (in the context of COP26) Y/N

Example: 'Critics say that government ministers themselves are not doing enough/fast enough'.

*** NB this is not contestation about the report but we should code it anyway*

14f. Other (example: 'issue is irrelevant'; should nuclear energy be part of the solution?) Y/N *If Y, please note what these are in Excel sheet cell below Y/N answer*

D Presence of skeptics

15a Was climate skeptic thinking present in the report? Y/N

If Y,

15b was it in the words of the anchor or reporter Y/N, or

15c Were individuals who express scientific skepticism present in person/by zoom/other in the reports? Y/N

If Y to 15a, 15b, 15c, were they *(NB These categories are not mutually exclusive)*

15d Questioning the science of the report Y/N

15e Questioning the policy implications Y/N

15f Other Y/N *If Y, please note what these are in Excel sheet cell below Y/N answer*

From which sector did the skeptics come? *Please just code with total numbers from each sector, so for example, if two university scientists interviewed or clipped, code as 2.*

15g University scientist

15h Other type of research centre

15i Lobby group/NGO

15j Media pundit (e.g. newspaper columnist)

15k Other *If Y, please note what these are in Excel sheet cell below Y/N answer*

15l Was the mention of skeptical thinking or their inclusion sufficiently contextualized e.g. saying that these views were not representative of the majority scientific view. Y/N

E. Other strong narratives

Were the following narratives present?

'Present' means at least one sentence mentioning them. Multiple narratives are possible.

16 Stark warning from scientists/'code red', highlighting need for urgent action Y/N

17. (More) Certainty about the science Y/N

'It is indisputable that human activities are causing climate change';

'The IPCC is virtually certain about the key findings'

18. Climate change is happening now (in many parts of the world) and/or irreversible Y/N

19. Human influence is making extreme climate events, including heat waves, heavy rainfall, and droughts, more frequent and severe. Y/N

20. Impacts other than extreme climate events e.g. sea level rise Y/N

21. Uncertainty (possible ranges) about the scenarios: e.g. warming trajectories, sea level rise Y/N

Example: 'The big question is how much more of the planet will heat up in coming decades, so scientists explored different scenarios.'

22. Reasons for hope (general) Y/N

Examples: 'But there is some hope — the report concludes that it's not too late to stop the worst effects of climate change, as long as governments around the world make deep and immediate cuts in carbon emissions.'

'There's no going back from some changes in the climate system. However, some of these changes could be slowed and others could be stopped by limiting warming. The scientists' analysis showed that if humans make immediate, rapid and widespread cuts in emissions, warming could be limited to 1.5 degrees, with the climate stabilizing after the middle of the century.'

'Solutions are at hand'

23. Opportunity for a better world/green recovery based on clean, renewable resources; or mention of specific examples of green alternatives. Y/N

24. Role of Methane in causing global warming Y/N

25. Other Y/N *If Y, please note what these are in Excel sheet cell below Y/N answer*

Notes

1. Types of skeptics 12a) trend skeptics (who deny the global warming trend), 12b) attribution skeptics (who accept the trend, but either question the anthropogenic contribution saying it is overstated, negligent or non-existent compared to other factors like natural variation, or say it is not known with sufficient certainty what the main causes are; 12c) impact skeptics (who accept human causation, but claim impacts may be benign or beneficial, or that they are exaggerated)