

Media habits, political orientation, and perceptions of about climate change in Ireland^{1,2}

Gretta Mohan* (ESRI) and Jack Byrne (ComReg)

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Introduction

Public perception of climate risk is a critical precursor to policy support and individual behavioural changes. While the media acts as a primary channel for communicating climate science, its influence can vary depending on the structural nature of the communication channel and the political context of the audience. This study examines how daily consumption of different media sources relates to climate change scepticism and perceived local harm in Ireland.

Data and methods

Data from the Environmental Protection Agency's *Climate Change in the Irish Mind* (CCIM) survey conducted in 2021 was employed, featuring a representative sample of 3,077 Irish adults. To analyse public attitudes to climate change, two primary measures were created: a 'Climate scepticism index', which assessed beliefs about whether climate change is occurring, its underlying causes, and the extent of scientific agreement, and a 'Harm perception index', which gauged the perceived threat to personal circles, the Irish way of life,

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* Correspondence: gretta.mohan@esri.ie

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and future generations. Daily media habits were grouped into four channels to see understand how news sources may affect views: national media was the most popular (57.2%), followed by social media (43.4%), local media (40.2%), and streaming (34.2%).

Results

Climate scepticism is revealed to be low in Ireland, with approximately 10% of the population expressing any degree of doubt. Daily engagement with national media—such as TV, radio, and newspapers—plays a constructive role, as it is linked to both reduced scepticism and a stronger sense of the potential local harms caused by climate change. While social media consumption also heightens the perception of local risks, it is noted that social media operates within a regulatory vacuum, leaving audiences more susceptible to misinformation. A significant link between political leanings and media influence was identified; generally, a right-leaning orientation is associated with higher levels of scepticism and lower concern for local impacts. Moreover, the consumption of local media sources appeared to reinforce climate scepticism among right-leaning audiences, suggesting that political orientation may act as a powerful filter for how local information is processed.

Conclusions

The findings of this research suggest that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ communication strategy is likely insufficient for addressing climate risks in Ireland, given the diverse ways the public consumes information. Strategic investment in science-based reporting within national outlets remains vital, as these platforms are key to maintaining a broad public consensus on the reality of the climate crisis. However, because local media may serve as a space where scepticism forms among specific groups, targeted interventions using trusted local messengers, such as community leaders or local weathercasters, may be employed to deliver more relatable and impactful messages. Additionally, enhanced cross-sectoral collaboration is essential to combat misinformation, particularly on social media platforms which are vulnerable to fringe, anti-

establishment viewpoints that may undermine public support for necessary climate policies.