Fall 12-2-2020

# Transnational Privilege during the Climate Crisis

Joanna Falla
*Chapman University*, falla@chapman.edu

# Transnational Privilege during the Climate Crisis

## How Zip Codes can Affect Public Perception


## Joanna Falla

*Chapman University, Department of Political Science, Orange, CA*


# Introduction

### A Review of the Literature

This study explores the connection between a person's location in relation to natural disasters with their concern about the severe consequences of climate change.

- Past studies have studied political affiliation, education level, and economic status as major influential variables in being afraid of climate change.
- The majority of those causing the most climate impact globally are often live in the least affected areas (and vise versa).
- Many influences have been proven to affect someone's ideas and perceptions about climate change; there can be a plethora of reasons for why one person is more afraid of climate change than another.
  - This disparity between groups can be seen globally between nations or regionally between neighborhoods.
  - Ethnographic studies have seen that people in geographically more fortunate locations are desensitized and even ignorant to effects of the environmental crisis happening in real-time. (Norgaard 2012).

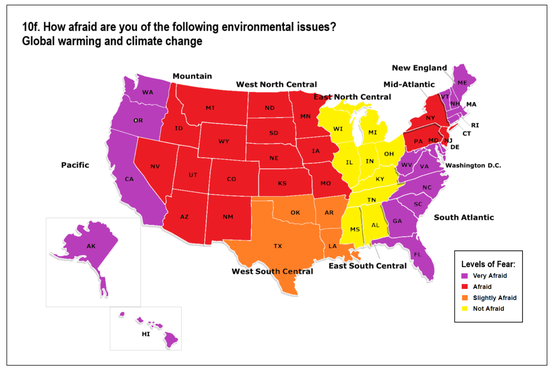
### Transnational Privilege

Transnational environmental privilege is a continuation of environmental privilege — the ability for more privileged groups to keep environmental benefits to themselves and exclude less privileged groups, in this case, the benefit is living in an area less negatively affected.

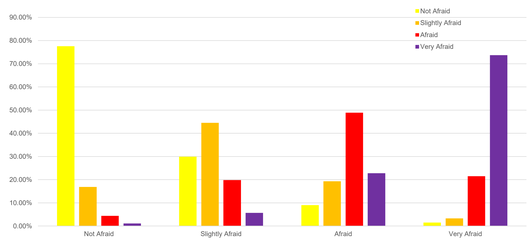
- Norgaard observed that while people may be educated about climate change, their geographic privilege shields them from the true damage caused by environmental consequences.
  - Consequences include increase in the rate and severity of natural disasters, or a significant disparity in the quality of life due to air or water pollution in a single community.

# Analysis

### H1: People in divisions that are most affected by climate change are the most afraid.




### H2: People who are more concerned about pollution are more afraid of climate change.




### H3: People who achieved a higher educational level will be more afraid of climate change.

| Model | Coefficient (B) | Standard Coefficient | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Air Pollution | 0.439 | **0.394** | **0.000** |
| Drinking water pollution | 0.044 | 0.04 | 0.192 |
| Water Pollution | 0.435 | **0.377** | **0.000** |
| Education | 0.026 | 0.038 | 0.611 |
| Disaster Probability | -0.073 | -0.05 | **0.015** |
| Severe damage | 0.03 | 0.023 | 0.246 |

# Results

### Hypothesis 1

The dependent variable analyzed centered around the individual's fear of global warming and climate change. For the first hypothesis, geographic location was tested. The New England and Mid Atlantic divisions were considered significant in shaping the responders' fears of climate change; these were also the most influential variables with the highest Beta value.

| Model | Coefficient (B) | Standard Coefficient | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| New England | 0.469 | **0.084** | **0.022** |
| Mid Atlantic | 0.319 | **0.097** | **0.044** |
| East North Central | -0.094 | -0.029 | 0.55 |
| West North Central | 0.11 | 0.023 | 0.555 |
| South Atlantic | 0.136 | 0.048 | 0.363 |
| East South Central | -0.127 | -0.026 | 0.506 |
| West South Central | 0.1 | 0.026 | 0.554 |
| Mountain | 0.006 | 0.001 | 0.971 |
| Pacific | 0.247 | **0.079** | 0.112 |

### Hypothesis 2

The comparison of fear of pollution to fear of climate change yielded largely self-explanatory results. Those who are most concerned about pollution are more afraid of climate change and those less afraid of pollution are less concerned. What is interesting to note is that people seem to be often less afraid than more afraid of climate change (by choosing "Slightly Afraid" or "Not Afraid") no matter how afraid they are of air pollution.

### Hypothesis 3

The final hypothesis was by far the most informative. The variables that were chosen for the linear regression included location (9 divisions), fear of different types of pollution, education, and the responders' perception of how imminent and serious a natural disaster could be for them. Education, drinking water pollution, and potential severe damage to someone's home/family were not considered significant.

# Conclusions

### H1: Location

The data gleaned from the analysis is certainly interesting but seems very similar to other maps comparing partisanship or population density; the coasts seem the most concerned and the East North and South Central divisions were the least. In comparison to where the uptick in environmental disasters are happening, this region is just past Tornado Alley and just before the coasts known to be hit with blizzards and hurricanes, so that may be a reason for the stripe of yellow seen.

### H2: Pollution

The distribution of the data for the second hypothesis was not unexpected, but what was interesting is that a higher percent of respondents are generally less afraid of air pollution. There is a much steeper difference in results for people who chose "Very Afraid" to "Less Afraid" than there is for those choosing between "Not Afraid" and "Slightly Afraid." This insinuates that people who acknowledge the dangers behind pollution are less likely to be convinced to be less afraid. Adversely, this means that people who are not aware of the dangers of pollution might be more easily convinced to be more afraid.

### H3: Education

Fear of an incoming disaster (or a stronger one than usual) and education were not influential in a person's fear of climate change, nor was drinking water pollution. However, natural resource concerns (air and ocean pollution) were much more influential. It seems that people are more concerned with the health of the planet than the quality of drinking water in the U.S, which is arguably an example of transnational privilege in the U.S.


References

Goldsby, M., & Koolage, W. (2015). Climate Modeling: Comments on Coincidence, Conspiracy, and Climate Change Denial. *Environmental Philosophy, 12*(2), 221-252. doi:10.2307/26169837

Kahan, D. (2015). Climate-Science Communication and the Measurement Problem. *Political Psychology, 36*(S1), 1-43. Retrieved September 23, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/43783843

Norgaard, K. (2012). Climate Denial and the Construction of Innocence: Reproducing Transnational Environmental Privilege in the Face of Climate Change. *Race, Gender & Class, 19*(1/2), 80-103. Retrieved September 25, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/43496861