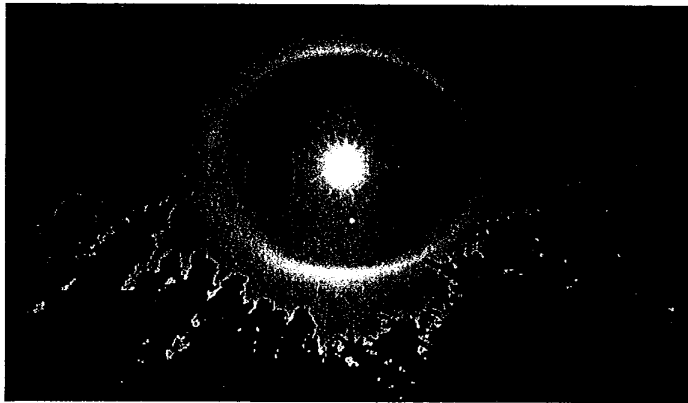


# Public supports geoengineering research, survey finds

First international survey on the perception of geoengineering finds 72% of respondents approve of research

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The British, American and Canadian public is largely in favour of research into engineering the planet's climate to combat global warming, according to the study. Photograph: Gallo Images/Getty Images

The British, American and Canadian public is largely in favour of research into engineering the planet's climate to combat global warming, according to a study published on Monday. But critics said the paper was "not exactly disinterested science" because one of the authors is the founder and president of a geoengineering company.

The first international survey on the perception of geoengineering, published in the Environmental Research Letters of the Institute, comes at a critical stage as a major UK test project was recently postponed.

Scientists from Cambridge, Oxford, Reading and Bristol universities had planned to send a balloon with a hose attached 1km into the sky above Norfolk within months, to test the future feasibility of pumping hundreds of tonnes of minute chemical particles a day into the thin stratospheric air to reflect sunlight and cool the planet. But late in September, they delayed the test, citing the need to "allow time for more engagement with stakeholders."

The new 18-question, internet-based survey, was "designed to ascertain how widespread public knowledge of geoengineering was and how the public actually perceived it."

Some 72% of the 3,105 participants in the UK, US and Canada said they "somewhat" or "strongly" supported general research when asked: "Do you think scientists should study solar radiation management?"

But there was also significant support for views such as: "The Earth's temperature is too complicated to fix with one technology"; "Humans should not be manipulating nature in this way", or "Research into solar radiation management will lead to a technology that will be used no matter what the public thinks."

Prof David Keith of Harvard University, one of the authors, said: "Some reports have suggested that opposition to geoengineering is associated with

environmentalists, but our results do not support this view. We found that geoengineering divides people along unusual lines. Support for geoengineering is spread across the political spectrum and is linked to support for science concern about climate change. The strongest opposition comes from people who self-identify as politically conservative, who are distrustful of government and other elite institutions, and who doubt the very idea that there is a climate problem."

But Jim Thomas from the Ottawa-based technology watch ETC Group, that campaigns against geoengineering, said: "This commissioned survey by a commercial company is not exactly disinterested science - it's more like a marketing exercise by a high profile geoengineering advocate and his students."

Thomas said that Keith was "consistently on the record as a supporter of real world geoengineering experiments". He added: "Keith has designed 'self levitating' nanoparticles to be released in the upper atmosphere and managed a multi-million dollar private fund from Bill Gates from which he distributed monies to technicians developing geoengineering hardware to be used by private companies in experiments."

Keith is also the founder and president of Carbon Engineering, a geoengineering company with 10 employees funded with around \$6m by Gates and tar sands oil magnate Murray Edwards.

Keith told the Guardian: "To be clear, starting two years ago I did organise a commercial activity in CO<sub>2</sub> removal [another form of geoengineering], but I believe that

commercial activity in solar geoengineering should be restricted or where feasible prohibited."

He said that ETC Group was "attacking the messenger, not the message".

"We are happy to make all the survey materials publicly available. If the survey is wrong then ETC should work with a survey firm or an academic to produce a survey that contradicts these results. Our survey was reviewed by Nick Pidgeon, a leading expert on studying public reception," he said. Pidgeon told the Guardian that, while he was a peer-reviewer for the study, he was not endorsing it any way.

Ashley Mercer, co-author of the study at the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy at the University of Calgary, said: "I can assure you the funding sources did not bias this research or its design. The goal was to simply assess current understanding and provide baseline data on emerging attitudes."

Earlier this October, the Washington-based thinktank Bipartisan Policy Center published a major report calling for the United States and other countries to move forward on "climate remediation". Prof John Shepherd, chair of the Royal Society's Working Group on geoengineering, wrote in the Guardian in September that research would be "sadly necessary" because current greenhouse gas emission cuts and political will were not sufficient to stop global warming.

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